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Chapter 1.0 Local Identities of Space and Place

Just as social groups reside in space, space itself fundamentally inhabits a world of social categories and relationships. In the following three chapters on identity and place in Yining, we will learn about the spatial relations of the home and neighborhood, of suburb and city, and come to understand how these create a sense of belonging that lies at the foundation of Uighur identity. Though I will be practices focusing on concerns and practices specific to spatially articulated identities, many other dimensions of personal identity and social relations, which are engaged with more fully only in subsequent chapters (such as those of ethnicity, gender, class, status and religion), are foreshadowed here.

My account follows two conventions, one traditional, one fanciful. First, the neighborhood I describe, *Zawut mähällä*, is the pseudonymous neighborhood I lived in during my field research. The house and courtyard I describe, although tucked away on the corner of a narrow and dog-legged dirt lane on Yining's periphery, stand here, I think fittingly, at the center of my narrative. As the home I lived in and learned to know best, it was central to my experiencing of local life.' Moreover, as the home of Yining-born Abidam Nasreddin (age 76), who generously hosted me during my research, it was the center of a large extended kin network of native Yining residents.

1. I selected this home as a field site after visiting in 1992 for one month with Abidam's son, a professional musician who had been a close friend of mine in Beijing since early 1987. Although his departure for Beijing more than 20 years previous was a special situation for the family, in many other regards the family seemed, and later proved, to be typical of other large extended native Yining families.

Abidam had borne fourteen children, and the experiences of her surviving descendants — a group that included seven children, thirty-seven grandchildren and nineteen great-grandchildren — formed an important part of the social world I lived in and learned from during my research. Many of the families in her kin-group, including both her *tughkhan*, (consanguine relations) and her *khuda* (affinal relations), lived just minutes away in adjacent *mähällä*. Hence it was a rare day that at least a few of her adult children or grandchildren did not stop by to visit and chat, to share a meal or some recent gossip.

The second convention is this: The chapter unfolds by paralleling the expanding awareness of space I imagine a *Zawut* resident might acquire as he or she travels through life. Thus, I begin with the home — the house and its courtyard — where infants learn to take their first steps towards becoming persons. Then I describe a typical Uighur residential neighborhood, or ‘*mähällä*’ (pronounce together the rhyming syllables *met*, *het-* and *let*, then drop the three *t*’s),² along whose winding lanes young children laugh, play, and form informal age-peer cohorts that often last lifetimes. Next, I describe the concentric ring such neighborhoods form around Yining’s urbanizing center, a distinct suburban periphery that separates the city from the fertile fields and villages in the surrounding countryside. All of these spaces are filled with human activities, the social dramas that will be examined in more detail in the four sections that follow. Indeed, the description of the home in chapter 1.1 is intentionally filled with references to persons and events that are only fully explained in later chapters, a ploy intended to whet the reader’s appetite for those chapters. In this section, though, the main focus is on space and place.

Finally, I wish to add a note about the generality of the account offered in these and subsequent chapters, in relation to Yining’s topography. The word *mähällä* means simply

2. For a pronunciation guide to the transliteration system used in this dissertation, see Appendix 1

‘neighborhood’.³ Many Uighur residents of Yining remember and sometimes speak of *mähällä* boundaries where the city now stands. In those areas, however, traditional-style Uighur homes and neighborhoods have all but given way to concrete apartment buildings built to house the increasing numbers of ethnic Han who work and live in the city. Though many Uighurs still organize their perceptions of the city-center through the remembered grid of its *mähällä*, ever fewer Uighurs live there, and many of the sites that gave those *mähällä* their names and their distinctive characteristics have been tom down, obstacles to a state-sponsored quest for modernization. As a result, the notion of *mähällä* as a *kind* of space has emerged in Yining, associated with the many dozens of suburban *mähällä* that encircle its urban city-center. To the casual observer, as well as in the eyes of the Uighur families who live in them, this ring of neighborhoods remains a predominantly Uighur residential space encircling a Han city. When I write about *Zawut*, then, I am also writing generally about this suburban periphery and its dozens of neighborhoods. Though each *mähällä* possesses subtle differences in form and feeling—which residents may feel quite sharply—I am confident after viewing and visiting homes in many of those neighborhoods and interacting widely with their residents, that the general description given here could apply equally well to most of them.

