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**‘MAKING CULTURE MATTER’: SYMBOLIC, SPATIAL, AND SOCIAL
BOUNDARIES BETWEEN UYGHUR AND HAN CHINESE.**

Joanne N. Smith

Introduction

In 1989-1990, Justin Rudelson carried out the first prolonged anthropological fieldwork ever to be conducted among the Uyghur¹ of Xinjiang. Since that time and particularly from the mid-nineties on, a number of scholars have been able to conduct long-term research in the region, and the fruits of their efforts are now beginning to appear.² Some existing studies focus on specific aspects of identity expression among Uyghur in certain regions of Xinjiang (see Bellér-Hann 1997 on Uyghur peasants, 1998 on gendered economic relations, and 2001a on the veneration of the dead in southern Xinjiang; Roberts 1998 on the *mäšräp* ritual in the Ili valley; Joanne Smith 2000 on ethno-political ideologies among Xinjiang’s urban youth; and Cristina Cesaro 2000 on food and identity in Ürümchi). Other more general studies stress the relative nature of Uyghur discourse on identity, and argue that notions of an ‘imagined common history’(or indigeneity) form the basis of contemporary Uyghur national identity, which is constructed with reference to the Chinese state and Han Chinese hegemony (Gladney 1990, 1996; Rudelson 1997). It has further been shown how this national identity disappears among Uyghur born into an émigré community (Gladney 1996).

By contrast, this article seeks to illustrate how Uyghur define and reinforce contemporary Uyghur national identity in relation not to the Chinese state but to Xinjiang’s growing Han Chinese immigrant population. In the following sections, I explore the cultural criteria selected and employed by Uyghur to demarcate and

maintain symbolic, spatial, and social ethnic boundaries between themselves and Han Chinese in Xinjiang in the 1990s.³ It is shown how these boundaries are negotiated such that they dictate the conditions under which Uyghur and Han may interact and ensure segregation in situations where they should not. Finally, the underlying factors influencing the current reinforcement of symbolic, spatial, and social boundaries will be analysed. One year was spent in Xinjiang between September 1995 and September 1996 conducting fieldwork mainly among Uyghur in Ürümchi, in addition to short-term periods in Kucha, Aqsu, Qäšqär, and Xotän. An ethnographic approach was adopted in order to gather information ‘straight from the horse’s mouth.’ During the first six months of the fieldwork period, I learnt Uyghur so that I might hold conversations with respondents in their mother tongue. The core of the empirical data comprises informal conversations with Uyghur of both sexes, of various ages and social groups, and from various localities. It also includes qualitative observations of practices and interactions among Uyghur, as well as interactions between Uyghur, Han Chinese, and other minority nationalities in Xinjiang.⁴

Self-Ascription and Relativity (‘Us and Them’)

Throughout this paper, a number of theoretical assumptions are made. Firstly, I adopt the central notion that ethnic identities (and symbols of those identities) must be selected by group members themselves, this process being called self-ascription. An ethnic group can only be defined and structured from within, and only those ‘objective’ differences considered significant by the actors themselves are taken into account.⁵ De Vos provides a list of potential criteria for cultural difference, including racial uniqueness (some sense of genetically inherited difference), place of origin, economic independence (secured by community organisation within the plural

society), religious beliefs and practices, aesthetic cultural forms (e.g. food, dress, dance), and language. In choosing some or all of these criteria as symbols of identity, group members define the way in which they differentiate themselves from other groups.⁶ This set of cultural criteria is rarely maintained in its entirety through time and space. Most ethnic groups include cultural forms in the past that are clearly excluded in the present. Similarly, while a group spread over ecologically varying territory will display regional diversities of cultural practice, self-identification as a group member may nonetheless continue.⁷

The second assumption made is that ethnicity is not isolated (i.e., absolute in a primordial sense), but relative. In other words, ethnic distinctions cannot exist within a vacuum of contact and information, but rather entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation embodied in the construction and maintenance of ethnic boundaries.⁸ There can only be ‘insiders’ where there are also perceived to be ‘outsiders.’ Ethnicity can therefore only develop if an ethnic group is in regular contact with another group or groups from whom it considers itself substantially different (or against whom it has reason to want to differentiate itself): “I identify myself with a collective *we* which is then contrasted with some *other*...What *we* are, or what the *other* is will depend upon context.”⁹ Ethnic boundaries – like ethnic identities themselves – are fluid and negotiable and will appear, change shape, and vanish in relation to changing social, political, and economic contexts. Accordingly, group members may employ different cultural criteria at different times in order to define themselves against different groups.¹⁰

This theoretical framework is particularly useful when considering the case of the Uyghur of Xinjiang because it takes account of the notion of change. Central to this paper is the idea that while Uyghur are currently employing certain religio-

cultural differences in order to dictate and control patterns of interaction with the Han Chinese, those same differences apparently did not prevent Uyghur from interacting with the Han in the past (in a different socio-economic context). Nor do those differences stop Uyghur from interacting with Han Chinese in the present context *when it suits them to do so*. The impact on Uyghur-Han relations of the vast socio-economic changes occurring in Xinjiang over the past ten to fifteen years has hitherto been given insufficient attention in the anthropological and sociological literature. This paper will argue that Uyghur in the mid- to late nineties are activating and exaggerating religio-cultural differences between themselves and the Han as a means of demarcating a unified ethnic identity in relation (or in reaction) to increased competition from Han immigrants in the spheres of education and work, and growing perceptions of socio-economic inequalities.

Emergence of ‘Us and Them’ Dichotomy and Eclipse of Oasis Identities

It is crucial next to outline the background to the present ‘local situation’ in Xinjiang. Over the past century, the region Westerners once called East Turkestan has been formally incorporated into China and the resulting increased Uyghur interaction with the Chinese state and the Han Chinese people has played a significant role in shaping modern Uyghur identities. Following the conversion to Islam of the last remaining Buddhist Uyghur of Gaochang in the mid-1400s, the ethnonym ‘Uyghur’ was abandoned and for the next five hundred years Uyghur identified themselves using terms denoting social group (e.g. ‘merchant’) or oasis origin (reflecting the geographical isolation of the region’s disparate oases).¹¹ It was only in 1821, when the Qing dynasty began to encourage mass Han immigration to the region in an effort to incorporate it into the Han Chinese realm, that Uyghur began to unite against the

perceived dominant hegemony.¹² Yet the ethnonym ‘Uyghur’ did not reappear until 1921, when Soviet advisors at a conference in Taškānt proposed that the name ‘Uyghur’ be used to designate all those people hitherto known by names denoting oasis origin. This proposal was duly adopted in 1934 by the then Xinjiang provincial government.¹³

Drawing on fieldwork carried out in 1989-1990, Rudelson has emphasised the continued predominance of local oasis and social group identities over other identities in Xinjiang.¹⁴ Yet my fieldwork data of 1995-1996 suggest that, since the time that Rudelson was conducting research in Turpan, contemporary Uyghur identity has undergone significant changes, in response both to changing international politics (the collapse of Eastern Europe in 1989, the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, and the subsequent formation of the CIS republics) and to changing socio-economic circumstances within Xinjiang itself. Certainly, Uyghur in the nineties and beyond like to distinguish between the unique features of different oases, and these differences evoke a certain atmosphere of local competition. For instance, all Uyghur prefer their particular hometown, and insist that it is better than the others. However, such assertions rarely take the form of an attack, and do not seem to stem from some powerful ethnic sentiment. Uyghur attitudes towards Han immigrants are by contrast characterised by disgust, anger, bitterness, passion, and a strong sense of injustice. This paper argues that traditional oasis rivalries may now have been largely (but perhaps temporarily) eclipsed by a new religio-cultural and socio-economic threat: Xinjiang’s Han Chinese immigrant population. If we follow this theory, then oasis differences like regional foods, styles of dress or wedding practices become less significant when confronted by alien cultural practices and economic competition from without. The fact that the vast majority of criticisms made to me by Uyghur

were levelled not at Uyghur from other oases but at Han Chinese immigrants is indicative of the emergence of just such a new ethnic dichotomy in Xinjiang.

