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Muslim Women at a Crossroads:
Gender and Development in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China

by

Cindy Yung-Leh Huang

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:
Professor Aihwa Ong, Chair
Professor Liu Xin
Professor Kevin O'Brien

Fall 2009

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by Cindy Yung-Leh Huang

Abstract

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This dissertation is an ethnographic study of the Muslim Uyghur ethnic minority in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwestern China. I explore how the narratives of the women I study reflect historical conditions, as well as shape their political, ethical and cultural engagement in the present. In dozens of interviews and over a year of participant observation, a persistent theme emerged: being one who is *japakesh*, one who perseveres through difficulty and suffers with a moral purpose. Given the shifting demands of an environment marked by rapid change and development, being *japakesh* entails different sacrifices and challenges for each generation. Even as the women share a concern with how to live a good life as a Muslim Uyghur woman in Xinjiang today, this project takes on a form and character particular to their historical experiences. In weaving together the gendered stories of those who came of age during different periods of China's development (socialist, reform and post-reform), I illuminate the contours and ambivalences of generational narratives, in particular vis-à-vis the rising dominance of "middle class" dreams. The stories that women shared with me, and that I contextualize and retell in this dissertation, convey a sense of how life is conceived of, and therefore how life is lived, in contemporary Xinjiang.

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PREFACE

After picking up my luggage, I scan the small crowd at the gate and see Ayshe.¹ She is wearing a puffy brown coat to protect against the flurries of snow and wind. A black scarf frames her wide, pale face. There are more wrinkles around her eyes than when I saw her just a year and a half ago. We grab each other's hands and exchange kisses on the cheek. We last said goodbye at a bus station near her home village in southern Xinjiang. It is an emotional moment. Ayshe is at once my mirror and my foil. She is a curious and open-hearted graduate student. We can talk for endless hours about the meaning of life and the meaning of the study of life. We are devoted to books and thinking about culture. Unlike me, however, Ayshe has few opportunities to earn fellowships or to travel. She is a devout Muslim; I am an uncommitted agnostic. Ayshe is a Uyghur in an increasingly Chinese-dominated region; I am an American-born Chinese.²

The taxi ride is an effusive jumble of Uyghur, Chinese and English.³ Ayshe hasn't practiced English much since my last visit and my Uyghur, never fluent, has deteriorated. Our Chinese levels are about the same, though my accent is better while her vocabulary is bigger. I try to decipher her awkward rendition of Chinese tones, while she giggles at my wide circumlocutions. Between bursts of conversation, I glance out the window. The streets are dark. Despite the winter chill, my cheeks flush with excitement.

Our fifth-floor apartment near the university is a typical communist-era concrete block, half-heartedly disguised in a drab pink. Inside, the wood floors are shiny, the furnishings sparse. Ayshe excuses herself because it is already late for her evening prayers. Nurgul, our third roommate, is preparing *suyuqash*, a noodle soup traditionally served to weary travelers. She is a graduate student in history, serious and reserved. Both Ayshe and Nurgul are in their mid-twenties. At nearly thirty, I am the eldest, but in our makeshift family, I am the child – eager but unsure, energetic but unfamiliar.

Fariha sails in during dinner. She is a tall, thin nineteen-year-old economics student, with a billowing skirt and headscarf pinned under her chin. In the taxi, Ayshe described Fariha as a smaller version of herself, with respect to the age and girth. They both speak with animated gestures and accents unique to their hometown of Hotan. Fariha tells me excitedly about her plans to visit her sister who recently moved to Montreal. After dinner, Fariha asks me if I like movies. Her English teacher, who she describes as a black Muslim from England, gave her an animated video called *Muhammad: The Last Prophet*. The movie is in English with Chinese subtitles. It's an entertaining Disney-style depiction of the early days of Islam.⁴ Fariha likes it because the English is clear and simple. Her eyes brighten as she asks about my interest in Islam. I respond with a halting, long-winded story about being in Turkey during the earthquake in 1999 and then living Pakistan, where I conducted research on gender and development.

¹ All names have been changed; in some cases, I have also altered biographical details to preserve the anonymity of my research participants.

² Unless otherwise specified, I use "Chinese" to refer to people of Han ethnicity as well as Mandarin, rather than to indicate citizenship. In English, Chinese is used to denote ethnic background as well as citizenship status, though more commonly the former. In Uyghur and Chinese, there is no similar elision in terminology.

³ As Jay Dautcher observes, "Uyghur is usually pronounced in English as WEE-gur, although the Uyghur pronunciation is closer to OY-gore, as in 'toy store'" (2009:xv). In transliterating Uyghur terms, I have followed the Latin Script Uyghur (LSU); Chinese words are in *pinyin*. The letter that is likely to cause confusion is x. In pinyin it is read as "sh," whereas in LSU it is closer to "kh" (like the j in the Spanish *juven*, meaning young).

⁴ The director, Richard Rich, worked at Disney and then started his own studio and has produced many animated films about religious figures.

Everyone asks, but the truth is that it's difficult to articulate why I am drawn to study Uyghur culture. I have a connection with China, but a version far removed from life in Xinjiang. My parents were born in Zhejiang, on the eastern seaboard, and grew up in Taiwan before moving to the United States over thirty years ago. Most likely, my interest was born out of a romanticized vision of Xinjiang as both Silk Road entrepôt and "Wild West," images common to both Chinese and Western portrayals of the region. While in Pakistan, I traveled by jeep to the border with China. I marveled at the majestic mountains, the legendary Central Asian hospitality and the people with a stunning combination of Asian features, light eyes and fair hair. Drunk on alpine air and Orientalist imaginings, I felt I could be at home in the region. This turned out to be the case, but not for the reasons I anticipated.

A few days after my arrival, Ayshe and Nurgul cook a special dinner for my naming ceremony. For more than a year, Ayshe has been searching for a suitable Uyghur name for me. She finally settles on Zuhre, explaining that it is a name with Arabic origins, meaning bright, beautiful star. She shaves down a chopstick, dips it in a jar of ink and writes my new name in elegant script. We feast on rice and stir-fried vegetables with mutton. We finish the meal by savoring juicy pomegranate seeds. Ayshe gives a short speech about how she hopes that I become a shining star in the future, leading others in times of darkness. Nurgul adds that I should become the guiding light for those who know nothing about Uyghurs. We laugh at the solemnity of the occasion, I more nervously than them. Though I doubt myself, I am touched that Ayshe's faith extends to me. From that night onward, Ayshe and Nurgul call me Zuhre. Our improvised ceremony coincides with my transition from visitor to housemate. According to Uyghur custom, you are no longer a guest after three days have passed.

Though no one could forget that I was an outsider, Ayshe's blessing was not for naught. I celebrated the small victories as much as the large. One afternoon early in my stay, I ate at a small restaurant near Urumqi's Grand Bazaar. I was hungry and quickly slurped down a plateful of pumpkin and mutton dumplings. When I returned a few weeks later, I chatted with the wife of the owner and a few of the staff. As I finished my meal and tried to pay, no one would take my money. Finally, one of the waiters told me that it wasn't generosity: on my previous visit, they had charged me double. Here, at least, I would no longer have to pay the foreigner tax. Receiving Ayshe's blessing, however, did not mean that I was exempt from her criticism. After a frustrating week of conjugating Uyghur verbs, I complained to her that my progress was slower than I had hoped. So many people had praised me the week before, Ayshe responded, perhaps I had attracted the evil eye. I understood that Ayshe was warning me against being prideful. There would be plenty of opportunities for friends to chide me for failing to understand or follow what they took to be common sense or moral and spiritual truths. Even as I blushed and at times resisted, I took their prodding and censure as a good sign: not only was I someone other than a guest, I was also a person worth cultivating as a friend – perhaps even as an honorary sister, daughter and Uyghur.

Context and Purpose

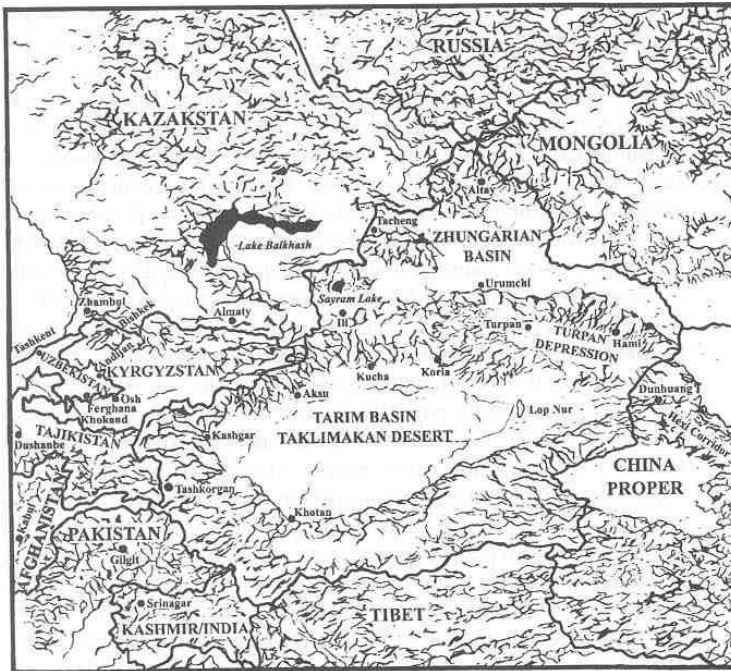


Figure 1: Topographical Map of Xinjiang



Figure 2: Map of Xinjiang with major cities

In 2007, I lived in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwestern China, an area that comprises one-sixth of the country's land mass. I spent the first half of the year in Urumqi, the regional capital in the north, and the latter half in Kashgar, a smaller city of 200,000, close to the Tajik and Kyrgyz borders. Urumqi is a city of 2 million residents, more than 70 percent of whom are Chinese. Erdaoqiao, the city's main Uyghur neighborhood, is

distinctive for its cluster of minarets, the smell of roasting mutton, and signboards with the flourish of Uyghur's Arabic script. Outside of Erdaoqiao, Urumqi resembles a typical medium-sized Chinese city, replete with high rises and highway overpasses. In the south, considered the religious heart of the region, it is a different story. As the map above shows, Xinjiang is bisected by a mountain range, the Tian Shan, and the Turpan Depression (see figure 1).⁵ The large-scale conversion to Islam began in Kashgar in the 10th century, spreading east and north over the next five centuries.⁶ Even before I move southward, I hear a good deal of this story. The majority of my research participants in Urumqi were from the south's two largest cities, Kashgar and Hotan, where more than 80 percent of the population is Uyghur. Over the past fifty years, the overall demographic shift has been dramatic. In 1953, Chinese comprised 6 percent of Xinjiang's population of 4.9 million. The figure rose to 40 percent of 18.5 million in 2000. Over the same period, the Uyghur population fell from 75 percent to 45 percent.⁷

Figure 3: Regional per capita GDP (PPP)⁸

	Yr 2000	Yr 2008
Kyrgyzstan	1250	2140
Uzbekistan	1430	2660
Pakistan	1690	2700
Xinjiang (est.)	2229	5281
China	2340	6020
Kazakhstan	4500	9690
Russia	7440	15630

Uyghurs have benefited greatly from the market reforms that started with Deng Xiaoping's rise to power in 1978. After a lapse of several decades, Uyghurs resumed their role as Eurasian traders, accelerated by the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. Farmers, the majority of the population in Xinjiang, have reported cash savings as a result of the economic boom. Between 1978 and 2000, China's gross domestic product grew at an average of 9.5 percent per year. Xinjiang's growth rate was even higher, at 10.3 percent per year (Weimer 2004:164). In 2000, its overall per capita GDP placed Xinjiang as 12th among China's provinces, the only interior or western area above the national average (Bequelin 2004:359). However, as in the rest

⁵ Xinjiang has three distinct ecological zones. In the southern Tarim Basin, most of the population is located in oasis towns in the desert-mountain contact zone. The main productive activities are in small-scale trade and agriculture, especially cotton. Its oil, gas and mineral industries are also growing. In the Turpan depression, at the fork of the Tian Shan in east central Xinjiang, the major crops are grapes and cotton. The northern Zungharian basin and Ili River valley have abundant pasture and croplands, as well as large deposits of oil. For a description of Xinjiang's zones and the importance of water, see Toops 2004. On cultural variation between regions, see Rudelson 1997.

⁶ Before their conversion to Islam, Uyghurs practiced Buddhism and indigenous forms of 'shamanism' and 'ancestor worship.' Their religious practices were also influenced by Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Manichaeism. On the lack of equivalence between 'shamanism' and other religions in the Inner Asian context, see DeWeese 1994. Also, the use of 'Uyghur' here is anachronistic because it was not until the modern period that the term came to have the connotations of the present-day ethnonym (Gladney 2004:205-228).

⁷ The remainder of the population is comprised of Kazakh, Hui (Chinese Muslim), Kyrgyz and other ethnic minorities. Kazakhs, predominately located in the northern region, made up 7 percent of the population in 2000. The number of Chinese is understated because the census does not count the substantial floating and unofficial migrant populations, for which there are no reliable figures. The population is split evenly between the North, including the Turpan depression, and the South. For a detailed description of Xinjiang's population, see Toops 2004 and the Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook 2000.

⁸ 2000 data is from UN-WHO databases (data.un.org). 2008 data is from the World Bank (go.worldbank.org). Xinjiang PPP is calculated by applying the ratio of per capita income in yuan from the Chinese national and provincial statistical yearbooks to the PPP figures (chinadataonline.org). In 2000, the ratio between China overall and Xinjiang per capita GDP was 1.05 and rose to 1.14 in 2008, which reflects an increase in inequality. In 2007, 1 US dollar equaled approximately 7.5 yuan.

of China, the end of the “iron rice bowl” – Mao’s guarantee of income and benefits – has created deep worries about job security and paying for college, retirement and medical care. In addition, Uyghurs, who speak a Turkic language, must compete for jobs with native Mandarin speakers and navigate the shifting bureaucracy in a second language. Moreover, much of the economic growth has occurred in the industrial and corporate sectors, where Uyghurs have relatively low participation and access.⁹ Nevertheless, as figure 3 illustrates, residents of Xinjiang fare relatively well in comparison with their Central Asian neighbors.

The reform era also ushered in a period of social and cultural change. The relaxing of external and internal borders in the late 1980s, as well as the privatization of space in the 1990s, created new possibilities for forging new identities through travel and consumption. In cities and villages, remodeling one’s home became not only a frequent topic of conversation, but also a symbol of private life and middle class dreams. Uyghurs began traveling to Turkey, Central Asia and inner China, bringing back diverse stories of possibility and promise. They also studied in Pakistan and went on pilgrimage to Mecca in significant numbers, introducing people at home to the ideas and practices of the Islamic Revival. Although the government has imposed significant restrictions on religious practice in recent years, private space, trade and wealth have transformed the landscape of Uyghur religious engagement. The volume of religious media has skyrocketed, for example, and Quranic study groups regularly meet in homes. Even taking into account the varied impact of post-socialist policies, there is no question that the reform (1978-1992) and post-reform (1992-present) eras entail modes of living that were hardly imaginable in the Maoist years.¹⁰

While the broad strokes painted above provide important context, my central question is necessarily a narrower one, both in substance and in method: how do Uyghur women narrate their lives against this backdrop of change? When I describe my research topic – economic change, women’s lives and Uyghur culture – women of all backgrounds and aspirations respond in similar ways. They speak of marriage and divorce, cooking and hosting, mothering and work. They speak of love of family, God, film, fashion and knowledge, though not in that order or in the same ways. And, in near equal measure, they speak of their difficulties with poverty, illness, infidelity and bureaucracy. In focusing on narrative and everyday experience, my work is squarely situated in an anthropological tradition that includes storytelling, life history and the observation of daily life. Rather than aspire to theoretical innovation, my writing is intended to affirm a humanistic approach to understanding cultural sameness and difference.

A persistent theme throughout the stories is being one who is *japakesh*, one who perseveres through difficulty, suffers with a moral purpose. In conversation on matters big and small, Uyghur women offered it as both praise for one’s hard work and empathic recognition of one’s troubles. *Japakesh* does not signify the opposite of love and joy; at times, it is the very vehicle for their deepening or fruition. Given the shifting demands of the recent past and present, being *japakesh* entails different sacrifices and challenges for each generation. Even as

⁹ There are no reliable statistics on growth and ethnic inequality because the government does not release economic statistics by ethnicity. Wiemer created an estimate by regressing 1998 county-level GDP data on percentage of non-Han population and share of population in agriculture: “For a given agricultural share in a county’s population, every percentage point increase in the non-Han share in population is associated with an expected decrease in GDP per capita of 44 yuan” (2004:177).

¹⁰ Scholars and other observers divide the post-socialist era in different ways, while some avoid the term post-socialist altogether (Liu 2000:xii). I use post-socialist to refer to the entire period since the economic reforms began in 1978. I divide the period into categories of reform (1978-1992) and post-reform (1992-present) to distinguish between different generational experiences; these should be understood as rough approximations, rather than as fixed periods. American observers tend to consider 1989, the date of the Tiananmen incident, to be the end of the reform period, while Chinese scholars are more likely to emphasize 1992, the date of Deng Xiaoping’s southern tour that ushered in a period of more aggressive capitalist development (Farquhar 2002:293, fn. 5).

the women I studied share a concern with how to live a good life as a Muslim Uyghur woman in Xinjiang today, this ethical project takes on a form and character particular to their historical experiences. In weaving together the stories of women who grew up during the socialist, reform and post-reform eras, I illuminate the contours of generational narratives. In the process, I return to a message that bears repeating: from a historical perspective, differences are revealed as contingent, rather than essential.

Why Write?

“To write is thus both to disclose the world and to offer as a task to the generosity of the reader” (Sartre 1988:65). The reader, knowing the disclosure is always allusive and elusive, trusts that the author has used her creativity and judgment in good faith. The writer, too, trusts that the reader will bring a degree of openness to the words on the page, to the possibility of transformation. The anthropologist enters into a similar pact, one that relies on the generosity of her research participants. The Uyghurs I studied placed abundant faith in my intentions and abilities. They were tireless in their efforts to introduce me to potential research participants and to help me understand their lives and stories. I promised that I would write about their lives, a feeble gift in return. With this promise in mind, I asked many friends and interviewees what they hoped my readers might understand about Uyghur life. I always added an important caveat: most academic works, especially published dissertations, have a minute circulation. I nevertheless endeavor to deserve their generosity.

When I posed the question to Yakupjan, an intellectual in Kashgar, he didn’t hesitate before delivering a remarkably eloquent and impromptu speech. First, he began, you should tell the world who the Uyghurs are. He related the story of a Uyghur scholar who traveled to Japan and was surprised that no one had heard of the Uyghur people. In his book, the scholar observes that if a castle were built with 10 million bricks, it would be famous. Yet, the 10 million Uyghurs in the world remain unknown, apparently less important than a collection of bricks. Second, Yakupjan continued, you should describe how Uyghurs are devout Muslims, but do not hate the West or support fundamentalists. They are not terrorists. Though Yakupjan has never traveled abroad, he reads a lot of English-language media and is well aware of how Uyghurs fit into the geopolitical imagination. He feels that Uyghurs are in a double bind: most people have never heard of their ethnic group, but when they have, it is usually in the context of violence and oppression. They hear about riots in the region or about Uyghurs being detained in Guantanamo Bay.¹¹ Tell a different story, he says.

Adila, a graduate student in Turkey, concurs when I mention Yakupjan’s invocation of bricks: “I’m so tired of people asking me where I’m from and then saying, ‘But you don’t look Chinese!’” Adila chose to study in Turkey because she feels most comfortable in a place where she does not have to constantly explain herself. In Turkey, Uyghurs are well known as the first settled Turkic people; indeed, the Turkish word for civilization is *uygarlık*.¹² For Adila, there is a sense of kinship in Turkey that makes being far away from home slightly less unbearable. Like

¹¹ Less commonly, people outside of Xinjiang hear about the Uyghurs in the context of human rights campaigns and Rebiya Kadeer, the millionaire turned dissident, who was released from prison in 2005. She now lives in the United States. Though Uyghurs are alternately cast as victims and perpetrators, the overall discourse of ethnic and religious strife remains remarkably constant.

¹² The Uyghurs were settled by the mid-9th century (Gladney 2004:212). I wish to thank Sener Akturk for pointing out the Turkish word for civilization to me. *Medeniyet* is another word for civilization that is used more commonly, but *uygarlık* is still widely known and used.

Yakupjan, she experiences the lack of recognition – the inability of others to understand her response to the question, *who are you?* – as existentially painful.

The desire to be known and understood was not limited to the intellectuals I befriended. The majority of people I met had never traveled abroad and cared more about global culture than geopolitics. They were also excited about the prospect of sharing their stories. They found joy in the thought of my family, friends and fellow citizens knowing about Uyghur women's lives, and their lives in particular, if not their names. Despite the ruptures of the socialist era, Uyghurs are still located in wide circles of reciprocity, hospitality and kinship. Just as I became implicated in their circles, they expected and hoped to become part of mine. At the same time, Uyghurs, no less than anyone else, are embedded in a milieu saturated with images and information via newspaper, radio, television, and increasingly, the internet. Their desire to be known could also be thought of as quintessentially postmodern: "The great contemporary terror is anonymity. If Lionel Trilling was right, if the property that grounded the self, in Romanticism, was sincerity, and in modernism it was authenticity, then in postmodernism it is visibility" (Deresiewicz 2009). Here, and in general, it is helpful to recall Marshall Berman's injunction to supplant the logic of Either/Or with that of Both/And (1982:24).

Inevitably, there is a gap between what my research participants envisioned and what I have written. And, as I suggested above, there is sure to be an even larger gap between their hopes and the actual impact of my work. In early July 2009, ethnic riots in Urumqi made international headlines. According to the government, nearly 200 people were killed and over 1,700 injured, mostly Han. Ethnic tensions continued in August and September as hundreds of people, again mostly Han, reported being attacked with syringes in public spaces. Though Uyghurs participated in my study for a variety of reasons, the overarching theme was that they hoped to become better known as a people and as individuals, outside the context of ethnic and religious violence. In light of recent events, this task is more pressing than ever.

Many people and organizations have made this journey possible. It goes without saying that all of the stumbling and detours along the way are my responsibility alone. My greatest debt is to the people in Xinjiang who shared their lives and stories with me. For intellectual guidance, I wish to thank Aihwa Ong, Kevin O'Brien, Saba Mahmood and Vincanne Adams. Liu Xin was generous not only with his philosophical and anthropological insight, but with his patience and wisdom as well. During the writing process, Dace Dzenovska and Katherine Lemons were constant reminders of the joys of friendship, intellectual and beyond. And, throughout my near-perpetual studenthood, Emmy, Jamieson and Jinbao nourished me with home-cooked meals, family love and patient care.

I am grateful to the Social Science Research Council and the Paul and Daisy Soros Foundation for supporting the research and writing of this dissertation, none of which would have been possible without language training enabled by more than one Foreign Languages and Area Studies fellowship. In addition, many organizations at the University of California, Berkeley, provided me with grants and fellowships: the Graduate Division, the Center for Chinese Studies, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the Berkeley Program in Eurasian and East European Studies and the Department of Anthropology.

This dissertation (and eventual book) is dedicated to my parents. I'm not certain what I did in past lives, but I do know that I hit the jackpot this time around. If I am able to bring a measure of love and compassion to my work, the people I study, and life in general, it is because of them.

PART I – BACKGROUNDS

In *Other Modernities*, Lisa Rofel (1999) compares the lives of three generations of female workers at a silk factory in Hangzhou, a city in the eastern province of Zhejiang. She explores how different historical conditions shape each cohort's class and gender identities. The women, in turn, engage the politics of the present in different ways. Those who came of age in the revolutionary 1950s embraced the discourse of gender liberation: the ideal of the model worker allowed them to break free of a cultural system that degraded them for working inappropriately *outside* the social space of the family. During the reforms of the 1980s, they responded to their marginalization with a nostalgic and intense engagement with their work in the factory. For the women whose identities were shaped during the Cultural Revolution, *politics*, rather than *labor*, became the site of struggle and then disillusionment. Like the oldest cohort, these women were shaped by the imperative to act like model citizens, rather than “like women.” They often challenged or refused state authority, though their engagements were marked by a deep ambivalence. The youngest women, who entered factory work in the mid-1980s and 1990s, did not find meaning in struggles over labor. Instead, they cultivated a feminine interiority and strove to free themselves from the leveling effects of Maoist gender relations and body politics.

Although Zhejiang and Xinjiang are distant in geography and culture, Rofel's generational descriptions are resonant with my own observations of Uyghur women. This is no doubt an indication of the profound and far-reaching reconfigurations of politics, gender and everyday life that occurred between 1949 and the present in China. This remaking, as we shall see, is not simply about a transformation of external conditions, but about the fundamental ways in which people narrate their lives and experience their worlds. A central premise of my study is that self-narratives, which are always imbricated with communal narratives, guide action and the search for meaning. Thus, I look to stories that people tell in order to shed light on the complex processes through which historical conditions shape inner and outer life, with the understanding that the line between inner and outer is one of the critical sites of change.

While the transformations of the latter half of the 20th century were profound and widespread, it goes without saying that no generation is homogeneous: “multiple positions, paradoxes, ambivalences and dilemmas” develop out of a common historical experience (Rofel 1999:169). In the process of assembling this text, I have tried to select individuals and incidents that reflect the heterogeneity, limits and contours of generational stories, knowing too that the lines which separate generations are necessarily provisional and malleable. Because I conducted my fieldwork in the mid-2000s, rather than in the mid-1980s and early 1990s as Rofel did, the youngest cohort I study is of the post-reform generation. For these women, it is no longer a matter of freeing *from*, but of the diverse, and often conflicting, resources they draw upon to articulate normative gender relations. In Xinjiang, where there are large Turkic and Chinese Muslim populations, these articulations are inseparable from questions of ethnic, religious and cultural difference. Unlike most observers of Xinjiang, however, I do not take power struggles over such differences as the main object for investigation and explanation, though they inevitably arise throughout. My anchor is the stories that shape and constitute Uyghur women's responses to the question of how one should live.

On Chinese Minorities

A rich group of studies, enabled by the opening of China to foreign researchers in the 1980s, reveals the multiple ways ethnic groups have been constructed and reworked by state,

elite and everyday practices (see, for example, Gladney 1991; Harrell 1995; Schein 2000; Litzinger 2000). Within this literature, there has been an important emphasis on the processes by which groups were classified and constructed as *minority nationalities* in the People's Republic of China (PRC), beginning with the ethnic identification (*minzu shibie*) project of the 1950s.¹ These studies take the project of modern nation-building as the locus for analyzing the historical origins that shape, limit, and help to explain the creativity of national minorities. The politics of ethnic identity, they rightly argue, cannot be understood outside of the overriding quest to create *modern* citizens, for whom *traditional* and *backward* minorities serve as contrastive others. By exploring the complex processes that produce ethnic identities, anthropologists have contributed to a subtler understanding of how modernity is subject to manifold remaking, while nevertheless remaining hegemonic. The deflection of dominant representations and classifications, in other words, is always limited by a powerful set of historical structures and meanings: "In China, the desirability of the modern – trumpeted as universally accessible – has become so hegemonic that it is sought after even by those constrained by the role of signifying its opposite" (Schein 2000:164). It is often ethnic minorities, especially minority women, who appear as the Other of development and progress.

When anthropologists of Chinese minorities engage a deeper past, they tend to be more concerned with specific forms of historiography than history. They are interested in how a critical analysis of the political and social life of histories and historians might contribute to destabilizing modern classificatory schemes. For example, Ralph Litzinger reads Yao histories through the nexus of power/knowledge: "What is remembered in narratives that locate the Yao subject in the history of the Chinese nation? What is forgotten? Who is empowered in the retelling of the past?" (2000:32). In contrast to the pre-1949 concern with origins, Yao histories came to follow a Hegelian narrative of development and self-realization through the time of the nation (see Duara 1997). Thus, anthropologists who "write the margins" do not simply add to a repository of knowledge about China, but engage in a critical practice that illuminates the dynamics of Chinese nationhood, as well as the techniques and modalities of power that classify and shape subjects as more or less *modern* and *Chinese* (Dikotter 1997; Gladney 2004). Over the past twenty years or so, anthropologists of minority nationalities have produced elegant and challenging ethnographies that promote the understanding of China as a multiethnic nation-state. The persistent lesson is that ethnic minorities can never be fully encompassed by classificatory schemes, state or otherwise; they reclaim, remake and redefine. Moreover, in the relative openness of the post-socialist period, the past serves as a critical and malleable terrain for articulating hopes about the future (see Bovingdon and Tursun 2004; Harrell 2001; Mueggler 2001).

While building on the anthropological scholarship on Chinese minorities, my approach differs in that I attempt to convey the rhythms and textures of life-as-narrated and life-as-lived. Rather than deploy minority memories and narratives to fragment and reveal multiplicity within the narrative of Chinese nationhood, my aim is show that other narratives, though never outside of modernity or the nation, are resources for telling coherent stories about life and community. In many ways, I look to older forms of ethnographic writing – the life story, in particular – though I write with an awareness provoked by the critiques of the 1970s and 1980s (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988). That is, I take it as given that "life histories are actually stories that people tell about themselves, texts requiring attention to the conventions of storytelling and the context of the elicitation" (Abu-Lughod 1993:30). Rather than eschew humanistic forms and holistic narratives in favor of deconstructing them, I have tried to find a balance between story and analysis. Ideally, though my literary skills are not up to the task, I would illustrate

¹ There is no obvious equivalent for *minzu* in English. Here, I use "ethnicity" and "nationality" to refer to *minzu*, with the caveat that, as with all categories, it must be understood in the context of a specific history and usage.

throughout, and without stating so directly, that analysis is a form of storytelling, storytelling a form of analysis.

My second shift is to move away from descriptions of the Uyghur that reinforce a division between an oppressive state and majority population, on the one hand, and a resisting and restive minority on the other. One primary reason for doing so is that existing studies of Xinjiang, as well as media accounts, tell this story in full. Within political science, conflict, violence and resistance are dominant themes (see, for example, Dillon 2004). Following Jim Scott's discussion of "weapons of the weak," Gardner Bovington (2002) provides a fine-grained analysis of daily life in Xinjiang, but one that remains within the framework of domination and resistance. Likewise, historical studies center on state power and threats to it (Forbes 1986; McMillen 1979; Millward 1998).

Anthropological studies of Xinjiang are few but growing in number.² Justin Rudelson (1997) published the first English-language ethnography of Xinjiang in the post-socialist period. As part of his study, which also included participant observation and analysis of nationalist texts, Rudelson asked eighty-one informants to rank order five words that best described them: Muslim, Uyghur, Turpanlik (local of the Turpan oasis), Junggolug (Chinese national), and Turk. I highlight this particular exercise because it reflects a common model of identity that is hydraulic in nature: greater salience in one category implies less of another. As the narratives of the women I study make clear, this conception of identity as a buffet for individual appetites is inadequate: the categories themselves are sites of negotiation, ambiguity and amplification. Dru Gladney's work on the Hui and Uyghur is an important contribution to articulating a relational model of identity. He argues that attachment to certain identities cannot be understood in the abstract; it is in specific contexts and with specific audiences that a set of meanings come the fore (2004:202). Yet, even particular examples and malleable models are insufficient to convey the complexity of identity; here again, I return to my concern with stories.

Jay Dautcher's (2009) ethnography of a suburb of Ghulja (Yining) in northern Xinjiang, *Down a Narrow Road: Identity and Masculinity in a Uyghur Community in Xinjiang China*, is an excellent example of how close observation and personal narratives, in his case folklore, can convey the richness and complexity of life as narrated and lived. Like Dautcher, I found ethnicity to be an important feature of daily life, but one that is always made meaningful through multilayered narratives and situations. He describes, for example, how the vibrant practice of nicknaming among Uyghur men ("Women have hair, men have nicknames") is a window into the gendered construction of personality and emotion. In many ways, my study complements *Narrow Road* in focusing on different aspects of gender, identity and place: while Dautcher studies men and masculinity in the north, I explore women's lives in Urumqi and the south. Although Xinjiang is still less open to researchers than other regions of China, there are increasing opportunities to conduct long-term fieldwork and thus to understand the subtler complexities of identity in the region. In the book's foreword, Stevan Harrell commends Dautcher for capturing these complexities:

In contrast to so many works about the Uyghurs that are all about ethnicity, about ethnonationalism, separatism, statism, and so many other abstract isms, *Narrow Road* portrays identity as emerging out of customs and practices of everyday life. As such, ethnic identity as Uyghurs is only one element of identity's complex, many-stranded net (xi).

I hope the chapters that follow will be understood in this context and in this spirit.

² For a review of anthropological work on Xinjiang, see Beller-Hann 2008.

CHAPTER 1 – NARRATIVE ETHICS

We tell ourselves stories in order to live.