For the Uighurs who live in these neighborhoods; for the children who spend their days playing in their narrow lanes, attending school, or hawking apricots in the street from a hand cart on the weekends; for the men who trade in the markets, perhaps closing their stall early in order to sneak off to *drink* with their friends by the riverside; for the women who work in the local

3. This word originally came from a word for **an** area of salt flats outside of Fez that was also that city’s Jewish quarter. From this beginning, the word has taken on the meaning of ‘quarter; residential section of a town or city’ throughout much of the Islamic world.

factories, who visit their kinfolk bearing gifts and gossip on their days off; for all the residents of Yining's *mähällä*, the home remains a central place, the place from which all of the days activities begin, and the place to which they all return. The centrality of the home space in *Zawut* residents' lives encouraged me to consider how their experiences of these places and spaces constitute perhaps the most important foundation upon which all other social identities are subsequently constructed.

Chapter 1.1 The Blessed Home: Residence and Identity in a Uighur Neighborhood

Saying ‘prosperity, come here’, it’s wanting to have a blessed (*bārikätlik*) household, like this household.’

Look around, there’s nothing here, but there is everything, too. Everything needed, Apam has somewhere...

Sänāngül (age 27), describing her mother Abidam’s house.’

The ordering of domestic and residential spaces in *Zawut* cannot be understood without situating those spaces in the wider social order that encompasses them.³ The spatial organization of domestic life is inseparable from many key categories of social identity in the lives of local residents. In *Zawut*, for example, an independent cooking stove is a key defining unit of the *öy*

1. The Uighur *bārikät* is cognate with baraka (‘blessing’), a concept which is widely discussed in the scholarly literature. See, e.g., Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God*.

2. This and all subsequent field conversations conducted in Uighur are rendered here in English based on interview notes and field notes recorded typically within one or two days of the actual conversations.

3. For other studies on the relationship between domestic space and the symbolic ordering of identity in Islamic communities, see, e.g., Metcalf, ed., *Making Muslim Space*; Campo, *Other Side of Paradise*.

(‘household’). One idiom for expressing the marriage of young adults and the formation of an initial conjugal unit is to say they have become ‘homed- and-stoved’ (*öylük-oqakhlikh*), or simply ‘homed’ (*öylän-*), which suggests that they cook and reside apart from others. An *öy* then is a home, a social unit as well as an architectural one.

Uighur homes in Yining’s suburbs are strikingly uniform in architectural style and method of construction. Floors are built on earthen foundations raised several feet off the ground. Walls are made either of rammed earth (*sokhma tam*) topped with locally made adobe brick (*kesäk*), or increasingly, of fired brick. Their flat roofs are simply made; poles are laid over roof joists, then covered with mats of *khomux* reed, a layer of straw, a layer of soil, and a topping of cinder or gravel. Though their rectilinear layouts vary, virtually all houses in the area are based on a single socio-spatial theme: A conjugal unit requires a two room structure, an outer *dawan*⁴ and an inner *saray*. The division of *Zawut* residences into *dawanöy* and *saray* is highly uniform, and arises from the sharp distinction made, in regard to social relations, between the informal interactions of kin, friend and neighbor, on the one hand, and the visits and gift exchanges marked in *Zawut* with the terms ‘making guests’ (*mehman khilix*) and ‘being guests’ (*mehman bolux*), on the other.⁵

I turn now to consider in detail the home of Abidam Nasreddin, who maintains an independent hearth (*oqakh*) and residence in a courtyard she shares with the household of her eldest surviving son, Yakupjan’kam. The main domestic spaces in Abidam’s home—and the floor plan of her son’s home is virtually identical—are its two adjoining, rectangular rooms, the

4. Given in most Uighur dictionaries as *dalan*, from Ch. 大廊 *dalang*, ‘large hall’, this was pronounced *dawan* in Ili vernacular.