The present consolidation of Uyghur identity across the region and the resulting reinforcement of ethnic boundaries vis-à-vis the Han can be attributed in part to three ‘internal factors’ (in addition to changes in the international political arena – the ‘external factors’). These are: a) The Chinese government’s policy of mass Han Chinese immigration to Xinjiang; b) The *de facto* institutionalisation of the Chinese language; and c) (Perceived) Han Chinese exploitation of Xinjiang’s natural resources. I will examine each in turn, beginning with immigration policy. Like the Manchus and the Chinese Nationalists, the Chinese Communists have consistently advocated mass Han Chinese immigration to Xinjiang, largely as an attempt to stabilise this important border region. Immigration to the Northwest has been facilitated over the past half century by the extension of the railway first from Lanzhou to Ürümchi, and then from Ürümchi to Qorla and on to Qāšqār. Many new roads have been constructed in the region, including the Ürümchi-Xotān desert highway, which was completed in recent years and became the first road to cross the hostile Taqlamaqan desert. These improvements in communications, along with Han development of Xinjiang into a territory suitable for large-scale settlement, have greatly speeded the immigration process. As a result, the number of Han Chinese immigrants in Xinjiang has drawn gradually closer to the number of local inhabitants.¹⁵

Continued Han immigration to Xinjiang has had three visible effects on life in the region. Firstly, as the number of Han Chinese has grown, pressure on fragile ethnic boundaries has increased, making religio-cultural differences harder to manage. Previously, Han Chinese settled in areas separate from Uyghur ‘Old Towns,’ and

contact between Han immigrants and local people was limited. More recently, however, they have begun to settle not only in urban areas (Ürümchi and Han Chinese ‘New Towns’) but also in rural areas. Furthermore, Uyghur have themselves begun to move into Han-dominated sectors, lured by new opportunities in education, employment, and trade. The result is a higher instance of (intentional or unintentional) boundary crossing. Secondly, the increase in Han numbers has led to growing Uyghur perceptions of socio-economic inequalities between ethnic groups in Xinjiang (such that the unemployment rate among Uyghur, for example, is blamed on the increase in Han immigrants). Finally, the growth of the Han immigrant population has had a profound effect on the immigrants themselves. Finding themselves the numerical majority in some urban areas of Xinjiang (notably, Ürümchi and Aqsu), Han Chinese are now unwilling to adapt to Uyghur culture and, instead, expect Uyghur to adapt to Han culture. This has led Uyghur to complain of Great Han chauvinism¹⁶ and ethnic discrimination.

The second internal factor contributing to the present consolidation of Uyghur identity vis-à-vis the Han is the *de facto* imposition of the Chinese language. Over the past half-century, the Chinese language has been all but institutionalised in the spheres that matter: education, work, and regional administration. As a result, urban Uyghur find themselves increasingly caught in a web of socio-economic discrimination. To have a good chance to become fluent in Chinese and so be able to survive a university course, Uyghur children must normally go to a Han Chinese school.¹⁷ Uyghur who fail to reach university (usually *minkaomin*¹⁸) - and even *minkaomin* who have been through university - are discriminated against by Han-dominated work units and companies who prefer to hire employees fluent in the Chinese language and well versed in Han culture (i.e., Han immigrants or

*minkaohan*¹⁹). This has led to a higher unemployment rate among Uyghur than Han, and increasingly bitter perceptions among Uyghur that high-status, white-collar posts are all held by Han immigrants. The situation is worsened by the fact that many Uyghur parents are either afraid or unwilling to send their children to Han schools. On the one hand, Uyghur children often suffer ethnic discrimination at the hands of Han Chinese classmates. On the other, many parents wish to try to preserve Uyghur culture through Uyghur education. Uyghur resentment of the Han, then, emanates partly from a growing awareness that the *de facto* institutionalisation of the Chinese language has led to their effective marginalisation in a new urban social hierarchy created by Han Chinese for Han Chinese in developed urban areas.²⁰

Finally, Uyghur perceptions of Han Chinese exploitation of Xinjiang's natural resources play a salient role in the current reinforcement of ethnic boundaries. The depth of Uyghur feeling regarding the issues of discrimination in the urban labour market and Han exploitation of the region's oil, coal, and other deposits is reflected in the evidently strong desire to bring these issues up, often at the first meeting. For many young urban males, notions of control of Xinjiang's natural resources and of political independence from the People's Republic of China go hand in hand. They feel that Han Chinese can be allowed to stay on one condition only: that they help Uyghur to develop on an equal basis with Han Chinese immigrants.

Boundary Dynamics (Symbolic, Spatial, Social)

Having provided the background to the local situation in Xinjiang, I will now explore the dynamics of boundary maintenance between the two groups. This section examines those criteria for cultural difference that are 'made to matter,' that is,

employed by Uyghur to emphasise their contrastive ethnic identities through the demarcation of a complex system of ethnic boundaries. Some of these boundaries are symbolic (cultural differences that are given symbolic meaning in patterns of interaction); others are more concrete (ensuring spatial and social segregation). Uyghur across the region currently link many of their criticisms of the Han Chinese directly to the fact that Han are non-Muslims. Correspondingly, many of the cultural differences chosen to demarcate boundaries between themselves and the Han have their roots in Islam. In particular, Islamic avoidance of pork is employed at the present time to enforce spatial and social segregation.²¹

Symbolic

The first symbolic boundary is constructed through language. Most Uyghur express their preference for the Uyghur language by making clear distinctions between the home environment and ‘the outside,’ corresponding to times when they speak Uyghur and times when they consent to speak Chinese. Although many urban Uyghur, particularly Ürümqiliks, are fluent in or can speak a certain amount of Chinese, most emphasise that Chinese is a language of practical convenience only. Tömür (a *minkaohan* in his forties) is employed by a Han Chinese work unit in Ürümqi.²² He became very excited when I asked him which language he generally used, and outlined the boundaries of the respective languages thus: “Oh, we may speak Chinese outside...but we all speak Uyghur as soon as we get home!” By ‘outside,’ he meant environments where Uyghur interact with Han Chinese who cannot speak Uyghur. These are usually state work units or private companies set up by Han Chinese that employ mainly Han staff, and where all administrative paperwork is in the Chinese language. At home, however, almost all Uyghur speak Uyghur. The exceptions to this

rule are some *minkaohan*, who tend to have a stronger foundation in Chinese than in their native language and often code-switch at home.

In university dormitories, *minkaomin* speak Uyghur to one another. They also speak Uyghur to *minkaohan* roommates until the latter show signs of discomfort. Then they speak in a mixture of Uyghur and Chinese, or entirely in Chinese, until the point has been grasped. In this way, the rules are slightly altered to accommodate the *minkaohan*, who sometimes have problems expressing themselves in Uyghur, especially in academic conversations.

On the street, it is taken for granted that conversations between Uyghur are carried out in Uyghur, whether the other person is an acquaintance or a stranger. In Ürümqi's Uyghur-dominated Erdaoqiao district, Uyghur always spoke to me in Uyghur first, breaking into Chinese only if they perceived that I could not understand. The best examples of the Uyghur preference to speak Uyghur came from 'accidental' observations of interactions between Uyghur. Once, while browsing in Ürümqi's Hongshan department store, I witnessed a Uyghur man approach the counter and, without looking up, begin talking to the store assistant (whom he assumed to be Han) in Chinese. Halfway through his sentence, he glanced up, saw that she was Uyghur, and instantly switched to speaking in Uyghur. They both laughed and he apologised for his mistake. The same thing happened on another occasion when I boarded a bus with Rāwiä, a French language specialist, in Ürümqi. She initially addressed the Uyghur bus conductress (whose facial features were closer than usual to those of Han Chinese) in Chinese, but changed to Uyghur halfway through the sentence and apologised. Rāwiä is *minkaohan* and therefore probably more comfortable with Chinese than with Uyghur. Yet she was quick to correct her mistake. Her action represented a public acknowledgement of mutual ethnic origin and of shared

difference vis-à-vis the Han Chinese. Once, I was eating with Šöhrat, a young male archaeologist from Ürümchi, in a Uyghur street restaurant in Turpan and was dressed in winter clothing typical of an Ürümchilik woman. As I had only just begun learning Uyghur, we conversed in Chinese for convenience' sake. When we left, we overheard two old Uyghur in the corner mutter: “But she’s a *Uyghur* girl! Why on earth is she speaking in Chinese?” To them, it was inconceivable that Uyghur should speak Chinese to one another while eating lunch in a non-Han environment.

Whether they want to or not, many Uyghur are now forced to master Chinese if they are to compete with Han immigrants. However, they describe the decision to learn Chinese as a purely strategic career choice, claiming that the only way to get ahead in the Han-created urban society in Ürümchi is through fluency in Chinese. Learning Chinese is thus seen as a means of survival. Regarding the trend in recent years of putting Uyghur children in Han Chinese schools, Tömür said: “I’ll tell you, there’s only one reason why we learn to speak Chinese, and that’s just to get a better job!” This view was echoed by Rāwiä and many other Uyghur parents in Ürümchi throughout the year. Aliyä, a female postgraduate studying dentistry in Ürümchi, explained: “We speak Chinese because of its dominant position in this society. There is no way around it. Uyghur is not as important as Chinese now.” Despite the acknowledgement, she spoke Uyghur at all times except when speaking to Han Chinese or when intermingling Uyghur and Chinese for the sake of *minkaohan* dorm-mates.