- Joan Didion

I begin from the premise that human experience is narrative in nature. “Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions,” writes Alasdair MacIntyre, “essentially a story-telling animal” (1984:216). In Joan Didion’s (2006) phrase, we tell stories in order to live: they are not deceptions or palliatives, but the means through which we make sense of the world. Stories, therefore, are not *mere* stories. The sequencing of events into a meaningful order – beginning, middle and end – enables mundane actions as well as understandings of self and the good life.³ Broadly speaking, this dissertation is an exploration of how life is narrated by Uyghur women. I write about stories that women shared with me with the aim of conveying a sense of how life is conceived of, and therefore how life is lived, in contemporary Xinjiang. At the same time, I consider the resources upon which they draw to narrate their lives, as well as the particular conditions that shape their telling. Without losing sight of the irreducibility of differences, I argue for the privileging of historical difference. It is a way, though not the only one, to make sense of the collective contours of the narratives when they are taken as a whole.

How should one live in post-reform Xinjiang? For my research participants, this question took the form of a set of three intertwined questions: how to be an economic success, a pious Muslim and a good Uyghur? I pose these questions separately because they articulate the most important realms of value among Uyghurs. My subjects, however, rarely thought of them in distinct terms. It was precisely through (evolving) self-narratives that women navigated across all three realms in order to create a single story of the good. The three realms were defined in relation to each other. Some women, for example, assumed that my interest in Uyghur language and culture meant that I was planning to convert to Islam. And, even if I weren’t planning to do so, it was understood to be a natural, expected outcome. They viewed, too, economic success as flowing from pious conduct and devotion to God. Others emphasized entrepreneurial spirit and material achievement as essential to revitalizing Uyghur identity, especially in light of the historical role of Uyghurs as traders and businesspeople. The act of narrating/navigating *across* realms of value to tell a story of the good is a profoundly ethical one. I use *ethics* to refer to this act, rather than to a particular realm or *tradition* of the good.⁴ When speaking of rules of right and wrong within a particular realm, I use the term *moral*.

Narration as an ethical act does not occur only at the level of life story (birth, life, death). A form of speech in Uyghur helps to illustrate the range of narrative ethics. *Yaman bolidu*,

³ I use story and narrative interchangeably. With theorists such as Taylor (1992) and MacIntyre (1984), I argue that human experience is essentially narrative. We aim to tell holistic, coherent stories about our lives. These narratives are not arbitrary but oriented toward good: “One could put [my underlying thesis] this way: because we cannot but orient ourselves to the good, and thus determine our place relative to it and hence determine the direction of our lives, we must inescapably understand our lives in narrative form, as a ‘quest’. But one could perhaps start from another point: because we have to determine our place in relation to the good, therefore we cannot be without an orientation to it, and hence must see our life in story. From whichever direction, I see these conditions as connected facets of the same reality, inescapable structural requirements of human agency” (Taylor 1992:51-2).

⁴ I find MacIntyre’s (1984) conceptualization of moral traditions compelling. Though I do not share his pessimism about the incoherence of modern individualism, I concur that traditions have lost the coherence of the past (also see Pandian 2008). What I am speaking of as a ‘realm of value’ is most closely related to Aihwa Ong’s articulation of ethical regimes: “*Ethics* is used here in the ancient Greco-Roman sense of a practice of the self, or normative techniques in self-care for attaining a particular mode of being. An ethical regime can therefore be construed as a style of living guided by given values for constituting oneself in line with a particular goal” (2006:21-2; also see Collier and Lakoff 2005). I differ from Ong, however, in my emphasis on narrative.

which literally means “it will be bad,” is a formulaic utterance that invokes cultural, religious and historical authority. Every Uyghur I met was familiar with *yaman bolidus*. They range from “don’t steal” to “don’t trim your fingernails and toenails on the same day” (because it is said there will then be a wedding and a death on the same day). One woman in Kashgar recalled the common *yaman bolidus* her father told her:

“If a girl does not wear a long dress or long pants, and if she wears short sleeve and wears things [like this] and if her arms are uncovered, it will be *yaman bolidu*. If women go outside a lot and hang out with men, people will not like this kind of thing. It will be *yaman bolidu*. She will come under judgment.” This is what he said. He said these things will be *yaman bolidu*.

Yaman bolidus, however, are not merely moral injunctions severed from their original context and reasoning, though they can be deployed in that way. Khanpasha, a woman, in her early twenties described the kind of ethical and scientific discourse that surrounds *yaman bolidus*, where ethics and science are viewed as inextricably linked:

Among us Uyghurs there is a lot of talk about *yaman bolidus*. For example if pieces of *nan* fall to the floor and we step on them, it is said to be *yaman bolidu*. If you step on a piece of *nan* (bread) it is said your eyes will go blind. But there is also an *ilmiy* (scientific, academic or learned) basis to this. Because the farmers reap the wheat harvest with great difficulty. So if we step on *nan* we are not respecting people’s labor. If we understand it scientifically, this kind of meaning comes out. If we cut our fingernails at night it is *yaman bolidu*. It is said that things will go badly for you. But actually, when it is dark we can’t see clearly under an oil lamp, so we could possibly cut ourselves somewhere. This also has a scientific basis.

Khanpasha assumed that I would consider *yaman bolidus* evidence of Uyghur “backwardness.” Therefore, she spent a great deal of time presenting the *ilmiy* reasoning behind them. The way she did so, by reworking the common understanding of *scientific*, is noteworthy. In the first example of not stepping on *nan*, the source of the rule is that one should respect the work of others, an important communal principle. In the second example of not cutting one’s fingernails at night, the reason is directly practical. (Though I did not ask Khanpasha about rules regarding modest dress, one could imagine her explaining them as reasonable insofar as they contribute to living a virtuous life.) Khanpasha’s rebuttal to those who consider *yaman bolidus* as superstition is to reframe them as well-reasoned. At the same time, this reasoning is not understood with respect to a single authority or set of values and principles. Thus, *yaman bolidus* call upon the speaker and listener to relate moral rules to realms of value and their own lives. The test for reasonableness is not formed with respect to, say, a differentiated Islamic or Uyghur morality, but rather to a commonsense notion of how they come together. This happens, I argue, through the practice of narrative ethics.

A woman in her sixties, Buayshem, recalled the time in her youth when she became a teacher. According to government rules, she could no longer wear a veil. She asked her cousin, the imam of the local mosque, what she should do. He answered that the intention behind and the merits of her work as a teacher would be the essential factors in God’s judgment:

I asked him, “If those of us who have jobs go about with our faces uncovered, people say it will be *yaman bolidu* – our father and our relatives say this. What should we do?”... He told us... “What you are doing now is related with science and you have also taught science to the children... we say that [teachers] turn black into white... no matter what subject it is [whether religion or academic subjects] people who impart knowledge will go to heaven. So my child if you do not have evil intentions toward other people and if you go

about like you are now with your face uncovered, but if there is no evil in your heart, then it will not be yaman bolidu.” After [hearing] this viewpoint, I did not feel a lot of stress.

In this case, yaman bolidu is referenced as a basis for bringing together communal and religious principles in a specific political situation. The imam helps Buayshem re-narrate her understanding of the requirements of a pious life by focusing on the virtue of passing knowledge down to the next generation. In my reading, this is not a mere rationalization for abandoning proper religious conduct; rather, it is a novel refashioning of ethical life in the face of the exigencies of the time. Put differently, the imam or Buayshem were no less genuinely Muslim, though critics might judge them as such.⁵ As has often been the case in recent history, Uyghurs are called upon to make sense of a rapidly changing and often unpredictable world. They do so in dialogue, in person and through a range of media: all narratives are thus co-narratives. Through stories big and small, they forge self-narratives, which in turn, inflect shared stories of the good life.

Middle Class Dreams

In *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah et al. write of the middle class as marked by an ethos rather than an economic or professional condition: “In the true sense of the term, the middle class is defined not merely by the desire for material betterment but by a conscious, calculating effort to move up the ladder of success.” ([1985] 2008:148). They note the remarkable fact is that *everyone* in America tends to think in middle class categories, “even when they are inappropriate” (xlix). In China, where the post-socialist period has now endured as long as the socialist, the proletarian-as-role-model is scarcely imaginable to the younger generations. The relentless striving for upward mobility and praise of technical rationality is pervasive. Among statesmen and scholars, there is a near obsession with proving the existence of and cultivating a middle class that will serve as the bedrock of China’s long-term stability and economic development (Liu 2009:91). When Ayshe was a middle school teacher in 1999, for example, there was a campaign to teach students the three most important things to know in the 21st century: computers, English or a foreign language, and how to drive a car. She was teaching in rural Hotan, Xinjiang’s deep south, where most of the students had never seen a computer. Most, too, would never travel abroad or own a car. Nevertheless, this trifecta of the 21st century captured their imaginations. It evoked a life as a white collar employee or wealthy businessperson, driving to work and sending emails to international counterparts. (In this dream’s apotheosis, the job followed studying in Beijing or, even better, in America.) Even people for whom this vision described an improbable, if not impossible, path, defended it vigorously – if not for them, then for their children.

One interpretation of the dominance of middle class ideals is that Uyghurs, like other Chinese citizens, are experiencing an anticipated social moment, a time for private dreams after a period of privation. In this view, people’s desires were repressed or deemed unrealistic during the socialist era: the reform period represents an unleashing of the basic aspirations of the modern individual. The theoretical underpinning of such a view is that individuals have interests, pursue them and try to overcome obstacles put in their way. An alternative to the instrumental and empiricist understanding, and one I find more compelling, is that the intense wave of private dreams and desires was not unleashed, but rather enabled, induced, and most importantly, grappled with as the context of life shifted. As Ayshe’s experience in rural Hotan

⁵ The division between “pure” Islam and its “customary” and “syncretic” forms has a long history, especially with respect to Central Asia. For a critique of discourses that privilege the “pure” as the “real” in Central Asian Islam, see DeWeese 1994 and 2002.

illustrates, a key location of the inculcation of values and cultivation of desire is the schoolroom. The totem of today is the college entrance exam (Ch. *gaokao*), a fitting symbol for the children of the information revolution.

As a shrinking religious and ethnic minority in their own autonomous region, Uyghurs are well aware that the middle class dream, with its prizing of individual achievements over group solidarity, has potentially dramatic consequences. During a discussion of interethnic relationships, a friend chastised me: “It’s fine if you marry a person who isn’t Chinese, there are more than a billion of you. If there were a billion Uyghurs, I’d marry an American!” The very changes that led to the ascendance of a middle class ethos have also enabled and induced particular visions of community. As I spent more time in Xinjiang, I began to grasp the contours of the ideal middle class Uyghur woman. She maintains a fine balance of integration (speaks fluent Mandarin, has an excellent education and a well-paying job) and separation (marries a Uyghur, speaks and writes Uyghur, dresses modestly and prays regularly, teaches her children Uyghur culture and has traveled to inner China or abroad but never plans to stay). Though the list seems long, it is only a representative sample of what my interviewees described in surprisingly consistent ways. The stories I share here are rife with dilemmas and situations in which women struggle to find their way in a world of contradictory demands and multiple glass ceilings.⁶

Storytelling

I will have spent my life trying to understand the function of remembering, which is not the opposite of forgetting, but rather its lining. We do not remember, we rewrite memory much as history is rewritten.
- Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil*

The stories I present in the chapters that follow are meant to be evocative of life in Xinjiang. Of course, they do not constitute a holistic picture of Uyghur women’s life since they are based on my experiences as field researcher and friend over the course of a year. I chose and textualized the stories with certain anthropological purposes in mind. Overall, I recorded forty-six semi-structured interviews with Uyghur women.⁷ I also spent countless hours engaged in the classic activities of participant observation: shopping, studying, attending weddings and drinking tea.⁸ In several cases, I traveled to meet the families of my research participants and spend time in their hometowns. Although each chapter takes a single woman’s life history as its structure, I also weave in observations, conversations and materials from other interviews and sources. I experimented with presenting my material in different ways, but I kept returning to the humanistic conventions of storytelling and the life story in particular. As with all stories, they can be read in many ways. This is a story about the people I spent time with in Xinjiang, as well as one about the social, historical and political conditions that shape their lives and self-

⁶ As Wiemer observes, minorities in Xinjiang tend to “be more intimidated by the process of securing licenses and approvals and to have greater difficulty obtaining financing.” This is largely because they lack the necessary networks. For example, the non-Han share of the preferred “staff and worker” (*zhigong*) jobs in state and collective units was only 30 percent (2004:179-80).

⁷ I recorded a total of sixty-eight semi-structured interviews that cover a broad range of topics, including a life history. The remaining twenty-two interviews were with Uyghur men, Chinese men and women, and other minorities in Xinjiang (e.g. Hui, Mongol, and Kyrgyz). In subsequent work, I plan to draw from the interviews that are not discussed here.

⁸ As a foreign student at Xinjiang University and Kashgar Teacher’s College, it was required that I live in student housing. Therefore, I was unable to immerse myself in the life of a single family or village as I might have liked to. In fact, my original plan was to spend the entire year in Kashgar, but the college there was not accepting applications from foreigners at the time. A few anthropologists have had luck working around the rules (Rudelson 1997; Dautcher 2009); for the most part, they conducted their fieldwork before the tightening of restrictions in the late 1990s. It is extremely difficult to live for long periods in rural areas. I am not aware of any foreign researcher who has been able to do so.

narratives. It is a story about how I experienced Xinjiang in sensory, emotional and intellectual terms. All of these narratives are intertwined; all are true in their limited and partial way.

Even as life histories and humanistic writing techniques create opportunities for connection and cross-cultural understanding, they also raise certain challenges.⁹ One of the risks is that readers will take the women I write about to be average Uyghur women. Although I sought to interview women of different groups, they in no way comprise a random or representative sample. Likewise, my account does not reveal the genuine experience of Uyghur women. As described above, my aim is to illuminate the contours of an ethos, not to sociologically parse life in Xinjiang. In many cases, I found that someone with unique experiences best elucidated a facet of life or way of thinking. The moral of the story, as Abu-Lughod suggests, is that things are and are not what they seem to be (1993:19). Equivocation goes all the way down. If there is an overarching point to writing about Xinjiang through “mirrors and foils,” it is to undermine the tendency to think of Islamic reasoning as *particularly* resistant to (or susceptible to cooptation by) other forms of reasoning, for example, instrumental, nationalist or feminist.¹⁰ I hope these stories will convey to the reader that like people everywhere, Uyghur women engage in a narrative ethics that draw from realms of value in systematic, yet novel, ways.

It is also important to emphasize that oral histories are performances – stories people tell about themselves – delivered in a particular moment and context and with a particular audience in mind (Behar 1990). As Marker suggests, every remembrance is, in fact, a rewriting. Inevitably, I have had to find a balance between omitting the details of oral history-as-performance altogether and being self-reflexive to the point of distraction, thus undermining the goal of creating a sense of connection and empathy. There are two points about context that merit attention at the outset. First, because the political situation in Xinjiang is very complicated, I worried that I might cause problems for my interviewees. Uyghurs, I assumed, would be hesitant to say anything that could later be interpreted as anti-government and therefore “separatist.” They were taking me at my word that I would do everything possible to protect their anonymity. Based on the volume of critiques levied and the general tone of our conversations, I did not sense much reluctance, though I can never be sure. Some elderly Uyghurs gave accounts of turbulent times using formulaic, official language. More often than not, however, this was followed by a vigorous commentary as they described their own lives under actually existing socialism.

Second, because I am an ethnic Chinese, I worried that Uyghurs would be suspicious of my intentions or simply uninterested in talking with me. In my year in Xinjiang, this came up only once with a Uyghur man who thought I might use my research to somehow benefit the Chinese government. The rest of the time I was overwhelmed by offers to help. I had far more volunteers than time to interview them. The main reason for this was not my charm or commitment, as I might like to think, but simply the fact that Uyghurs by and large did not perceive me as Chinese. In all of the telltale signs of habitus, from my permanent smile to my practical footwear, I was patently an American in their eyes.¹¹

⁹ For an incisive review of the tradition of humanistic writing in anthropology, see Abu-Lughod 1993.

¹⁰ See, for example, Abu-Lughod 2002, Ahmed 1992, Mahmood 2005, and Morris 2002.

¹¹ In the end, my ethnicity facilitated my research. I was able to spend time in villages where another foreign researcher might not have been able to stay for more than a day visit. Travel in the countryside in southern Xinjiang is highly restricted and all overnight foreign guests are supposed to register with the local public security bureau.

Narrative and Historical Difference

In considering the interviews as a whole, I felt the difference in genre was greatest between generations. This suggestion is not new, but it is one that cuts across the dominant ethos in Xinjiang and China more broadly. In the rush of the race, it is easy to forget that *desire* and *interest* have not always been structured in their current forms. Besides obvious differences in content, there were overall patterns in the rhythm and temporality of the self-narratives. The generation that came of age during the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution tell stories of past tumult and present quietude, of a loud roar that settled into a peaceful rhythm. The women who are the children of the reform era describe their lives in syncopated beats – steady periods punctuated by possibilities for re-making one’s life through new opportunities to travel and be entrepreneurial. The youngest generation, for whom the socialist revolution is a mere footnote, speaks of life in the frenetic rhythm that characterizes the present; their narratives swing pendulum-like between competing demands and desires. Although there are many other ways I could have organized the materials I gathered – by region, profession, wealth, education and so on – I am convinced that an attention to history, to the critical moments that shaped a generation, is good starting point from which to understand how people make sense of their worlds in the present.

CHAPTER 2 – INTIMATE HISTORIES

Ancestors

Like wind from cold stars,
you all are passing between my eyelashes,
hey, you who have settled on death's continent,
there in my body,
hey, my ancestors...

How yellowed, your hopes,
like treasures!
And discarded, in the prayer hall,
like oil lamps put out by the wind,
your faces silent!

As for me...
I sit sadly in your deserted wastelands,
like your wounded camel.

by Ekhmetjan Osman [undated]
(translated by Joshua L. Freeman, December, 2008)

On a bright afternoon in Urumqi, Patigul and I drive to her mother's apartment. It is in an unpainted concrete apartment building, rising six or seven stories, a few miles from the Uyghur neighborhood where I live. Several months earlier, I met Patigul, a college professor, through a mutual friend. Adila, Patigul's younger sister, opens the door in a white t-shirt and sweatpants. She brushes back her unruly curls and welcomes us. As we take off our shoes, their mother Amangul walks up with her hands outstretched. She is portly and jolly, with deep furrows in her browned cheeks. Amangul wears a matching floral polyester skirt and long-sleeved shirt, as well as a wispy headscarf with golden threads that sparkle in the sunlight. We sit at a long wooden table next to the window, with cashews, almonds and sweets laid out in more than a dozen small glass bowls on an embroidered tablecloth, protected by a heavy plastic cover. The inside of the apartment is as plush as the outside is dreary. Framed photographs of children and grandchildren sit alongside vases of fake flowers and lace doilies. After Patigul pours us tea, we chat about our families and my research. One of Amangul's grandchildren is watching television in the next room; every so often, we hear the squeaky banter of Chinese cartoon characters. As soon as I begin my interview questions, it is clear that Amangul is a master storyteller. She barely pauses for sips of tea. Adila, who is on break from a doctoral program in Turkey, listens in, adding a comment or two. Patigul leaves mid-conversation to make *laghmon*, handmade noodles with a tomato and mutton sauce. She checks in occasionally to tell her mother to answer my questions and stop talking about "unimportant things." But Amangul cannot help speaking in full stories.

In this chapter, I detail the intimate ruptures that shaped the lives and narratives of a generation. Across China, periods of upheaval meant an inability to carry out the daily and ritual tasks of life in familiar ways. Meals were monitored, weddings were hurried. Socialist rule was remarkable, not in its brute or ideological strength, but in its intimacy. The effects of revolution exceeded the already profound impact of the redistribution of political and economic power. These ruptures both conjured and depended on a reconfiguration of the relationship between state power and the community, family and individual (Friedman 2006; Mueggler 2001; Yan

2003). Unpredictable political shifts shaped Amangul's life, from experiencing hunger during the Great Leap Forward (1958-61) to marrying quickly during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). She experienced, too, the excitement of the times, the sense of possibility and transformation. Through a new program promoting minority education, Amangul was recruited to study in inner China. Her engagement with the revolutionary project culminated in her rushing to Beijing and squeezing through a sea of people to glimpse Chairman Mao. No less than others in China and elsewhere, Amangul dreamt of a life more modern. While she described the post-socialist present as an improvement on the socialist past, her story about the potentials and perils of Party politics is a relentlessly complex one.

Drawing on histories of the region and my interviews with members of the older generation, I describe the ways in which moments of upheaval figure into narratives of self. Though I never heard the Great Leap Forward or the Cultural Revolution mentioned in daily conversation, these periods served as reference points for life in the contemporary moment. Humahan, a grandmother in Hotan, suggests they were a time of ethical challenges:

Before, we wore headscarves. Later we entered into a period of wearing thin headscarves where you could still see our heads through the scarves. Most people didn't wear headscarves. They would just go outside with nylons up to here. Now again, things are like they were before – the children of the older people – it doesn't matter if it is in their clothing [or in other areas of their life], they are now looking to the way things used to be. They have started dressing appropriately, in a very good way, in tune with Islam. Now there are even some cadres' kids who are wearing long skirts and praying namaz five times a day.

It is now possible to look to before, “the way things used to be,” for guidance. When I press Humahan about her periodization, she clarifies that the “period of wearing thin headscarves” is the “time of Mao Zedong.” For her, the order of things has been restored, marked by the fact that the children of Party members can dress modestly and pray. Even if the vast majority does not do so, the ones who do are symbolic of the possibility of living with greater ease.

Not surprisingly, economic improvements are central to the common refrain, *things are better now*. When I ask Humahan about how her life has changed from before, she replies:

Now we have good conditions for everything. For instance, if you go out on the street there is public transportation. If you want to go somewhere, there is no trouble going there. Before, if we walked from Hotan to the countryside our feet would hurt. There was no car. Even if we went by donkey one of us would have to walk beside the donkey and lead it. Things were difficult. Now we have good conditions for everything. Allah has made things good.

A similar sentiment was expressed by a seventy-year-old woman in Kashgar who embroidered designs on Uyghur *doppas* (square hats). She lived in a single room with a light bulb hanging overhead; besides a decades-old television, her room had only the bare essentials. Her eyesight was starting to fail and she answered most of my questions with the refrain: “Because I have grown old, it is gone from my memory.” But when I asked about the hardest time in her life, she did not hesitate: “That time, the time when I was little when we ate *zaghra* (corn bread). If we found food, we ate; if we did not, we went hungry. Now every place has become rich.” For the generation that remembers the Great Leap era, eating corn instead of wheat is associated with extreme poverty and deprivation. Despite her lack of means, even relative to her neighbors, she considered herself well off. She could afford wheat bread. Though the past remains unspoken in everyday life, it is remembered, inevitably, in the sensibilities and dispositions of today.

The narratives of the older generation are guided by a sense of recuperation: not as a return to a past state or a loss compensated by an equivalent gain, but a process of healing that simultaneously restores and transforms. When a scar forms over a deep cut, the skin is never the same. By the time the scar fades, the body has aged; a complete return is impossible. That is to say, healing takes time and times change. In the following stories of upheaval, the Party marks the passing of time with big gestures that resound through the everyday and intimate. Amangul marries Polat to disentangle herself from a ‘reactionary’ boyfriend; as a young woman in Kashgar, Gulbahar divorces her ‘tyrant’ husband to avoid harassment. For these women, healing entails a calm and stability that allows one to be a good mother and wife, a good provider and pious Muslim. In their children, they see the fruits of order restored.

Ancestors

In the poem above, Ekhmetjan Osman mourns his past, a landscape that both surrounds and permeates him. He sits in the “deserted wastelands” like “a wounded camel.” Within Central Asian cosmology, the camel represents continuity between worlds and generations, the ancestral line. In modern literature in the region, the camel has come to symbolize the national spirit of a people, perhaps most vividly in Chingiz Aitmatov’s novel, *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* (1983). The novel’s Kazakh protagonist, Yedigei, struggles to find and tame a camel. He describes the camel as his brother because they were “fed from the same milk” (85). Yedigei’s saga, which occurs in the span of a single, epic day, opens at the railway station at Boranly-Burannyi, a name half-Kazakh, half-Russian. When he finally confronts the camel, he sees a refracted image of himself:

Yedigei was astonished by the indomitable, unabated fervour of the male; his rock-like determination to hold onto his freedom. He knew that he had to take that happiness away from him, but there was no other way out...In the animal’s dilated, unblinking eyes, Yedigei saw a sharp reflection of himself... (269)

Eventually, Yedigei tames the camel with a vicious whipping but refuses to castrate him. The subduing of the camel invokes two intertwined struggles – with Soviet/Russian dominance and with the need to tame one’s nomadic spirit in the face of the dreams and demands of modern life.¹²

It is also possible to interpret Osman’s lament in a dualistic manner. While some observers of Xinjiang focus on the Chinese presence as a process of “internal colonization” (Gladney 2005), less attention is paid to the sense of loss stemming from abandoning the dreams of one’s ancestors; to wit, Osman uses the image of ancestral hopes being *discarded*. As Amangul’s self-narrative reflects, Uyghurs also sought to participate in China’s modernizing project. This was no doubt a fraught desire, especially when ethnic and religious attachments were denounced.¹³ At the same time, what is mourned as lost (and celebrated as revived) marks a broader transition that is constitutive of the modern condition. The socialist revolution marks a break after which the Chinese subject was no longer “under the ancestors’ shadow.” A utopian future, rather than the genealogical past, became the basis for society. When the socialist future

¹² Put in another way, the camel would have to be tamed according to either grand vision of the 20th century. Unlike the nomadic history of the Kazakhs, Uyghurs were a settle people by the mid-9th century. Nevertheless, the camel has similar symbolic resonance among them, especially as camels were important beasts of burden for Uyghur traders. Here, of course, the nomadic spirit should be understood metaphorically.

¹³ Many Uyghurs felt their ethnic and religious practices were disproportionately targeted, even though Chinese ancestor worship and “superstition” also came under attack. James Millward finds evidence that the ethnic factor in Xinjiang did lead to “insults and abuses of human rights over a longer period” in comparison with Han areas (2007:275).

fell away, one was left “in one’s own shadow” (Liu 2000, 2002).¹⁴ This is no less true for the Uyghur subject, for whom the past is a resource rather than a determining structural condition. Thus, we should interpret any sense of return, of recuperation, as a thoroughly modern invocation of the traditional past.¹⁵

Eastward Imaginings

Amangul was born in 1946, in a small town near Kashgar. She was sixty-one at the time of our interview. Her father died when she was young, leaving her mother to support seven children by selling vegetables in the market. In the early morning and late afternoon, Amangul helped her mother by carrying cabbage on her back to the market. When she spoke of her childhood, emotion overwhelmed her: “I didn’t have shoes on my feet...My teacher would feel sorry for me and would say, ‘Oh, my daughter, you don’t have shoes on your feet, how can you bear this?’ And she’d take me in front of the stove. When I would sit like that and rest, I would buy *zaghra* (corn bread) for five *pong* (cents) and eat it sitting in the sunshine. At noon if I went home, my mother would not make food, she would give me one *mao* (ten cents) and tell me to get some food from the bazaar and eat it.” Amangul wiped tears from her wrinkled cheeks. After a long pause, she said, “Because I knew difficulties like this, I wanted to go study in inner China.” Inner China (Uy. *ichkiri*, Ch. *neidi*) represented an escape from hardship, a symbol for educational and economic opportunity.¹⁶

In 1960, when she was in the 6th grade, Amangul had her chance to leave Xinjiang. Teachers came to choose minority students for an arts school in Beijing and she was one of the four selected from her county. Despite her mother’s protests, Amangul boarded a bus at the last minute to catch up with the other students in Urumqi: “When I said I was going to go study, [my mother] cried and cried and she locked me in the house – this is what she did. When she did this, I said I would kill myself. I went up on the roof and put a rope around my neck – this is what I did – I threw myself off the ladder. The younger of my older brothers opened the door, and as soon as he came he quickly cut the rope. ‘What is this you have done?’ he said. And then they said, ‘we have to send her to study.’”

But on the way to Urumqi to catch the train to Beijing, Amangul became sick with tonsillitis and needed surgery. The teachers in charge tried to persuade her to stay and study at the Urumqi Arts Institute, but she did not agree. She told the teachers, “I am one of the people going to Beijing.” It was inconceivable for her to agree; she had left home against her mother’s wishes with the goal of reaching inner China. In the end, the teachers found a place for her in Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu, a province to the east of Xinjiang. They told her that Lanzhou was a smaller version of Beijing. When she arrived, however, the situation was bleak. It was nothing like she had imagined. In the morning the students ate only a “black *zaghra* (corn bread) as small as a walnut.” The dorms were filled with stories of what was happening beyond the school walls: “At that time in 1962 and 1963, it was the time when there was a very serious famine in Lanzhou. People ate each other’s dead bodies; they ate each other’s dead bodies. It was a time when these kind of circumstances happened.”

¹⁴ The phrase “under the ancestors’ shadow” comes from the title of a book by Francis Hsu ([1948] 1967). Buck-Morss beautifully describes how this unmooring, both a cause and effect of modernization, is shared across socialist and capitalist dreamworlds: “The construction of mass utopia was the dream of the twentieth century. It was the driving ideological force of industrial modernization in both its capitalist and socialist forms” (2002:ix).

¹⁵ On the modernity of tradition, see Hobsbawm & Ranger 1992. In the case of Xinjiang, see Bovingdon and Tursun 2004.

¹⁶ Inner China, or China proper, is used to refer to the regions of China where Han Chinese are the majority group. Areas typically excluded are Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia and parts of Manchuria (the northeast provinces of Heilongjiang, Jining and Liaoning). This division was frequently invoked in everyday conversation.

The students continued with dance practice even though they often passed out from hunger and fatigue. Amangul fainted five different times, “In the last year, I don’t know how I studied, I was always crying.” She could not keep up in her classes since her Chinese was poor. The other minority students in her cohort had already been at the school for two years. Eventually, the teachers told her to switch into a Railway Department class that enrolled at the same time she had. Amangul was then transferred to a training college in Urumqi; after graduating in 1964, she was assigned to a job selling tickets at a major train station. Less than a year later, the department recruited her to be an announcer on a new line that extended all the way to Beijing because her Chinese had improved during her studies in Lanzhou. Amangul was excited. Her first difficult experience in inner China had not deterred her eastward imaginings.

Past Repast

Given that her family owned no land and that she was young child in the 1950s, Amangul did not recall the reorganization of farmers into communes. For most, however, the period was experienced as a profound rupture both in daily life and in the system of managing social and economic relations. In 1949, the vast majority of residents of Xinjiang were farmers. When I asked about land reform (*yer eslahat*) in general, most spoke about the Great Leap period (1958-61). It was remembered so vividly because it was the culmination of the logic of mass collectivization. Buayshem, who later became a cadre, characterized the time as one of equality: “There were not some people who were rich and some people who were poor. It was the same for everyone – everyone was poor.” Others emphasized the contrast between the socialist ideology of equality and the inequalities of actually-existing socialism. For example, a woman who lived near Kashgar recalled the differential burdens of group labor: “At that time we carried the soil and fertilizer to the field, very far, as far as the Yerkend road is from here. Some people had donkey carts, and whoever had a donkey didn’t worry that it might be too difficult for them and put their loads on the animal.” The change, however, was more than in the configuration of inequalities: urban and rural Uyghurs alike were fond of telling me that “the five fingers are not the same,” that is, equality of the socialist kind contradicted the natural order of things.¹⁷

As Beller-Hann (2008) has shown, the everyday and ritual practices around food were central to constituting Uyghur community for at least several centuries before the socialist period. *Dastixan*, meaning both tablecloth and the food offered on it, and *chay* (tea) signified a complex of practices that operated as organizing social principles. They embodied the Uyghur system of hospitality and reciprocity: “Rules of everyday hospitality were so binding that, in the early twentieth century in Khotan, it was held that if the same person entered another person’s house as many as ten times a day, the tablecloth had to be spread out for him on each occasion” (206-7). Failure to offer hospitality to a guest – at a minimum nan and a cup of tea – brought shame to the household; conversely, refusal to accept an offer of food or drink caused great offense. As recently as the 1930s, it was considered an obligation to offer cooked food to one’s neighbors (205). Communal eating was also a religious event: each meal began with the reciting of the Fatiha, the first chapter of the Quran, and concluded with a prayer. Uyghurs often shared bowls and teacups as a symbolic gesture of equality.¹⁸

Practices of hospitality, characterized by the ideals of reciprocity and altruism, nevertheless had inequalities embedded within them. Serving prestigious foods was a sign of

¹⁷ Beller-Hann translates the phrase as “The five fingers of a hand are not similar.” She observes that it is unclear if this saying and its ubiquity emerged as “a recent reaction to enforced equality or whether it survived from the pre-socialist period, in which local stratification was to some extent mitigated by redistributive social institutions (as, of course, it is today)” (2008:429).