5. Hosting and guesting practices are discussed further on pp. 186-202.

dawanöy and the *saray* or *saray öy*.⁶

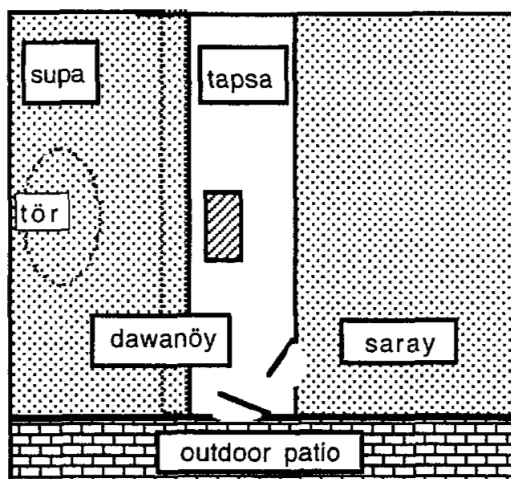


Figure 1. Abidam's two room house

Abidam's *dawanöy* is perpetually 'full'; not with material objects, as the quote on page 5 suggests, but with the bustle of daily life. Few possessions are on display: A small wooden table, painted dark green, leans tilted on its side against a white-washed wall; folded blankets sit neatly on a wooden chest; a bare forty-watt bulb hangs from one of three wooden beams overhead. This *dawanöy* is typical of such rooms in having two adjacent sections, the *supa*, a twelve-by-fifteen foot platform raised twenty inches off the ground, and the *tapsa*, a six-by-fifteen foot floor made of brick. The *supa* here is built of solid earth, though many have planked-over storage spaces inside. The *supa* is covered first with mats of *kigiz*, a locally made thick wool felt; over these are laid carpets of soft wool or acrylic fiber, woven in Southern Xinjiang. Carpets are colorful, usually with red geometric or floral designs. In well-to-do homes such carpets are often hung on walls as well, but the adobe walls in Abidam's modest *dawanöy* are

6. Floor plans for Uighur suburban residences in the Yining area from the 1920s and 1930s (Golomb, *Die Bodenkultur*, 51) reproduce this schema in duplicate, i.e., one *dawan-saray* pair for men, one for women.

bare, except for a whitewash of lime. Even the single carpet on her *supa* is a bit too small, and the frayed *kigiz* protrudes along a fifteen inch swath on the *supa's* edge. *Kigiz* mats, although viewed as inferior to carpets, have their own allure, with paisley-like patterns dyed in purples and pinks onto a dark cocoa field. Although *kigiz* are ubiquitous in Uighur households, their designs—Uighurs say—are distinctive of Xinjiang's Kirgiz ethnic group, eponymous with the felt pads they traditionally made, and as such are a reminder of links of exchange that have connected nomad and peasant in the region for centuries.⁷

Despite its sparse decor, a wide range of daily activities is centered here. For much of the year, meals are prepared here, and eaten around the low table, with family and guests seated on *köpä*, thin cotton pads placed directly on the *supa*. Sleeping takes place on the *supa* in bedding—different *köpä*, sheets, and blankets—that is stowed away each day. In this room women mix dough in wooden troughs for the staple *nan* flatbread, mend and sew clothing, and rock their infants, strapped tightly into wooden cradles.