Most Uyghur (with the exception of *minkaohan*) prefer to read and write in the Uyghur script. Periodicals and journals containing minority-nationality literature have appeared all over Xinjiang since the early eighties and the re-introduction of more relaxed minority policies.²³ In 1986, at least twelve journals were being published in

Uyghur in Xinjiang.²⁴ In 1996, over seventy different publications appeared in Uyghur, indicating that there is a large audience of literate Uyghur who increasingly prefer to read in their native language. There are also many Uyghur language newspapers in addition to several Uyghur language television channels. Most southerners watch the Uyghur language channels in preference to the Chinese language channels, although Ürümqilik (who tend to be at least semi-fluent in Chinese due to the large Han population in the city) also like to watch soap operas or dramas on the Chinese channels.

Urban Uyghur frequently register rejection of the Chinese language by making it the object of humour or ridicule. The most common example is the Chinese expression *Man man zou!* (literally, “Walk slowly” or “Go slowly”), uttered when a person takes leave. On one occasion, Sultan, a specialist in Russian literature in his fifties, joked: “Why would anyone want to walk slowly? They should walk quickly! Otherwise they will never get to where they are going before night falls!” That Uyghur intellectuals strive to compare the Uyghur language favourably to Chinese indicates that they feel themselves to a certain degree to be in cultural competition with Han Chinese.

In rural areas, however, boundaries concerning language use are more blurred. Uyghur peasants, many of whom have received little education in either Chinese or Uyghur, are often proud to show off their limited knowledge of Chinese. Ömärjan, a peasant in his sixties in Aqsu, translated all the terms for the crops he raised into the equivalent Chinese for me. For him, the ability to speak a few words of Chinese carried novelty value and was an evident source of pleasure and pride. It seems that, for Uyghur peasants living in relatively Han-free areas and still untouched by

discrimination of language in the spheres of education and work, the Chinese language remains free of stigma.

Time is another criterion through which Uyghur (and other Central Asians in Xinjiang) draw a symbolic boundary between themselves and Han Chinese. It is the vehicle through which they underline their belongingness to the land vis-à-vis the Han Chinese and the Hui Muslims, whom they perceive to be newcomers. While the watches and clocks of one half of Xinjiang's population read 10 a.m., those belonging to the other half insist that it is still 8 a.m. Further investigation into this strange circumstance reveals that, while Han Chinese and Hui Muslims use China's official 'Beijing time,' Uyghur, Qazaqs, Özbäks, Tajiks, and others all use 'Xinjiang time,' the local time congruent with the region's topological position and two hours behind 'Beijing time.' Änwär, a *minkaohan* interpreter in his thirties from Ürümchi, explained: "You see, all the original inhabitants of Xinjiang use local time. It's what we're used to."²⁵ By 'original inhabitants,' he indicated people of Central Asian origin who have lived in the region for centuries. Over the next few weeks, it became clear that while official Han Chinese work units (companies, shops, railway stations) used 'Beijing time,' the Central Asian peoples of the region were unanimous in their continued use of local time.²⁶

Uyghur persist in using local time despite the obvious inconveniences (for example, the constant need to ask: "Do you mean Xinjiang time or Beijing time?"). On the one hand, their persistence in using local time as opposed to Beijing time reflects a desire to stick to old habits and practices. However, it also represents a symbolic rejection of Han Chinese hegemony and administration, all the more remarkable in the light of the inconvenience it causes to all concerned. It represents a symbolic boundary between the 'original' Central Asian inhabitants and the Han

Chinese and Hui Muslim ‘newcomers.’ The time question is further complicated by the fact that Hui Muslims regard ‘Beijing time’ and ‘Xinjiang time’ as one and the same thing. When asked which system they used, they usually replied ‘Xinjiang time’ or ‘Ürümchi time.’ On closer questioning, it transpired that they actually used Beijing time but called it ‘Xinjiang time.’ Like the Han Chinese, the Hui consider Beijing time the standard time for Xinjiang as for all regions of China. This is probably one factor contributing to the mutual mistrust between Uyghur and Hui Muslims in Xinjiang.

Still, there are some Uyghur who use Beijing time either because they are simply accustomed to using it or because their job requires that they do. These individuals include some (but by no means all) *minkaohan* and some Uyghur who work in Han Chinese work units or whose spouses do. The former attended Han Chinese schools where Beijing time was used throughout their school lives. The latter have to use Beijing time every day in the work environment. In particular, a Uyghur whose job is concerned with timetables (rail station, travel agency) uses Beijing time simply because it is too confusing to persevere with local time. Nevertheless, the majority of Uyghur working in Han Chinese work units keep their watches set to local time and calculate the time difference.

One factor that has led Uyghur and other Central Asian Muslims in rural areas (particularly the south) to draw boundaries between themselves and the Han Chinese is their attitude towards birth control. Uyghur opinion on birth control is divided along north-south and urban-rural lines. Although many northern urbanites have begun to espouse the ‘modern’ conception of smaller families and are not particularly averse to family planning,²⁷ southerners and Uyghur in rural areas abide by the Islamic notion that children are ‘a blessing from Allah’ and tend to be strongly opposed to CCP birth

control policy.²⁸ Southern Uyghur often enquired if there was birth control in England, and wanted to know why Westerners usually had small families (that is, whether they were constrained to by law). Tursun, one peasant in his thirties from a small village in Aqsu, lamented that Uyghur could do nothing about birth control policy in Xinjiang “because our king is the Han.”²⁹ I asked another recently married young Aqsuliq how many children he would have if there were no mandatory birth control. He replied airily: “Oh, twenty or thirty! It can’t be helped.” Although this figure was exaggerated for comic value, he was clearly desirous of having lots of children. Perhaps more significantly, he considered pregnancy to be a matter out of his hands and dependent on the discretion of Xuda (Allah).

In 1996, southern peasants were unanimously unhappy with the family planning methods being enforced by Han Chinese authorities. Many women in the countryside had never seen a condom. Tursun’s wife, Arzigül, originally had an IUD coil fitted after having her third child, but this caused headaches, incessant bleeding, and extreme weakness. When she went to the doctor, he removed the coil immediately and said that she might have died had he not done so. Many women in the area have reportedly died from using the coil, which seems to have been routinely fitted. Now, Arzigül takes a birth control pill prescribed by her local hospital, but suffers frequent headaches. A visit to the family planning clinic in Aqsu New Town revealed that the authorities are heavily promoting a new pill, which serves as a morning-after pill or in varying doses as a drug that induces miscarriage. Glossy adverts on the clinic wall proclaim it safe, painless, and 100 per cent effective.

Tursun and Arzigül stated that those who have more than the legal quota of children face fines of between 8,000-10,000 yuan (compared with the rural family’s annual income of 5,000 yuan in a good year). They also confirmed frequent reports of

pregnant women in the south being rounded up, loaded onto trucks, and taken away for mandatory abortions. Those who do have more than three children are forced to send the fourth or fifth child to live with relatives elsewhere. Alternatively, the mother may give the child over to a childless woman to bring up as her own. Although a small minority of urban southern women would prefer to bear fewer children, for the vast majority of southern and rural Uyghur, the issue of birth control has become the main focus of opposition to Han rule, if not necessarily to Han Chinese as individuals.

A further symbolic boundary between Uyghur and Han Chinese is the current Uyghur-enforced taboo on intermarriage. Although Uyghur and Han intermarried in the past, such an idea was unacceptable by the 1990s. The chief reason cited for this development is differences in religio-cultural practices. One young Ürümchilik woman told me:

We believe in different religions. Before, there was intermarriage, but nowadays there is none. Once a couple gets older, they start to realise their customs and practices are different. And their religions are different. One person says one thing and the other says something else. They can't agree. It almost always ends in divorce.

For Uyghur and other Central Asian Muslims, national customs are almost inseparable from Islam. Past experimentation seems to have proved to many that marriage to a non-Muslim can be fraught with difficulty. Liu Lan, a 20 year-old *erzhuanzi*³⁰ whose parents had divorced twelve years before, explained that “national sentiment had proved too strong” on the side of her Uyghur mother. Many older Uyghur also reported that they had seen mixed marriages fail. A friend of Rāwīā’s concluded: “Two separate races of people still have areas that are very different at the end of the day. These differences cannot be resolved with love.” This woman was

minkaohan. Although *minkaohan* are generally supposed to be culturally closer to Han Chinese, most nonetheless reject the option of intermarriage.