¹⁸ This practice continues in a new form during alcohol drinking rituals among men (Dautcher 2009).

wealth and a way of affirming social status. A guest of rank was offered the place of honor, facing the entrance, while others were seated farther away. As expressed in a saying from northern Xinjiang, displays of wealth and status were important:

It is fitting to go to a wedding in a good caftan, and to the feast on horseback.

Local informants at the beginning of the twentieth century explained to the Russian ethnographer Pantusov that guests who arrived on horseback during religious festivals had a better time (Beller-Hann 2008:207). Well-dressed guests sat in the place of honor and were entertained with respect, while others were disregarded.

Pre-socialist Uyghur community operated according to a system of inclusion/exclusion and equality/inequality, which was neither static nor arbitrary. It revolved around life cycle and religious rituals, such as circumcision, marriage, remembrance of the dead and the Festival of Sacrifice (*qurban heyti*; Ar. Eid al-Adha), commemorating Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son in obedience to God. These events had a redistributive element, through which the less prosperous received alms or gifts, creating bonds with the broader community. More affluent households provided food to all members of the mosque community; during many of these events, giving charity to beggars and other outsiders was considered an important aspect of the ritual itself. Daily hospitality, however, occurred mostly between neighbors, close kin and invited guests, creating a network of reciprocity, usually within the mosque community. In both contexts, *dastixan* was a key symbol and resource. The types of food offered reflected the status of the guest and host and constituted the network of mutual pleasure and obligation in the community. Broadly speaking, it was this economic and moral system that was refigured by the socialist revolution.

Communal Life Refigured

In the early 1950s, Gulbahar was sitting with her mother-in-law in their home in Kashgar when a cadre came in and denounced their home as the home of a "local despot" (*zomiger*), saying, "Because the girls are not old enough they will not be considered landowners (*poméshchik*), but this home is considered the home of a landowner. Your oldest son will be considered a landowner." The oldest son, Imam, was Gulbahar's husband. Gulbahar's father-in-law was tied up on a stage and accused for several days and then imprisoned for two or three years. After her father-in-law's arrest, young girls and divorcees in the neighborhood came and took away everything – the land, furniture, clothes – until the house was empty: "Nothing happened to me. I looked at them. And when my mother-in-law would cry, I would just look at her." She was in shock. Not long after, her mother-in-law died of a heart condition that, according to Gulbahar, was caused by anger.

Gulbahar, who was born around 1940 in Kashgar, lamented her ill-fated first marriage, recalling how her uncle had warned against it. He said, "They are going to go after the rich people [lit: take out the brains of the rich people]. Imam is very rich so he said, 'Let's not hold the wedding.'" But Gulbahar's grandmother replied, "Oh my child there is the saying, 'What the wolf takes he gets, what the dog takes he gets.' No matter what, if people ask whose son did you give her to in marriage, if others say she was given to so and so Hajji's son, it doesn't matter if they do not get along." The wolf and dog are of the same kind, so one might as well be the wolf and pursue more; in other words, the family should arrange the better marriage to the rich hajji's son. In her grandmother's thinking, there should be no shame in making a good match. Gulbahar paused and then said with sadness, "Now fifty years later, until now, these words are still in my mind. Later, when [my father-in-law] had those troubles, we would say it would have

been good if my grandmother hadn't said this." As Gulbahar's experience reflects, the new system of class labels and struggle went beyond a material revolution: even folklore and conventional wisdom would have to be replaced. Her grandmother could not have anticipated how devastating it could be to marry a rich hajji's son.

As in other parts of China, poor peasants in Xinjiang initially welcomed the land reforms. However, the rapid acceleration of collectivizing land, livestock and other property in the late 1950s caused confusion and resistance. Because early incrementalist approaches failed to yield the desired results, Mao announced the Great Leap Forward, a plan to jumpstart industrial and agricultural production.¹⁹ Following the Soviet example, grain and steel were to serve as the pillars for the unprecedented leap in development. In August 1958, the Politburo set the goal of doubling steel production within a year's time. In the ensuing frenzy, household items like pots and utensils were smelted into brittle, often unusable, steel. Aygul, a teacher and farmer in Hotan County, recalled the process by which precious trees in the arid south were burned to form a paltry amount of steel:

During that time, they were smelting steel and iron. To smelt the steel they cut down every poplar tree, mulberry tree, hawthorn berry tree, and burned them all... and when they burned several tons of firewood, a few *miqsals* [3.6 grams] of steel would be produced. They would produce charcoal by burning the firewood. And then using the charcoal they would smelt the steel and iron.

Aygul went on to describe the plight of farmers:

The farmers worked in the communal kitchen, and helped in the implementation of the Great Leap Forward. As nan became less and less available, the farmers' lives became difficult. Everyone's lives were very difficult. The cadres would take the flour from the grain storehouse and distribute it; people would eat what was provided for them by the communal kitchen. No one had a pan hanging in her home... The leader and the [Party] secretaries had plenty of food. They and their children had a lot of food. The common people only had a little food but they did lots of work. People had to use tickets.

Inequalities persisted, but in different forms and without traditional means of redress. Food, once at the center of Uyghur custom and community, was scarcer than most anyone could remember. The physical and social landscape was also transformed. During this time, when Amangul was suffering from hunger in Lanzhou, millions of people across China died from malnutrition and related causes. She left at an unlucky time. Although the situation was difficult everywhere, Xinjiang fared better than other provinces: over a million people fled more desperate situations by migrating to Xinjiang. Between 1960 and 1962, about thirty thousand tons of grain was exported from Xinjiang to other provinces.²⁰

The dramatic failure of the Great Leap ushered in a period of moderate policies. In the calm after the storm of her father-in-law's arrest and mother-in-law's passing, Gulbahar and her husband had three children. The calm, however, was short-lived. The family came under attack again during the Cultural Revolution: "I was so afraid, and I thought they would think I was part of the rich people's group, so I got divorced... The kids would say 'Let's roll the round father into

¹⁹ Collectivization happened more slowly in Xinjiang, partly related to the dearth of local non-Han cadres. By the end of 1953, thirty-four percent of the peasants had been organized in mutual aid teams or agricultural producer cooperatives, compared to forty-five percent in the Northwest region (McMillen 1979:134). By early 1954 over 11,000 hectares (7,370,00 *mu*) had been redistributed to some 650,000 households; by the next year sixty-three per cent of Xinjiang's farmers were in mutual aid teams and five per cent in first-stage cooperatives. By October 1958, 5,836 agricultural producers' cooperatives in Xinjiang had been merged into 562 people's communes of some 30,000 people, fifteen times the size of previous collectives (Millward 2007: 259). The Second Year Plan (1958-1963), referred to as the Great Leap Forward was cut short because of its dramatic failure.

²⁰ 300,000 rusticated urban youth and 890,000 others migrated to Xinjiang between 1959 and 1961 (Millward 2007: 263).

a ball and stack him in the brick furnace.” Soon after, Gulbahar remarried a mild-mannered man: “If you tell him to stand over there, he will stand over there. If you say come here, he will come here.” This time she preferred to take like a dog, not a wolf: “No matter what I said he would agree with me. Whatever I said I was going to do, he would agree with it. We wanted that time to pass uneventfully. And this is how it went.”²¹

Marriage in the Time of Revolution

In 1962, after the end of the Great Leap era, Amangul studied in Urumqi and began her work at the Railway Department. After selling tickets at the station for a short period, she was selected to be a train attendant between Urumqi and Beijing. Amangul distinguished herself during the “Learn from Comrade Lei Feng” campaign, carefully studying his diary and rising to the top of her class. Lei Feng was a soldier who, after his death, became the symbol of the ideal comrade. According to his diary and other mass education materials, Lei Feng committed innumerable acts of selfless devotion, such as sacrificing his meal for a hungry comrade, while also mastering the works of Chairman Mao. In addition to assigned readings, Amangul pored over volume after volume of Uyghur folktales and Chinese short stories during the long train rides. Because her Mandarin was now excellent, she was promoted again, from attendant to announcer. Before she finished her training, however, Red Guards took control of train communications and she returned to being an attendant. This marked the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) for Amangul and the other residents of Xinjiang.²² Not long after, the trains were overrun with Red Guards traveling to Tiananmen Square to catch a glimpse of Chairman Mao. Amangul joined the crowds:

We made it to Beijing on the train that day. We heard that Chairman Mao was receiving [the Red Guards]. People were carrying each other like this, like that, getting up on top of each other. People would say, “There is Chairman Mao!” It was like that. We stood at a very far distance and saw him; this is what we did. But I was not worthy to go beside him and see him. Inside I felt very upset [because I did not get closer]. Anyway, in my heart I have deep feelings about Chairman Mao. I also studied a lot. I memorized the works of Chairman Mao. At that time, if they said, memorize, I’d memorize long portions, the whole book.

After the initial stirrings of the Cultural Revolution, Amangul’s family entered a troubled period. Her brother, a cadre, was arrested for being a counterrevolutionary.²³ Amangul was nearly arrested because of her brother’s political problems and she was not permitted to work for three months. In December 1966, Amangul’s mother died of stomach cancer. Amangul was still mourning her loss when she met Polat at a friend’s wedding. Polat offered to cook *poshkal*, a flat

²¹ Another woman in Kashgar spoke of how her mother was unable to remarry because of her class label: “At that time, father was thirty-three years old. Because we were rich, there were people like this that worked [at our place]. My grandfather hired people to work and gave them money. They said we were oppressors. After the government came and after they made my parents wear a [dunce] hat, we were not like ordinary citizens, isn’t that right? Because we were not like ordinary citizens, so later it was like this for my father. In front of our house there was a mulberry tree. We wanted to burn the mulberry tree because there was no firewood for cooking. So at night we ourselves cut our own tree and we cooked a meal. The *xiao duizhang* [assistant captain] said, ‘Why did you cut down [the tree]? We the government is in control.’ He beat my father to death. So this is why I am crying now. He died at age thirty-three and left us with our mother for forty years. After we were left with our mother, she took care of the three of us. Then when my mother said that she wanted to marry someone else, they said rich farmers cannot get married with anyone else, and they beat my mother and cursed her and hung her up [by her hands].”

²² Millward identifies 20 years of cultural revolution in Xinjiang (1957-78) because tensions arose earlier in Xinjiang, due to strain in Sino-Soviet relations, and the lingering effects of attacks on local autonomy, even after the fall of the Gang of Four (2007:254-276).

²³ Amangul’s brother was associated with Liu Shaoqi’s work teams that Mao dispatched the Red Guards to combat.

pancake offered at a meal of remembrance (*nezir*), for her mother's death. *Poshkal* is usually prepared by the family or a friend of the family, and thus it was a gesture of intimacy. Polat, who worked in a publishing office within the agro-military corps, was eager to bring Amangul to meet his parents.²⁴ A few months later, they decided to marry. Amangul was anxious to find a husband because her boyfriend, a former schoolmate, was in political trouble. His parents had been arrested: "In fear, I thought if I got married all the problems would be gone. I got married to my husband so I could break up with that guy."

Amangul and Polat were married in the spring of 1967. On her way to her husband's home, there was fighting between two Red Guard factions:

When we came to that place there were two sides fighting with each other; they were fighting 'bong bong' with clubs. I was in fear inside the car. The rest of them were afraid and they left me and ran away. I thought, "If this is my wedding day, what will my future be like?" With one of my friends, I carried my trunk... The roads had snow on them and it was muddy. That day it was raining. I carried the trunk and went to Erdaoqiao [the Uyghur neighborhood in Urumqi], and when I was about to enter the apartment complex [of the groom and his family], there was a friend of my husband. He said to me, "Older sister you have brought your trunk by yourself, why didn't older brother Polat bring you?" And at that time I realized the man was supposed to go to the woman's home [to fetch her]. I did not know this custom.

Because her mother had passed away, there was no one to teach Amangul about wedding customs. In a traditional wedding, members of the bride's family and neighborhood block her path, symbolizing their reluctance to let her join another community. The obstacles are removed only after gifts are offered. In Amangul's case, there was none of the usual rituals or gifts, only fighting in the streets to block her way.

When Amangul gave birth to her and Polat's first daughter in 1968, her mother-in-law, knowing Amangul's desire to return to work, said she would raise the child for her. When Amangul became pregnant again, she wanted to get an abortion, "but at that time it was the Cultural Revolution – oh my, where could you find a place to get an abortion?" Amangul sent her second daughter to Hotan to be raised by her elder sister, who was lonely because her husband had been imprisoned. Amangul sent her twenty yuan each month, a hardship since her salary was only fifty to sixty yuan. Amangul and Polat raised four daughters, with the help of various relatives and nannies, while they both continued to work. Despite the uncertainties of the time, family life fell into a routine. Then, in 1974, Amangul's entire family was reunited: her brother was released from prison and the government returned part of the money that had been seized from him. Finally, her family "was at peace."

Socialist-Uyghur Ethics

In 1984, Amangul was told that she would have to find another job because of the restructuring of the Railway Department. She found a position at a government legal office. Given her love for reading and learning, the job was a good fit. In 1990, at the age of forty-three and with the support of her office, Amangul returned to get a bachelors degree. After graduating, she transferred to a higher bureau and became a department director. In her new role, Amangul

²⁴The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC, *Xinjiang shenchan jianshe bingtuan*) was established in order to transition soldiers into civilian agricultural work. The XPCC's share of GDP ranged from fifteen percent in 1952 up to thirty-one percent in 1971. In terms of employment, the XPCC's share was at a maximum of 22.5 percent in 1967; the vast majority of the members are Han Chinese (Millward 2007:253).

was in charge of helping people find the appropriate place to file complaints and lawsuits. They were usually poor people, often those with injuries and disabilities, who were seeking government benefits. To the irritation of her Han colleagues, she would serve them tea and listen to their concerns:

The people in my office would yell at me, “Why did you bring these people into the office? If something goes missing, what will you do?” When they yelled at me I would say, “He is also a human being the same as us. He is from your ethnic nationality. He is a Chinese person from Aqsu. He is from Ghulja. He does not have any money. If you do not help him, fine, but if I do help him what does it matter? What did they take from you?”

One time she got into a heated argument with a leader and confronted him for failing to arrest a person he was supposed to: “I have never kissed up to someone at the work unit. I have not said things like, ‘You are good in this way, in that way.’... All of my children have this [dislike of flattery]. Whatever we do, we do it with clear conscience.”

In speaking of her work at the legal office, Amangul invokes two moral realms. First, she distinguishes herself as a good socialist bureaucrat, concerned with the poor regardless of ethnicity. When Amangul initially described her enthusiasm to see Mao and study his texts, I thought she was perhaps being ironic. We had all laughed. But as the interview continued, and when I listened to it again later, I realized that her comments on, Lei Feng for example, were driven by neither irony nor cynicism. Her laugh was in recognition of how impossible it would be for me or her daughters to understand what it was like at the time. When she later voiced her criticism of her Chinese colleagues, it was clear that her ethical world was still embedded in socialist values. As Judith Farquhar notes, it is easy for people in China today to recall as Lei Feng as “an unsophisticated busybody,” and one largely fabricated by the Party’s propaganda department. Nevertheless, “some citizens even today – perhaps remembering still the egalitarian ideals of the revolution or deploring the rise of consumerism – remember him as an exemplar of generous service and high moral seriousness” (2002:41).

The second contrast Amangul presents is between her freely given hospitality and the current state of Chinese *guanxi*, or social networks. While she offered tea, biscuits and care to their clients, her coworkers only paid attention to people who offered bribes and flattery. Amangul implicitly distinguishes the norms of Uyghur hospitality from the self-serving behavior of her Chinese colleagues. In her description, their individualism is parasitic: they are so concerned with their own positions that they don’t even want her to help people, perhaps out of fear that problems will arise or that her efforts will paint them in an unflattering light. Amangul’s narrative makes clear that a combination of socialist and Uyghur values remains central to her self-narrative as an ethical subject.

In 2003, two years after retiring, Amangul and Polat went to Turkey to visit Adila and another daughter. From Turkey, they went to Saudi Arabia to complete the hajj. I asked her about the trip and her impressions: “We noticed that all the people in the world were there. All of them were crying out like [wailing sound]. We Muslims have a special person we respect, the Prophet Mohammed.” When she returned from hajj she began wearing a gauzy headscarf, which she had not done since her childhood. She also began to pray namaz once a day. But she tells me that it is as if she and Polat have “not truly gone on the hajj” because they don’t “go about like *real* hajjis.” Polat does not go to the mosque regularly and they do not talk openly about praying. She explains that because she worked in a legal bureau and Polat is a retired Party member, they do not want to attract attention to their religious practice. Amangul wanted to join the Party in the 1980s, but was stymied by her older brother’s political problems. While studying for her

bachelors, she once again became a candidate to join the Party. But when her second eldest daughter married and moved to Turkey, there were rumors at the work unit. The government is suspicious of Uyghurs with ties to Turkey because they fear pan-Turkic nationalist sentiment. In the end, she never became a cadre. Years later, Amangul still expresses disappointment.

Daughters, Futures

Among Amangul's four daughters, Patigul was the most academically successful. Despite the promises of the reform era, however, Patigul's plans were likewise thwarted by political events. Based on her college entrance exam score, Patigul should have been admitted to one of the top colleges in Beijing. But because of the Tiananmen protests in 1989, Uyghur students were not sent to Beijing that year. After studying in the year of preparatory classes required of students who attend Uyghur schools, Patigul was accepted to Lanzhou Normal University in Gansu. Both Amangul and Patigul ended up in Lanzhou, a place in between, a space of compromise. At first, Patigul wanted to go into law like her mother, but Amangul encouraged her to teach: "I wanted to be a teacher, but this was the only dream I was not able to realize. Originally in my dreams, first of all, I wanted to be a performer; then second, I wanted to be a teacher." Adila chimes in that Patigul scored so well on the college entrance exam that it was announced in the major newspapers in Xinjiang. With characteristic modesty, Patigul tries to deflect the praise, but her mother interrupts: "Because Patigul studied well, when the teachers said I was Patigul's mother, they looked at me with respect." Patigul has realized and exceeded her mother's dreams: she is a famous literature professor who appears regularly on television and radio shows. Amangul proudly tells me about an award Patigul received to take Masters level courses at a university in Shanghai.

Adila, the youngest, also studied in Shanghai. When she finished her bachelor's degree, she joined her sister in Istanbul. Her sister had moved there with her Turkish husband; after their divorce, she stayed and opened a successful import-export business. In the beginning, Amangul did not support Adila's move to Turkey to study for her doctorate: "I did not agree to this daughter going to Turkey without her getting married." When we finally pause to eat *laghmon*, the conversation turns to the potential husbands that Amangul has lined up for Adila's inspection. Together, Amangul, Patigul and Adila lament that it is nearly impossible to find a man who will understand her and who meets her qualifications. When Adila leaves to wash our dishes, Amangul tells me that she often cries when she thinks of her daughter bent over a book late at night, in a foreign country, alone. She supports her daughters in their studies and dreams, but also wonders if they know what could be lost along the way. When Adila returns, I ask her if she has thought about staying abroad permanently like her elder sister. She sighs and says, "I can't change." Turkey would never be home. Adila explains by citing a Uyghur woman's duties as a mother, worker and wife. Her mother, she thinks, is the ideal model of a woman who wears all three hats. She promises her mother that she will give the next suitor a serious look. Adila, it seems, knows what could be lost.

The Weight of the Past

In light of the upheavals experienced by Amangul and those of her generation, it is unsurprising that they place great value on stability. The oral histories and conversations I collected are replete with stories of loss accelerated by the policies and politics of the time. There are remembrances of lost parents, husbands, boyfriends, land, trees, cooking pots, traditions, jobs, and opportunities. To be *japakesh* was to adapt to rapid and unpredictable fluctuations,

while still keeping as central one's ethical duties as mother, worker and wife. None of the women I spoke with had illusions about the problems and challenges of the present. They are, after all, worried about their medical bills and their children's job security. They know the competitive market can be as capricious as party politics. Yet, while their memories remain largely unspoken, they are present: *things are better than they were before*, even when that simply means one can eat wheat instead of corn. As I suggested at the outset, the contemporary moment offers possibilities that both evoke and exceed those of the pre-socialist period. Humahan, who I quoted as praising the modest dress and pious behavior of cadres' children, told me her main childhood dream: "My hope was to be a good person, to be a good mother, and to train my children to be good people." Indeed, Humahan's daughter has surpassed her dreams: Nadie is training to be a Quranic teacher.²⁵ For Amangul, the possibility of the present is also embodied in her daughters. They have been able to fulfill professional dreams that escaped her grasp.

Before I leave, Adila tells me that Amangul rarely speaks of the past, even though she is known as a master storyteller. Even her mother, Adila reflects, has become mainly concerned with daily meals and prayers and the future of her children and grandchildren: what use is the weight of the past in today's China? Yet, when I asked about that heavy past, Amangul could not stop the stories from flowing: "If you ask me about the things I experienced, the things I saw on the train alone would be a one or two volume novel." Her novel, and the novels of her generation, remains unwritten. Yet, her stories are passed along and incorporated into those of her children and grandchildren. When Amangul tells me about her love of storytelling, Adila cannot resist interrupting with her own memories of those times. She recalls the stories about Nesiridin Ependim, the legendary Sufi jokester:

When mom came from the train, when she came back from a trip in inner China, at that time we had a wooden *kang* [a wooden platform bed]. We had a big wooden *kang*. My mother slept in the middle with two of us on each side, this is how she slept. We slept on this side. After we ate a meal, we waited for a long time wondering when mom was going to tell us some stories. My mom lay down in the middle and would say Nesiridin Ependim had this happen to him: "He was riding on a donkey. He was a really good guy, and something like this happened to him." When she told us everyday stories like this, the stories really sank deeply in our imagination. Again, my mom would say this happened, that happened and we would ask, "What happened? Did he learn well? Where did he go?" Our mother would tell us stories like this until 11 or midnight. My mom would become tired, she'd be like this. My mother would sleep. I don't know about the others, but into the night I would imagine and think. I couldn't sleep, "What happened to that guy Nesirdin Ependum? What happened to Nuzugum [a Uyghur folk heroine]? In the end what happens?" And I couldn't sleep at night; I'd turn to that side and I'd turn to this side, imagining these things like that. The next day until the evening I would be in a hurry wondering, when will mom tell us a story? This is what we did. Layle [Amangul's granddaughter] is like that now isn't she mom? If you don't tell her a story in the evening she can't sleep.

We tell ourselves, and our children, stories in order to live. When pressed, the women who came of age during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution speak of past tumult and present quietude. Gulbahar, whose father-in-law was imprisoned and who divorced her first husband out of fear, has found a simple peace with her second husband: "We wanted that time to pass uneventfully. And this is how it went."

²⁵ See chapter 5 for a discussion of her daughter Nadie.

PART II – SELF-MAKING AND THE MIDDLE CLASS

Peride and Rahile work across the street from each other in Erdaoqiao, the Uyghur neighborhood in Urumqi. Peride settled into her current home via a circuitous route that began in Kashgar and wove through Shanghai and back through her hometown. Rahile boarded a bus in Ghulja, in northern Xinjiang, and never looked back. Peride is portly, with a grandmotherly bosom before her time, and wears long skirts and wide headscarves. Rahile is known as the neighborhood beauty, with careful makeup and pressed skirts and blouses. She wakes early to dress and coif before opening the dry cleaning store she manages. Peride rises even earlier to pray and prepare breakfast for her two sons and husband. Through different paths, each arrived in Erdaoqiao, a place that captures the hopes, possibilities, and contradictions of the emerging Uyghur middle class. It is a neighborhood – a Uyghur neighborhood – where money can be made, where Uyghur fashions and crafts are displayed next to Chinese and foreign goods, and where outstanding Uyghur professors teach. Yet, its singularity poses a challenge to the vision itself.



Figure 4: The Grand Bazaar

have an amusement park glow (see figure 4); when the weather is balmy, families stroll through, occasionally stopping to buy a snack or a trinket for a pleading child.

Peride and Rahile's shops are a few blocks from the Grand Bazaar, where the rent is cheaper and most of the customers are local. Against backgrounds of oversaturated yellows and blues, their shop names are emblazoned in Uyghur and Chinese. Shortly before I left Xinjiang, Peride's husband proudly showed me his new sign, which added, at the very top, the store's name in English. Their narrow shop, flanked by DVD and other fruit-and-nut vendors, is packed from floor-to-ceiling, front-to-back. Cardboard boxes filled with dates and unshelled walnuts spill out onto the sidewalk. During my months in Urumqi, I spent a few afternoons a week dipping my hands into them, savoring the sticky sweetness of dates from southern Xinjiang and Iran and the addictive saltiness of roasted peanuts. When Peride was busy, I would answer the phone or encourage passersby to come in and sample the goods. Most of the time, I sat on a stool in the back of the six-by-ten foot shop and chatted with her.

I also sat for long hours in Rahile's store, just a block or so from Peride's. We would talk while she ironed a batch of clothes, pausing when customers walked in. The front of the store was filled with washing machines and racks of drying clothes. In the back, there was a raised platform with cushions and rugs where her employees, teenage girls from villages around her hometown of Ghulja, could rest and pray. When Rahile first started the job, she didn't have money to rent a room, so she slept at the store. Over time, Rahile added her sense of style to the décor: vases with fake flowers, a large mirror and an airbrushed photo of a Mary Kay model. Rahile, too, was model-like in the midst of heavy, sweaty work. Even when she was ironing, her poise and ensemble remained graceful, like an executive directing an important meeting. Business, fittingly enough, was brisk.

Brief History of Urumqi

Before Urumqi became the military, political and economic center of Xinjiang, it was an important trading post along the Silk Road. Because the city lies on both north-south and east-west trading routes, it grew steadily in population and commercial importance. Today, 1.4 million people reside in urban Urumqi, with the number rising to 2.3 million when suburban and rural areas are included. The northern and eastern cities of Xinjiang, including Urumqi, have historically been home to greater numbers of Chinese. In 1949, about 108,000 people lived in Urumqi, seventeen percent of who were Uyghur and sixty-three percent Han. In 2007, twelve percent were Uyghur and seventy-three percent Han. By comparison, in the autonomous region overall, Uyghurs and Han comprise forty-six and thirty-nine percent of the population, respectively (Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook 2006, 2008).

During the Qing Dynasty, Urumqi was established as a garrison town, where Manchu, Mongol and Chinese troops were stationed. Construction of the first walled city began in 1758. It was the same year the Qing defeated the Zunghars, a confederation of nomadic people who created an empire in the fertile grasslands of northern Xinjiang. Between 1760 and 1830, Chinese civilians arrived in Xinjiang in significant numbers to feed and clothe the government officials, exiles and troops.²⁶ They settled in the relatively unpopulated area of Urumqi and in the state farms in the Zungharian Basin. By 1765, the people and their activity exceeded the expanded city walls, and a new city was built north of the old one.²⁷ Uyghur traders and craftsmen were gradually drawn to the growing city. They established neighborhoods (*mehelles*), organized around mosques, outside the city walls. In this period, Urumqi and the surrounding areas increasingly came under Chinese-style administration, resembling the governing structures in the provinces. Still, until the mid-nineteenth century, the Qing maintained parallel administration and loose segregation of Uyghur, Mongol, Hui and Chinese residents.²⁸ The overarching policy of segregation began to shift toward an assimilative approach in the 1830s. The Qing encouraged Chinese to settle permanently in the region, including in the southern Tarim Basin. By the end of the nineteenth century, "some Chinese literati would be advocating the full-scale assimilation of Xinjiang to Chinese norms as a means of securing the territory, an approach to which the Qing court would increasingly acquiesce"

²⁶ In contrast, the Han and Tang dynasties located their Xinjiang headquarters in the East, rather than in the North. The Zungharian Empire defeated by the Qing had its capital in the northern city of Ili. For a summary of Urumqi's history, see Clark 1999. On the practice of exiling political troublemakers and criminals to Xinjiang, see Newby 1999.

²⁷ This city was completed in 1767 and named Dihua (Clark 1999:55). For simplicity, I refer to the city as Urumqi throughout, even though it was not given that name until 1954. Unlike other major cities in Xinjiang that had substantial local populations, Urumqi had few settlers before the Qing established the military garrison in the area.

²⁸ Loose segregation served as a means of limiting intergroup tension; it also was consonant with Qing efforts to rule the territory with legitimacy traced through Mongolian (Chinggisid) descent, rather than in the model of the Chinese emperor. See also Millward 1998 and Perdue 2005.

(Millward 2007:107). In 1884, the Qing court granted Xinjiang provincial status, with Urumqi as its capital.

Though the walls themselves are no longer standing, the second city still forms the basic structure of modern day Urumqi. There continues to be a large Hui population just south of the old walled city, where the Hui who served in the Qing armies originally settled. The Uyghur neighborhoods were established farther to the south at Erdaoqiao. Today, the main landmarks are the department store formerly owned by the exile Rebiya Kadeer, the Grand Bazaar and Xinjiang University. I spent most of my time along this Uyghur corridor in Urumqi. I later learned the inscriptions that used to be above each of the old city gates. The gate facing the Uyghur oases to the South pronounced, “Let prosperous times begin (*kai zhang fan rong*)!”

Mobility and the Middle Class

In the following two chapters, I describe the lives of Peride and Rahile as windows into life in Urumqi and the emerging middle class. Peride was born in 1971, Rahile in 1976. They both grew up in rural areas and migrated to cities to seek their fortunes. Their mobility, aspirations and – most importantly – ethos about self and family are indicative of broader trends in the region. Even though they are very different in disposition and daily habits, Peride and Rahile share a story of reinvention that is common to their generation. They are the children of reform. Unlike their parents in their youth, Peride and Rahile could travel with relative ease and had options in terms of school and work. Yet, the path was not yet well paved. They confronted a society where understandings of public and private, property and class, were being redefined. Along the way, they remade themselves as cosmopolitans of sorts – not as a repudiation of the local, but as a means to revitalize Uyghur culture and community. Peride narrates her life through her experience in Shanghai and global Islam, while Rahile does so through her engagement with Mary Kay, the American cosmetics company. In their narratives, Uyghur culture has become unmoored from its central values of family, community and religion. This is, in their diagnosis, a result of the individualism and selfishness unleashed by those who cleave economic and ethical worlds. For Peride and Rahile, striving for a solid middle class life both requires and cultivates the virtue of faith – in God, oneself, family and community. It is faith that distinguishes those who become entrepreneurs in order to pursue a good life from others who are led astray by wealth and competition.

When I ask Peride about her accomplishments in life, she describes the unity and harmony of her family:

C.H.: What do you think of as the greatest success in your life?

PERIDE: That we are at peace as husband and wife and live a happy life. But I have not read a lot. I don't have a high level of education. I don't know a lot of things – this is all I know.

C.H.: Don't say that, because being a good person is unrelated to how long you study... I have seen how much hardship you and Osmanjan – the two of you – have had and how hard you have worked. I am impressed. I am definitely going to write this in my book.

PERIDE: I think if a husband and wife have peace (*inaq*) in their life, they can do anything. No matter if it is in household issues, or in the training of the kids, in all of these things husbands and wives can be at peace and have unity in their lives. For instance, the

good grades that Akber has gotten, this is from the peace that the two of us have as husband and wife. If the two of us as husband and wife went about fighting with each other and blaming each other, the kids' thinking would be disturbed, and they would not be able to concentrate their minds on class. They can also see this. "Why don't they get along?" they would say. "Maybe I shouldn't study?" and then they can't study well. We are happy. Whenever they looked at us, we smiled at them, we said good things to them.

Peride married Osmanjan, a distant relative, when she was fourteen and he was twenty-two. Three months after their wedding, they went to Suzhou to begin a new life. They worked hard – she woke early to bake nan, he stayed out late to sell it – but it was a happy time. With her husband as her only company in the beginning months, they became a close-knit team. Peride remembers those times as particularly happy because Osmanjan was "very good," that is, when he "was very busy and very hardworking."

Peride moved back to Kashgar to give birth to their second child, while Osmanjan stayed behind to continue working. Despite being surrounded by her family, she was overworked on the farm and isolated. The basic living conditions were also difficult to adjust back to, though they were not her primary worry: "No one came to visit me. I was very lonely. If we had money, all our relatives were there. If we didn't have money, there was no one, we were alone." Though she rarely complained about her hardship, she was sad when talking about her disappointed expectations. Peride decided that she never wanted to move back to her hometown.

When Rahile moved to Urumqi, it was the first time she had gone more than a few villages from her hometown of Ghulja. She left with only two hundred yuan, which covered little more than the bus fare. With her talent for persuasion and willingness to work hard, Rahile quickly found a job managing a dry cleaning store. How she did so exemplifies her entrepreneurial spirit. One day, Rahile saw a television ad for a skin cream and ordered a jar. Her friends complimented her skin and asked her about the cream. Rahile convinced the head of the company in Urumqi to allow her to sell jars for a small profit. When she arrived in Urumqi, she called him to ask for advice and in the process discovered that he also owned a chain of dry cleaning stores. Only a few months after starting at the store, she became the manager and convinced the owner to replace her salary with a profit-sharing agreement.

By all accounts, Rahile was an extraordinary businesswoman. Even when she was exhausted, she was animated and chatty with her customers. Men flirted with her and joked that seeing her was a highlight of their day. At thirty-one, however, she was still single. Just before I left Urumqi, Rahile was trying to persuade the store owner to let her to hire a manager for the store, whom she would supervise. She had aspirations of finding full-time work at Mary Kay. Although she sold Mary Kay products to her friends and attended regular training sessions, it was not yet a significant source of income. Her main concern, she told me, was not salary or status; above all, she wanted put herself in a more family-friendly situation: "I need to get married. I need to form a household, and make a good household. I need to have children. If I continue to work all day, I can't do those things, so right now I am preparing to become a boss rather than a worker." Despite her continued difficulties and sense of being a social outsider as a single woman, Rahile was remarkably optimistic. When I asked her to reflect on her successes, she replied: "A lot of things I've done have been successful. We can't all be rich. For example, I think it's a success for me to live like this. I lost my job, I was left by the person I love. Now I am away from my hometown and my family. In a situation like this, even though I don't have a lot of money, I am happy. I think living happily in this situation is a success."

Peride and Rahile expressed a mix of pragmatism and optimism that I found to be characteristic of the new middle class. Unlike the children of cadres and the well educated who transitioned more easily into middle class occupations, they came from struggling rural families. They were willing to take bigger risks that, by definition, yielded results. But they were also realistic and hardworking about what it would take to accumulate a small amount of wealth. Once, a man in Shanghai cheated Peride and Osmanjan out of several thousand yuan by saying he could buy flour at a large discount. Even though they had purchased bulk supplies from him before, this time he didn't return. She was stoic in the story's retelling: "There was nothing we could do. Even if we were angry, there was nothing we could do. We worked hard again and earned money." When Peride first mentioned that she and Osmanjan were tricked out of a substantial amount of money, I was surprised. I imagined that they bought into a Ponzi or other get-rich-quick scheme. When I heard the details, the situation made more sense: they were being more frugal than speculative.

Both Rahile and Peride strive to earn enough money to live comfortably, but do not dream of expensive jewelry, houses or cars. This is not necessarily an index of their current purchasing power, since I met many in the younger generation with fewer means, but far more luxurious fantasies. Peride centers the bulk of her energy and anxiety on her children going to college and finding steady work. As for many of her generation, this means a white collar job with the government. Rahile, as a single woman in a more precarious economic situation, struggles to create a network of friends and colleague in Xinjiang's capital. The particularities of their middle class ethos are important. Their identity is inevitably understood in contrast to others, especially, in their case, Han women and Uyghur women they perceive as Sinified, often equated with ostentation or elitism. While they both consciously work toward moving up the ladder of success, both refuse consumption and social status as ends in themselves. In their narratives, they contrast their sense of humility and modesty with the excesses and emptiness of consumer capitalism. This is not to say they refused modern conveniences; rather, they took pains to elaborate on the proper relationship between consumption and the good life. In the next two chapters, I explore how Peride and Rahile forge a sense of meaning and community that serves as a foundation for critiquing the dominant consumer culture in Xinjiang's largest city.

CHAPTER 3 – PERIDE

On the appointed day, I sat on a cushion across the low table from Peride and watched her flick tubes of freshly kneaded dough into ear-shaped noodles. It was our ritual: once a week, I went to her home and kept her company while she cooked dinner. I was in charge of the dishes afterwards. Peride was wearing a pink shirt that enhanced the glow of her round cheeks; her wispy curls were pulled back in a clip. Everything around her had its usual twinge of mirth, but she was quieter than usual. I arrived early so we would have time alone. Her sons were still out studying and playing with friends. We had put off our formal interview until the last possible moment. We were both, I think, hesitant to transition from our easy, laughing conversations to unknown territory. Once more, Peride insisted that she was unqualified to tell me anything important about Uyghur culture. I responded with my usual, convoluted explanation of the “location of culture” – not in museums or university archives, but right here, in everyday life and everyday stories. She finally relented just before I left Urumqi for Kashgar, but I suspect she never had much sympathy for my explanations. As always, she was being a good friend.

A year later, recalling the evening, I began sorting out the details of our interview and long pages of notes about other events and conversations we shared. I soon found myself frustrated by my inability to account for all of Peride’s years and movements. I started to make a timeline to capture the information that emerged in fragments, stories and corrections. I laughed at the irony of my wanting to impose the kind of linear order that my interview design was intended to resist. Inevitably, as with the other life stories, I have sought a middle ground in writing about Peride’s life, using my judgment to select details for this retelling. Even if these are not the particular details she would have chosen, I believe the emphasis on perseverance, faith and family is.

Peride’s belief in the centrality of family, and especially of the partnership between husband and wife, emerged explicitly in the second half of our interview, when I asked her to reflect directly on her relationships and values. This belief in family as the relevant social unit is distinct from the ties of the past, which revolved around extended family networks and one’s neighborhood (*mehelle*), defined by mosque membership. Peride’s conception of family centers very much on the private nuclear family, especially the idea of unity and peace as the result of a cultivated partnership. In contrast to the typical image of the modern family, however, Peride and Osmanjan had an arranged marriage – a fact that presented no contradiction to Peride’s worldview. This reflects a critical distinction: in her understanding, the purpose of the partnership is not the fulfillment of personal preferences (expressive individualism), but is rather tied to a notion of mutual responsibility based on her engagement with Islam:

Both men and women are the same. In Islam it says that women should do the housework well, train the children well, and take care of the husband well. It says for women this is worship. And it says that men should protect their wives, that they should not beat or curse them, that they should look after their kids well, and that they have the responsibility to provide their wives and children with all their food and drink. Islam never says beat and curse and abuse your wives. There are many demands on women because they give birth, they take care of the children, and they train the children, and must be capable of taking care of their husbands. And for men it is the same. They make money outside the home. They provide all the food and drink for their children and wives, and they protect them. They also have a lot of responsibilities. They protect them. There is no situation where one looks down on the other.

As argued in chapter 1, I do not find it productive to dissect Peride's relative commitment to Uyghur or Islamic norms; she has woven them together in a particular way. For Peride, to be Uyghur is to be Muslim. She is not, however, dogmatic about how Islam should be practiced. Her experience of befriending Chinese in the coastal cities opened the door to a kind of cosmopolitanism and humanism that she understands as fully consonant with being a good Muslim.

Early Years

Peride, one of six siblings, described the time of her early childhood in succinct terms: "That was the time when things were socialized, when everyone worked for the government, and everything belonged to the government." While her mother and father worked in the fields, she and her siblings stayed with her paternal uncle and grandmother in the city of Kashgar. She attended school, but stopped after the third grade to care for her younger siblings and relatives. One day in the early reform period, Peride's father read in the newspaper that "the period of socialism was finished and they would give land to the people." "My father went to [a village in Kashgar County] to his younger brother's farm and came back to get us with a donkey cart, horses and cows. The area we moved to was opened up and daily life was good. We built a house." After they settled in their new home, Peride said she wanted to study again; in part because of pressure from the commune, her parents allowed to finish elementary school. At the time, she learned to read and write Uyghur with the Latin alphabet.

Between the 1930s and 1980s, the Uyghur writing system was modified five times. Reforms in 1937 and 1954 altered the Arabic script to more closely fit the sounds of modern Uyghur. In 1956, as China and the Soviet Union intensified their scientific and educational exchange, Uyghur became Cyrillic-based, as did the other Turkic languages of Soviet Central Asia. Soon after, in response to rising tensions in Sino-Soviet relations, the Cyrillic transcription system was replaced by an adapted Latin alphabet in 1960. Then in 1984, just after Peride finished her schooling, another set of reforms reintroduced a modified Arabic script.²⁹ By the time I met Peride, she has learned to read the Arabic script, but only at a very slow pace.

After graduating from elementary school, Peride's parents arranged her marriage to Osmanjan, who is eight years her elder: "I didn't know I was going to marry him. I thought he came for my sister. At that time I couldn't cook. I also couldn't wash clothes... When we went to get the marriage license, I didn't know [we would be getting married]. It was just like we were playing." At first, Osmanjan's family proposed that Peride's sister marry him, but her grandmother refused because she felt the elder sister should continue studying:

PERIDE: So [my in-laws] said, "Okay, if you don't give the older one it is okay, but give us the younger one." Because I had not continued my education, I got married. It was 1984. At that time I was fourteen years old. I was married when I was fourteen years old.

C.H.: At that time how did you feel?

PERIDE: At that time I had just turned fourteen years old. It was when I was little. I didn't know anything...

²⁹ More recently in the 1990s and 2000s, a new orthographic system adapted to the computer keyboard has emerged, *Uyghur Kompyuter Yeziqi*. On language policy in Xinjiang and its history, see Dweyer 2005.

C.H.: At that time, did Osmanjan come to Kashgar? He said he would get married with you, and your parents thought...?

PERIDE: The family members said, "Think about it and make a good match." Because his older brother was a teacher at the commune, he knew our family. He thought of us being more like city people in the commune; he thought of us as open people like the Chinese.

It was a simple wedding. Both of Osmanjan's parents had passed away and he used money he had saved from working in inner China for the *toyluq* (betrothal gift or bride wealth).³⁰ They moved into Osmanjan's elder brother's home; their early life together in the village was happy. Three months later, when Osmanjan told her they were going to coastal China, Peride was giddy. It would be her first time outside of Kashgar. But her family disagreed and said, "We don't know what this guy is like because he went around for several years in Shanghai. Was he a thief, a pickpocket? We don't know anything at all about him." Across China, Uyghurs are stereotyped as thieves, drug dealers and gang members. Peride, however, knew and trusted her husband. She told them, "I am going to go. He is very good and wherever he goes, I will go there." In the end, she was so determined that her family agreed to let her go.

East-West Journeys

In the first year, Peride and Osmanjan lived on the outskirts of Suzhou, a city just north of Shanghai. Peride woke up each day at four in the morning to bake nan. Osmanjan would go to the city to sell nan from a cart and run errands. When they first arrived, Peride didn't even know the most basic phrases in Chinese: "If our neighbors asked, 'What's your name?' and questions like that I would just look at them... [Osmanjan] bought all the vegetables. When he was on the way home, I would fix the meal and make preparations. We would finish eating and he would take me to the theater to see a movie. It was very fun. Later I got pregnant, but I didn't know and I lifted some heavy things and because of this the baby miscarried." Though I asked questions as guideposts, Peride repeatedly returned to important events, the ones that marked time for her. In this case, a thought about buying vegetables led to memories of going to the theater and then to her miscarriage: "Later Osmanjan came and took me to the hospital. When the doctors asked him, is your wife more important or is your baby more important, he said, 'My wife is more important, it is not okay for me to not have my wife.' At that time, the doctor told me it would be good if you had children only after five years." My questions about daily life returned her to the persistent theme of our interview, and her life in general – the centrality of her partnership with Osmanjan.

After the first year, they moved from Suzhou to Shanghai. Peride found the Chinese in Shanghai very friendly: "When they saw me they said, 'Uyghurs are beautiful. Their eyes are beautiful. You are from Xinjiang.' They liked us a lot. In addition to this, because the kids were very cute, wherever we went they would pick up the kids and we got along well."³¹ Life was happy and peaceful until they met the Uyghur man from Hotan who swindled them out of eight

³⁰ As Beller-Hann notes, foreign observers often characterized arranged marriages as parents selling their daughters "to the highest bidder." She contextualizes *toyluq* within principles of mutuality and community, rather than as an economic transaction: "*Toyluq* in fact usually referred to gifts given by the groom's family to the new couple" (2008:246).

³¹ As Peride's comments reflect, Chinese are persistently fascinated by the 'exotic' beauty of Uyghurs, especially their eyes, which are light brown or, more rarely, green and blue. Chinese also often comment on the appealing arches of Uyghur noses. Gladney observes that the orientalist dynamic goes beyond the East-West divide: "...this study makes a contribution to those discussions that attempt to move beyond Edward Said's Eurocentric orientalist critique – the representation of minorities and the majority in Chinese art, literature, and media will be shown to have surprising parallels to the now well-known portrayals of the 'East' by Western orientalists" (2004:53).

thousand yuan by claiming he would buy them flour in bulk at a discount. They had no choice but to persevere by working hard and saving money again.

When they returned to Kashgar in the summer of 1988, Peride and Osmanjan had a fight – their only big fight in twenty-three years of marriage – and she refused to go back to Shanghai with him. In Uyghur custom, married women can return to their natal home to live when they have serious disagreements with their husbands. Peride, who was on poor terms with her mother, went to Urumqi to stay with an aunt. A few months later, she returned to Shanghai after Osmanjan sent a letter asking her to come. When she did, their relationship quickly returned to normal: “The two of us were very happy. In November 1988 I went to Shanghai. We got along very well.” Shortly thereafter, she became pregnant with their first son, Akber.

The following April they returned to Kashgar, but Osmanjan left again for Shanghai just days before Peride gave birth in July 1989. In the past, Uyghur women gave birth to their first two children in their natal homes, where they were thought to be best cared for by their mothers and elder women in the community. Following this custom, Peride gave birth to Akber in her mother’s home and, as is common in Turkic cultures, rested for forty days afterward.³² She was to stay under heavy blankets, sleep and eat special foods prescribed for post-partum women, such as eggs and rich soups. In part because it was harvest time, Peride’s family did not spend much time caring for her. They hastily prepared meals and left her alone most of the time. It was hot and Peride wasn’t able to rest under the layers of blankets.

Osmanjan stayed in Shanghai in the following months and sent Peride most of his earnings. She bought sheep and started tending the fields. When Osmanjan returned the following summer, they built a small house in the village and sold eggs and expanded their cropland. Peride soon became pregnant with Asim. Before she gave birth in March 1991, Osmanjan returned to Shanghai because they had run out of money. Peride gave birth to Asim in her own home, instead of her mother’s, because she still felt the sting of her stay there after Akber was born.

When Osmanjan left once again, she had to take care of things by herself: “I planted wheat in the field. I cut the corn. I raised the sheep and cows. I looked after Akber and Asim. It was very difficult.” When I asked Peride if she preferred farming in Kashgar or selling nan in Shanghai, she said she preferred Shanghai because it was less lonely. It was at this point that she mentioned her disappointment that her family’s affections had become instrumental: “If we had money, all our relatives were there. If we didn’t have money, there was no one, we were alone.”

Stereotypes

When Akber was about three years old, they all returned to Shanghai and the children enrolled in a Chinese school. Osmanjan wanted the children to return to Kashgar so they could study in a Uyghur school, but Peride prevailed. She couldn’t bear to be separated from her children and she argued that the schools in Shanghai were of better quality. For Peride, parenting, not the language of instruction, was the central issue: “My children know Uyghur culture. Knowing culture depends on how parents raise their kids.” When I asked her if she or her sons ever felt looked down upon for being Uyghur, she told me the following story about a boy at school who called Akber a thief:

³² In my fieldwork, I found that by the mid-2000s, most women went to hospitals to give birth, including those in rural areas. Though the forty days of rest is still normative, many women are expected to continue household chores before the forty days end.

C.H.: I have heard that prejudice exists.

PERIDE: Yes, it exists, because the Uyghurs there have not given a good impression. If we went walking around the bazaar, there were Uyghurs on the streets pick-pocketing and robbing people. People thought we were thieves. When Akber was studying in school, people said he is a person from Xinjiang, a thief.

C.H.: How did he answer them?

PERIDE: He told me he said, “I am not that way. If I was a thief I would not be studying in school.” So I went to his school and met with the school principal. We met each other and I told him kids who engage in stealing don’t come here. One day they run around over there, another day they run around over here. My child is not a thief. Later they held a parent meeting and we said, “We don’t send our child out to be a thief, we send him to school” and things like this. “Our neighbors know what we are doing. Their kids are also at this school.” After that they investigated to see what kind of people from Xinjiang we were after all. They said about us, “They have endured a lot of difficulties (*japakesh*); they are very good.” Our neighbors always said to me “Make us some *laghmon*.” And I would make them *laghmon*. They would take a small bowl and leave with it. They said, “Teach us how to make *laghmon*.” I taught several of them. It was very fun. In between, seven years passed. Akber entered the fifth grade and Asim finished the second grade. As time went on business got worse and worse because at that time there was a growing number of people who sold heroin, who smoked heroin, who robbed others, and people who did things like this. Shanghai became very chaotic. These people were Uyghurs. So because of this, we thought Xinjiang is still good and we came to Urumqi in 1999.

I reproduce this long quote from Peride because it reflects a common framing of Uyghur-Han relations. Both Chinese and Uyghurs I spoke to expressed distrust of Uyghurs living in inner China. Several Chinese living in large cities in inner China remarked that they hold onto their bags and purses tightly when they see a Uyghur board a bus. One Uyghur woman living in Shanghai made a point of telling me that she avoids associating with other Uyghurs in the city for fear of getting taken advantage of by criminal elements. The stereotype of Uyghurs as thieves or violent thugs, with its obvious class dimensions, reflects and perpetuates tensions between the two groups. Peride invokes the stereotype as a way of distinguishing her family as one that earns money in ethical ways and that contributes positively to the neighborhood. For her, the most potent symbol of this contribution is cooking for her neighbors and teaching them how to make the popular Uyghur noodle dish. She forged good relations with her neighbors through her culinary talents; thus, cooking is not only a labor of love to nourish her family, but also a primary language of communication for creating a basis for resonance and mutual understanding among neighbors.

There is an ironic corollary in ethnic stereotypes: several Uyghurs who had studied in Beijing or Shanghai told me that they believe Chinese are good people in general, but that the Chinese in Xinjiang are the “undesirable” ones. They are characterized as “low quality” Chinese, who could not succeed in their own home provinces.³³ Both Uyghurs and Chinese distinguish between previous migrants who settled in Xinjiang in the pre-reform era, and recent migrants who are, in their view, coming to seek their individual fortunes in a less competitive province because of their lack of talent or work ethic. In contrast to “local” Chinese, these migrants are said to make little or no effort to learn Uyghur and to be more likely to eat pork and to express ethnic bias. In the case of each stereotype, the minority group is denigrated – Uyghurs in inner China, and recent Chinese migrants in Xinjiang – by virtue of being members of an undesirable

³³ See Greenhalgh and Winckler (2005) about the countrywide discourse on quality (Ch. *suzhi*, Uy. *sapa*).

segment of the larger group. Rather than ethnicity per se, a complex intertwining of ethnicity, class and place is at issue.

As illustrated in the earlier conversation about the arrangement of Peride and Osmanjan's marriage, "like Chinese" is at times used positively to connote openness and development. This is unsurprising given that Chinese hold positions at the top of the political, economic and social hierarchy and are often represented as more "civilized" than "backwards," "traditional" minorities. Once, when we heard Peride's neighbor rushing her children out the door because they were late for school, Peride commented that tardiness is common in Uyghur schools. Her sons and their Han classmates, in contrast, are always punctual, orderly and prepared for class. Uyghur parents choose to send their children to a Chinese school not only because of the increasing importance of Mandarin, but also because the quality of education is considered higher. On the whole, Uyghur schools have less funding and are now in the process of being phased out; therefore, differences in student outcomes and behavior are largely related to structural factors.

I do not, in any case, interpret Peride's comments about distancing herself and her family from "low quality" Uyghurs as a form of self-loathing or internalized racism. As I discuss further below, Peride does not emulate Chinese culture, consciously or subconsciously; her ethical world is firmly anchored in Islam. In contrast to other parents, she did not fear her children would be assimilated, even though they attended Chinese school. Peride told me that she does not worry about her sons becoming distant from Islamic morality, marrying Chinese women or forgetting Uyghur language and culture. I read her criticism of her co-ethnics as a reflection of her pragmatic individualism: each person should be judged by her actions, Uyghur and Chinese alike. Like others of the reform generation, Peride had little regard for those who felt they deserved praise or advantage based on communal and historical sediments. She had moved from a small village to Shanghai and built good relations with her neighbors through hard work and hospitality. She had little patience for people who acted unethically, and in the process, created problems for others.

The final part of our interview, covering her family's time in Urumqi, was very brief. When they returned, Peride and Osmanjan bought an apartment in a building undergoing major renovations. For two years, they lived in an inexpensive rental on the outskirts of the city. They also opened their first dried fruit stall in front of the main mosque in Erdaoqiao. Business was good and they earned about a thousand yuan per month. Peride and Osmanjan saved up money to move to a store near the heart of Erdaoqiao, where I first met them. As business prospered, they opened a DVD store across the street where Peride's sister and brother-in-law worked. Business continued to flourish and life entered a steady rhythm.

Japakesh

Peride described inner China as a time of *japa tartish*: "These seven years we persevered through difficulties... Even though we had difficulties it was still a happy time." As discussed in Part I, *japakesh*, the adjectival form of *japa tartish*, can be translated in many ways, including enduring difficulty, working hard, and persevering. The phrase was used to describe troubling times; it was also frequently used as a form of praise. This laudatory notion is particularly important because it connotes that someone persevered while remaining faithful to moral

principles.³⁴ When Peride recounts her discussion with school officials, she quotes them as saying about her family, “They have endured a lot of difficulties (*japakesh*), they are very good (*yaxshi*).” Here *japakesh* is directly connected to the judgment of someone as a good member of the community.

Japakesh, like *yaman bolidus*, is part of a conceptual web that is not equivalent with a rigid notion of good or a particular set of moral rules, but about how one faces challenges. In overly theoretical terms, a discussion of *japakesh* could be used to address the following question: has one navigated overlapping, conflicting and novel demands in an ethical manner? *Japakesh* is also gendered; it is most often used to describe women and what they do in fulfilling the demands of their roles as daughter, daughter-in-law, wife, mother, and worker.

After reading through the transcript of Peride’s oral history many times, I began to see the patterns of her storytelling – what was evoked by my questions and how one thought connected to another. As noted above, when I asked her how she bought groceries without knowing Mandarin, her response quickly segued from recounting her and Osmanjan’s happy routine to her miscarriage. This is characteristic of memory and especially of oral histories; people recall the unusual and formative, the turning points that give shape to stories. For Peride, pivotal events were most often related to mobility and family. Osmanjan was the constant throughout, except for their fight in 1988. After settling down in Urumchi in 1999, she had very little to say about her life. I had, she remarked, witnessed her life since then: visits from

relatives, working at the shop, cooking for her family, chatting with her neighbors and hosting guests. It would be more of the same comfortable routine until her sons were married with good jobs and homes and she and Osmanjan had gone on hajj. Then, she would be ready to retire.

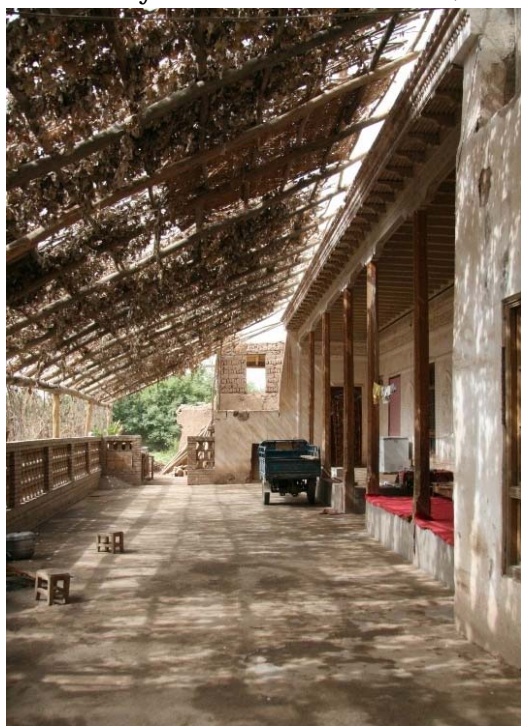


Figure 5: A village home in Kashgar

A Village Home

On a sunny April afternoon, I arrive at the shop and Peride looks harried and exhausted. Osmanjan hastily packs a bag and runs off after greeting me with a quick nod. After he is out of sight, Peride sits and explains the commotion. Her younger brother, Erkin, was selling fresh fruit from his cart in another part of town. A public security officer came by and told him to move the cart from the sidewalk. Erkin became angry at the officer’s tone and punched him between the eyes. Osmanjan was in a rush to meet Erkin at the bus station to give him money and send him back to Kashgar to live with his parents. Hopefully, things would settle down and the police

would stop looking for him in a month or two. Later, Erkin tells me that he could have paid twenty-thousand yuan to avoid trouble, but he preferred to leave. The most upsetting part for Peride is that Erkin is taking his son with him. Peride dotes on her nephew and often babysits him. She will also have to comfort her sister-in-law in the coming weeks.

³⁴ In the verb, rather than adjective, form, *japa tartish* is also often used to describe accomplishing minor tasks and overcoming small difficulties.

I start to ask Peride more about her hometown, where I am going for a visit in a few days. She doesn't remember much because her last trip to Kashgar was in 1993, fourteen years earlier. Our conversation is cut short when two people who work nearby stop in to buy cans of Red Bull. One is a painfully thin Uyghur teenager who spends all of his daylight hours at Internet cafes; the other is a rotund, middle-aged Chinese man who mixes herbal medicines. They joke between long swigs of the popular energy drink, which will keep them awake during the evening shift. With the arrival of the odd pair, Peride is distracted from her worries about her brother and unsettling thoughts of home. Once again, she is cheerful.

Erkin and Peride, I discover the following week, get their round cheeks from their mother Maysigul. After a half-hour motorbike ride past the famous 17th century Apaq Khoja tomb, several brick factories and a dam, Erkin and I arrive at their parents' home. As soon as I sit down on the raised outdoor platform that serves as a porch, Maysigul brings me chilled water flavored with apricots. When I hand her a gift of candy, she replies with a warm "Thank you, my child." Erkin's two children, a seven-year-old girl from a previous marriage and a toddler, are also at home. When I arrive, her husband Parhat is out in the field widening an irrigation channel. Erkin starts to prepare *polo*, a Uyghur pilaf with mutton, carrots and onion.



Figure 6: *Dalan* in Uyghur home

Though village houses vary by region, income and taste, they share several main characteristics. Jay Dautcher's description of the relationship between space and sociality in Yining's suburbs applies broadly to homes I saw throughout Xinjiang:

Although their rectilinear layouts vary, all homes are based on a single socio-spatial theme: a conjugal unit requires a two-room structure, an all purpose *dalan* for living, dining, and sleeping, and a *saray* for entertaining guests. This division into one room for family use and one room for guests arises from the sharp distinction between the informal interactions of kin, friends, and neighbors that take place in the *dalan* and the more formal visits and gift exchanges of the *saray*, which are described using the term "making guests" (*méhman qilish*) and "being guests" (*méhman bolush*). (Dautcher 2009:12)

In addition to the two main inner rooms, Maysigul and Parhat's home has a small sitting room that joins them, as well as areas constructed from adobe brick for storage and a basic shower. The rest of the house, remodeled a few years earlier, has been whitewashed and painted. The ceilings are high, supported by poplar beams. The three indoor rooms are divided into two sections: the *supa*, a raised platform covered with pressed felt mats and the *tapsa*, a narrow floor made of brick. The *kigiz* mats feature bright colors and bold geometric patterns: "Although *kigiz* are ubiquitous in Uyghur households, their designs are distinctive of the ethnic Kirgiz whose craftsmen have traditionally made the mats; as such, they are a reminder of links

of exchange that have connected nomad and peasant in the region for centuries” (Dautcher 2009:13). Aside from decorative drapes, there are few items on the walls. I notice only a calendar with a print of a painting of Mehmud Qeshqeri, the 11th century Uyghur scholar famous for assembling a Turkic-Arabic dictionary. Wealthier families often hang carpets and other decorations. I also saw many homes with elaborate plaques depicting the Kaaba or laminated posters of flowers and large Western homes. In the corner of the *dalan*, the family stacks blankets and bedding mats, which are also used as cushions for sitting (see figure 6). A coal stove sits at the center of the room to provide heat in winter months.

Most of the time, the family uses the outdoor stove across from a raised porch that serves as the *dalan* in warm weather. The courtyard is shaded by the grape trellises that run from a low wall to the roof of the house (see figure 5). Erkin tells me that the area has done quite well since the reforms began. In their neighborhood village, there are approximately 150 families. His parents’ home is situated on two mu of land; they own another ten mu across the street.³⁵ One of Parhat and Maysigul’s nephews tends the land to one side of their house. Parhat’s younger brother and his family live on the other side. Maysigul and Parhat moved into the house just after their wedding, when she was sixteen and he nineteen. They are now fifty-six and sixty, respectively. Over time, they saved money for additions and renovations to the main home. As Maysigul shows me around, she proudly points out the plaster designs with intricate patterns of shapes and flowers that adorn the walls facing the courtyard. Behind the house, there is a large two-story pigeon coop built with adobe brick. Erkin takes me to a small building next door, where there are two pool tables. It is a popular hang-out for the young men in the village.

Erkin watches over the pot of rice, meat and carrots from a low stool. Parhat returns from the melon patch next to the house and joins us for dinner. His skin is leathery and creased. His back slopes forward, but his muscles are still strong from working in the fields every day. Next to him, Erkin looks the part of the city slicker. He wears gray slacks and a tightly knit sweater, despite the heat, and carefully wipes the dust from his black leather shoes before taking them off to sit on the outdoor *dalan*. When I ask about the general contours of change, Erkin replies, “Life was more or less the same before reforms, except now the roads are paved.” It is an agricultural area, but the previous year a Chinese and Uyghur jointly opened a brick factory. Erkin explains that the company has a diverse work force, with a mix of Chinese, Uyghur, Kyrgyz and Hui. They can earn about forty to fifty yuan per day. Erkin earns about three thousand a month selling fruit in Urumqi. Even though he would make less on the farm, he plans to return in a few years and help his father: “In the city you can earn money, but you don’t rest. In the country, you can’t earn much money, but you rest.”

In one form or another, many of our conversations revolve around money. Maysigul and Parhat talk about plans of buying an apartment in Urumqi for their retirement. Erkin asks his father how much it will cost to expand and renovate the current house, which he plans to do when he moves back to the village. He worries aloud about when he can save the sixty-thousand yuan required to send his parents on hajj. He jokes that his father will have to learn how to pray when that time comes. While Maysigul prays five times each day, Parhat prays only once per day, and then only inconsistently. The mealtime prayers are quick and perfunctory, in contrast with those said in Peride and Osmanjan’s home.

³⁵ One mu of land equals approximately 1/15th of a hectare.

Before I leave, Maysigul asks whether I prefer Chinese or Uyghur homes. I reply, honestly, that I prefer the high ceilings and open spaces of Uyghur homes. She grabs me close to her bosom, wide and warm like Peride's. She says they are indeed better because they are wide and spacious (*keng*). The low ceilings of Chinese village homes and urban apartment blocks are stifling to her. On the way back to the city, Erkin takes me to see the brick factory, a newly-constructed mosque, and finally, a tourist development in progress. A company from Hong Kong is digging a lake to create a resort. I see its beginnings: a Chinese pagoda next to a large, dry basin. It is raining dust. It is hard to imagine where the water will come from in this chronically drought-ridden region.

Sociality, Transformed

Since Peride and Osmanjan settled in Urumqi, their relationship with her family has improved. As described above, Peride's time in Xinjiang before 1999 was remembered as extremely difficult, often marked by separation from Osmanjan, physical labor on the farm or a sense of neglect by her family. Inner China, on the other hand, represented hard work, but also the opportunity to make money and give her children a better education. By facing the challenge of living in coastal China together, Peride, Osmanjan, Akber and Asim created a strong nuclear bond; in contrast, childcare remains a largely intergenerational and communal task in villages.

At a broad level, between 1984 and 1999, Peride's experiences were reckoned more by space than by chronological time. This is not surprising since that period of her life was defined by movement from the east-west extremes of China. Eventually, Peride and Osmanjan accomplished one of their central goals – saving enough money to own their own business and earn a steady income. Their life in Urumqi allowed her to stitch together her two lives, East and West, here and there. Now, Peride is embedded in the mundane of familial relations once again; she regularly cares for her nephew and provides work for her brother and sister-in-law. During my time in Urumqi, a niece lived in their home for a few weeks after leaving a factory job in inner China. Though Peride still has little desire to return to Kashgar, her mother and other relatives visit often, bearing melons from the yard and nan from the outdoor oven.

Despite her settling into life in Urumqi, Peride was a frequent critic of how materialism warped social relationships in the city and countryside. While she owned a washing machine and large refrigerator, her house was furnished in a simple manner. She almost never went to restaurants and rarely bought new clothes or shopped at Arman, the Uyghur supermarket chain. Akber had a computer, but I never saw it because Peride had put it away and canceled their internet service. The teachers at Akber's high school had advised all parents to do so for the months leading up the college entrance exam. Every purchase, it seemed, had a purpose, almost always related to her sons' future. Food was her main pleasure, and even then, she first went through the labor of preparing it from scratch.