In 1995 and 1996, young Uyghur rarely had romantic relationships with Han Chinese. Those that did came under attack from Uyghur elders and peers. I spoke to a 19 year-old girl from Ürümchi who had a Han Chinese boyfriend. She told me: “It’s really hard for us to even go out anywhere. If other Uyghur see us together in public, they give us trouble. If Uyghur men see us together on a public bus, they swear at us and hit us. Uyghur women aren’t so bad, but they still make comments.” The young woman’s elder sister (a model in Beijing) also planned to marry a Han Chinese. Under the weight of public disapproval, the mother would not allow her younger daughter’s marriage to go ahead in Xinjiang, even though the Han boyfriend had given up pork and begun to learn the Uyghur language (thereby removing what barriers he could that might obstruct the match). She agreed, however, to the elder sister’s marriage, since the wedding would take place far away from Xinjiang, and her married life would be spent in Beijing away from public pressure. This suggests that rather than religio-cultural differences *per se*, it is the threat of disapproval from within the Uyghur community that rules out intermarriage at present. Uyghur in the nineties are coming under significant pressure from ethnic peers to conform to patterns of ethnic segregation.

Spatial

In each of Xinjiang’s oases, there is a similar pattern of spatial segregation of Uyghur and Han Chinese. Each oasis has an Old Town (*kona šähär*) and a New Town (*yengi šähär*). The populations of the Old Towns are composed entirely of Uyghur. The populations of the New Towns are composed mainly of Han Chinese immigrants, but

include a proportion of Uyghur employed in Han Chinese work units. The one exception to this rule is Ürümchi, where there is no division of New Town and Old Town. The entire city might be described as a New Town in which Han Chinese immigrants dominate all districts except one: the Uyghur district of Erdaoqiao in the south-east. In Erdaoqiao, there are next to no Han Chinese. Comparatively small numbers of Uyghur are spread throughout the Han Chinese districts.

In this case, the boundary has been drawn by the Han Chinese. From the start, the Chinese government pursued a policy of settling Han immigrants in areas not settled by Uyghur, or in New Towns that were constructed adjacent to the Uyghur' Old Towns.³¹ In this way, they probably hoped to manage religio-cultural differences (in particular, the raising of pigs by the Han Chinese as against the Uyghur avoidance of pork) and so avoid conflict. It is likely that the policy also made the prospect of immigration more appealing to new Han settlers, many of whom were reluctant to move to Xinjiang, which they perceived as a distant and hostile territory.

In the present context, it would be untrue to say that all Uyghur prefer to live separately in Old Towns. On the contrary, there is evidence to suggest that many are willing to compromise and go to New Towns if a good job and a new house beckons. *Loufang*³² homes in New Towns all have water supplied on tap, and so the problem of sharing a common water supply to wash 'clean' and 'unclean' meat does not exist. In addition, some *minkaohan* have, over many years at Han schools, partly internalised the Han Chinese perception of hygiene and beauty. As a result, they prefer the clean new *loufang* homes to the traditional one-storey Uyghur homes of Old Towns, which are made of earth and trap the dust.

Despite this concession, Uyghur endeavour to ensure and maintain spatial segregation as far as possible. They do so by laying a deliberate emphasis on the

Islamic avoidance of pork. Certainly, Uyghur, as Muslims, must strictly avoid eating pork or coming into contact with pigs. Yet in the present context, Uyghur are not simply adhering to dietary prescriptions for their own sake. Rather, they are actively employing dietary differences as a means to distinguish between ‘clean’ (Uyghur) and ‘unclean’ (Han) people.³³ A middle-aged Uyghur doctor in Xotän observes: “There are still huge differences in culture between the two nationalities. For instance, food. A Uyghur will not eat pork, although the Han do. If a Uyghur ate pork, he would no longer be a Uyghur. It is as simple as that.” Han immigrants in Xinjiang similarly identify Islamic dietary prescriptions as the main factor complicating interaction between the two groups at present. A young Han woman in Ürümqi explained that Uyghur rules governing diet were so strict that in the rare case of Han Chinese marrying Uyghur, they must drink a bitter concoction to sterilise their intestines and then convert to the Muslim diet. Yet the rules surrounding avoidance of pork do not appear to be hard-and-fast. Rather, Uyghur seem to be constantly negotiating this boundary, which is permeated with contradictions and with concessions made in particular circumstances.³⁴

The boundary operates firstly on a symbolic level. The scandal surrounding *zhuancha* (brick tea) from the mid-nineties provides adequate demonstration.³⁵ During 1995-1996, several Uyghur in Ürümqi told me they had ceased drinking brick tea, a tea imported from China proper and once popular among Uyghur. Upon further enquiry, they explained that a Uyghur reporter had a few years earlier circulated some photographs, allegedly showing Han Chinese workers slaughtering pigs within a brick tea factory complex in China proper. They added that the pictures also showed Han workers trampling the tealeaves while sweating profusely. Although there was clear doubt surrounding the validity of the evidence, the ensuing scandal united many

Uyghur in a boycott of the product for five months, a boycott inspired not only by the alleged presence of pigs in the factory grounds but also by the vision of Han Chinese sweat soaking into the leaves. According to Šöhrat, the young male archaeologist in Ürümchi, the Chinese government later launched a campaign to persuade Uyghur to resume drinking brick tea (sales from the tea make up a large proportion of profits from three Chinese provinces, including Hubei and Hunan). Subsequently, many people did not know what to believe, and brick tea lovers began to drink it once more.

The food boundary should in theory necessitate spatial segregation between Uyghur and Han Chinese in many environments. However, on close investigation, it becomes evident that Uyghur employ dietary differences to ensure spatial segregation only insofar as it suits them to do so, and often make concessions if they stand to benefit. For example, if one examines patterns of Uyghur patronage of different eateries, a number of apparent contradictions emerge. In Ürümchi and urban areas of Xinjiang, signs outside restaurants state whether food served inside is *hancan* ('Han cuisine,' including pork and therefore 'unclean') or *qingzhen* ('pure and true,' avoiding pork and selling mutton and beef dishes). Within this basic distinction, there are three types of restaurant: a) Han-managed *hancan* restaurants which sell Han Chinese food including pork dishes; b) Han-managed *qingzhen* restaurants which serve Chinese- and Uyghur-style dishes but avoid pork; c) Uyghur and Hui *qingzhen* restaurants serving 'pure and true' Xinjiang dishes.

Uyghur avoid the *hancan* restaurant without exception. This is an understood social fact in Xinjiang. Following my arrival in the city, Uyghur at the local market quickly attempted to dissuade me from entering *hancan* restaurants, arguing with Han Chinese who invited me into their establishments: "She doesn't eat Han food! She eats Muslim food, don't you?" In this way, they tried to ensure that I would eat only

qingzhen foods while in Xinjiang and thereby align myself (culturally and politically) with them. It made no difference that I might well eat pork when in the UK; indeed, Uyghur chose to believe that I did not. In this way, Uyghur used the food boundary as a means to reject the Han people but chose not to apply the same rules to Westerners.³⁶

If dietary requirements truly represented a hard-and-fast rule, one might expect that Uyghur would refuse to enter any establishment where food comes into contact with Han Chinese. Yet I found, for example, that Uyghur eat in Han-managed *qingzhen* restaurants under certain circumstances. Uyghur from my work unit (*minkaohan* and *minkaomin*) usually ate in nearby Han-managed *qingzhen* restaurants when lunching with Han Chinese work colleagues. I also observed that groups of young Uyghur (again, *minkaohan* and *minkaomin*) liked to hold birthday parties and other special events in Han-managed *qingzhen* establishments, though they ate in Uyghur or Hui *qingzhen* restaurants at most other times. It is notable, however, that they were rarely if ever accompanied by Han Chinese.³⁷ The Han Chinese managers of these restaurants rarely conform to the Muslim diet themselves, and are evidently only interested in increasing profits. By excluding pork dishes from the menu, they can attract both Han and Uyghur customers. When I questioned why Uyghur should consent to eat in a restaurant whose manager, chefs, and waitresses came into regular contact with pork at home and possibly also during their lunch break (and which might therefore be considered ritually ‘unclean’), Šöhrat, the young archaeologist from Ürümchi, countered: “But have you noticed that it is a certain type of Uyghur who goes there? Those who went to Han schools [*minkaohan*]. They’re not so fussy about things like that. And, also, those who haven’t received a higher education. They haven’t thought of all the implications, you see.” He thus admitted (albeit unwittingly)

that the only type of Uyghur not to eat in Han-managed *qingzhen* restaurants is the educated *minkaomin* like himself, of whom there are relatively few.

Uyghur willingly eat in either Uyghur or Hui restaurants since both are *qingzhen*. Yet given the choice, they will usually enter Uyghur rather than Hui establishments. Some Uyghur explained that they were not so keen on the flavour of noodles served in Hui restaurants, complaining that Hui did not know how to cook *läghmän*³⁸ sauce and always put in too many chilli peppers.³⁹ Uyghur restaurants are distinguishable by the sheep carcasses that hang outside, which indicate that meat sold there is *halal* ('clean').