Peride contrasted her own practices with those who participated in new forms of *chay*, "tea." Given the busy schedules of many urban and suburban Uyghurs, *chay* is no longer a regular part of neighborhood hospitality.³⁶ It has become common for groups of friends to

³⁶ This is also related to space. As one person explained, you would rarely stop by a friend's apartment building and knock on the door. But in traditional Uyghur homes, even city ones, there is a different sense of space. For example, when I went to visit a friend in the Kashgar suburbs, she wasn't home. Her neighbors saw me and started calling to friends, roof to roof, to try to find her (see chapter 6).

formalize chay as a system in which women meet at a restaurant once a month to hold a party. Each attendee pays dues and the money is given to the host of the evening as part of a rotating credit system. Most women use the money for large consumer purchases they couldn't otherwise save the money to buy:

There is a lot of wastefulness here [in Urumqi]. Some people take part in the rotating tea parties. They have fun at restaurants. In our home, we don't go to restaurants. If guests come we treat them well. But we are not wasteful. We don't invite people and take them out to restaurants. If you go to a restaurant you just sit and look at each other and don't eat. You don't finish everything and after you leave they throw it out. This is very wasteful.

Here Peride suggests that the shift in the practice of chay is emblematic of a broader transformation in sociality. Money not only has the power to change priorities, but also to handicap people's ability to communicate. The image sketched by Peride is surreal. People go to a restaurant to show hospitality and to eat, but end up performing pale versions of both. Yet, Uyghurs feel caught up in a competition to host better parties. According to Peride, jealousy serves as the fuel: "People say, 'If he can do that, why can't I do that?' We have a lot of jealousy. Being jealous of others is a serious problem." More than her psychological observations, what is interesting is the way Peride has constructed an object for critique. The relatively new rat race to consume and impress has the potential to warp the most basic social interactions. When Peride hosted, people ate well and stayed late to talk and drink tea. Once, during mulberry season, she bought several boxes of the sweet, soft fruit and invited her neighbors over. Because they have a short season and can be grown in only a few areas, mulberries are expensive. But it would not have occurred to her to hoard them: she conceived of this gathering as an essential part of her pleasure, not an act of generosity. Whether one calls this mother love or traditional Uyghur hospitality, entering her world was an experience to remember.

Tests

In most respects, 2007 was a typical year in Peride's household. But in our time together, there was one big event that often weighed on her mind: Akber's college entrance exam. Peride talked about cooking the right mind-nourishing foods and encouraging Akber to sleep to maximize his focus. She also frequently mentioned that she wished she could help her sons more with their studies. With a fifth grade education, she could not grasp most of the content of the exam. But, as with many parents, that did not stop her from figuring out the best way to support her sons. Akber attended special preparatory classes and had the best home-cooked meals and supplements one living in Urumqi could hope for. The main theme of our long evenings together was the exam, both the preparation beforehand and the assessment afterward. The other atypical event, of course, was my frequent presence in their home. This, too, involved a test of sorts. Though I often spent time with Peride's family, I spent the night only a handful of times. The experiences, as I describe in one instance below, were more intimate and insistent.

* * * *

It is a quiet evening in April. I ring the doorbell and hear Peride tell Asim to open the door. I follow him past two small bedrooms and the living room, furnished with a low table and cushions in the traditional style. Peride and her mother Maysigul, who is visiting from Kasghar, are busy kneading dough. Akber is sprawled on a cushion, his nose deep in a college exam prep book. He is lanky, with a wide nose and fine hairs above his upper lip. In the right light, they

form a nascent mustache. The overhead light is dim. I can't tell if he is furrowing his brow in concentration or squinting to make out the words on the well-thumbed pages. He glances up at me and nods. Like students across China, he has committed a frightening amount of material to memory. He often gazes at the ceiling as textbook passages flow steadily from his mouth, as if to the hypnotizing click of a metronome. I touch cheeks with both women and sit down as Asim pours me a cup of black tea infused with rose petals. Continuing a conversation that my arrival interrupted, Maysigul implores Asim to study harder, "Your mother works so hard." She looks to me. I nod in support.

It's after 9 P.M. by the time we sit down for dinner. We say a prayer and start eating *dapanji*, a big platter of fresh noodles with chicken and potatoes simmered in a spicy sauce. We help ourselves with our chopsticks. As usual, Peride tells me I don't eat enough meat and puts two big chunks of chicken on my dish. She does the same for her children, reminding Akber that if he scores well on the exam, she and Osmanjan will buy him something special of his choice. Perhaps, she suggests, he'll want an entirely new wardrobe. When I think the meal is over, Peride steams some flat buns filled with lamb and onion. As soon as we finish dinner, the boys get ready for bed. It is Sunday and they have to wake up early to go to school.

After we finish cleaning up, Maysigul, Peride and I go to the bedroom to relax and watch one of Peride's favorite Chinese soap operas. A few minutes later, Osmanjan arrives and, always the comedian, collapses on the floor at Peride's feet in mock exhaustion. He hands over the day's earnings to her, more than eight hundred yuan. A good day, Peride says. Osmanjan suggests we watch a film. We all settle onto cushions and devote our attention to *Hassan's Dream*. It is a B movie that, according to Peride, was made in Saudi Arabia. The music, with its thunderous beats and atonal whines, evokes fire and brimstone. Peride tells me that watching this kind of movie will make one love (*amraq*) Islam. Though none of us knows Arabic, the plot is relatively clear and Peride and Osmanjan provide constant commentary.

Hassan's dream, or more accurately nightmare, begins with him playing cards with friends in a large house. After a long scene of Hassan's father praying in white robes, we see him call out to his son in an attempt to get his attention. Hassan can't hear because he is lounging on a couch, listening to an MP3 player. After his father breaks up the party, Hassan's nightmare begins: he has died and Israel, the angel of death, appears in a black cloak to oversee the washing of his body. We see Hassan undergoing various tortures: he is washed in boiling water and pulled with chains into a fire pit. At one point, Hassan transmogrifies into a dog. The punishments reach a climax and Hassan finally wakes up and calls out to his father in fear. The ending scenes are of Hassan praying and of an august graveyard.

Next, Osmanjan suggests that we watch a DVD that he showed Akber and Asim the night before. It is a recording of a sermon given in 1998 by a famous Uzbek mullah. Even though spoken Uzbek and Uyghur are similar, I have difficulty understanding the accent so the others continue to provide commentary. When the mullah says that there are six thousand mosques and thirty thousand hajjis in Uzbekistan, there are hums of approval. The recording intersperses several shots of men crying in response to the mullah's words. Osmanjan comments, "The mullah says that we can all be pious Muslims, we need only simple white clothes." Then he looks straight into my eyes and says, loudly, "True or false?" Before I find my tongue, Peride interrupts with a plate of dumplings in hand. We join Osmanjan in his late-night meal and then pray. He chides me for holding my hands closed, instead of open in the proper form for thanksgiving. Maysigul arranges our bedding in the living room and immediately starts snoring. Scenes of fire and brimstone are still rolling through my head.

Before sunrise, I hear Peride rustling around the kitchen to start breakfast and Maysigul wake for her morning prayers. Later, when I rise, I see Peride has prepared *polo* which, she says, is the most sustaining food. At breakfast, Akber drinks a vial of “Life #1 Supplement brain enhancer.” According to the label in English, it is manufactured by a joint Japanese-American company named EN-SURE. As Akber lifts the brown liquid to his mouth, his younger brother announces the countdown – 430 days – to the Olympics, and then pauses. In a dramatic voice, he continues, “forty-two days until the college entrance exam.” We laugh, but Akber purses his lips. Peride says confidently that Xinjiang University, the best university in the region, is not good enough for her son. He must go to inner China for college. Akber responds with a worried smile.

After Akber and Asim leave for school, Peride puts on a CD of Quranic verses, and we start to clean up. Her neighbor, Hebibe, stops by after she rushes her children out the door for school. She admires photos of me in Kashgar, saying that I’m a proper Uyghur *ana* (mother) with my headscarf and long skirt. The conversation turns to how it would be wonderful if I continued to be a good student of Uyghur language. Then, she says, “you will become a Muslim.” The clear implication is that one grows naturally from the other: the language is fertilizer for the spiritual flowering. She relates two stories that made a deep impression on her. First, there is a Western singer who was given a copy of the Quran while visiting Turkey. After studying it, he gave up his singing career and devoted his life to religious pursuits, including Quranic recitation. The second story has a similar theme: one of Hebibe’s favorite movies is about a Danish woman who marries a Turkish man and becomes a Muslim.

Sustenance

Although this overnight stay was not markedly different from others, I raise it because it brings together several strands of my experience with Peride and her family. First, the pressure regarding Akber’s college entrance exam was persistent and pervasive. It is almost impossible to overemphasize how much of one’s life is perceived to depend on a three-day exam, taken by ten million students across China. Peride often talked about his preparations, and her efforts to sustain him during them, but it wasn’t until I observed the evenings and early mornings that I understood how preparing for the exam had become a way of life and the grounds for much of their familial relations. For Peride, Akber’s performance would mark the critical difference between his finding a good white collar job and becoming a shopkeeper like his parents. It was often a mysterious process. Peride would attend workshops given by the school on how to strategically rank college preferences. But, she said, she barely understood what the majors were, much less the intricacies of ranking schools and majors. When I asked about the “brain enhancer,” Peride told me that she bought it after attending a workshop advertised at the school on proper nourishment during test preparation. This she found comprehensible.

Second, I was able to observe the rituals and rhythms of Peride’s daily life and how they differed in private and public. While at home, Peride read namaz and surrounded herself with religious media. At the store, she rarely mentioned religion, even with friends with whom it might be a natural topic of conversation. In part, this is because of continued restrictions that make people wary of appearing “overly” religious in public. I think, at least in Peride’s case, this also reflected a division between the outside and inside, a sensory world of smells and sounds that helped one cultivate virtue (Hirschkind 2006). Until this particular evening, I wasn’t aware of Peride and Osmanjan’s extensive collection of religious CDs and DVDs. Many people told me that these have become strictly regulated and harder to obtain in recent years. During the early reform period, Uyghur cassettes circulated widely, but in the tightening that ensued, fewer

locally produced media became available (Waite 2007). Watching films in Arabic and Uzbek was thus a pedagogical event, a dialogue among the observers and an exercise in translation.

Finally, as the conversation with Hebibe elucidates, Peride had a particular approach to missionary work. While she was happy to share a film that helps one cultivate love for Islam, she never told me conversion stories or commented that my interest in Uyghur life was a sign of my desire to convert. Osmanjan and Hebibe, on the other hand, frequently brought them up as topics of conversation. Osmanjan would test me on prayers he had taught me. It was, Peride assured me, the way he expressed his care. Although Peride also hoped I would follow the path of Islam one day, she saw it more as an individual choice that I would have to come to on my own. This was, in my reading, another reflection of an attitude that was shaped by two important strands in her self-narrative: a cosmopolitan individualism related to her experiences in inner China and the reformist emphasis on equality before and direct connection with God (see chapter 5): “If everyone would help other people, then everyone could have a good life in the same way. It is not good if we gossip behind each other’s backs and put each other down. We are all the same – we are people. The Chinese are people, the Uyghurs are people, the rich are people, the poor are people. We will all die, and in the same way we will all be buried in the ground.”

In the end, Akber was admitted to a good college in a provincial capital to study international trade. Peride was busy preparing his clothes and feeling excited and anxious, like parents everywhere about to send their children to college. A few weeks later, she met me at the train station to send me off to Kashgar with a big bag of fruits and sweets.

CHAPTER 4 – RAHILE

Rahile was born in 1976, in what she described as an “ethnic village” (*milliy yéza*) outside of Ghulja (Ch. Yining), a large city in northern Xinjiang.³⁷ Her hometown was a mix of Chinese, Kazakhs and Uyghurs. Rahile is one of six children, one boy and five girls. Her father was an elementary school teacher; her mother, who did not work, “had a great role in educating the children.” Rahile described her mother’s parenting style as definitive of her own values: “Even though she hadn’t studied much at school, she had a very open (*ochuq*) mind. She didn’t order us around; she gave us a lot of freedom and trusted us.” Her father’s first marriage had been to a cousin, but after three or four months, they couldn’t get along. The doctor also warned that there could be medical problems with their children. After their divorce, her father pursued Rahile’s mother, who was considered a great beauty because of her long hair. They fell in love but her parents didn’t approve of their relationship because he was a divorcee. One night, her father and some friends knocked on her mom’s window. She left with them and the group stole away on horseback. Rahile described “kidnapping” as “a practice of people who really love each other but have no alternative because of external pressures.” Eventually, they returned to her mother’s village. Her parents finally accepted the marriage when they saw that the couple was happy.³⁸

Because her father taught at a remote school, leaving her mother with the kids, Rahile lived with her paternal grandparents nearby. She became so close to them that she cried when people addressed her as her father’s child. She considered her grandparents to be her real parents. Rahile described herself as very “obedient” (*yuvash*; gentle, introverted). For example, when guests came to the house she would set snacks on the table. When her grandmother went places, they would go together and she was never mad or fussy: “I would basically sit at the end of the table and not say or eat anything. I was a very quiet girl.” Her grandmother taught her how to sew and cook. Rahile still retains a reverence for her grandmother’s traditional ways: “When I was a kid my grandmother had a reputation. If any guests would come she would serve them milk tea no matter how little she had in the house. Even if she just had two eggs, she would serve them. And I feel that today I am also very hospitable to guests and a feel that is a legacy from my grandmother.” Her grandparents were farmers; even though there was little money when she lived with them, they had fruit, crops and livestock.

They fared well until Rahile’s uncle lost a lot of the family money. It reached a point that they sometimes couldn’t even afford tea and small snacks. During the third grade, Rahile went to the city of Ghulja to stay with relatives. The family had no daughters, so she went to help with the housework. On a typical day she would prepare food, do laundry, go to school and wash dishes. She originally left for the city hoping to attend a better school, but she was too tired from her chores to pay attention in class and study well. When she returned to her village, she had to repeat the third grade. When recalling this time, she commented, “Uyghur women are very japakesh.”

³⁷ As mentioned above, Dautcher (2009) has written an excellent ethnography of a suburb of Ghulja. Until the Sino-Soviet split, there was a heavy Soviet influence in the north, especially in Ghuja. One of the independent Turkestan republics was established here with Soviet help. This northern region did not convert to Islam until several centuries after Kashgar and the southern cities. After the defeat of the Zungharian Empire by the Qing Dynasty, the region was populated by Chinese soldiers. It was the Qing victory that opened the fertile pastures for large-scale Uyghur migration to the north.

³⁸ The practice of abducting brides has been recorded throughout Central Asia, ranging from elopement, as in the case of Rahile’s parents, to non-consensual and even violent kidnapping, often when the man’s family does not have money for the bride wealth. Werner (2004) documents the rise of this non-consensual kidnapping in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. In my understanding, this is very rare in Xinjiang.

After finishing middle school, Rahile went on to study for another two years at a small teacher's training college outside of Ghulja. Her favorite class was literature because, "everything in life can be put into literature; it has an intimate connection with real life." When she finished her classes, she found a job as a part-time elementary school teacher, but after a short time, the school had no more work for her. It was 1996 and unemployment was high. Rahile had no choice but to go home. Her father decided to invest in a small bus; Rahile sold tickets to the passengers. She woke up at three in the morning and returned home late in the evening. Three or four years passed. The days were tiring, but her family gave her freedom and didn't pressure her to get married. All of her friends were getting married, but she didn't think seriously about it until she ended up in the hospital one day.

On the fateful day, Rahile had severe stomach pains and the bus driver, Dilshat, brought her to the hospital. He encouraged her to eat and brought her blankets. He talked about taking her shopping and buying her beautiful clothes once she recovered. During her hospital stay, he visited faithfully, and before long, she agreed to be his girlfriend. As a sign of his devotion, he collected back the letters and gifts he had given to other women and presented them to her. Rahile took it as a sign that they were ready to marry. Everyone in their families agreed, except for her boyfriend's mother, who said, "It would be unfitting [*set bolidu*, lit. ugly] to marry a village girl." Dilshat's family had lived in the city for generations. In Rahile's view, his mother was afraid that Rahile would take charge of the finances and that her son would abandon the interests of his own family: "One day the following happened. For thirty-six days he didn't send word or come to see me. Every day his mother said that he couldn't go anywhere. My heart was truly broken [*yerim*, lit. in half]. I watched the road every day." After four years of being together, they separated. She could no longer think of working on the bus. At first, she tried selling life insurance. Because of her "clever tongue," she was persuasive, but the villagers could not get beyond the idea of profiting from someone's death. It seemed sacrilegious. Then, she tried baking bread and cookies and running a stationary shop, but none of the businesses were successful. Her heart was halved, her life in pieces.

To the Capital

The thread that would lead Rahile to a new life in Urumqi came in an unexpected form. One evening she was watching television at home and saw an advertisement for cream that promised to lighten and even out one's skin tone. She used the cream with good results. Her friends became interested and Rahile arranged to sell jars to them, making a small profit. She called the owner to thank him: "Even though I paid money for it, I still called and said thank you, and in that way I developed a good relationship with the owner of the company." As her grandmother taught her, Rahile has never forgotten the virtue of saying *thank you*. As her appearance began to recover – her pale, drawn face regained some of its roundness and luster – so did her spirits. One of instructors from the insurance company who lived in Urumqi encouraged Rahile to seek a new beginning in the region's capital. Her parents supported her, saying, "You haven't gotten married and you've gone through a lot (*japa*) to help your younger sisters and brothers get married. Go see the city."

Without much planning and with very little money, Rahile boarded a bus to Urumqi in 2005. She stayed with the instructor while she looked for work. Shortly after arriving, Rahile called the owner of the skin cream company and arranged a dinner meeting. At the end of the meal, during which she praised his entrepreneurial success and life in Urumqi, they discussed business. He and his partner offered her a job: "They said, 'We have a dry cleaning store, you can come work there, we will give you a salary of five hundred kuai [yuan, per month].' I said,

'Please don't choke me; just pay me according to the work I do. If I do five hundred kuai worth, give me five hundred kuai. If I do 1,000 kuai worth, give me a thousand kuai. If I do ten kuai worth, give me ten kuai. Please don't give me a limit and restrict my work. I will do as much I can.'" She worked "from her heart" and earned close to a thousand kuai in the first month. A few months later, the owner made her manager of the store and agreed that Rahile could keep any extra profits above the average, but would have to absorb any losses. When we met, business was going well. The store brought in about three thousand yuan per month and after expenses she had a thousand to fifteen hundred left over.

In late 2006, Rahile's life took another leap for the better. One of her customers, Azize, had caught her attention. Azize, who was polished, beautiful and amiable, had also noticed Rahile. Every time she came in to drop off or pick up clothes, she stayed to talk for a few minutes. She told Rahile that she had too much potential to be stuck forever in the shop, ironing and sweating from morning to night. Azize invited Rahile to her house for an individual Mary Kay tutorial. After buying and using the products, Rahile was impressed and started attending classes. The requirements to join and become a representative were simple: she had to buy at least twenty-four hundred yuan worth of products and open a bank account. Rahile described meeting Azize and being introduced to Mary Kay as the most important turning point in her life. She related the words of Azize that had the greatest impact on her: "Look, you've been working really hard. But the money you made is zero. Show me your hand, I will tell you. The money you made is zero, your parents are zero. Your work is zero. All of your brothers and sisters, and relatives are zero. Only you yourself are one. If you are not there, all of these zeros are still zeros. All those don't have value, right? Only if you are there and recognize yourself, these zeros have value. The more it becomes, the more value it will have. So, you mustn't forget about yourself." Later, Rahile reflected on Azize's words: "That's right. I thought about it. It's really true. When people know their value, then others value them. Then, there is a lot of value and profit that arises. If you forget about yourself, other things don't have significance anymore."

A Culture Company

One spring afternoon, I walked into Rahile's shop to give her photos I had taken at a Mary Kay class. One of her admirer's was chatting with her. I tried to hand her the package, but he intercepted it:

"What is this?" he asked as he flipped through the photos.

"A Mary Kay class," Rahile replied.

"I know what Mary Kay is. It's the makeup company."

"No, it's a culture company!"

Since meeting Azize, Rahile said, her manner of speaking, her dreams and her attitude had transformed. Rahile insisted that Mary Kay was a program of life change, a process of outer to inner and then outer transformation: "Through using makeup, I found a kind of belief. Day after day I look at myself in the mirror and see change. It's not just about beauty; it's not even primarily about beauty. The aim is becoming the kind of person who looks in the mirror and believes in herself." Makeup, in other words, can help jumpstart the process of discovering one's inner strength and beauty, but genuine beauty springs forth only when one understands and embraces one's true self. Given that Mary Kay is one of the largest American cosmetics companies, it is unsurprising that this narrative of self is reminiscent of the apotheosis of expressive individualism — America's therapeutic culture.

In 2007, Mary Kay had 2.4 billion dollars in global sales; in 2008, despite the economic downturn, Mary Kay sales in China grew by over fifty percent and its Chinese sales team expanded to more than 350,000 “independent beauty consultants.” Around the world, as in China, Mary Kay operates predominately through a recruiting system, rather than through storefronts. Women hold parties with their friends or go door-to-door to sell products. As Rahile reported, entry costs are relatively low. At the time of my research, there were a dozen or so Mary Kay offices in Xinjiang. Rahile and other beauty consultants spoke about Mary Kay as a global movement in over forty countries, taking care to point out that Mary Kay is present in Muslim countries such as Malaysia.³⁹

Mary Kay’s business model of sales through personal networks makes local adaption a critical first step. Both Rahile and Azize spoke with me at length about how the principles taught by Mary Kay could be a force for revitalizing Uyghur culture for the modern era. Fundamentally, they argued, Mary Kay has this potential because the company promotes values that are central to Islam, such as strong families and female modesty. Taking care to be well-appointed (*retlik*), being attractive and feeling confident are important to keeping husbands happy and thus families together. Many urban Uyghurs, they complained, interpret attractive and modern in the wrong way, wearing sleeveless, low-cut shirts and short skirts like Chinese women. According to Rahile and Azize, Mary Kay women dress in a manner in sync with modern times, with bright colors and professional cuts, but still modestly. By organizing inspirational classes that are simultaneously “how to,” the company not only promotes the right principles, but also offers the practical means to live by them. Equally important, the business is not competitive in the usual sense. Women are encouraged to bring members into the Mary Kay community: success for one is success for all. Islam, they noted, also promotes mutual aid and the expansion of community. A statement on the company’s website affirms that these principles are foundational: “It was a first – a company dedicated to making life more beautiful for women. It was founded not on the competitive rule but on the Golden Rule – on praising people to success – and on the principle of placing faith first, family second and career third. It was a company, as Mary Kay Ash often said, ‘with heart.’”

Technologies of Self

Azize first heard about Mary Kay through her work at a local press. She was assigned to edit a Uyghur translation of a book about Mary Kay. When Rahile first introduced us, I was instantly struck by Azize’s flawlessly plaited hair, heavy eye shadow and gap-toothed smile, framed by bright pink lips. A few days later, I attended a class taught by Azize and was impressed by her poise and power of persuasion. The main technology, as a model of self-presentation, was the testimonial – a stylized version of the kind given during Mary Kay house parties and friend-to-friend sales pitches. It was designed to produce and induce a therapeutic self-narrative.⁴⁰ Azize’s own story of transformation was paradigmatic. She stood confidently in front of a dozen of us and spoke fluently without notes. The classroom was spare except for a poster-sized head shot of Mary Kay mounted at the front.

³⁹ When I looked on the Mary Kay website to check these figures, I found that Mary Kay has representatives in thirty-five countries. Countries with significant Muslim populations include Malaysia, Kazakhstan, Philippines.

⁴⁰ Bellah et al describe the therapeutic attitude as “grounded in a conception of authentic self-knowledge, and an ethic that rests on absolute and objective moral obligations” ([1985] 2008:102).

* * * *

Azize begins by telling the class about her childhood in the 1970s: her parents were divorced and she and her two siblings grew up in poverty. In the most difficult times, all three shared little more than a few pieces of nan for the entire day. She was a good student, but was always very withdrawn: “I wasn’t the kind who got embarrassed easily, but I didn’t like people. I wanted to be alone.” As one of the top three graduates in her class, she should have been able to choose her work unit, but the university “misplaced” her dossier and she was assigned to work at a publishing house. While some might feel bitter about this misfortune, she observes, she was content because this twist of fate led her to Mary Kay. Because she grew up without a father, she didn’t always appreciate the importance of family: “The first thing I learned [through Mary Kay] is that for women the most important thing is the family. Because my mother and father are divorced, I felt that it is okay if you have a family but it’s also okay if you don’t have a family. I learned the need to value the importance of the family. The second thing is that I learned the need to preserve the family and how I can do that. I learned how I can be a good woman.”

Before becoming involved in Mary Kay, Azize never wore makeup or used skin cream. She was married and had a child with a man who loved her, but whom she did not respect. He was a policeman from her hometown. “Why did I marry?” she asks, “I married him because my mother was sick and blamed her illness on the fact that I, her eldest daughter, was still single.” Before she learned about Mary Kay, she was “in a state of not wanting to take care of the family.” She considered life hopeless: “I didn’t care about myself at all [lit: I had completely thrown myself out].” Then, she found hope and her true self:

It’s like this. The company can’t give to you things you don’t have, it can only uncover your potential [lit: the things you have buried]. I can see in your eyes a different kind of searching, a different kind of seeking. You have dreams, and they need to be explored. What I learned at the company is this way of thinking.

Her point, repeated over and over, was that the skin and spirit (*roh*) are intimately connected. According to Azize, Uyghur culture is in need of renewal: “Looking at this culture, I think our culture has fallen behind.”

In her view, rejuvenating Uyghur culture is not a complex task. The fundamental principle and precondition is to have hope (*arzu*) in the potential for change. Every day, she declares, should be Woman’s Day, a holiday that is now widely celebrated in Urumqi. Azize presents the cornerstones of being a Mary Kay woman in a classroom format, asking the audience for thoughts and input on each. She emphasizes that the practices in each category are simple and concrete:

1. Beauty – Care for one’s appearance through dress, makeup, posture;
2. Needs – Reassess what is truly necessary; many Uyghurs think they need fancy and expensive items, but the focus should be on values;
3. Waste – Don’t waste food, money, and so on;
4. Service – In interactions with all people, be gracious and accommodating;
5. Clothes – Don’t buy overly expensive clothes, but always be well put together; and
6. Respect – Have respect for all people, especially men.

Azize tells us that the seventh point will be described in class on the following Sunday, which I unfortunately cannot attend. Ayjamal, the director of the Mary Kay branch, gives a few concluding remarks about implementing the principles. You know you have succeeded, she declares, when these practices become habit: “Don’t think of yourself as having unique problems that can’t be solved. Look, look into Mary Kay’s eyes. What do you see? You see that she has felt it all. She understands you.” Ayjamal continues the lesson by reviewing examples from Uyghur

culture that are in harmony with the Mary Kay principles of being modest and ladylike. She cites several yaman bolidus, such as patting one's hands dry instead of shaking them: "Mary Kay and Uyghur culture fit together. It is about returning to our own habits, our own culture. Some people have forgotten these. In the end, who do we do this for? Everyone."

Interpreting Mary Kay

Among Urumqi's middle class, Mary Kay is a well-known brand. I was impressed by the reach of the bombastic Texan entrepreneur. Most college students and teachers I knew were familiar with it, and even Rahile's young suitor had recognized the brand. Although not as expensive as other available foreign brands, like Shiseido and Estee Lauder, Mary Kay products are still costly enough to be considered luxury items for most. Yet, in its own rhetoric, Mary Kay does not bequeath social capital, but rather promises an empowered lifestyle, which its fine-tuned instructional and inspirational classes are designed to deliver. Indeed, in the classes, one learns that simplicity and modesty are key values.

There are many possible lenses through which to read Mary Kay as a phenomenon with broader implications for understanding urban life in Xinjiang. First, we might view it as offering an alternative to more individualist and materialist visions of the good life. As the above quote from the website claims, the company is devoted to a beautiful life according to the principles of faith, family and career, in that order. We can read this with irony or cynicism given that Mary Kay is a for-profit enterprise. Yet while there may be individuals who view the "lifestyle" merely as a means of selling makeup, the majority of the women I met did not. Azize spoke of Mary Kay as a way of navigating between the "traditional" and the "modern" — again, in both philosophical and practical terms. Thus, she saw Mary Kay as providing a hopeful compromise, between past and future, as well as a way forward. Part of its promise is precisely that it can provide material sustenance through a model of mutuality as opposed to competition. For its participants, Mary Kay provides a language for making sense of a rapidly changing world that is simultaneously progressive and culturally unique.

Second, we might read Mary Kay from a feminist perspective. Within the network, Mary Kay's personal story serves as the archetypal narrative of self-empowerment: "That company story didn't begin until Mary Kay Ash faced a situation all too familiar to women. After twenty-five years in the direct selling business, Mary Kay Ash resigned her position as a national training director when yet another man she had trained was promoted above her — at twice her salary. Her response was visionary. At first, she started writing a book that would help women gain the opportunities she had been denied. But soon she realized she was creating a plan that would do much more than give advice. It formed the foundation for a new opportunity where women could develop their talents and achieve unlimited success."⁴¹ Except for a few high profile examples, such as Rebiya Kadeer, prominent businesswomen are relatively rare in Xinjiang (Kadeer 2009). The director, Ayjamal, was correct when she emphasized that Mary Kay is unique in Xinjiang because it is a company *of women, for women*. Mary Kay's philosophy, with its focus on beauty and traditional gender roles, reflects a particular brand of feminism, one that has great appeal among Uyghurs. Many Uyghurs view past socialist policies of gender equality as a misguided attempt to make women into men. They understand their own emphasis on femininity and family as contrasting with mainstream Chinese values. Azize, for example, tells me that Mary Kay is a closer fit with Uyghur, as opposed to Han, culture because Uyghur women care more about beauty.

⁴¹ See the Mary Kay web site for details.

Third, it is possible to interpret Mary Kay as a particular manifestation of “cultural Islam” in an increasingly urban, secular society. For a “cultural Muslim,” Islamic identity remains important for symbolic reasons, but has little relevance to self-understanding. In this view, Uyghurs who focus on outward displays of religious commitment – such as modest dress and not eating pork – do so as markers of identity, rather than as practices of faith.⁴² According to a “thin” theory of identity, Mary Kay’s multiple references to values and tradition are merely a symbolic veneer on a consumerist movement. Indeed, some women who identified with the Islamic Revival levied critiques of this kind. They argued that “truly” religious women do not wear makeup, except on rare occasions and then only in the presence of their husbands. Yet as I have been arguing throughout, I do not find it productive to parse movements as “genuinely” Islamic or Uyghur or not. While it may be easy to dismiss Mary Kay as a clever form of lifestyle marketing, I think it is more; it is certainly more to most of the women who devote their time to it. In my reading, Mary Kay represents a creative attempt to articulate a vision of community in a place that leaves many bereft. If Islam and “Uyghurness” are available as resources to nationalists, intellectuals, and religious reformists, they should be equally available to the women of Mary Kay.

Finally, Mary Kay can be seen as a particular example of the ethos of self-making that is constitutive of the emerging middle class. As Ayjamal points out, one knows when the inner and outer transformation is complete when the practices become habit. Mary Kay women stand up straight, smile when listening and speak clearly and with confidence. When I ask Rahile about her sales skills, she declares, “I speak beautifully. Among Uyghurs, I am first rank.” The women are transformed at the level of disposition, habit and bodily comportment. Azize elegantly summarizes the essence of the Mary Kay ethos, “If I learn not to laugh with my mouth but to laugh from my heart, this is the most important change isn’t it?”

The Upper Middle Class

Although most of the women I studied are new or aspiring members of the middle class, I also spent time with people who could be described as upper middle class. Most of these women were from families that were well-placed to benefit from the transition to a market economy, usually through Party membership. I interviewed and spent time with several women who grew up in large cities with parents who were Party members and/or high-level government workers. My initial intuition was that the child of a government worker would be less likely to share a narrative of new possibility and self-transformation. Born in the 1970s, they would remember little, if any, of the Cultural Revolution. Their parents would be able to offer them the opportunities of the reform era from its inception. Thus, I reasoned, their lives could more easily fit into the model of modern “white collar” success without the narratives of hardship and reinvention central to the new middle class. Many of these assumptions, I found, were flawed. In part, their stories were more complicated because they are women and minorities, who nowhere fit seamlessly into this model. More importantly, the reform era offered new opportunities and ways of imagining one’s future to all. The most significant change for these women was the opening of borders in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They looked to Malaysia and Turkey as exemplars of Islamic modernity, as well as to America as a cultural center. Two of Amangul’s daughters (see chapter 2) were living in Turkey, and one woman I interviewed had studied in America. This looking-outward was in one sense a critique of Chinese culture; more importantly, it fit the spirit of the time, a spirit of looking-elsewhere.

⁴² This view of identity-making is common in analyses of Xinjiang. For example, Joanne Smith (2002) looks at practices, such as eating halal, as a means of articulating identity. While I do not disagree with her analysis, I attempt to describe a ‘thicker’ view of these practices by illustrating how they connect to broader visions of the good.

When I met Dilnurqiz, she embodied what I thought of as upper middle class. She wore stylish skirts and blouses, which were shorter and lower cut than Rahile would ever wear. She bought Korean makeup from an upscale Chinese mall and her hair was bouncy from a recent perm. When I visited her apartment, I admired her spotless white couches and shiny dishware. Her house had all the modern conveniences, including a dish sanitizer. Unlike the other Uyghur apartments I visited, there was no traditional sitting room with cushions on the floor. She showed me photos of her vacation in Malaysia and of her daughter performing in dance competitions all over China. Tutiye, who attended Chinese school, was a serious student of ballet and Uyghur dance.

Dilnurqiz was a secretary in a government unit; her husband was a high-level official who administered the government-owned housing for a section of Urumqi. Her father had been the leader of an agricultural bureau in Korla, a city in eastern Xinjiang, and her two sons were drivers for businessmen visiting from Central Asia.

When we spoke about the heavy responsibilities of Uyghur women, she praised her husband: “[Uyghur] men don’t help at all. But my husband does things for me. He washes the dishes. If I am kneading the dough, he prepares and washes the vegetables. He does everything.” Dilnurqiz liked her work, but her real passion was cooking. Once, a man from Uzbekistan came to eat in their home. After the meal, he offered to help her open a restaurant in Tashkent. She later visited Uzbekistan’s capital and agreed that her restaurant would be very popular. Dilnurqiz and her husband talked about the possibility, but in the end decided that he would have too much trouble managing the three children on his own: Tutiye was nine and her brothers were in their late-teens. Her husband agreed to help her buy a restaurant in their neighborhood.

In the middle of our interview, I asked about the gap in age between her children. She paused and told Tutiye to do something in another room. Dilnurqiz then explained that many years ago when her older sister was diagnosed with cancer, she became the primary caregiver for her sister’s two sons. When her sister passed away, the family asked her to marry her brother-in-law so the boys would have a mother. She was uncertain but felt a strong love for her nephews and eventually agreed to the marriage. Ten years later, Dilnurqiz says she is a happy wife and mother. She opened a drawer and showed me a photo of her sister. There were tears in her eyes. Things were and were not what they seemed to be.

Syncopated Stories

Peride, Rahile and Dilnurqiz are not typical in a demographic sense. The number of people in Xinjiang who have lived in Shanghai, participated in Mary Kay or traveled abroad is undoubtedly small. They are, however, exemplary in another way. As members of the reform generation, they grew up in a time of new possibilities for movement and the pursuit of private dreams. For this generation, being *japakesh* was embracing the possibilities of reform, including self-reform. Their lives are narrated as journeys punctuated by opportunity to re-make oneself, though never arbitrarily. Their manner of self-narrating should be interpreted within the context of their historical past and the demands of the present. In their milieus of rapid change, Peride, Rahile and Dilnurqiz have found and forged visions of the good life that draw on traditions in novel and transformative ways.

PART III – MAPPING THE FUTURE

Ayshe and Gulnar grew up in Hotan and Kashgar, respectively. They are the two largest cities in the south, considered the religious heartland of Xinjiang. It is also the Uyghur demographic center (see figure 7). Like so many others in China, Ayshe and Gulnar dream of studying in Beijing or abroad. The competition for places in graduate school, as well as for jobs, has become so intense that their plans and preparations swing pendulum-like. Ayshe has an opportunity to study in Turkey, but she is uncertain about whether she can get a passport and whether her father will give his blessing for her to go. Without a clear sense of what will happen, she works tirelessly on several options for employment and study. Gulnar often called me from the internet café to ask my opinions on different graduate school entry exams. She still wasn't sure which major would be best and spent frenetic days researching and planning. At the same time, she was working to improve her Russian in case she decided to pursue a job with a trading company. From one perspective, these concerns are common around the world, and certainly in China given the highly competitive environment. Yet, from another angle, the rhythms and concerns that pattern Ayshe and Gulnar's lives reflect a culture and people in transition.

For both Gulnar and Ayshe, their non-native Mandarin is a barrier to pursuing graduate education in inner China. The moment of transition they are caught in is different from that of their parents. The elder generation grasped the new opportunities of the reform era: they could farm their own plots or seek their fortunes in the city. They could also fail, but at least the possibility of pursuing a new path was manifest. Ayshe and Gulnar see the grooves before them, but cannot seem to get on a smooth track. The next generation, educated in bilingual or Chinese schools, will have fewer concerns about road blocks and glass ceilings. Certainly, they will have a new set of worries. Managing the pendulum swings of fate and merit with as much grace as possible constitutes being *japakesh* for the women of Gulnar and Ayshe's generation.

Figure 7: Major ethnic groups in Xinjiang by select prefectures, 2000 census

	Uyghurs	Han Chinese	Kazakhs	others
Xinjiang	45%	41%	7%	8%
North & East				
Urumqi	13%	75%	2%	10%
Karamay	14%	78%	4%	5%
Turpan	70%	23%	<0.1%	7%
Kumul	18%	69%	9%	4%
Ili	16%	44%	26%	14%
Altay	2%	41%	51%	6%
South				
Kashgar	89%	9%	<0.1%	2%
Khotan	96%	3%	<0.1%	0%

Source: China Provincial Population Census Data (2000)

The Islamic Revival

Until China reopened its borders in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Uyghurs were more or less cut off from developments in the Islamic world. Religious knowledge was primarily handed down orally and at the local level; opportunities for sustained religious study were very limited. Over the past three decades, there has been a dramatic increase in travel to and from Central Asia and the Middle East as well as in religious publications and other media. Many mosques were renovated and new ones were built. By 1984, there were reportedly fourteen thousand mosques open in Xinjiang (Waite 2006:254). Several friends recommended that I read books by Uyghurs who have studied in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Dubai to better understand Islam in China and the rest of the world. As discussed in chapter 2, Humahan gives a metaphorical synopsis of religious life before, during and after the reforms:

Before, we wore headscarves. Later we entered into a period of wearing thin headscarves where you could still see our heads through the scarves. Most people didn't wear headscarves. They would just go outside with nylons up to here. Now again, things are like they were before – the children of the older people – it doesn't matter if it is in their clothing [or in other areas of their life], they are now looking to the way things used to be. They have started dressing appropriately, in a very good way, in tune with Islam. Now there are even some cadres' kids who are wearing long skirts and praying namaz five times a day.

Edmund Waite, one of the few foreign scholars to also conduct fieldwork on religion in Xinjiang, uses the term reformism as a “gloss on any Islamic movement that challenges existing patterns of religious authority, knowledge and practice” (2007:166). Others, he notes, have used “revivalist,” “religious activist” and “Islamist” to describe similar developments in recent decades. I use the term Islamic Revival to locate trends in historical context, as part of the global movement, beginning in the 1970s, to return to “orthodox” practice and a scripturalist tradition. Although no return is complete, Humahan's description captures the temporality of revivalist sentiment in Xinjiang today: people are “looking to the way things used to be,” informed by old memories and new teachings from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, Central Asia and elsewhere.

The Islamic Revival is, of course, a complex and heterogeneous movement that includes a broad range of trends, including increased mosque attendance, reading the Quran in Arabic rather than in translation, women taking on the veil or more conservative forms of the veil, and so on. Charles Hirschkind's description of the Islamic Revival in Egypt is relevant to China: “While this movement encompasses a wide variety of phenomena, from political parties to underground militant organizations, in Egypt its broadest section has always remained grounded in grassroots efforts to revitalize Islamic forms of knowledge, pedagogy, comportment, and sociability” (2006:6). Given the strength and reach of the Chinese state, it is even truer in Xinjiang that the movement is predominantly grassroots. For Ayshe and her friends, the Revival centers on family and community revitalization, not political revolution.

In Xinjiang, as in other places, the veil has important political connotations, especially because students and workers in government institutions are prohibited from wearing one. Yet, at times the focus on resistance has the consequence of reducing religious practice in two ways: the veil stands in metonymically for piety and piety becomes understood primarily in political terms. As Ayshe's experience bears out, this dynamic also takes place among Uyghurs. Even though piety extends far beyond the veil, it is nevertheless an important marker for Ayshe and her friends, and it came up frequently in conversation.

Unwittingly, Ayshe has found herself as a symbol of the contradictory desires of many of her peers. When she was younger, she desperately wanted to be admired for her performance in school. But ironically, as she succeeded academically, more compliments and criticism focused on her dress and piety rather than her work. At first, she stayed quiet when others questioned her, but soon found that students bullied her even more in her quiescence. So she started to respond by asking people directly why they feel the need to criticize her, even though she never comments when they drink alcohol or do not veil. Over time, Ayshe has accepted that her path of faith includes serving as a lightning rod for many struggling to find their way as pious women in contemporary Xinjiang. To be sure, the unbidden challenges have shaped her path, but she keeps moving forward. Although still a warm and sensitive person, she describes herself as less concerned about praise after years of questioning gazes and words. When others press her to waver, she thinks: “Then I would not have any face before Allah who created me. I would not have any face before my own self. Until now this is the road I have been living on. This is the road I am walking on.”

As figure 8 illustrates, only a small percentage of Uyghurs attend school through junior college or above. (Overall, the college-educated population in Xinjiang is greater than the country as a whole because of the number of intellectuals that was sent to Xinjiang during the Cultural Revolution.) The rate of minority college education in Xinjiang is higher than in Tibet, but lower than in Inner Mongolia, where Mongolians are more likely to attend college than the Han in the region. Despite the low rates of university attendance among the Uyghur, the opportunity for one, or one’s children, to attend college is a weighty component of middle class dreams. Perhaps more than anything else, it is the symbol of upward mobility. In the next two chapters, I focus on how education, especially as it is imbricated with the questions of language, religion and ethnicity, operates in symbolic and practical terms.

Figure 8: % of Population with Junior College Education and Up (age six and above)

		Han	Uyghur	Overall
Xinjiang	Male	9.6%	2.8%	5.9%
	Female	8.9%	2.6%	5.3%
	Total	9.3%	2.7%	5.6%
		Han	Tibetan	Overall
Tibet	Male	11.5%	1.0%	1.9%
	Female	8.2%	0.6%	1.0%
	Total	10.3%	0.8%	1.5%
		Han	Mongolian	Overall
Inner Mongolia	Male	4.4%	5.0%	4.5%
	Female	3.4%	4.3%	3.6%
	Total	3.9%	4.6%	4.1%
				Overall
China	Male			4.6%
	Female			3.0%
	Total			3.8%

Source: China Provincial Population Census Data (2000)

CHAPTER 5 – AYSHE

Ayshe tells me that some people are like a round watermelon, a Uyghur phrase for one who is always changing her mind: “These people come to me and they say, ‘I am the daughter of a mullah. I can read the Quran very well. But because of the situation I cannot dress in an Islamic way. I really admire you.’” Then, the next time they meet, the same girl will say, “It is not good that you dress like this. Actually, it is not only you who is a good person, but I myself am also a good person. Dressing like this is not something to be proud of.” I laugh along with Ayshe at such whims and inconsistencies, but I know the comments make her heart ache. I should say the area *around* her heart. According to Ayshe’s mother, if you say the heart itself, it will remember and give you trouble in the future. Ayshe has enough trouble as it is: “Why have we become so strange? Why have people who wear headscarves become so strange? Why do we look ugly to other people? I think about these things.” She feels less judged by Chinese; in her mind, they expect Muslims to dress distinctively. Uyghurs, on the other hand, worry about being perceived as “backwards” by association and are ambivalent about how religious practice fits into their lives.

Ayshe wore a headscarf throughout her time at the university, even though it is not officially permitted. Despite regulations, monitoring and enforcement vary widely, especially for students. Her professors and friends warned her repeatedly that she would not be able to find work as a teacher if she continued to do so. Foreigners, too, often asked her why she wore a headscarf while other urban Uyghur women did not. Ayshe said that I was the first foreigner not to ask her for an explanation for why she chooses to veil. In contrast to the dominant discourse, she does not accept the dichotomy between piety and work. When a retired teacher insisted that she answer the question of which she would choose, Ayshe responded:

Is it possible or not to work in a job and to keep wearing a headscarf? Does this kind of work exist? Even if this kind of job is hard I will search for this kind of job. And then if there is this kind of job, I will work there. If it involves my death, if someone says to me, ‘If you do not take off your headscarf you will die.’ Maybe I would still think about whether or not I should take off my headscarf. But for the most part I would not take it off. When I said this she was very angry at me.

In Ayshe’s view, to push the question in black-and-white terms does not lead to moral clarity or serve as a guide to action. Living a pious life in China happens at this moment, not in a theoretical exercise.

In this chapter, I discuss the lives of Ayshe and her friends. At the time of my fieldwork, they were in their mid-twenties, in the midst of making important decisions about work and family. Because I lived with Ayshe and one of her friends, Nurgul, for several months, I was able to follow their debates and discussions closely. The same was true of their daily devotional practices, such as dressing modestly and praying. When our shopping trips lasted longer than expected and we did not have time to return home, I followed them while they looked for a place to pray. My concern, however, was never the extent to which claims of piety aligned with practices, though that is a lively topic of conversation among many Uyghurs.⁴³ Rather, I was

⁴³ The tendency to focus on the gap between what they claim and what they do, or the gap between ‘orthodoxy’ and practice, is implicated in the much broader debate about Islam in Central Asia. DeWeese 1994 and 2002 provide an excellent refutation of the claim that Central Asian Islam is more ‘syncretic’ or ‘lesser’ than other forms. Several scholars have shown how such misrecognition is also based “in the entrenched notion that Muslims are everywhere the same – that Islam, *more than the other*

interested in how they narrated their experiences as women who studied and lived together at an important moment in Xinjiang, when economic reform coincided with the increasing influence of the Islamic Revival. As Ayshe's angst indicates, the particular opportunities offered to women concerned with intellectual and religious self-cultivation contained paradoxes that intensified as they faced choices about marriage, further studies and work. Had they been born in the generation that came of age during the Cultural Revolution, they would not have had the opportunity to go to university, nor could they have held Quranic study groups or hoped to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. Now, the possibilities were there, but they had few guides to help them navigate the complex and changing terrain.

It is difficult to overemphasize the ways in which these women viewed their intellectual and religious pursuits as complementary and overlapping, not separate. While concerned with academic rigor and job prospects, each repeatedly told me that the primary motivation behind her studies was to become the best Muslim and mother possible, a duty understood in religious terms. The generational divide was also evident in this realm. For the parents of Ayshe and her friends, education was an investment in a child's earning potential, not an opportunity to cultivate virtue: "No matter what, our parents will restrict us. For instance, if we say we want to be a housewife, then our parents will pass out... They will say 'You have studied and studied and now you want to be a housewife?'" Though each of the women in Ayshe's group of friends has pursued a different path, they are guided by their faith, and at important moments, by each other.

Early life & education

Ayshe was born in 1982 in Hotan prefecture, known throughout China for its jade, carpets and religious piety. Of the 1.7 million people in the prefecture, ninety-six percent are Uyghur and four percent are Han; Hotan city, with a population of 186,000, is approximately eighty-four percent Uyghur (Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook 2000). Ayshe grew up on a farm outside of the city as the seventh of eight children. When I asked about games she played in her youth, she first named "Hospitality" (*méhmandarchilik*). With the children next door, she and her siblings would build play houses to host guests and hold weddings. *Méhmandarchilik* is exemplary of the organizing principle of reciprocity in Uyghur culture, a feature of pre-socialist society that people still proudly refer to as characteristic of the Uyghur (see chapter 2). As Cynthia Werner describes among the Kazakhs, exchange in Central Asia challenges the dichotomy between the gift and commodity economy; rather, there are "varying combinations of interest and disinterest, instrumentality, generosity, calculation and benevolence" (1997: viii). Ayshe and Nurgul frequently educated and chided me about rituals and protocol around hosting guests. The proper way of pouring tea, for example, is to place the spout of the teapot by the edge of cup, rather than near the middle. Ayshe was less jocular when I felt too busy to visit her professor's mother; as her charge, I was already implicated in her complex world of generosity and obligation.

As the youngest girl, Ayshe's parents and siblings indulged her, but she was also responsible for feeding the livestock and helping in the fields. She was never fragile or shy as others told her girls should be, but robust and precocious. The three youngest children were put in the care of Ayshe's eldest brother and his wife. Her eldest sister stopped attending school after a few years in order to help their mother with chores and childrearing. Their parents were

world religions, demands a strict uniformity of its believers" – a view ironically shared by Orientalists, Soviet and Chinese ethnologists and Islamic fundamentalists (Lipman 1997:xviii, emphasis mine).

particularly busy; since each had several years of education, they worked as elementary school teachers and as farmers. Starting in the second grade, Ayshe was the class and academic monitor. Still, she was bad (*yaman*) in both senses, tough and naughty. When boys picked on her, she fought back and once she even gave a boy a bloody nose.

Ayshe had trouble at the beginning of middle school because it was more competitive, with students from many villages who were better prepared than she was. Also, two of her cousins failed to enroll in school when required and the teacher repeatedly asked Ayshe to address the problem, to no avail. Ayshe felt the teacher disliked her as a result. The situation changed, however, after a school accreditation visit. Ayshe was given an unexpected test as part of the assessment. She received twenty-one out of one hundred on the literature exam; even though it was a failing score, it was the best among all the students in her school. From that point on her teachers praised and encouraged her. She admired her teachers and dreamt of becoming one. Her father was supportive, but it was her mother who pushed Ayshe and told her that if she studied well she could continue her studies to the limit of her ability, whether in Beijing or abroad. Ayshe became interested in studying Chinese because her mind was set on Beijing: "In my thinking foreign countries were not big, but Beijing was big. I thought to myself, 'I will study in Beijing'... I thought that from now on since I was a person who planned to study in Beijing, even if the teacher scolded me, and even if others made me go to the fields to work, I must study well. So I did study well." Once, her brother made her stay home from school to help plant melons, but she stayed up late with only the light of the oil lamp to memorize her Chinese vocabulary. The next day her teacher called on her and she wrote the characters on the blackboard. Her teacher praised her. The young Ayshe looked at the floor and smiled, barely able to hold in tears of joy. Her passion for Chinese deepened: "Even if I went to bed late, I would memorize words and read them to my father."

After finishing middle school, Ayshe prepared to take an exam to learn Chinese at a teacher training school in Hotan. She stayed with her older sister and brother-in-law, who was an algebra teacher, so they could help her prepare. In 1996, when she was fourteen, she took the exam and passed; however, she did not get a high enough score for a scholarship to study Chinese. In order to obtain a tuition waiver, she had to change her major to liberal arts, a less prestigious one:

So from that time on I started to hate the Chinese language. If you ask me why ... For one thing I had loved Chinese very much. But I did not obtain the thing I wanted. Secondly, I had very much lost my face in front of my family. I was just not able to pass it, and so I was very upset. Even though I had memorized the three years of texts, and even though I had studied so well, I was not able to pass it [at a level where I could study for free]. So because of this I started to hate Chinese.

Nevertheless, she knew she needed to improve her Chinese to pursue her dream of further study.

The theme of ambivalence toward Mandarin is a powerful one in Xinjiang today, especially among people of Ayshe's age. For the older generations, Uyghur schools were the norm and most jobs did not require fluency in Chinese. In 2004, the government announced that all schools would begin the transition to a system of Mandarin education (Dweyer 2005). Even earlier, bilingual schools were established to bridge the gap in language competence; for the younger generation, education in Uyghur and Mandarin is becoming the norm. In these schools, classes are generally taught in Mandarin by Uyghur teachers, except for Uyghur

literature, which continues to be taught in Uyghur.⁴⁴ Ayshe and her friends, however, are caught in the middle. They are held to high standards when seeking employment and post-graduate education, but did not have good language training in their early years.

Work & political study

As Ayshe recalls, it was during her second year of teacher training school that she began to ask questions about God and the world: “I had a lot of ideas, like, how was this world created? Who created it? What happened? How was it created? And things like this, and so slowly I changed.” She spent all of her time reading books and reviewing lessons and no longer had time to play games. After graduating in July 1999, she passed the self-study exam for her training diploma and associate’s degree. When Ayshe went to the work unit to get assigned to a school, she was instead sent to do a month of military training. According to Ayshe, the requirement was in response to “terrorist” explosions in Xinjiang that began in 1997. Ubiquitous “wanted” posters offered rewards of up to a hundred thousand yuan. At the military training, the government announced that schools also needed to prepare to fight “anti-government” elements. Ayshe recalled them saying, “It is not enough for the people in work units and the teachers to just teach your classes, your hands and feet need to be ready. If someone comes in fighting you...you must teach them a lesson. So we will put you through military training.” The training foreshadowed a series of political reeducation efforts that would prompt Ayshe to leave her job teaching at the middle school she herself had attended.

In the fall of 1999, Ayshe’s first semester of teaching, all the teachers were abuzz with the message of the three important things to know in the 21st century: computers, English or a foreign language, and how to drive a car. These three essentials were in the news, books, and conversations on the street. After telling her class about the three essential skills, she added that they must first learn Chinese and do well in their other classes as a foundation for everything else. When she finished her speech, one of the students asked, “What is a computer?” Ayshe gave a very basic description because she barely had any experience with computers. By the time I lived in Xinjiang more than seven years later, all of this had become common sense, even in relatively small villages.

Ayshe was happy to realize her dream of becoming a teacher. But during her two years at the middle school, there continued to be attacks.⁴⁵ Some said the problems came from educated people, including teachers. As a result, there were endless hours of political study of the “Three Stresses” (*san jiang*) – stress study, stress politics, stress healthy trends. Because Hotan had more “anti-government” activities than other regions, the teachers in the area had more intense

⁴⁴ Even though the dominant language of education in bilingual schools is Mandarin, many Uyghurs separate them sharply from Chinese schools, where the teachers and the majority of other students are Han. Some parents told me that they prefer to send their kids to Chinese schools because of better resources, instruction and discipline. However, most expressed a strong preference for bilingual schools because they were afraid of their children forgetting Uyghur culture and of picking up bad “Chinese” habits, such as spitting and eating non-halal food. Though the transition has been gradual, the bilingual schools are a step toward integrated Chinese-medium schools (Dweyer 2005).

⁴⁵ Millward identifies three shifts before the increase in attacks: “The first was the release by the Standing Committee of the CCP Politburo on March 19 of a secret directive (CCP Central Committee Document 7) warning of illegal religious activities and foreign influence and infiltration into Xinjiang. The second was the signing of a mutual tension-reducing and security treaty by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, the so-called Shanghai Five, on April 26 (now expanded to include Uzbekistan and known as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization). The third was the announcement of the first “Strike Hard” anticrime and antiseperatist campaign late that same month” (2004:28-9). My aim is to provide a local perspective on the effects of these changes.

study sessions. Party members came to investigate the school. Ayshe described it as a “Second Cultural Revolution:”

If someone exploded something outside, they would immediately gather us together. They would say, “On this day at this time where were you?” We would write down proof. We would write: “I was at home sleeping.” or “I was doing something outside. So and so can be a witness to this. Oh I did not do this thing. Oh I did not help them. If you curse him, I curse him too. Whatever you are saying was done, I did not do it.” If we said this, they did not believe us. But we wrote it down. We would say, “This has nothing to do with us.” We would write down the name of a person we had never seen in our life and say, “We have not seen this person. We have not been involved in the things he has done.” We would say things like this...So I think my mind is strange, my psychological state is not normal. This is because there was always so much stress.

When she complained to her parents, they would comfort her with a simple refrain, “These kinds of things happen.” The campaigns and investigations were minor compared with their experiences during the Cultural Revolution, but Ayshe found the constant accusations unbearable. Sometimes the principal would open the door when the teachers were being cursed so that the students could hear. Teachers who performed poorly ended up having political problems. The students fell behind because everything was about politics first, and only then about studies and teaching. The stress was so great that Ayshe had “tears coming out of fifteen places in [her] eyes.”

There were fifty students in her class and they were difficult to control. Ayshe came up with two methods for keeping the students engaged and better behaved. A teacher from an experimental middle school came to demonstrate a new approach based on “quality” education. Instead of talking through a set lesson, he asked the students guiding questions and made them do most of the speaking. Ayshe adopted this method and also began to tell the class Uyghur fables (*chöchek*). She had learned and recited many with her schoolmates while they performed their required communal labor (*emgek*). If her students paid attention for forty minutes, then Ayshe would spend the last part of the period telling a story: “Because we were used to each other, if the character was a male I would tell it in a male’s voice. If the character was a female, I would tell it in a female’s voice. If the fable had some sort of scary section the students would say, “Ohh!” For each fable I would use expressive body language; I told it in an expressive way. It went really well. Even kids who in their whole lives had never used a pen or used a notebook, in my class, they would take a notebook and do their math problems.”

Still, the situation was frustrating and Ayshe wanted to continue her studies in Urumqi. She had not given up her dream of studying in Beijing. After she taught for two years, the school administrators agreed to support her to study Chinese in Urumqi. The school would continue to pay her salary with the understanding that she would return to teach, a common agreement as schools transitioned to Mandarin-medium curricula. At the last moment, she almost didn’t travel the long distance to Urumqi because her mother fell ill. Ayshe’s sisters and relatives told her not to leave, but her mother pleaded her to go. As Ayshe embarked on her new and difficult journey, her mother recovered her health.

Study in Urumqi

In the fall of 2001, Ayshe enrolled in one of the main Education Institutes in Urumqi. It was an entirely different level of competition and she soon found herself at the bottom of her class. She sat in the back of the classroom. People made relentless fun of her “hick” Hotan accent. In the first three months, she barely spoke to anyone and just wrote in her diary. She

would write to herself, “Don’t be sad, these days will also pass. You can also learn Chinese. If the kids make fun of you, just let them make fun of you. Be determined.” She began to open up a little when two girls befriended her, but it wasn’t until she enrolled in an English night course that she found her confidence again. The class had already begun, but Ayshe caught up quickly and became the best student in the class. She began to think, “No matter what, even though I was not able to learn Chinese well, I am going to learn English well.” On one of the Chinese tests, she scored a 69, the lowest of the passing grades, and she started to think seriously about switching majors: “I cried and wondered, ‘Why can’t I learn Chinese?’” Ayshe convinced the department head to allow her to change majors, but he warned her that if she didn’t succeed in English, she would be sent home.

On the first day of class as an English major, a friend introduced Ayshe to Reshide, who was also from Hotan. Through Reshide, Ayshe came to know many students who also performed namaz, the five daily prayers. Ayshe became inseparable from Reshide, who always provided gentle encouragement, and Menisa, who pushed Ayshe with her competitive nature. With their support, Ayshe did well and her heart became devoted to English. She was especially proud to perform better than the *minkaohan* (minorities who study in Chinese school) students, who had already studied English as part of their regular middle school curriculum. Students in Uyghur schools are usually exposed to little or no English early on because they study Chinese as their second language.

One encounter soon after she switched majors left a deep impression on Ayshe:

Now a girl came to me and said, “Do want to study English?” I said, “Yes.” She said, “Can you deal with the difficulty?” I said, “Yes, I can deal with it.” She said to me, “Do you perform namaz?” I did not say anything. I did not say yes I do. She said, “Young people who pray namaz are able to deal with the difficulty.”

I said, “Why do you say this?”

When I said, “Why do you say this?” She said, “First of all people who pray namaz are very determined people. Because every day in the morning, you wake up and get up and pray namaz. And in the evening in the same kind of difficult conditions you perform namaz. They are firm and determined in their religious faith.

“The second thing is that simply put, you perform namaz in the morning and after you have finished performing your namaz you can go outside and recite the texts. You can actually speak English. You will not just be sleeping like everyone else is at that time. No other study method is as good as this one. Those who are studying language definitely must get up in the morning, go outside, and recite the text with a loud voice.”

At that time I was nineteen years old. I was young. I was very surprised. Oh my. She had a very strong faith. She really believes strongly. This girl told me, “If you perform namaz, then you will be able to study English very well.” I did not say anything. In the dorm the other students did not perform namaz. But they saw me and they said, “We should perform namaz too. Wake me up.” I said, “Ok.”

Because I did not have a phone like I do now, I did not have an alarm clock to wake me up. But in the morning I got up by myself. My bed was on the top bunk. I would read books. But when I read, you know, I would read the Quran or the Hadith.

Ayshe told me this anecdote as a part of her story of deepening religious practice, when she began to pray five times a day without fail. It struck me as important at the time, though I wasn’t quite sure why. In retrospect, the moment captured the complexity of motivation, virtue and reward around religious practice. For Ayshe and her interlocutor, there is no inherent

contradiction between the devotional aspects and practical benefits of prayer, between this-worldly and other-worldly. Ayshe does not pray regularly to become a better student of English in any straightforward, instrumental sense. Rather, she cultivates herself through the everyday practices of dress and ritual to become the kind of person who excels in difficult tasks, such as learning English. At the same time, if her friends join her for her early morning prayers with the hopes of improving their test scores, their religious commitment is not somehow defective or wrongheaded. A famous hadith affirms that Islam is not meant to be a burden on humanity; indeed, “Islam promises blessings of various kinds in this life, above all the blessings, tangible and intangible, derived from normal participation in a human community sacralized by divine forms” (DeWeese 1994:57). Despite my not being Muslim, many friends encouraged me to say prayers after meals and to wear a headscarf. These practices, they suggested, would bring me closer to God and may be the first step in converting to Islam. Faith, in this view, is not only a matter of inner belief manifested in outward actions, but also of embodied actions cultivating inner conviction.⁴⁶

In Ayshe’s case, her devotion to prayer, study and loved ones dovetailed: “In a person’s life, when there is something she loves to do, it is not hard for her at all. Even if it is difficult she can bear it. Just like if we love someone, but that person does something bad to us, we still do not complain to them about it. It is the same as this. I loved English very much – my heart was devoted to English.” She, Reshide and Menisa studied English together and had an informal group to read religious books and discuss them. The three began to spend most their time together, just as Ayshe and Nurgul would do in graduate school: “We do everything together. We perform namaz together, we eat together. We are together in the dorm. We play together. We sleep at the same time. We do everything together.” They also supported each other during Ramadan by bringing each other food to eat before daybreak and after sunset. Ayshe emphasized that they never participated in any political activities and never disobeyed any specific orders from their teachers: “The teachers also told us, ‘If possible, don’t fast, you have a lot of stress. You will get tired.’ We said, ‘Ok.’ The teachers said to us, ‘It would be good if you did not fast.’ But they did not tell us, ‘Don’t fast at all.’ The teachers would say to us, ‘This is a Muslim custom that we have to understand. We understand it.’”

In the beginning of her second year at the Education Institute, Ayshe became very sick with a stomach illness. She was in the hospital for four months and fell behind in her classes. Reshide and Menisa visited her in the hospital every day. When Ayshe moved back into their apartment, they took care of her, bringing her food and medicine. During this time, Ayshe owed them a lot of money. Her parents told her to return home and stop studying because the illness was stress-related, but Ayshe felt she had to persevere. Finally, Reshide encouraged Ayshe to get out of bed and run. It seemed like a crazy idea but she ran all through the winter. When she recovered in the spring, she attributed much of her improvement to her early morning jogs.

Another one of their roommates was taking the graduate entrance exam in linguistics and Ayshe became interested. Several years before she had read a book about Uyghur Ph.D.s and, for the first time, the possibility seemed within reach. Because she completed her bachelors

⁴⁶ See, for example, Mahmood 2004 and Hirschkind 2006. Devin DeWeese, a scholar of Islam in Central Asia, points to the way many rooted in Christian or modernist anti-ritual conceptions of religious conversion “insist upon ‘heart’ as more important than ‘the law,’ emphasize ‘content’ over ‘form’ and consider ‘religion’ first and foremost as a matter of ‘personal belief.’” This creates a difficulty in understanding the “distinctly Islamic approach to the formal and external, an approach already clear in the divinely and prophetically sanctioned designation of Muhammad’s religion as *islam*: to overstate the case, we may suggest that the Islamic tradition regards even *purely* formal and ‘external’ adoption of Islamic practices and patterns meaningful, since those patterns, *even in their formal aspects*, are conveyors of divine grace, *barakah*” (1994:25, emphasis in the original).

through self-study rather than at a four-year college, Ayshe felt that she would need a Masters if she wanted to study in Beijing or abroad. But when she went to Xinjiang University to watch a thesis defense, she became nervous because there was not a single student wearing a headscarf. Still, she bought the books and started preparing for the three exams in English, politics and Uyghur literature. She did not pass the politics exam the first time because her written Chinese wasn't good enough. But she was determined. She prepared for another year and passed the exam. As before, her score was not high enough to receive a tuition scholarship. Through a combination of work and help from her family, Ayshe completed the three years of her Masters in literature in May 2007.