On university campuses, kitchens and dining halls are segregated. Lunchtime visits to Ürümqi's Universities of Medicine and Education revealed separate queues before the *hancan* and *qingzhen* serving hatches, the former queue composed entirely of Han Chinese students, the latter of mainly Uyghur students. Likewise, universities usually have separate dorms for Uyghur and Han Chinese, in order to manage dietary differences. Yet Uyghur informed me that they sometimes chose to live in mixed dorms in order that they might practise their Chinese with Han roommates (Chinese language ability being crucial both for success at university and in the urban job market). They claimed that in such cases, Han Chinese students always took care not to eat pork in the dormitories and ate out instead, though I did not have the opportunity to observe whether this was truly the case.

Uyghur often cite the problem of utensils, crockery, and cutlery being 'unclean' as a key factor preventing them from visiting the homes of Han Chinese (and ensuring spatial segregation in the domestic sphere).⁴⁰ Yet here, too, there are many inconsistencies. For example, Uyghur serve food to Han Chinese customers in

Uyghur restaurants every day, meaning that their Uyghur customers come into contact with the same plates, bowls, chopsticks, and spoons used by Han (who eat pork).

When I queried this point, Uyghur usually responded by saying that there was no way around this problem since they needed Han Chinese custom to keep their businesses ticking over. Šöhrat, the archaeologist from Ürümchi, went on to insist that it was a different case when a Han ate in a Uyghur home: “On the few occasions that a Han comes to a Uyghur home, the bowl, dish, and chopsticks he uses are thrown away afterwards.” I subsequently asked a Uyghur in his late thirties in rural Aqsu whether he also followed these guidelines. He shrugged, said that he himself would just wash the crockery in hot water, and added that such an extreme attitude was to be expected from a Qäšqärliq.⁴¹

Uyghur also claim to feel disgusted by the sight of live pigs or by the smell of pork cooking. It is true that Han immigrants in rural areas have to raise pigs on all-Han settlements well removed from Uyghur dwellings due to the problem presented by the rural water supply. When I asked a Uyghur peasant from Aqsu prefecture whether Han Chinese who lived nearby raised pigs, he replied decisively: “No, they can’t. They don’t dare. We all use the same water from the same rivers and streams. If they raised pigs, the pigs would drink from the streams, the meat would be washed in the streams...then the water would flow downstream to us! That would cause big problems.” It is also true that Uyghur must not come into physical contact with pigs.⁴² Yet I got the distinct impression that urban Uyghur exaggerated their disgust regarding pigs and pork in order to better articulate their dislike for the Han Chinese. For instance, one young female student in Ürümchi assured me that she and her friends always went the long way round at the local market just to avoid passing a Han butcher’s stall. In practice, I never noticed her doing so during our own strolls

around the market. In Aqsu New Town, a Uyghur chef insisted with some bravado that Han could not open many *hancan* restaurants there since “pork stinks when it is cooking.” Nevertheless, this fact has not prevented *hancan* establishments from spreading across Ürümchi. Nor does it prevent Uyghur petty entrepreneurs from selling lamb kebabs directly in front of those establishments.

Social

With the exception of practical relationships formed within the work environment, Uyghur do not willingly mix with Han Chinese. Accordingly, ethnic segregation is maintained between the two groups in the home environment, on the street, and in all social situations. If I asked Uyghur whether they socialised with Han Chinese, the enquiry brought a negative click of the tongue or a decisive shake of the head.

Once more, the principal reason cited for this absence of social interaction is different dietary habits.⁴³ On a purely practical level, the Han Chinese inclusion of pork in the diet makes socialising in many situations that involve food impossible. The reality, however, is that Uyghur simply do not want to socialise with Han Chinese, and use abstention from pork as a means of ensuring not only spatial but also social segregation. The one exception to this rule is lunchtime in the work unit. At work, Uyghur seem willing to bend the rules, whether for the sake of protecting their jobs or preserving basic harmony in an environment where they are obliged to work with Han Chinese on a daily basis. A compromise can be reached in the workplace if Han Chinese agree to eat lunch with Uyghur in *qingzhen* restaurants. However, such compromises are rarely made outside the work unit. I had this conversation with a Uyghur woman in her forties in Ürümchi:

Author: Do you have any Han friends?
 Uyghur: Yes, but only at work.
 Author: So they're work colleagues?
 Uyghur: Yes.
 Author: Don't you have any close friends you spend time with?
 Uyghur: We don't usually socialise with Han. We don't go to their homes. Our eating habits aren't the same. They eat pork...so we don't like to socialise with them.

Not only do Uyghur avoid visiting Han Chinese homes but they also feel uncomfortable about Han Chinese coming into their homes. A Uyghur peasant in his forties in Aqsu told me that Han colleagues occasionally visited his home or the homes of his neighbours. At these times, he said, they always asked the Han guest: "Would you like something to eat?" Such an enquiry indicates reluctance in Uyghur culture and is tantamount to stating that you do not wish to entertain a guest. Conventionally, a Uyghur host just produces tea and refreshments and enjoins the guest to tuck in: "*Yäng! Iching!*" ("Eat! Drink!").

Ethnic segregation is plainly visible on the streets of Ürümqi and Xinjiang's New Towns, where Han Chinese walk hand in hand, and Uyghur arm in arm, but mixed groups are never seen. Similarly, Han Chinese rarely attend Uyghur social gatherings,⁴⁴ unless in an official capacity (for example, a Han superior from the work unit might briefly drop in on a Uyghur wedding party to pay his respects, or a Uyghur businessman might take a Han businessman to a Uyghur dance restaurant). Certainly, there is any number of objective reasons why Han Chinese might find it difficult to participate in Uyghur social events. Firstly, Uyghur gatherings provide an arena for Uyghur to make music, sing, dance, and generally take centre stage. A comparable love of public performance does not figure in the social lives of most Han Chinese, who do not consider themselves natural show-offs and tend to be less extroverted than Uyghur. While many Uyghur love to be in the limelight, Han Chinese are usually loath to be the 'bird that sticks its head out of the nest.' Participation would also

require that Han guests were *au fait* with traditional Uyghur music and dance. As Uyghur like to honour special guests by asking them to dance or sing, one could easily imagine that Han guests might soon find themselves in an awkward and embarrassing position.

Secondly, the Uyghur way of serving and consuming food is often different to that of the Han (Islamic dietary prescriptions aside). At house parties, for instance, Uyghur sit cross-legged in a circle on the floor and feast from the *dastixan* (special tablecloth) rather than sit at table, as Han Chinese do.

Thirdly, Han Chinese might be confused by conventional patterns of sexual segregation practised by Uyghur men and women at such events. For example, when attending birthday parties, Uyghur adults in Ürümqi usually sit at sexually segregated tables. It is not so much that an inalienable social law forces them to do so, but rather that Uyghur men and women simply feel more comfortable in the company of their own sex. During house visits, women often retire to one room while the men sit in another. At Ürümqi wedding parties, men sit together down one side of the hall, while women sit along the other. At funerals, also, men and women move in separate groups.

Fourthly, Uyghur ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, and circumcisions are strongly influenced by Islam and participants require special ‘insider’ knowledge in order to understand and fulfil their roles. To give some examples, the young male friends of the groom at a Uyghur wedding know that they are responsible for the fetching of the bride, which is carried out with much noise, enthusiasm, and playing of practical jokes. The door of the bride’s home is barricaded against the men, who have to bribe their way in with presents for the bride and her family. The bride knows that her passage to the groom’s home or the hall will later be blocked, and she in turn

must buy her entry with presents given to the men. Female guests, on the other hand, know that they should bring pieces of cloth or money gifts to be collected as presents for the bride.

Uyghur funeral ceremonies similarly require ‘insider’ knowledge in order to run smoothly. The ceremonies are held in the home of the deceased or of their relatives, and the bereaved rely heavily on the support of neighbours. Rāwiä, the French language specialist from Ürümchi, related how Ürümchiliks particularly regret having Han Chinese neighbours at the time of a death:

When Uyghur have a death in the family, that’s when they most wish they had other Uyghur as neighbours. Especially during the first week after the death, friends and relatives come to the house with gifts of food, since the family is too beside itself with grief to cook. With so many guests coming every day, the family will really wish it had Uyghur neighbours, who would simply open up their homes and allow the guests to overflow into their houses.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, the close relatives of the deceased must know how and when to cry. The ‘crying’ (similar to wailing or the recitation of Islamic verses) is loud, theatrical and very public. It demonstrates to relatives, friends, and neighbours the love that one felt for the deceased. If close relatives do not cry at the moment of death and throughout the first day, they are criticised and it is assumed that they did not care for the deceased person. To a Westerner or Han Chinese, however, the crying seems almost unearthly.

Finally, the vast majority of Han Chinese cannot speak Uyghur and would be out of place in an environment where Uyghur is spoken almost exclusively.

Still, these facts alone should not absolutely prohibit Han Chinese from socialising with Uyghur. The *wuting* (dance hall) within the Chinese work unit is one venue where Uyghur and Han Chinese might potentially share a love of dance.

Although few Han Chinese in Xinjiang can dance traditional Uyghur dance, many

enjoy ballroom dancing. Yet after a brief greeting, Uyghur and Han Chinese sit in separate groups, Uyghur going to dance with Uyghur, and Han with Han. Uyghur men occasionally ask Han Chinese females to dance (usually their next-door neighbours), but all return to their separate seating areas afterwards.

The consequences of boundary-crossing: bus stories and street fights

Where Han Chinese transgress these boundaries, trouble can occur. At a private New Year's party in a Uyghur friend's street restaurant in Ürümchi, groups of Han Chinese twice stumbled through the door and demanded to be served food, or stood grinning at the scene. The owners said nothing but looked quietly angry, threw the intruders an initial glance, then looked elsewhere as they waited for them to leave. The second time this occurred, my host got up with a furious look on his face and bolted the door when the offending individuals had gone.

Situations where Uyghur and Han find themselves unwillingly crammed together within a limited physical space, such as on crowded buses or at markets, can also breed conflict. I often observed Uyghur and Han Chinese go out of their way to avoid sitting next to one another on buses. I heard one story of how two Uyghur spread themselves across three seats to prevent a Han policeman from sitting beside them. Fights break out on buses over issues as simple as a Han Chinese stepping on a Uyghur's foot. As a result, bus stories have become a favourite subject of Uyghur storytelling. Street fights are guaranteed to occur if Han Chinese men dare to approach Uyghur women. Romantic relationships between Uyghur and Han Chinese are presently taboo, and Uyghur men are extremely protective over the honour of female relatives, colleagues, and classmates. Furthermore, they view Uyghur women as their monopoly and not to be won by Han Chinese.

In the south of the region, ethnic conflicts often occur in public shower-houses, these being one of the few places where Han and Uyghur are forced to interact. In one small village in Aqsu, the shower-houses were not only sexually but also ethnically segregated. When I inquired why this was, the local people told me that it was “to prevent fights breaking out.”

Managed interaction in the workplace

There is one environment in which the two ethnic groups contrive to manage interaction: the workplace. The mutual pursuit of good jobs, regular salaries, and a better livelihood in a competitive urban society has meant that Uyghur and Han Chinese have, to a certain extent, learned to live with one another in the work environment.

My observations of Uyghur and Han Chinese employees in work units and Han-dominated companies in Ürümchi lead me to believe that relations there are relatively friendly, at least on the surface. Uyghur and Han courteously refer to one another as ‘Han comrades’ and ‘minority comrades.’ They frequently gossip about their colleagues (a phenomenon one might expect to find in any workforce in the world). Indeed, a love of gossip is one thing that Uyghur and Han Chinese seem to have in common. Uyghur and Han employees usually ask one another their lunch plans. If they decide to lunch together, it is Han Chinese colleagues who must compromise by accompanying Uyghur colleagues to suitable restaurants that do not offend their religious sensibilities. Mixed lunch parties therefore eat in Han-managed *qingzhen* restaurants or Uyghur or Hui Muslim restaurants.

There is a certain sense that appearances should be kept up and that harmony should be preserved in the workplace. Some Uyghur employ humour to try to smooth

the way. I once observed a conversation between a Uyghur academic and a Han academic. The Han asked the Uyghur if they would go to a meeting together or if he should go alone. The Uyghur replied: “Together, together! Of course we’ll go together...after all, we *are* inextricably bonded, aren’t we?”⁴⁶ In this way, he attempted to lighten up relations with his Han colleague by making a joke at the expense of the Chinese government’s catchphrase ‘nationality unity.’ On this occasion, the Han colleague was unsure whether to laugh or not and left the room in confusion.

Relations in the workplace occasionally break down along ethnic lines. This tends to happen in situations where minority nationality employees feel that their respective languages or cultures are being ignored or played down by Han colleagues. Alternatively, an employee who privately subscribes to separatist ideologies may try to bring about a temporary mutiny against Han employees.

Besides sometimes taking a work lunch together, the only other time Uyghur and Han colleagues socialise with one another is at events organised by the work unit (for example, meetings over lunch or national celebrations such as the 40th Anniversary of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region). These events take place in working hours, and members of the work unit are obliged to attend. At meeting lunches, Han Chinese and most Uyghur present tend to drink large amounts of *baijiu* and make constant toasts. It is possible that alcohol and the act of honouring one another through frequent toasting further helps to smooth interaction. Beyond this, Uyghur never visit the homes of Han colleagues, and Han Chinese rarely enter the homes of Uyghur colleagues. Han work unit members occasionally pay festival visits to Uyghur homes during the Qorban and Rozi festivals, as a gesture of courtesy and a

public display of respect for Uyghur culture. These interactions, too, are often managed with the help of a generous amount of alcohol.⁴⁷

Another arena where the two groups seem able to manage interaction at work is the local market. Here, some Uyghur and Han Chinese petty entrepreneurs have established mutually beneficial working relationships.⁴⁸ I regularly observed scenes in Ürümchi where Uyghur and Han Chinese collaborated to increase one another's business, despite the fact that one dealt with *halal* ('clean') meat and the other with *haram* ('unclean') meat. At one Ürümchi market, Uyghur youths rent kebab stands in front of 'unclean' *hancan* restaurants. To an extent, the location of these stands is undesirable for business, since Uyghur customers never eat in *hancan* restaurants. However, Ghäyrät and his fellow kebab-sellers exploit the situation by attracting the custom of Han Chinese instead. They call to Han customers and encourage them to eat in the *hancan* restaurant in front of their stand, hoping that the customers will later call for some kebabs to be brought in. In return, Han Chinese managers of *hancan* restaurants recommend the Uyghur' kebabs.

Since both parties are self-employed and reliant on their own efforts to subsist, they can find things in common to talk about when business is slack. Their personal relationship remains basically untouched by popular Uyghur perceptions of economic inequality because Uyghur here can see that these Han at least are no better off than themselves. Uyghur and Han Chinese petty entrepreneurs often sit chatting about the amount of money they have earned that day or how much they paid for such and such an article. When the talk is limited to money matters in this way, conversation remains perfectly amicable. Yet where cultural differences are touched upon, a sense of ethnic competitiveness enters the equation and Uyghur and Han tease one another about those differences:

Uyghur: I went to that wedding on Sunday afternoon. Everyone was dancing. I was dancing too. Uyghur weddings are lively! Not like Han weddings! Han just fetch the bride, stand outside the house, let off a few firecrackers, and then go inside to eat! That's it!

Han: No, the groom has to carry the bride over the threshold! You lot don't do that, do you ?

However, such exchanges do not seem to cause long-term offence, at least not in this environment. Everyone is happy to continue warming their hands over the kebab-sellers' charcoal embers and devour hot chestnuts. A good working environment has been established which remains fundamentally undamaged by religio-cultural differences.

Still, as with relationships between Uyghur and Han Chinese in work units, relations between these petty entrepreneurs do not extend beyond the working environment. The only instance of Uyghur stallholders socialising with Han Chinese outside work was at the market pool tables. There, Ghäyrät and others often played pool with Han Chinese when taking a break from work. However, the opponents said little to one another throughout the game, which was characterised by a tangible element of ethnic competition. When the game was over, they thanked one another and went their separate ways.

The Underlying Factor: Perceived Socio-Economic Inequalities

Important as symbolic boundaries are, it is the 'food boundary' which has become the primary means of drawing ethnic distinctions between Uyghur and Han Chinese in the 1990s, allowing Uyghur to ensure spatial and social segregation between the two groups on a day-to-day basis. Yet they often compromise this boundary, and usually in situations where they stand to gain socially or financially. Uyghur find jobs in Han work units and move to New Towns in order to secure a home, a steady income, and a

livelihood. Uyghur restaurant owners oblige their Uyghur customers to use the same chopsticks, cutlery, and crockery as Han customers because they need (or want) the extra custom. Uyghur students choose to share dorms with Han Chinese students because their studies and career chances will improve if they speak better Chinese. Uyghur petty entrepreneurs co-operate with their Han counterparts at the local market as a strategy to improve business, and so forth. In situations where they stand to benefit, Uyghur often forgo the supposedly hard-and-fast rules surrounding concepts of 'clean' and 'unclean' food (and people), and can forge relatively amicable relationships with Han Chinese, at least on the superficial level. However, the compromises made in these situations are not extended to other situations. Presumably, it should be possible to invite Han Chinese to Uyghur social events, provided that they conform to Uyghur dietary habits for the duration. But Uyghur are clearly not willing to do this. Even in the Han Chinese dance halls, where Uyghur and Han might share a love of ballroom dancing, they choose to sit separately.