When I asked Ayshe about the happiest time in her first twenty-five years of life, she remembered the period at the Education Institute most fondly. It was the time that she deepened her faith surrounded by, and with the support of, her best friends: "...for the most part our lives in 2001, 2002, and 2003 were filled happiness and excitement. We were very determined during this time. We even wore our headscarves in the summer you know. We even wore our headscarves tied in the front under our chins." Ayshe contrasted their determination with most girls who arrive from the countryside or southern cities and take off their headscarves and wear skirts and make-up within a few months of moving to Urumqi. She also compared her current dress to when she was in middle school and at the teacher training school in Hotan, where she wore pants and put her hair in braids with a thin headscarf. Even after entering her graduate program, Ayshe continued to wear a headscarf in a more modest way, tied under her chin with all of her hair covered, rather than tied behind her head. She never stopped wearing long skirts and dresses, even during the frigid winters when pants would have been warmer. As she reflected on the changes in her life, Ayshe seemed proud and happy. Modest dress, as an expression of her piety and her ideas, was clearly important to her. But she would not, and I think rightly, characterize it as a form of resistance to modernization or government policies, though her world was fundamentally shaped by both. She was concerned primarily with her relationship with God and with her overlapping circles of community.

Just before I moved from Urumqi to Kashgar, Ayshe told me that several people had criticized her for living with me, a non-Muslim and ethnic Han. Some even went so far as to suggest that they could no longer spend time with her as a consequence. Ayshe said that she doesn't share their opinion because isolation from and rudeness toward non-Muslims leads to greater misunderstanding and hatred of Islam. Her sense of community is expansive. In navigating her complicated world, she holds together cosmopolitan, religious and familial conceptions of community with grace, if not ease.

Marriage and the future

Ayshe and I are jogging on the college track, bundled up in sweats, scarves and hats. As she recalls the thrill of competing in school races, we weave slowly around puddles and patches of snow. We watch clouds of smoke from burning coal rise just a few buildings beyond the track. A handful of students are walking back and forth, books in hand, memorizing and reciting texts. We talk about Ayshe's worries about the future. After six years in Urumqi and completing a Masters in literature, she feels she cannot return to her job at her hometown's middle school. She cannot return to her village. She cannot find a job at a college or government office unless she stops wearing a headscarf. She wants to take the exam to enter a Ph.D. program in Beijing, but that would require a year of preparation because her written Chinese is not yet fluent

enough. That is expensive and uncertain. After her parents' investment, she feels the responsibility of putting them at ease by finding work. There are no easy options.

Later in the evening, we sit down for a cup of tea and snack on dried fruit and sunflower seeds. Our other roommates, Nurgul and Arzigul, are asleep. Ayshe whispers excitedly. There is another possibility. One of her teachers arranged for her admission to a university in Turkey. She would be able to study Turkish and English and then, if all goes well, enter a Ph.D. program with a scholarship. She hesitates and then looks at me with her wide-set eyes. "I'm not like you," she says. She has difficulty imagining life in a place thousands of miles away from her home, family and friends. What would it be like to live and do research there? My example gives her courage. But our situations are not the same. She must get her parents' permission and blessing to go. And then there is the government's permission – both to leave and to return. Some Uyghur scholars in Turkey have trouble reentering China if they are suspected of promoting pan-Turkism. Even getting a passport has become very difficult. Ayshe has come a long way but at the moment her path seems less certain than ever.

She asks me for advice. I tell her that Turkey sounds like a promising option, even though the regulations there on veiling in universities are in flux. I warn her that it can be lonely, especially because she could never be certain about her visits home. Even in my time in Xinjiang, the area around my heart aches more than I imagined it would. And my trip is planned for only a year. Ayshe tells me about Tutiye, a friend who went to Cyprus to seek her fortune but returned with the refrain, "foreign countries are not heaven." Tutiye did everything from tending sheep to working in a coal mine. Yet the most difficult part was not the hard labor, but getting used to eating meals alone. Uyghurs, Ayshe reminds me, are *ademkhomar* (lit. people addicts). After two years in Cyprus, Tutiye decided that getting married and staying in Xinjiang was not so bad after all. It is important not to romanticize living abroad, I tell Ayshe, but her situation as a graduate student would be different. Ayshe agrees that it's wise to at least apply for a passport, a process that promises to be an adventure in itself.

When we talk about future work and study, the question of marriage is always there, and with the question of marriage, the question of love. Ayshe and Nurgul often discuss their particular bind: if they go to inner China to study, they will be considered old maids by the time they return. On the other hand, if they marry, their husbands and families will probably not let them go study, or they may no longer want to go if they have children. Birth control, they fear, would be bad for their health. Their lives are filled with both faith that God arranges things and a disquieting sense of urgency.

During my second week in Urumqi, Ayshe's brother-in-law, a teacher, came from Hotan to attend a Chinese course. He brought a big box of nan and dried fruit, as well as a message from Ayshe's father that he was looking for potential husbands for her. Though the message worried her, Ayshe remained hopeful. While she would not act against her parents' orders, she thought she would be able to persuade them once she decided on her plan for further study and marriage. Initially, her father had not wanted her to study for a Masters, but she handwrote him a beautiful ten-page letter and he finally consented. Though Ayshe did not want her father to choose a husband for her, she did not see the alternative as dating and falling in love. The division between "arranged" and "love" marriage was fuzzy and shifting, no less so than Ayshe's views on her path to becoming a wife and mother.

As Yan Yunxiang (2003) observed in rural China in the 1980s and 1990s, Western forms of freely chosen, romantic love by came to be seen as desirable in contrast to traditional, pre-modern forms of marriage. This has become increasingly the case among Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

But since her youth, Ayshe has felt it is bad for a boy and girl to fall in love, go out, hold hands and gaze into each other's eyes. When one of her older sisters fell in love and married, Ayshe disapproved and no longer wanted to spend nights at her sister's home. Ayshe describes her views as based on a combination of her early intuition and careful study of Islamic thought: "We can get to know each other, but then after that we will not go around together every day, and we will not go to parks together and do things like that. It is good to do these things after you are married...I will not fall in love with someone and go out with him and get married. This is my hope. So until now I have not gone out with anyone. I am twenty-five years old."

A few days before Reshide's wedding, Ayshe despondently mentions that of her group of friends from the Education Institute, she is the only one without a husband or fiancé. She feels that her natural disposition – gregarious, seeking and *yaman* – makes it difficult to be as calm and modest as she should be, creating problems in finding a man to marry. Even Menisa, who Ayshe describes as the most conservative among them, is engaged. Menisa was introduced to her fiancé by a friend. She met him once or twice and then they spoke by phone and wrote letters for a few months before deciding to get engaged. Of her best friends – Nurgul, Menisa and Reshide – Ayshe feels she will be the last to marry.

Reshide's wedding

Ayshe and I take a flight from Urumqi to Hotan for Reshide's wedding. The night before the ceremony, Reshide's friends gather at her parents' home to put henna in clumps on their fingertips, not in the winding designs I have seen in South Asia. The next morning Ayshe and I get ready before meeting Reshide at a beauty salon where she will get her hair and make-up done. Ayshe asks me to change into a prettier shirt and tie my ponytail higher on my head. I snap back that I am not concerned with beauty in the way she and her friends are. Ayshe looks at me sympathetically and calls me a small child. I become more frustrated, even though I know I am the one being unreasonable. She explains, even though she shouldn't have to, that my state of dress and fashion is a reflection of her and of my respect for the hosts. Though she has never complained to me, she too is tired of the constant chatter about appearance; the night before, everyone spoke of how she has a big face and is overweight. I change clothes and let Ayshe arrange my hair. I laugh at myself for thinking that I would enjoy Uyghur weddings more than American ones.

The wedding is at a large hall with three rooms: one area for men to eat, one for women and a carpeted room where Reshide sits to receive guests and gifts and where the women pray. Reshide, tiny with birdlike features, is dressed in a green flowery confection of lace and embroidery. Everyone comments that she looks just like a doll. After a meal of pilaf and a local stew with broth and vegetables, we continue to sit in the wedding hall and wait for the groom's family and guests to arrive. I meet Reshide's eldest brother's wife, who is seventeen, and their three-year-old son. Her marriage was arranged by their paternal grandmothers when she was fourteen and he was thirty; they first met on their wedding day. As she dotes on her son, she tells me that she is happy, but very busy helping her mother-in-law to manage the household.

In the late afternoon, the family and guests of the groom's side arrive at the wedding hall. After they eat, the *nikah* (Islamic marriage contract) is read by a mullah surrounded by the male elders of the community. The dowry, a red suitcase filled with clothes and shoes, is delivered ceremoniously. Reshide sits inside the hall with her face covered and eyes cast downward, while the men sit outside the door on carpets. When both bride and groom say *tegdim* (I do), the marriage is complete. Reshide begins to wail, a traditional act of expressing sorrow at leaving her parents' home. After a prayer, we leave for the groom's home, which is at the edge of the city.

Children block the road until the groomsmen give them money for their passage. After eating another meal, we go to Reshide and her husband's own home, a small place in the city. Her husband and two of his friends worry over serving food and tea to the bridesmaids and me. It is unusual for newlyweds to go to their new house the night of the wedding instead of staying at the groom's home. The next morning, the feasting continues. Reshide is dressed in red gossamer and several aunties joke that she has the blush of a woman. We have another meal of pilaf at Reshide's house and then she is taken to her *chong öy* (big house), her husband's home.

Ayshe and Menisa have duties as bridesmaids throughout the event, so I am entrusted to the care of Menisa's younger sister, Nisagul. She lives in her elder brother's home in Yerkend, a city between Hotan and Kashgar. I learn that she was enrolled at the Agricultural University in Urumqi, but returned home after only five days. She did not know how to deal with the stares and rude comments: several students poked fun at her by asking her if she had any hair beneath her headscarf. Nisagul tells me proudly that she is on her second reading of the Quran in both Uyghur and Arabic, and is in the process of reading it for the first time in Chinese. Next, she plans to learn English. Nisagul takes on the responsibility of instructing me in proper behavior. When I ask permission before taking photos, she praises my caution and sensitivity. When I hesitate as others begin to pray, she gives me an encouraging look. Later, she says that I should pray because it is an expression of respect and a path to accepting Islam.

I spend the afternoon talking with another energetic and bright-eyed woman, Nadie. Like Nisagul, she is excited to tell me about her knowledge of Arabic and the Quran. She is nineteen and the youngest of six children. She has been studying Arabic for three years; after another two years of study, she will begin teaching the Quran to other women. She already teaches basic classes to small children. Like others influenced by the Islamic Revival, she believes that it is important to read and understand the Quran in Arabic. In the past, most people who studied the Quran would learn to recite in Arabic but then refer to the Uyghur translation to understand its meaning. There is a paucity of Quranic scholars in Xinjiang, Nadie explains, and so Uyghurs must learn Arabic themselves. Nadie is to be married within the month. When I ask if she feels it is early or late, she replies that the time is right: it is important not to marry too early because women need enough education to teach their children properly.

It is impossible to know how many Quranic Arabic programs exist in Xinjiang, since they are informal and illegal.⁴⁷ In the past, even in politically tumultuous times, religious study groups still assembled. Nevertheless, Nadie's description indicates that there are new spaces for religious practice and education, in particular enabled by the creation of private spaces in post-socialist China (Zhang 2007). Schools for women to learn to recite and understand the Quran in Arabic are a new phenomenon. Nadie has about ten classmates who meet every other day for about an hour with a teacher who studied Arabic in Urumqi. When we met, she had already memorized twenty-six of the thirty sections (*ajiza*) of the Quran. While surveillance potentially occurs anywhere, women's spaces are generally considered less threatening and less politicized. When I ask Nadie if she worries about officials finding out about her studies and plans, she replies, "God will provide."

⁴⁷ The Chinese government runs several official madrasas, but the students who attend are not well-respected by the general population. Several Uyghurs told me about the practice of sending male children to madrasas in inner China, where government oversight is less strict. In general, restrictions on Islamic practice are less stringent where the risk of collective action is perceived as small. One Uyghur who attended college in Shanghai said that the school made special accommodations for students fasting during Ramadan, whereas observing the fast in schools in Xinjiang is prohibited. It is important to keep in mind that space for religious practice varies greatly across China.

Looking westward

The following week I go to Yerkend to visit Menisa and Nisagul. They are both very thin and serious, though Menisa is more assertive and talkative. Nisagul is distinctive with a black cape-like veil covering her hair, neck and shoulders. Both sisters are studying Arabic, though they envision different paths for themselves. Nisagul studies for two hours a day with a class and is also studying computers at home with the help of friends. Menisa is preparing to take another set of graduate exams. Two years before, Menisa left a linguistics graduate program in Urumqi after only a few months. When I ask her why, she says that her advisor, an accomplished Uyghur professor, would sometimes ridicule her. Once she pointed at Menisa's headscarf and said, "If your hair is ugly, you should get a good haircut." Not all professors are as understanding as Nurgul and Ayshe's and so, as Nisagul had before, Menisa left Urumqi and returned to Yerkend. She hopes to be admitted to an M.A. program in Arabic, where the professors are more flexible, or leave to study abroad in Dubai, Saudi Arabia or Egypt. She is also considering post-graduate studies in education because her main interest is child-rearing, not language per se.

Nisagul began to deeply understand Islam when she was in high school. Once during class a boy who had done poorly on a math exam stormed out, yelling that his score was low because he spent his time studying the Quran. Nisagul was impressed. She spoke with him after that and became interested in learning more about Islam. As she tells me about how she has changed, she gestures that she wore her hair long, without a headscarf, and wore short sleeves. Many of the girls in her class "understood Islam" and were a good influence on her. But, most importantly, she came to her understanding through reading the Quran. At first she was afraid of God's wrath, but then came to realize that God forgives all.

Both of their parents are middle school teachers in a village outside of Yerkend. They were angry when Nisagul and Menisa came back from Urumqi. Her mom told them not to dress conservatively because people will misunderstand them. When I ask Nisagul why she decided to go to Urumqi in the first place, she replies, "I wanted to improve my knowledge to honor God, but then realized that wasn't the right environment. I could honor Him better on my own." Nisagul, like other young women I met, speaks longingly of Muslim countries where women can be teachers because girls and boys are in separate classes and they can dress appropriately. Many other youth dream of studying and working abroad in America, Canada or Australia. While their dreams seem to diverge, both groups are simultaneously indulging in escapist imaginings and engaging global developmental and religious imaginaries.

Nisagul, Menisa and I go to dinner at their friend Nurdur's home. They describe him as someone with a profound passion for Islam. It is one of the few one-room homes that I see while in Xinjiang. A wall has been built to divide the room into two spaces. The front is a narrow corridor with a small coal-burning stove and a tap. Three-quarters of the main section is taken up by a platform, covered in carpets, with mats and blankets for bedding stacked to one side. There are two large shiny posters of Mecca on the walls. Another male guest is present, so Nurdur's wife Aynur has her head, face, and upper body covered with a large piece of brown cloth. There are holes in the pattern that allow her to see. When she goes to the front room to cook, she flips it back so her face is no longer covered. I ask Nisagul about the brown veil and

she says that married women wear it if their husbands ask them to.⁴⁸ As Aynur cooks a dish with chicken, peas, carrots and rice, the smoke from the stove seeps into the room.

The discussion quickly turns to my interest in Islam and I feel I'm being tested by the two men. Even though I have come with friends, they want to make sure I don't have suspicious motives. I say I am not Muslim but they seem appeased by my knowledge about and respect for Islam. I ask Nurdur how he came to understand Islam. He responds with an extended computer analogy about the body as hardware and the soul as software. Without God to put the two together and in motion, there would be no human beings. When he heard someone discussing this, he realized that we should not be so arrogant to think that there is no higher power. This is a common enough analogy in religious philosophy. My interest is piqued not by his argumentation, but by his charisma and his intense gaze. He works at a copy shop during the day and spends his free hours reading Islamic materials and teaching himself how to use the computer. Menisa engages him in a discussion on a point of doctrine and I am struck by their engagement across lines of class and gender. After more than two hours, Aynur brings in the food and we eat in silence.

Metaphors of love and language

I ask Ayshe if she plans to send her children to Chinese school so they will not face the difficulties that she did in learning Mandarin. She says that if I saw her diary from her time at the Education Institute, I would laugh. She wrote that she would definitely educate her children in Chinese school. But since then she has changed her mind, "People can learn Chinese. People are able to learn Chinese or another language during a given period of time. But people cannot attend a class and learn the rules of close relationships between people, customs and traditions, and the things that belong to us." If there are only Chinese or bilingual schools when her kids enroll, Ayshe will make her own materials and educate her children at home after school.

Early in my stay, Nurgul told me a story to explain why she will not send her children to Chinese school. One of her nieces started in Chinese school when she was eight years old. After only a month, she picked up a lot of habits from her classmates, like sneezing without covering her mouth and spitting in public. When her parents corrected her, she replied, "Why not? Everyone at school does!" When I asked another woman to describe the difference between *minkaohan* (minority who studies in Chinese schools) and *minkaomin* (minority who studies in minority school), she replied with an illustrative example: shortly after meeting a boy, a *minkaohan* girl will say, "Let's watch a movie!" A *minkaomin* girl will never do that; moreover, she will sit with guests when they visit and pour them tea.

The fine balance that Uyghurs seek is reflected in what many view as the ideal education: the child attends Chinese elementary and middle schools while speaking Uyghur at home, and then a bilingual high school. Even though most instruction in bilingual schools is in Chinese, the child will benefit from being surrounded by Uyghur teachers and students. Equally important, if she attends a bilingual or Uyghur high school, she can take the college entrance exam as a *minkaomin* (lit. minority tests as minority). Points are automatically added to the score of a *minkaomin* and in some cases the admissions requirements are lower. One teacher told me about the trouble she ran into when putting the "ideal" plan into practice with her daughter, especially when she entered high school. Some difficulties were related to her daughter's trouble

⁴⁸ In Kashgar, people said it is often the wives of traders who wear the brown veil because traders are more protective because they go on long trips away from home. Waite (2007) observes that the brown veil, with holes to see through as opposed to eye slits, is unique to southern Xinjiang and that its use is spreading with the increasing influence of the Islamic Revival.

reading and writing Uyghur quickly; however, most were smaller habits of mannerism and preference. Her daughter complained that her Uyghur classmates were messy and had bad taste in music. It is a common joke that minkaohan are the 56th minority nationality of China.

Our third roommate, Arzigul, is a focused yet cheery M.A. student in environmental science. She wears her hair short so that she doesn't have to waste time styling it. Unlike Nurgul and Ayshe, she is from a large city in eastern Xinjiang with a large Han population. Arzigul completed her B.S. in Sichuan. Because of her fluent Mandarin and style of dress, she was sometimes mistaken as a minkaohan. In my experience, she responded with a combination of pride and offense. When I overheard her speaking with her sister, it was in a mixture of Chinese and Uyghur with a smattering of English. Her tones when speaking Mandarin were excellent, which is rare for a minkaomin or any non-native speaker. Still, she did not want to be mistaken for someone who lacked fluency in cultural and religious matters. This included basic customs such as eating *halal* food and understanding the nuances of Uyghur jokes. But, even more, she was concerned with being seen as someone fully embedded in an ethical community created through hospitality and reciprocity. It was she, not Ayshe or Nurgul, who reprimanded me for my lack of cooking skills. How could I be a proper wife, mother, sister, aunt and neighbor if I couldn't slice an onion?

The persistent theme of anxiety over and passion for languages – Chinese, English, Uyghur and Arabic – is indicative of the practical and metaphorical importance of language in Xinjiang today. Though the hierarchies of language differ among communities and individuals, they are shaped by and shape much broader dynamics. As in the rest of China, there is an English-learning craze in Xinjiang. Indeed, one of the most popular series of self-study texts and tapes across the country is *Crazy English*. The instructor encourages students to stand in front of the mirror and yell out vocabulary and practice sentences. Chinese students, it is often said, read and write well, but are shy about speaking out loud. *Crazy English* aims not only to teach a language, but to transform the student into the kind of person who can excel at English. (This logic of refashioning oneself is consonant with Ayshe's narrative, discussed above, of how her life was transformed by prayer and studying the Quran.) Uyghurs tend to learn English more easily, due to some grammatical and phonemic similarities between the languages. They are also stereotyped as more outgoing and outspoken. These factors, combined with its status and the sheer amount of media in English, create a draw to learning it that far outpaces its practical value. In instrumental terms, most English students would be better served by improving their Chinese. Yet, as Ayshe expressed, loving a language can be like loving a person or, perhaps, a people.

Paths

Between my two visits to Ayshe's home in 2005 and 2007, the dirt road has been packed down in preparation for paving. Her father Dilmurat points it out to me when I asked about changes in the village. Their home, with pigeon coops and cool brick rooms, appears the same. When I ask if he likes visiting Kashgar and Urumqi, he asks, "Why leave when everything one needs – schools, hospitals, food – can be found here?" He was a primary school teacher for thirty-nine years in the village and a farmer for even longer. He belongs here. With a chuckle, he recalls that two years ago I said Uyghur is the hardest language I've studied. I confirm it is still the case. He chuckles again. It is a point of pride and he often repeats the fact to friends and acquaintances. Dilmurat brings up another conversation we had two years ago, "Does the U.S. government give you anything if you are poor?" I start to describe the welfare system, but he

interrupts to say that he feels sorry for the poor in the United States; the Chinese government gives money and land. Everyone can have at least three mu of land. I don't contradict him but I am reminded of why Ayshe is nervous about getting his permission to study abroad.

Ayshe has gone through many of the steps of applying for a passport, but success is not in sight. The government has not only slowed down issuing passports, but is taking them back for "safekeeping." She has a promising lead – a friend of a friend who works at the passport office. Still, she will not go without the support of her parents. Her mother is making Ayshe's case for her, but her father remains unconvinced. Ayshe's path of faith, in God and in herself, cannot cross her parents'. They are a true source of happiness: "They encourage me. And they tell me that they believe in me. They tell me 'I believe in you. I believe in you. You can do it.' This by itself is a form of happiness. Even though we endure hardship, their words make us happy." One of Ayshe's greatest hopes is to be close with her own children. The other details of her future remain unclear.

I introduced Ayshe in the context of her resentment for being singled out as a representative or index of piety. Over time, she has come to understand her role as a responsibility, though her heart still aches:

[People] think that during the day these girls wear headscarves and go about in an excellent way, but when it is night and people cannot see what they are doing, they do bad things. And they think Muslims are like this. With their mouths they say something is wrong, but they themselves go ahead and do that thing. So there is something that has changed in my life. Before when I was at Education Institute, I lived for myself. I thought that as long as it was good for me then it was okay. After I came here, I knew that if I did not study well then the school would say, "So all the girls who wear a headscarf do not study well." They would look at me, and judge all girls who wear a headscarf. If I had not lived in a moral way, if I had gone around like this or like that, if I had spent time with boys at night, or if I had gone around talking with boys in the daytime, they would think, "So this is what the girls who wear headscarves are like. This is what Muslims are like."

After leaving the Education Institute, Ayshe learned that living well and being "at peace in our own sphere of life" was a myth. People who are like round watermelons – even her sisters – would judge and confront her no matter how quiet she stayed. Ayshe was pensive when she told me about someone who chided her for being more Arab than Uyghur. She stands her ground. She will not be defined by their terms, their categories: "Whether I am like an Arab person or like a Uyghur I suddenly came to understand these things. I am walking on this road. This is the faith I have chosen. I think that I need to do things in accordance with my religious faith. If we could be born two times, the first time around we could do whatever we wanted to do; then we die one time, and then the second time you know which direction you should walk in. But because we are only born once, we need to walk on the right path."

When she graduated, Ayshe won one of the few "outstanding student" awards given by the Faculty of Arts and Letters. She was proud. And, like the other students and professors, she was very surprised. No one ever thought the school would give the award to someone wearing a headscarf.

CHAPTER 6 – GULNAR

My guide in Kashgar was an outgoing, yet philosophical, student with ebullient curls and birdlike features. Gulnar delved into my project, introducing me to friends and friends of friends who might be able to help. She was one of the few students at Kashgar Teacher's College to request a dorm room with Chinese roommates. During her studies, she also took courses in Russian, English and Japanese. Her plan, if she did not pass the graduate school entrance exam, was to find a job with a company in Urumqi that conducts trade with Central Asia. As for Ayshe and her cohort of friends, language is not only a question of job opportunities for Gulnar. Language, as a metaphor for cultures and possibilities, is central to Gulnar's self-narrative. I always winced when she began a sentence with, "Do you remember that episode of Friends...?" Inevitably, I had no idea what she was talking about and she liked to chide me. Gulnar had watched every episode of every season in English with Chinese subtitles. My main concern, however, is not to draw attention to what watching "Friends" in Kashgar says about globalization, or conversely, about the localization of global culture and ideas. Rather, building on the argument of the previous chapter, I explore how Gulnar's self-narrative is shaped by her engagement with languages and the worlds and (sometimes literal) performances they invoke. At the end of a long conversation about language, a Uyghur friend told me to write in my notes that "language is the trace of culture." His final insistence on the primary role of language was a reference to the famous novel *Iz* (Traces) which chronicles the spirit of the Uyghur people.⁴⁹ Even Gulnar, the eager language student, worries about what will happen to that trace in the future.

This chapter, unlike the others, takes place predominately in Kashgar; therefore, I also give a sense of the space and spatial rearrangements that have occurred in the post-socialist era. One of the more important transformations is the emergence of suburbs. In the suburb that I studied, one I call *Besh Mehelle*, different groups have converged. Some have been displaced by urban redevelopment and can no longer afford to live in the city, while others desire more space at a reasonable cost. Most people in *Besh Mehelle*, however, have moved recently from rural areas. I spent most of my time in *Besh Mehelle* with two people: Gulnar's sister, whose family is lower middle class, and Rana, a struggling seamstress who rents a single room for her and her husband and young daughter. Both moved from the countryside to seek new opportunities and the conveniences of city life. In this chapter, in addition to Gulnar's story, I also explore the new circulations of people, knowledge and sensibilities between village, suburban and city life.

School and growing up

Gulnar was born in 1985 in a village west of Kashgar. Although the village was poor, her family was relatively wealthy because her father was the village leader (*yéza bashliki*). Her father had been a farmer before joining the army. Gulnar's parents met when her father visited her mother's village: "During the Cultural Revolution, my mother's parents were landlords, so the government took my mother's parents' home. At that time, my father was a leader, that is, during the Revolution, one day my father went to my mother's home and saw my mother. He liked my mother. So then my father told the leaders of the commune (*dadui*), 'I like that girl. Let

⁴⁹ *Iz* is a part of a series of historical novels. Otkur writes about the pre-socialist period, when Uyghur nationalist aspirations aligned with CCP interests. He is therefore able to write about the Uyghur spirits without directly critiquing the CCP (Rudelson 1997:167).

me tell her something.' [The leaders] told my mother's father and after he said it was okay, the two met each other and decided to get married." They were married in 1967.

From her early years in school, Gulnar was a good student. Although there were no Chinese teachers in her school, a Uyghur teacher taught one class per day. In 2000, she says wistfully, a bilingual school opened in the village. In high school, she continued to work hard, emulating an older cousin who studied economics in Canada for two years. Gulnar's score on the college entrance exam was high enough for her to study in Urumqi or a city in inner China, but her mother begged her, the baby of the eight children, not to go. She wanted to study politics, but was assigned to be an English major at Kasghar Teacher's College. At first, Gulnar was disappointed, but she felt better when her father told her that English was the most important language in the world. Like Ayshe and so many other students in Xinjiang, Gulnar dreams of studying abroad one day: "My mother does not agree. My father agrees with me, but my mother doesn't. You know, her ideas are a little traditional...maybe she loves me very much so she doesn't want me to go away...."

All minkaomin students must study Chinese for a year before starting the classes in their major. It was during her second and third years at the college that Gulnar lived in a dorm room with six Chinese students and one other Uyghur student. The Chinese students were all Uyghur majors. Gulnar was close with two of them, but had difficult relationships with the other four. Except for one student from Sichuan, the others were from different parts of Xinjiang. According to Gulnar, she tried to help them practice English and Uyghur, but the four weren't friendly: "They weren't really good people. In addition to that, they were only children. They were all just one girl at home." Despite their problems, Gulnar said they respected her by not eating pork in the room; she was only annoyed when they smoked and drank alcohol on occasion. By mentioning the difficulty of living with only-children, Gulnar, who grew up with seven siblings, emphasizes the values of communal living and generosity. Gulnar and her friends shared their few belongings, such as clothes and MP3 players. More importantly, there was a strong expectation that one would be generous with her time, for example, to help others study for an exam or go shopping in the bazaar. The attachment to private property and personal time, especially strong among only children, puzzled Gulnar. Soon after Gulnar's experience in an interethnic dorm room, the opportunity was eliminated because of a number of incidents: "Some things happened at the school. We called that national unity. Now, the school does not agree to that."

Many Uyghurs and Chinese told me that Han students assigned to study Uyghur are the less diligent and intelligent students. The college entrance exam score required for the major is among the lowest. It was frustrating for Gulnar to try to help the girls who were not interested in Uyghur language or culture. There were, of course, exceptions to this. In my time in Xinjiang, I met three Chinese students who chose to study Uyghur and worked hard to understand both the language and the culture. One was a graduate student in Kashgar writing a comparative cultural study, another was an undergraduate in Urumqi whose family encouraged her to study Uyghur for future business opportunities. Finally, a close friend of mine had studied Uyghur language and dance and sometimes performed at cultural events. Although her parents were in Guangdong, she grew up with an uncle who had married a Uyghur woman. While only a small proportion of Chinese speak Uyghur, especially among migrants in the post-socialist period, there were notable exceptions.

Gulnar hedges when I ask her about her opinion of minkaomin and minkaohan students:

I am a minkaomin. I think, now the minkaohan...I think minkaohan are good. Because now Chinese is very important, now everyone must speak Chinese. Anyway, first, minkaohan can find work very easily, and find work in a good place. Second, [minkaohan] can accomplish every kind of thing. But I have a good opinion of minkaomin. One of their strengths is that they are hardworking (*tirishchan*). Because they are hardworking, they manage to learn Chinese well. Through their hard work, they can accomplish other things as well. I think minkaomin are good.

Gulnar's view of the difference between minkaomin and minkaohan reflects, again, the ethic of being *japakesh*, in which enduring difficult, even repetitive work is a form of cultivating virtue. Within this shared narrative, working in a determined fashion is more important than natural talent, which, in any case, is God-given.

In contrast with Ayshe's understanding of the importance of veiling to pious comportment, Gulnar's view of religious commitment is centered on inner belief. In this, it is reminiscent of the imam who advised a woman in Kashgar in the 1960s: "So my child if you do not have evil intentions toward other people and if you go about like you are now with your face uncovered, but if there is no evil in your heart, then it will not be *yaman bolidu*" (see chapter 1). When she was in middle and high school, Gulnar wore a headscarf, but she stopped in college because of the school regulations: "I am now used to not wearing a headscarf. It would be good if I wear a headscarf because of my culture, maybe I will wear one at home...But when we go to work, they will not let us wear a headscarf." Many women who work in government jobs begin wearing a headscarf again after retirement. In part because of the accommodations made during the socialist era, the modern psychological view that emphasizes inner belief has relevance to life in Xinjiang.

Space and Suburbia

On weekends, Gulnar often stays at her sister's house in Besh Mehelle, a suburb close to the college. The houses in Besh Mehelle are modeled after the adobe row houses in the Old City, and as is traditional, the neighborhood is defined around the mosque. By my count, there are approximately 250 families. Small side streets cut across the two main thoroughfares that are paved with brick. There is a mix of renters and owners, with a large population of people who recently moved from the surrounding villages. Some families displaced by redevelopment also live in the neighborhood, though a greater number live across the street in a new block of apartment buildings, where the housing is cheaper. On Gulnar and my first visit together, we meet a man who moved from the Old City, leaving his house to his brother, to have more space. The crowds of the city gave him no peace. We also meet Rana, a seamstress with a small workshop. Several women from the neighborhood are gathered around, chatting with her as she sews and supervises her apprentices.

Gulnar's sister, Zaynur, has lived in the neighborhood for three years. Zaynur attended part-time beauty school, but now, she says, doesn't even have time to style her own hair. She is a housewife with three young children.⁵⁰ Her husband is a rotund cell phone salesman at the main post office in the city. She and her husband paid seventy-five thousand yuan for their house, a narrow two-story building, finished in some rooms with whitewash and tiles. On the first floor, there is a small kitchen with a gas stove and a room with a raised platform and cushions. A rope is strung in the corner for the baby's hammock. Upstairs, there is a small bedroom and a living

⁵⁰ Because her family is registered in the city, they are permitted to have only two children according to the birth plan. Zaynur and her husband paid 10,000 yuan to get papers for their third child. Minorities in the countryside can have three children. In this area, I found 10,000 yuan to be a common amount for having a child outside the birth plan.

room. Unlike many other houses I saw in the neighborhood, Zaynur's living room had couches and armchairs. Many families from her home village live along her street. On a warm day, I knocked on Zaynur's door and she wasn't home. Her neighbor saw me from her roof terrace and started calling across the roofs to find her. In certain ways, Besh Mehelle was like a village compressed into a suburb. Unlike those in the city, residents baked their own bread and cookies and made their own *sanghza*, a special fried dough sweet eaten during Ramadan.



Figure 9: The Id Kah mosque in Kashgar

In recent years, urban redevelopment in Kashgar has been a controversial issue. The neighborhood surrounding the Id Kah mosque at the city center is a particular point of contention. The mosque, built in the 15th century, is the largest mosque in China and serves as a symbol of Uyghur religious faith. Hundreds of homes were razed during one phase of development, making way for new stores and tourist sites, including two museums and a viewing tower.⁵¹ One man, who used to live in the neighborhood, told me that “love between people has been lost.” Ten years before, he said, there was a lively night market in front of the mosque. You could get food at anytime. In the morning, the vendors would serve tea and people would share nan, even with strangers. He ended his reminiscence with flourish, “Now each man eats his own nan.” A recent addition to the plaza in front of the mosque is a gigantic television, common to large squares in Chinese cities. Some people cited it as an improvement, noting that the sound is turned off during prayer times. Others said it was clearly *haram* (forbidden) because inappropriate images and films were displayed on the television.

Despite the significant redevelopment efforts that have relocated people from the city center, crowds still gathered near the mosque, especially in the bazaar across the street. To many, Kashgar and the Id Kah mosque still embody Uyghur tradition. One of my friends, who moved to Kashgar from Turpan in the north, tells me, “The dust in Kashgar is heavy. You cannot forget this place.”

⁵¹ In May 2009, city officials announced plans to raze eighty-five percent of the Old City in Kashgar for redevelopment (Wines 2009).

Performances

Gulnar invites me to attend a wedding that will be held at Zaynur's neighbor's house. It is a boisterous affair. We move between Zaynur's house, where wedding preparations are happening, and the main event. There is a rush of whispers about how the bride was raised by an aunt and uncle because she was born outside of the birth plan. Gulnar tells me that there is confusion among the guests about whether or not the bride herself knows who her birth parents are. The bride is dressed in a lacy white gown, rented for the occasion, and ghostly pale makeup. She met her husband-to-be while shopping at the main bazaar in the city. She is 18; he is 21. We discover that the wedding was planned in a rush because the groom's father is ill and wants to see his only son marry. It is three days after Eid al-Fitr, the celebration marking the end of Ramadan, and it is unusual to hold a wedding so close to the holiday.

The second round of hushed whispers starts when the room reserved for the fiancé is filled with guests. According to Gulnar, in city weddings the bride and groom shouldn't see each other until they are about to leave for the groom's village home. The bride spends several minutes texting back and forth with him to try and sort out the situation. As the proceedings are delayed, Gulnar decides to entertain the female guests with a reenactment of an American wedding. She recruits young girls in the room as actors and directs an impressive performance of a church ceremony. She plays the pastor. As part of an English lesson, her class had acted out an American wedding and Gulnar's memory of it is nearly flawless. Everyone laughs heartily and applauds. At the moment, the wedding within a wedding is more entertaining than the event itself.

When the bride's friends ask Gulnar when she plans to marry, she answers that she doesn't want to marry until she finishes graduate school. One woman tells a cautionary tale: a friend of hers went to law school, but dropped out a year before getting her degree. Her father lamented, "How much money I've spent!" The daughter, however, said that her happiness was more important. The moral of the story, I gather, is that investing in a lot of schooling is unlikely to bring happiness. Another girl chimes in that one of her teachers went to graduate school and didn't marry until she was thirty-two. Later, Gulnar tells me that her sights are set higher. She wants to study computer science, politics or international business. If she doesn't pass the exam the first time, she hopes to find work with a company that does business in the former Soviet Union. She has studied Russian for a year and one of her close friends works for a trade company in Urumqi. Her friend, who had traveled to several Central Asian countries on business, warned that it was not as he had expected. China, he said to Gulnar, is a much more developed place.⁵² Still, Gulnar craves the opportunity to travel and seek new experiences.

Gulnar was in charge of another memorable performance that I attended. As part of her practicum, she was a teaching assistant for a middle school English class and was in charge of coordinating and end-of-the-semester show. She invited me to give a speech about the importance of studying foreign languages. The school, which was transitioning from a Uyghur to bilingual school, had both a Chinese and a Uyghur principal.⁵³ At the beginning of the performance, the Chinese principal gave a short speech to kick off the "English competition." He

⁵² There is a long history of trade with Russia; at the turn of the 20th century, there were 10,000 Russian residents of Xinjiang (Wiemer 2004:166). Today, there is still a Central Asian neighborhood in Urumqi. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Uyghurs did look hopefully westward. But the subsequent failure of the region to succeed in economic terms, as well as continued strife, has lowered its status in many Uyghurs' eyes.

⁵³ This dual structure has parallels in the overall administration up to the top, where the Chairman of Xinjiang is Uyghur, but the Party Secretary is Han.

began his speech by saying, “Today I’ll speak in Chinese,” in an apologetic tone. Though he may speak basic Uyghur, I understood it as his ritual opening for addressing Uyghur audiences. The assigned theme of the event was “unity is power” (*ittipaqliq – küch*). A number of students sang songs and performed skits in Uyghur and English. The highlight was a play about misunderstandings between foreign tourists and traders at the bazaar. The confused tourist tries to apologize for not understanding. “Sorry, sorry,” he keeps repeating. The trader becomes incensed, “Did you call me *sarang* (crazy)?” Everyone laughs heartily. After my speech, the Uyghur principal gives some closing remarks on the importance of English to personal and national progress. It was a memorable event because it was one of the very few occasions that I saw people laugh about learning languages. Most of the time, the tone was anxious.

The Working Class

“My mother,” Gulnar sighs, “looked much younger three years ago.” We have just finished shopping with Gulnar’s parents and Zaynur at the mall across from the Id Kah. Zaynur and her husband are about to leave for a two-month visit to see their sister in Shanghai. They have been having problems and they hope a trip will help. They will take the youngest child and the other two will stay with relatives. We were shopping for gifts for her sister, who owns a successful restaurant in Shanghai. I ask Gulnar about what aged her mother. In August 2005, Gulnar’s brother died of electric shock while fixing some lines for work. Her father couldn’t perform his job for a year after her brother’s death and spent a lot of money on alcohol. Instead of going back to work, his office let him retire early.

Gulnar tells me that she loved her brother very much; their closeness evidenced by the fact that “our faces are the same.” She had trouble eating and sleeping for the next year. This was why her mother had aged so quickly and why her family was no longer wealthy. Earlier, her family had three hundred mu of land and two hundred sheep; now, her family farms one hundred mu and rents out the remainder. Despite their misfortune, Gulnar knows that her family is lucky compared with others who have nothing to fall back on.

Of our many shared conversations, Gulnar said one affected her the most deeply. We were in the Old City, to the south of the Id Kah, looking for a woman I had met the week before. We couldn’t find her, but Gulnar, ever energetic, suggested that we talk with a woman sitting outside a bike repair stop. It was a simple stall, no more than eight feet wide. She wore a faded green sweater over a threadbare dress made out of *atlas*, a pattern of normally bright Uyghur silk. Our conversation with Harigul was an important reminder that upward mobility remains out of reach for many.⁵⁴

* * * *

“I have three children.” This is where Harigul begins her story. Her mother and father-in-law passed away recently. She is the only child in her family still living. Her mother died just six months after Harigul’s wedding. From the age of sixteen until a few months before, Harigul took care of her father, who was a barber. She washed her father’s clothes and walked to the next neighborhood to cook for him, bringing him meat so he would stay strong. He never remarried. Now, she is 36.

⁵⁴ As numerous studies have shown, inequality in China has risen in the post-socialist period. See, for example, Davis 2009 and Bian 2002.

Harigul returns to her children: her eldest son is now in the village helping the army pick cotton.⁵⁵ Usually, he is here at the store helping her husband. She was so proud when her second son passed the exam to go to high school in inner China, but she was told to give another five thousand yuan, which she didn't have. Harigul begins to cry. Gulnar and I comfort her and lament the injustice: the government program is not supposed to have an entry fee. Harigul sends him to a weekend course for forty-five yuan a month. Her youngest son is eleven years old. She hopes her two youngest will be able to go to college one day. Harigul finished middle school, but it was a time when Uyghur was taught with the Latin alphabet, so she has trouble reading now. With tears in her eyes, she says that her life has been hard because after her mother passed away, she has had no one to talk with, no one to share her hardships with. She shares her favorite memory from childhood: when her feet were freezing, her mother would hold her and put her feet against her skin, in her armpits, to warm them.

When her father died, Harigul inherited her father's house. He had no money left for her. But it is a space for her to go and be alone when she is upset. She does not receive love and kindness (*méhr-muhebbet*) or support from her husband in their times of hardship. During the conversation, Harigul's husband walks listlessly in and out a few times, but she doesn't pay him any attention. They have had this repair shop for three years. Before, her husband was a furniture carver, but it didn't pay enough and people were often late with their payments. Now, they earn three to four hundred yuan per month. They have just enough because they need to save for the winter months, when people don't ride bicycles. The government also gives them 220 yuan each month. In exchange, her family has to pick cotton, as her eldest son is doing now. She worries about what her sons will eat when she leaves next week. Sometimes the work with the army is difficult because she doesn't understand much Chinese, but she commends the others as hardworking and harmonious.

Harigul returns to her children. Her sons offer to help with the housework, but she tells them to study. She starts to cry again. When she was younger, she had two miscarriages. Once, the bleeding didn't stop for months and she drank Uyghur medicines. Her father-in-law was paying for many of their costs, and he didn't give her money to go to a hospital. But her greatest heartache is her eldest son. He refused to study Chinese and was always very naughty (*shox*). He spent long hours away from home. Finally, in frustration, she went looking all over town for him. She found him at an internet café looking at pornography (*siriq kino*). It is a relief to have him picking cotton. When he is in the city, she spends a lot of time looking closely after him to make sure he stays away from the internet café.

Harigul worries that her neighbors gossip and look down at her. Many think her work is shameful because she meets unfamiliar men in the shop. They also talk about her dirty clothes and lack of education. Just this morning, she says, her younger sons brought coal from the market. Her clothes were dusty from helping her sons. One of her neighbors said, "Why aren't you more careful with your clothes?" The criticism is difficult to take because her neighbors all grew up in the countryside. She is the one who was born in the city. Yet, they look down on her. Her main comfort is reading namaz five times a day. Now, she is fasting for Ramadan. But she does not feel tired.

Rural Revivalism

In comparison with Harigul, Rana has a relatively secure life. As a seamstress, she earns about seven hundred yuan per month. She studied sewing for three years as an apprentice

⁵⁵ The "army" referenced is the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (see footnote 24).

before opening up her own shop. When I ask her about the dresses hanging on the wall, she tells me that many are designs adapted from Korean and Pakistani catalogues. One of her apprentices is working on a “sari,” a dress made from sparkling cloth from Pakistan. It is a beautiful combination of sari fabric and Uyghur design. Rana has a four-year-old daughter, Atikem, and is expecting. At barely five feet tall with small features, Rana would look almost childish were it not for her protruding belly. She is 24.

Rana’s family moved to the city when she was around six years old, but they often returned to their village, Kona Yeza. They continue to manage eighteen mu of land in the village. Rana, her husband and Atikem live in a room that is about eight feet by ten feet. When I visited, the room was musty and dark, mostly lit by a small television set. There were two laminated posters on the wall, depicting the Kabaa and a young girl praying. Her husband is a cook at a kindergarten. He is also trying to become a melon seller because his salary as a cook is very low. Rana pays sixty yuan per month to rent the room, and seventy-five yuan for her store. Still, she has only ten thousand saved for a house, a mere fraction of what she will need. But she is willing to endure the difficult conditions to afford her own house one day.

When Rana invited me to visit Kona Yeza for a wedding, I saw the stark contrast between her cramped city space and her former village home. The trip, unexpectedly, took the form of an extended religious and political discussion. I share a number of these conversations because they reflect two important aspects of life in Xinjiang. First, Uyghurs on the whole, including farmers, are avid followers of international news and think of themselves as members of the global Muslim community. Second, although the Islamic Revival is largely an urban phenomenon, it has made its way to the villages. In Rana’s village, this is related to its recent prosperity and the influence of the hajjis in the village.

In the shared minivan ride to Kona Yeza, two hours to the east of Kashgar, the driver tells us that he heard President Bush was assassinated on a trip to Germany. The people in the car don’t laugh, so I assume it’s not a joke and tell him that it’s not true to the best of my knowledge. He shrugs and moves on. He tells a story about being the driver for a Taiwanese woman who fell in love with a Uyghur man. She converted to Islam. After an elaborate wedding in Japan, she and her husband bought a home in Kashgar. Next, the topic of the Iraq war is raised; he declares it a tragedy that “real Muslims who pray five times a day” are being slaughtered. Though the conversation was disjointed, it shared similarities with conversations I had with Uyghur men throughout my time in Xinjiang. (Women, though no less politically-concerned, shared different kinds of reflections with me.) The driver’s pointed comments were prescient: during the trip, President Bush and the Iraq war were frequent topics of conversation. The unusual concentration on politics was due in part to the fact that the people in Rana’s home village had never met an American before. They were understandably excited to get a firsthand opinion on America’s policies vis-à-vis the Islamic world.

When we arrive, Rana and I are shuttled into a room to eat soup commonly served at weddings. The houses in *Kona Yeza* are particularly spacious, even compared to the homes I have seen in rural Hotan and other villages around Kashgar. Rana’s sister explains that this is a relatively rich area: about ten out of a hundred families have a hajji in the household. After eating, we visit the sixteen-year-old bride, Rana’s cousin, whose chubby face is being whitened with a thick layer of makeup. The wedding is being held at the bride’s grandmother’s house, where she grew up. People start arriving in the early afternoon, bearing gifts of cloth. Many are too small to make clothes out of, Rana comments, and so are kept to gift again at future

weddings. She estimates that the wedding meals will cost a total of five thousand yuan; the bride wealth (*toyluq*) was four thousand yuan.⁵⁶

Before the main ceremony, I speak to Rana's aunt's husband, Tahir. He also begins by asking me if Bush was assassinated a few days before. News and rumors travel quickly. Tahir was born in 1942. When he was growing up, the hamlet (*xiaodui*) had only twenty-eight households, but now there are fifty-eight, including a Chinese family. He says they speak excellent Uyghur. In the village (*dadui*), there are more than nine hundred households, with several Kyrgyz and Tajik families. Tahir, who grew up with six siblings, now lives with his fourth wife. According to him, electricity came to the village about twenty years ago, and running water, ten years earlier. Tahir is one of the hajjis in the village. He left for Mecca in October 2004 and returned in February 2005. For the entire period, he spent twenty-five thousand yuan, in comparison with the thirty thousand that the government charges for a month-long, escorted trip.

Tahir is animated as he relates the story of his maternal grandfather's trip to Herem, the Uyghur term for Mecca. He describes a ritual conducted for protecting male children that was performed for his health. The account highlights the broader contours of pre-socialist Islamic practice in the countryside:

When I was born, my mother already had four sons pass away. The boys did not live, but the girls did live. When I was born my mother's father went to Herem for the Hajj pilgrimage. At that time he rode a horse, and it took him six months to go to Herem by horse. He rode a horse for half a year – he was on the road for 180+ days. Now we go there very fast by plane.

It was around 1930. It was something that happened between 1930 and 1940. In 1947 when I turned seven years old, those Hajjis that came back from Herem gathered together. We had this custom. In homes where the children kept dying we would raise a sheep for one year. On a boy, they would leave an area of the hair of his head uncut and the rest of his hair they would cut. They would put the hair that was cut in the scales and hold it up [to weigh it]. After a year, we raised a sheep to be a big sheep and fattened it up. After a year was over, we would put the hair of the boy [one year's worth of hair] on the scale- the same scale we weigh gold on. However much the hair weighed we would put that same amount of gold on the scale and sell it.

On the day the Hajjis came together we would slaughter a sheep, we would not break any of the bones, we would read the Quran in the home, and we would read the whole Quran. After we had finished reading it one time we would put it [the hair] in a bag, and bury it at the cemetery. We would ask Allah to do this, to do that, we would truly ask our requests of Allah. "Give life [to this child]; four children, one after the other, have passed away." We would call together the Hajjis, the ones who had been to Herem. There was a man among the Kirghiz who was a Hajji and his name was Qadir. He also went with these Hajjis to Herem. At this event the men who were very learned [in religion] gathered together. The person whose children kept dying and had the son who had part of his hair not cut would say "change my sons' name"; they would say to Qadir "change my son's name, because you are the Kirghiz Hajji" This Hajji would come and he would say, "Let me give him a name. My name is Qadir Hajjim. May the name of my grandfather and the names in this home be Qadir Hajjim." Everyone would sit on the prayer mats and pray, "May [the boy's] name be Qadir Hajj.

⁵⁶ In the dozen weddings I attended, the *toyluq* varied from 4,000 to 12,000 depending on the situation. Less if the parents were not alive or not supporting the child, as in this case, where the girl was raised by her grandmother. Her father had remarried and was having trouble with his new wife.

In Xinjiang, boys are circumcised and begin praying at the age of seven, symbolizing their legal entry into the Muslim community (*jem'iyet*). Through this elaborate ritual, the hajji's power is transferred to the boy for his protection during a critical period of transition. By being bestowed with Qadir's name, harmful spirits will not be able to find and injure the boy.

During the socialist period, especially from the late 1950s to 1970s, such rituals were difficult, if not impossible, to perform because of political and material constraints. Religious knowledge was passed down informally, usually within the household, and tasks formerly delegated to religious specialists fell to elders. Tahir reflects on how his recent experience in Mecca showed him not only the diversity of the *ummah* (community of believers), but how much Islamic practice had changed between his childhood and China's reopening to the world.

Our conversation is interrupted by someone wailing in the other room. Tahir's wife, Rebiya, is having chest pains. People rush from the main wedding room to help organize transport to the closest hospital. Rana tells me that Rebiya has had heart problems for some time, in part as a result of the stress of her son's illness. Their son was born with a congenital heart defect and they spent several years, and tens of thousands of yuan, for his treatment. They have gone to the main medical university in Urumqi and even moved to northern Xinjiang for a period so he could be treated at a specialist clinic in Ghulja. It is another interesting contrast: the healing rites of Tahir's youth and his son's medical journeys.

Shortly after Rebiya is taken away, we form a procession, carrying the bride on a carpet to the groom's home next door. In most weddings, a car usually takes the place of the traditional carpet, but here the journey is short. We sit down for another meal with the women of the groom's family. In the bundle of cloth and cushions brought to the groom's house, there is a white cloth. I ask Rana if the mother-in-law still inspects the cloth the next day as proof of the bride's virginity. I asked about the practice of displaying nan with a hole in the middle outside the groom's door in cases where there is no blood on the cloth. Rana says she has heard of the practice, but has never seen it herself: "Now, that doesn't happen. You can just pay four hundred yuan to the hospital and get "fixed" so that no one can tell the difference." Several other people confirmed that the service is easily available.

In the evening, we go by donkey cart to Rana's uncle's home, which is half an hour away. Abdul, who is also a hajji, is full of questions and opinions. After a brief conversation about his early life in the village, he shares his thoughts on the Bush regime:

Just like you guys curse Bush, we also curse Bush. If you ask why and how we curse him, Our Muslims – they are also Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are called the Taliban – the word Taliban means those Qarim [those who can read the Arabic in the Koran and also understand it] who have studied before. Bush also hates the Muslims. Look, this kind of kid and that kind of kid – he's killed all of them in Iraq – has he not? In America they also say this kind of thing – that he has done this.

I had not yet expressed my opinions on the war in Iraq. Abdul had heard news about the unpopularity of the war in America. Uyghurs, in my experience, readily distinguished between individual Americans and their leaders. Even when people tested my views, they asked if I supported Bush, rather than assuming that perceived American antipathy toward Islam was widespread.

When I ask Abdul about the hajjis in the village, he says that the reopening of the borders allowed the villagers to learn the “proper” way of praying and moral instruction. Then, he gives an account of his own experience in Mecca:

After [the hajjis] came back, this is what they would say to us, “You should pray namaz like this.⁵⁷ In Herem no one gossips about anyone. They don’t say other people are bad. They don’t curse people saying this or that. There whatever you say, you will do – people help each other.

In Herem, look, this is what they do. People in Herem say, “Hey my Muslim [friend],” and they do their faces like this. The people there in Herem say to the people who go to Herem from here, “Oh so you can come from the place of the Chinese? They call our area here “China” [in English], “China,” “You have come from China. There are Muslims like you in China.” People that are walking and happen to be at a distance of one hundred meters from each other, in Herem they greet each other and they kiss the other person on the forehead. They have this kind of thing. This is very moving. Think about this: this is the greatness of Islam is it not? The people in Herem really do greet the people who come from China in this way.

Unsurprisingly, the image he paints of Mecca contrasts sharply with the religious environment in China:

Look, if we selected our imam, he would be a good *imam ahong* to us. He would say, “Pray namaz on time. May your girls wear headscarves. May you do that, may you do this.” Yes he would lead us on the right road. But the Chinese do not agree [to let us select our own imam]. The imam that they themselves [the government] chooses and gives to us says, “When you are eighteen years old you can pray namaz. If you are not yet eighteen years old, you cannot pray namaz.”

Despite government restrictions, the village is permeated with religious practice. The perceived gaps in the official imam’s instruction are filled by the numerous hajjis in the region. According to Abdul, most villagers pray five times a day and the boys aspire to learn the Quran.⁵⁸

Women’s Questions

The next day we take a donkey cart to visit Rana’s second cousin, Asingul. Rana says that Asingul doesn’t attend many large events often because she is “very religious.” Asingul’s father, who is *qari* (person who can read and understand the Quran), taught her how to read the Quran. Her daughter, precocious and outspoken, contrasts her grandfather’s knowledge with her father’s, “My dad can’t really read [the Quran]. Only a little.” After we have tea, Rana, Asingul, Asingul’s husband and brother-in-law, the children and I pack into a tractor to go to the river. It is a beautiful late summer afternoon. We pass women harvesting watermelons, walk along a canal and pick rocks from the riverbank. The men wander off.

I ask Rana what she thinks of all of the political discussion. She says the deaths in Iraq are terrible, especially because Saddam Hussein was a model Muslim who prayed five times a day. Rana and Asingul confer in whispers for a minute or two. They finally ask, hesitantly, what has been on their minds: “Do American women wash themselves before or after sex?” I say it

⁵⁷ He demonstrates that they should pray in the Hanbali (with hands clasped at the center of the chest) instead of the Hanafi (with hands clasped at the waist above the navel) style (Waite 2007).

⁵⁸ According to Waite (2007), villagers choose their own imam at the hamlet (*xiaodui*) level, but the imam is subject to the approval of the state-appointed imam at the village (*dadui*) level. Also, in the village where he conducted research, informal groups to teach the Quran to children ended after the 1996 ‘Strike Hard’ campaign started.

depends. Rana explains that Uyghur women wash afterward, but Chinese women do not. Both she and Asingul agree that God punishes women who do not. Then, they ask me about whether or not American women worry about their husbands cheating on them. After I offer my opinion, Rana says that Uyghur women don't worry as long as their husbands are good Muslims. Their questions and reflections are no less about identity and politics, though viewed through an intimate lens. The men return with watermelons to snack on and we change the topic.

People throughout Xinjiang commented that the women in Kashgar and Hotan, and the South more generally, have low status within the family. Rana, however, earns substantially more money than her husband and controls the finances in her family. Asingul's daughter's comment about her mother's religious learning references another basis for female authority. Women who stay at home now have the time and space to undertake religious study. Their religious learning and pious conduct, in turn, raises their status within the community and in their homes.

When I ask Abdul about men and women's roles, he pauses before he replies. There are many female relatives in the *saray* (lit. "palace") who have traveled here for the wedding. Abdul addresses them directly as if he's giving a lesson. It becomes an even richer pedagogical moment when Abdul's wife, Aypasha, joins the conversation:

ABDUL: We men earn the money. We do business, we buy this, we sell that, we earn money. The women look after the feeding trough and make sure the livestock do not go hungry, make sure the kids get their food on time and things like this, they train the kids, [telling them] "You stay over here, you stay over there." This is what women do. In Uyghur custom, men go to do the things that earn money. In our place here, for instance if I use myself as an example, I buy cotton and then sell it....

C.H.: Before you said male children are important. Do you think it is harder to be a boy or a girl?

ABDUL: Now in our customs it is very hard to be a girl. Yes, it is very hard to be a girl. Whatever a boy does, he can do that and take care of himself. According to our customs, we think women are weak.

C.H.: I think we could also say things are difficult for Uyghur men. In other areas, they have a lot of things to do. For example, they also work in the fields.

AYPASHA: I think between men and women, women have the greatest difficulties. We prepare the food, we knead the dough, we take care of the kids, we work in the fields, and we gather the feed for the livestock. The things that we have to do are several times more than what they have to do. There are a lot of things we have to do. We do everything don't we?

ABDUL: [to C.H.] Please lie down and sleep. It's late. We can talk about the rest tomorrow.

I don't know if my presence made it easier for Aypasha to speak or if it was an even bolder statement as a result. She had otherwise remained silent during the two hours of our conversation. In any case, it was clear that she wanted to set the record straight, that women are not weak, in front of me and the other women and girls in the room. The dozen or so of us sleep soundly in a row, exhausted from the day.

Rana gave birth to a healthy baby boy shortly before I left Xinjiang. She was staying at her mother's home surrounded by female friends and relatives when I went to visit. As I gingerly held the baby swaddled in meters of white cotton, I spoke to Rana's cousin, who was more than eight months pregnant. She and Rana shared their excitement about raising infants at the same

time. Rana's mother was cooking a hearty stew. As I left, she pressed two boiled eggs into my cupped hands. They were slightly warm, brown and smooth. They felt heavy.

PART IV – CONCLUSION

Time is not a series of moments stitched together by an evenhanded seamstress; time becomes meaningful through our stories and actions. My concern throughout has been with the way individuals stitch together meaningful stories about their lives. This is never a solitary endeavor: all narratives are co-narratives. I chose to write about Amangul, Peride, Rahile, Ayshe and Gulnar because I found them to be exemplary, rather than representative, of their generation's engagement with the middle class dreams that pervade contemporary Xinjiang. Amangul returns to college at the age of forty-three and supports four daughters in their pursuit of high-powered educations and careers. Peride saves enough money in Shanghai to open shops in Xinjiang's capital; Rahile survives heartache and remakes herself as a Mary Kay entrepreneur. Ayshe goes from studying and teaching in rural Hotan to earning an M.A. from a prestigious university; Gulnar studies multiple languages and simultaneously looks East and West for new opportunities. All the while, these women engage the ethical question of how to be a good Uyghur and Muslim, worker and wife, mother and daughter. Perhaps more actively than others, they participate in and shape the broader conversation about living a good life in contemporary Xinjiang. With their guidance and support, I was able to observe this conversation through multiple lenses.

The optical metaphor is fitting because it captures the idea that identity is not a matter of the degree of relative commitment to religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and so on, but how different elements are viewed holistically – as a grasping together in particular contexts. As I raised at the outset, one of my main goals is to open the discussion about Xinjiang beyond the issue of ethnic tension, without glossing over or minimizing the struggles that Uyghurs face in daily life. To this end, I have shared anecdotes and events that reflect how the question of ethnicity must be taken up simultaneously with questions about gender, class and religion. Moreover, by linking patterns of self-narrative to historical experience, I have tried to illustrate that differences are contingent rather than essential.

In her autobiography, Margaret Mead summarized the purpose of her professional life: “I have spent most of my life studying the lives of other peoples, faraway peoples, so that Americans might better understand themselves” (1972:1). For Mead, the path to better understanding involved difficult questions about the tendency to universalize one's experience and assume the superiority of one's culture. In her 1928 study, Mead argued that adolescent girls in Samoa, in contrast with those in America, did not experience puberty as a time of angst and difficulty. Therefore, she concluded that this was not a natural or inevitable female condition, but rather a historically conditioned one: “Realising that our own ways are not humanly inevitable nor God-ordained, but are the fruit of a long and turbulent history, we may well examine in turn all of our institutions, thrown into strong relief against the history of other civilizations, and weighing them in the balance, be not afraid to find them wanting” ([1928] 1961:233). This is the relativizing project at the heart of 20th-century anthropology, one that remains a powerful resource for self-critique and humility.

If there is a disciplinary aspiration to my work, it is to remind anthropologists of the value of telling compelling stories about cultural “others.” In the late 1970s and 1980s, ethnographic writing rightly came under scrutiny for representing peoples as backward, homogeneous and frozen in time (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Since then, anthropologists have paid great attention to how to write about culture in new and different ways. This has included experimental forms of writing, as well as a shift toward taking modernity, rather than

“primitive” peoples, as the primary object of study. The discipline has thus expanded from the study of distant cultures to close examination of science and technology, bureaucracy and political forms. In many ways, anthropologists are simply responding to a world changed by the increasing global flows of people, goods and information. The line between distant and near, though never clearly marked, has become increasingly complicated.

While recognizing all of these developments as critical and productive, I cannot help but wonder if something has also been lost, namely, the desire to write according to humanistic conventions that create empathy. In the ideal case, this opens the door to self-critique and transformation. The implicit argument of the preceding chapters is that this potential lies in part in storytelling as opposed to sociological or philosophical parsing. While both activities are important, the possibility of critical self-reflection that Mead invokes is more a matter of the former than the latter. Put differently, even the parsing only becomes meaningful in the context of a story that resonates with the reader. While writing is an act of disclosing the world, to return to Sartre, the act of reading is no less an act that requires engagement, trust and work: “Thus, reading is a pact of generosity between author and reader. Each one trusts the other; each one counts on the other, demands of the other as much as he demands of himself. For this confidence is itself generosity” (1988:61). Aesthetic joy, as part of the exchange, helps to lay the groundwork for this pact of generosity. Although I am certain my literary skills have not been up to the task, I have attempted to write in a way that begins to open up this possibility of resonance, exchange and transformation. For many of the topics that anthropologists work on, there is something broader at stake. In my case, I hope to tell stories in a way that engages Americans to think beyond the division between progressive Western and oppressive Islamic forces.

Thus, although I plan to share my work with people in Xinjiang, my primary hoped-for audience is in America. Through telling stories, I have tried to highlight areas in which “our ways” contrast with “their ways,” all the while acknowledging that internal differences, as well the global flow of goods, images, ideals and people, make any Manichean division untenable. At the same time, I hope my humanistic portrayals of the people here make clear that attention to difference does not necessarily lead to incommensurability or incomprehension. The aspiration of ethnography, I believe, should be representing a fine balance between sameness and difference in ways that create the possibility of connection while also raising questions about our own assumptions and histories.

After the riots began in Urumqi in July 2009, I sent Peride’s elder son, Akber, an email. I knew the government had shut down internet servers in Xinjiang, but I thought he might still be at school in inner China. He answered my email several months later, in November, and we exchanged several messages:

[From Akber to C.H.] i’m so sorry that i haven’t check my mailbox for so long a time(because we had not network in xinkiang that time and till now) i am at school in wuxi ,jiangsu and find your message just now.....
and i am so glad 2 tell u that all of my familly mumubers are fine although there happened some terrible things.....
in a word,we r ok and we miss u too!

[From C.H. to Akber] rehmets [thank you] akber!! i’m so happy to hear that everyone is fine -- please
tell your mom, dad and brother hello for me! i was supposed to go to

xinjiang, but my travel plans were stopped. study hard!!

[From Akber to C.H.] ok,i will send your greetings to them.
thank you for reminding us ,and we will welcome u all the time.

as 2 my study,it not bad till now,and i will work harder then!
there is a good news that i am fond of reading bokks now!
u know,before i was a senior student ,i don't like reading,but now i read books every day!
i am almost indulged in books! i like all kinds of books now. i found that reading can not
only broaden my horizon but also make me happy! now i realize that how stupid i was
before.....i waste lots of time on boring things...hehe...however,i love books now!
and i wish u can recommend me some,thank u~!

During the unrest in Xinjiang, several journalists called and asked me for comments. As an anthropologist, they asked me, what would I hope that people would know about the Uyghurs? When I responded with a series of stories and qualifications, I knew I was disappointing them. They were interested in the bottom line of what led to the tension and violence. Was it economic, ethnic, or religious? The proximate cause was a rumor posted on the internet that six Uyghur men had raped two Han women at a toy factory in southern China. The story spread by internet and text message; a few days later, groups of Chinese men attacked Uyghur workers. two Uyghur men died and 120 were wounded. The news of the attack spread to Xinjiang and groups of Uyghurs began to protest the perceived impunity of the offenders. The situation escalated, leading to several days of riots and retaliatory attacks in Urumqi. When quiet returned, nearly two hundred people were killed and over seventeen hundred injured, mostly Han.

Although my responses were insufficient, I felt compelled to repeat the same message: I hope that we come to understand Uyghurs as people who persevere through difficulties with resilience, creativity and a sense of discovery. We can do so by listening to their stories with an openness that offers the possibility of transformation.

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