Yet there is evidence that there was less social segregation of Uyghur and Han Chinese in the past. Uyghur in their thirties or forties told me that, during their childhoods, they had sometimes entered the homes of Han Chinese playmates. At that time, differences of diet had been 'managed' whereby Uyghur children were allowed to play in Han Chinese homes so long as they did not eat or drink anything while there. At the present time, however, there are almost no instances of Uyghur children socialising in this way. Similarly, giving up pork was once the prerequisite for a Han Chinese to marry a Uyghur, but this is no longer enough. Whether purely for religious-cultural reasons or for other reasons, public disapproval has made intermarriage practically impossible in recent years. That Uyghur children no longer have Han Chinese friends and that intermarriage between adults is no longer an option suggests

that, in addition to long-standing religio-cultural differences, there are other new factors making the estrangement between Uyghur and Han adults more pronounced, and leading Uyghur to keep themselves and their children segregated. Most salient among these is a growing awareness of socio-economic inequalities. In the present context, urban Uyghur have begun to emphasise religio-cultural differences and use them as symbols to demarcate ethnic boundaries between Uyghur and Han Chinese in what is actually an articulation of demands for ethnic equality in education and work, and the control of Xinjiang's natural resources.

Conclusion

Uyghur national identity in Xinjiang in the 1990s defines itself in relation to Han Chinese immigrants in an 'Us and Them' dichotomy. In emphasising the failure of Han Chinese to adhere to Islamic social laws, Uyghur define the differences between themselves and the non-Muslim Han along religio-cultural lines. On another level, however, they define themselves as an ethnic group in competition with Han Chinese in a new urban social hierarchy. To state that increased interaction between Uyghur and Han Chinese is necessarily conducive to increased ethnic tensions would be too simple. The fact is that the proportion of Han Chinese immigrants within Xinjiang's total population had already grown to 40 per cent (roughly equal to somewhat questionable official estimates in 1996) by 1970. Yet instances of ethnic conflict did not begin to accelerate until the end of the eighties and the start of the nineties.⁴⁹ Similarly, we hear that just one generation ago, Uyghur and Han children were allowed to play in each other's homes, that intermarriage between Uyghur and Han was common across the region, and that Uyghur colleagues visited Han Chinese colleagues at home during the Spring Festival.

What is clear is that Uyghur attitudes towards Han settlers have changed significantly over time (while religio-cultural differences have existed between them all along). Whereas it is said that the Uyghur originally “welcomed the Han Chinese with open arms,”⁵⁰ Uyghur in the nineties say they want the influx of Han immigrants to stop. The fact that Uyghur distinguish between first-generation and new Han immigrants further confirms this change of heart. The distinction is reflected both in the way Uyghur speak about original and new settlers, and in the nature of the relationships they enjoy with each. The improved relationships they have with original settlers are characterised by a willingness on the part of Han Chinese to learn the Uyghur language and adapt to Uyghur customs (for example, Han Chinese giving up pork). Worsening relations with new Han immigrants, on the other hand, result from a growing unwillingness on the part of the Han to embrace or even try to adapt to Uyghur culture.

Over and above the Great Han chauvinist attitudes prevalent in urban Xinjiang, it is the daily reality of the marginalisation of Uyghur in education and work that most affects contemporary Uyghur-Han relations. Since working in Han Chinese work units and companies requires fluency in Chinese (and, unofficially, acceptance of the Han culture), many Uyghur have been excluded from the Han-dominated labour market almost by default. Unqualified for white-collar jobs, Uyghur end up doing blue-collar jobs or remain in traditional agricultural roles. The result is widespread resentment at Han Chinese privilege. Televised publicity of ‘success stories’ of Han Chinese immigrants, added to the daily sight of Han Chinese living in clean new housing and driving (and apparently owning) brand new cars,⁵¹ only exacerbates these feelings. Although Han Chinese have created a new urban job market in Xinjiang, as well as putting mechanisms in place to facilitate the

exploitation of the region's natural resources, few urban Uyghur believe that they have profited from these developments. Uyghur standards of living are at least the same and probably substantially better than they were before 1949. However, urban dissatisfaction stems from the fact that Uyghurs now have something to compare themselves with.

Finally, the 'contamination effect' of the vision of the adjacent CIS republics should not be underestimated. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the establishment across the border of six independent Muslim republics (Azerbaijan, Qazaqstan, Özbäkistan, Qirghizstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan), the Uyghur, the Tatar, and the Salar became the only Central Asian Muslims in Xinjiang without an independent country named after their ethnic group.⁵² Since that time, the mass media have enabled Uyghur to sit and watch as their newly independent Muslim cousins took control of their social, political, and economic structures and of the exploitation of their abundant natural resources.

This paper suggests that religio-cultural differences alone might have been managed in such a way that Uyghur and Han Chinese were able to interact in situations where those differences were not felt to matter. However, growing resentment of ethnic discrimination and socio-economic inequalities, added to the knowledge that other Central Asian Muslims now enjoy control both over their politics and their economic development, has led Uyghur in the 1990s to exaggerate certain religio-cultural differences as a means of ensuring symbolic, spatial, and social segregation from the Han.

¹ The system employed by Hahn in *Spoken Uyghur* is adopted to transliterate Uyghur terms, as I consider this to be closest to local pronunciation. However, I make two changes: the consonant “ğ” is replaced with “gh,” and the consonant “ç” with “ch.”

² Published articles include Dru Gladney (1996), Sean Roberts (1998a), Ildikó Bellér-Hann (1997, 1998, 2001a, 2000b), Joanne Smith (2000), and Cristina Cesaro (2000). Scholars who have recently completed (or are on the verge of completing) PhD theses based on fieldwork in Xinjiang include Rachel Harris (1998), Joanne Smith (1999), Jay Dautcher (1999), and Gardner Bovington.

³ Since this article was submitted and accepted for publication in July 2001, I have had the good fortune to finally meet Ildikó Bellér-Hann. In our subsequent communications, I became aware of her (then forthcoming) chapter on Uyghur-Han relations, also dealing with strategies employed by Uyghur to reproduce ethnic boundaries vis-à-vis the Han (Bellér-Hann 2001c). With regard to similarities between our data and the theoretical frameworks we adopt to express those data, I would note that we carried out fieldwork at the same time in Xinjiang independently of one another and wrote our respective pieces unaware of the other’s work. Coincidental similarities in approach may therefore be considered mutual validation of our assessment of ethnic relations in Xinjiang. Indeed, the two articles can be treated as complementary, since my ethnographic material is based mainly on fieldwork in Ürümqi (population 90% Han, 10% Uyghur), while that of Bellér-Hann focuses on a small oasis town in southern Xinjiang (population 40% Han, 60% Uyghur). This difference in geographical focus and population composition accounts, I believe, for certain differences in our interpretations.

⁴ The material presented here first appeared in Chapters 9 and 10 of my as yet unpublished PhD thesis (Smith: 1999). Funding for postgraduate study was kindly provided by the Economic and Social Research Council, Swindon, UK.

⁵ See Barth 1969: 10,14; De Vos 1975: 9; Eriksen 1993: 37.

⁶ De Vos 1975: 16.

⁷ Barth 1969: 12.

⁸ Barth 1969: 9; Eriksen 1993: 10-12, 35.

⁹ Edmund Leach. (1967) *A Runaway World*. London: Oxford University Press. Cited in Epstein 1978: 100. Cf. Sartre’s theory of “us-hood” and “we-hood” (Jean-Paul Sartre. [1943] *L’être et le néant*. Paris: Gallimard. Cited in Eriksen 1993: 67).

¹⁰ Gladney (1996) has developed a similar model – which he calls “relational alterity” – to deal with the question of transnational Hui, Uyghur, and Qazaq identities, arguing that “people subscribe to certain identities under certain highly contextualised moments of social relation.” Locating the emergence of national identities in Central Asia within this field of contemporary and historical social relations, he draws attention to the “shifting simultaneity of identity,” and shows how different identities are constructed in different social contexts vis-à-vis a number of different “opposites.”

¹¹ Oda 1978: 42.

¹² Gladney 1990: 10.

¹³ Ibid: 4.

¹⁴ Rudelson 1997.

¹⁵ Between 1949 and 1970 alone, the percentage of Han immigrants in Xinjiang increased from 5.5 per cent to a staggering 40 per cent (Dillon 1995: 31). By 1990, there were 5,695,626 Han immigrants in the region compared with 7,194,675 Uyghur (Thomas Hoppe. 1992. “Die chinesische Position in Ost-Turkestan/Xinjiang.” *China aktuell*. June. p. 360. Cited in Dillon 1995: 48). According to estimates based on an official Chinese survey of population change carried out in Xinjiang in 1996, Han Chinese immigrants totalled 6,424,400 persons while local nationalities (including Uyghur) totalled 10,468,500 persons or 61.97 per cent (Xinjiang statistical communiqué for 1996, *Xinjiang ribao*, Ürümqi, 14 March 1997 in SWB [Asia Pacific], 7 May 1997, FEW/0485 WS2/8). However, population figures released by the Chinese authorities in recent years for these regions have been less than reliable. Shakya notes, for instance, that China has repeated identical population statistics for Tibet for the past several years (Talk on his book *The Dragon in the Lands of Snow* at Waterstones of Leeds, UK. 3/2/99).

¹⁶ Attitudes of Han racial and cultural superiority.

¹⁷ Some Uyghur educated at Uyghur schools do reach university, and this number is likely to grow as a result of the implementation of the self-paid school system. However, these students generally struggle with academic texts (which are printed in Chinese) once there, and may take more years to graduate.

¹⁸ The term used by both Han Chinese and minority nationalities for a member of a minority nationality educated in their mother tongue at a minority nationality school.

¹⁹ The term used for a member of a minority nationality educated in the Chinese language at a Han Chinese school.

²⁰ The same issues seem to be relevant in Tibet. Tsering Shakya identifies Tibetan awareness that they have not benefited from economic reforms and will always be marginalised vis-à-vis Han immigrants as the impetus for post-1987 demonstrations by young urban Tibetans (“China-Tibet: Further Dialogue?” East Asia Research Seminar, Leeds University, UK, 17/2/99). Rural Uyghur, on the other hand, have so far been relatively unaffected by Han chauvinist attitudes and Han competition for education and work, due to the smaller number of Han immigrants in the countryside. They claim to have experienced an improvement in their standard of living since Deng’s Open Door policy took effect in the mid-eighties. Furthermore, they do not feel that their native language has been marginalised in their rural environment, where government decrees are still issued in Uyghur. These factors help to explain why the proliferation of ethno-political ideologies in Xinjiang has so far been a predominantly urban phenomenon.

²¹ Cesaro (2000) devotes a paper to analysing ways in which Uyghur draw on Muslim dietary prescriptions in order to strengthen boundaries between themselves and the Han Chinese. Her fieldwork was carried out during 1996-1997, the year following my own.

²² The names of key informants and details of their occupations have been altered to protect their identities, although details of age, social group, and hometown are retained.

²³ Mackerras 1985: 77.

²⁴ Naby 1986: 243.

²⁵ He referred to Uyghur, Qazaqs, Özbäks, etc. as the *tumin* (in Chinese) of Xinjiang, literally, the “people of the land,” or the “people of the earth.”

²⁶ On discovering that I had set my watch to local time after only a few days in Ürümchi, an American ethnographer smiled and said: “Well...what other time is there?” The gesture also met with a positive reaction from Uyghur. When Rāwiä first noticed that my watch had been re-set to local time, she smiled, nodded, and said: “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.”

²⁷ This notion may have been engendered by CCP propaganda, which publicises the advantages of birth control and points out that many modernising Islamic countries (e.g. Iran) now practise birth control. Alternatively, Uyghur may have absorbed the notion from television images of modern nuclear families in the West.

²⁸ It is generally conceded that Islamic beliefs are stronger in the south than in the north of the region.

²⁹ Tursun used the word *padišah* (“king”) in keeping with Uyghur tradition.

³⁰ This is the derogatory term in Chinese designating children of one Uyghur and one Chinese parent. The English equivalent would be “half-breed.”

³¹ It has been suggested that Uyghur perceived this new pattern of Han settlement as “encirclement,” and that it led to the obscuring of historical oasis divisions and a new focus on rivalry with the Han Chinese. Rudelson 1997: 38.

³² Five or six-storey residential blocks that became popular in China after Liberation.

³³ Cesaro (2000: 230, 234) notes that Uyghur in the nineties define categories of forbidden/allowed foods according to what people those foods are associated with and not necessarily according to which items are explicitly forbidden in the Qur’an. For example, they include donkey in the list of “unclean” foods because Han Chinese eat donkey meat. Yet Uyghur from Ili prefecture (and sometimes other oases) eat horsemeat as a delicacy. In this way, articulation of the “food boundary” can be seen as a form of Uyghur resistance against the Han people.

³⁴ Cesaro (2000: 234) similarly notes a tension between what Uyghur say they do and what they actually do.

³⁵ See also Cesaro 2000: 231.

³⁶ See also Cesaro 2000: 232. A computer programmer I knew in Ürümchi was once given a plate with Chinese politician Li Peng’s signature on it during a trip to Beijing. He refused it, saying: “No, thank you. It’s not *qingzhen*!”

³⁷ Strangely, my findings differ here from those of Cesaro (2000: 233), who writes that Uyghur avoid Han-managed *qingzhen* restaurants on the grounds that the food will have come into contact with a Han, and that Uyghur only eat *säy* (*qingzhen* stir-fried dishes prepared, structured, and served in the Chinese style) if cooked by a Uyghur chef.

³⁸ Thick round noodles in spicy tomato, red pepper, and mutton sauce.

³⁹ Cesaro (2000: 230) also observed Uyghur reluctance to eat in Hui restaurants and attributes this to a lack of trust, arguing that Uyghur inevitably associate the Hui with the Han Chinese. This would correspond with my own findings on Uyghur responses towards the Hui preference for “Beijing time” over “local time.”

⁴⁰ Whenever I was invited to Han Chinese homes, Šöhrat and others tried to dissuade me from going: “You don’t want to go there! The Han eat pork, and the food will be cooked and eaten out of the same pans.” See also Cesaro 2000: 230.

⁴¹ The inference derives from the common perception that the Islamic faith is particularly strong in the southern oasis of Qäšqär.

⁴² Once, a sleeper bus on which I was travelling was delayed by a flood across the road. Presently, a truck full of pigs made it through the water from the other side and drove past us. One Han Chinese passenger remarked with surprise to his neighbour that a Uyghur had been driving the truck. His companion was scornful: “Impossible! When did you ever see a Uyghur transport pigs?”

⁴³ Rudelson (1997: 63) identifies pork as the main factor influencing interaction between Uyghur and Han Chinese in Turpan: “These social borders may appear invisible... but they become salient in structuring interethnic social, religious, and commercial interactions.”

⁴⁴ These include Islamic ceremonies (weddings, funerals, circumcisions, etc.), street-restaurant and house parties, group outings to the Uyghur dance restaurant or *wuting* (Chinese dance hall), all-Uyghur university dances, the *mäšräp* (a mass out-door gathering held during the hot summer months, where men and women feast, play *dutar*, sing, dance, tell stories and jokes, and play games), and the rural orchard gathering. For a description of the historical origins and various forms of the *mäšräp*, see Zheng and Luo 1989: 134-137.

⁴⁵ There is a strong feeling among urban Uyghur towards *muhalla*, a real group determining the social relations between individuals, and providing unity and solidarity. Within the *muhalla*, obligations and responsibilities are placed upon individuals in return for support and services, so that members celebrate weddings and festivals together, organise funerals and rituals together, and help one another when needed. Urban Uyghur often complain that *muhalla* life is disappearing in the big cities, particularly Ürümchi, thinking this the result of the large Han presence (Colin Mackerras, personal communication).

⁴⁶ He used the Chinese term *libukai* to describe the notion of Uyghur and Han Chinese being inextricably linked to one another, the same term frequently used in CCP propaganda to encourage “nationality unity.”

⁴⁷ In the 1980s, it was apparently common for Uyghur to visit their Han Chinese colleagues at home during the Chinese Spring Festival. However, this kind of social exchange has become very rare recently (Colin Mackerras, personal communication).

⁴⁸ The occurrence of an ethnic group establishing mutually advantageous patterns of transaction with other groups (e.g. trading relations) has been termed ethnic symbiosis. Barth 1969: 20.

⁴⁹ See Smith (2000) and Smith (1999), Appendix I: ‘A catalogue of Uyghur disturbances in Xinjiang 1949-1997.’

⁵⁰ cf. Ömärjan Alim’s song *Mehman Bašlidim* (“I Brought Home A Guest”), banned by the Chinese authorities soon after release.

⁵¹ Such vehicles are often the property of the Han work unit and are not actually privately owned by the individuals themselves.

⁵² The Salar are said to have originated from a Turkmen tribe (Schwarz 1984: 39-40), and therefore might be said to have their own country in Turkmenistan. The Tatar and the Salar in Xinjiang numbered only 4,821 and 3,660 persons respectively in 1990 (compared with 7,194,675 Uyghur). Thomas Hoppe. (1992) “Die chinesische Position in Ost-Turkestan/Xinjiang.” *China aktuell*. p. 360. Cited in Dillon 1995: 48.

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