One trait of Uighur spatial arrangements is their reproduction of the concern over personal status that emerges everywhere in local social life. Virtually all things in Uighur life, from meals to musical instruments to merchant activities, are differentially valorized, and associate those who bestow, use, or partake in them with varying degrees of status. Space is no exception. The *tor* is the room's most important spot. Just as a person's lap is formed only when they sit, the *tor*, the seat of honor at a social gathering, is never a permanent spot in a room, but is created by the presence of those gathered. At social gatherings of all kinds in Yining, participants sit in as

7. It is likely that these mats have long been made by nomadic Kirgiz in Xinjiang and bartered for the grain of Uighur peasants. For example, a joke recorded in Yining in the 1870s (Pantusov, *Obraztsy*) describes an itinerant peddler who trades Uighur-grown grain for the nomad's wool products.

circular an arrangement as possible; when men gather, for example, they routinely monitor and comment on the symmetry of the group (more on this in chapter 3.1). Despite this apparent egalitarianism, all such circles contain an inherent asymmetry. That point in the *supa* taken as the *tör*—and “taken” is the right word, as men are keenly aware of the fierce if subtle status competitions waged to occupy the *tör*⁸—is usually the point most distant from the *supa*’s boundary with *tapsa*, an area known as the *läp*.⁹ The *läp*, the *supa*’s least prestigious part, is also conceptually rather than physically demarcated, although at Abidam’s the protruding and well-worn *kigiz* appropriately marks that space.

On the fired brick floor of the *tapsa*, a coal stove, hand-crafted of steel by a local *mäxqi* (‘stovesmith’), provides heat during the cold winters, and serves as cookstove then as well. Some *Zawut* residents recall when the *tapsa* was called the *mañda-oqakh*,¹⁰ a phrase they associate with a now disappearing *Taranqi* sub-ethnic identity and lifestyle.” Near the stove, a hand-made galvanized tin water pail and a tin ladle—bought directly from the same *mäxqi* at his market stall—are used to bring clean water in from a spigot in the courtyard. Against the end

8. This motif is found, for example, in the joke that appears on p. 387. This theme of status competition will be explored more thoroughly in sections three, four and five of the dissertation.

9. This feature is noted in Figure 1 using a dotted line (see p. 7).

10. I suspect this phrase conjoins names for two distinct places, that of stove—*oqakh* means ‘oven’ or ‘hearth’—and walkway—given that *mañ-* is the verbal root ‘to walk’.

11. The identification of Ili Valley Uighurs as a sub-ethnic group labeled *taranqi* dates to the arrival in the area of the first wave of Uighurs from oases in Southern Xinjiang, mainly Turpan, Aqsu and Uq-Turpan, c. 1755-1760. The significance of sub-ethnic identity groups in Xinjiang is discussed further in chapter 1.2.

wall of the *tapsa*, opposite to the door, is hung a thin cotton sheet, to keep out of sight a set of sturdy wooden shelves, filled with bowls and jars of rock salt, homemade hot-sauce, sweet milk curd, refined sugar, sheepfat, vegetable oil, and *dimidi* holy water. Just inside the doorway that leads out to the brick patio is the *päga*, the least prestigious part of the *tapsa*, where one leaves one's shoes before stepping up to the *supa*.¹²

The *saray*, on the other hand, though brimming with objects, is usually quite 'empty'. The *saray* here is level with the *tapsa*, though many have platforms just as *dawanöy* do. This room, like all *saray*, is mainly reserved for entertaining guests, though it is frequently used for storage as well. Here the walls are painted a bright sky blue, and the floor is carpeted. A painted iron bed frame holds a high stack of cotton blankets—on hand for overnight guests—each in a cover hand-sewn from Chinese manufactured satin brocades. Against one wall leans a second low wooden table, this one much larger, on which Abidam spreads for her guests a *dastihan* ('tablecloth') and its offerings of hospitality. A wooden desk, painted yellow, is covered with oilcloth, and holds two ceramic vases. One is full of prepared sheepfat, the other with scraps of papers—various state-issued booklets and documents. Beside these more than fifty small serving bowls in different patterns, smaller bowls for tea, larger ones for noodles, are on hand for large gatherings of kin and other guests. A framed glass panel painted with the Arabic phrase *bismillahir rähmanir rähim* ('In the name of God the most merciful') sits propped there as well, an indication of the piety discernible in much of Abidam's daily routine. Two blanket chests sit

12. According to *UXS*, the area I recorded as called *tapsa* in *Zawut* is, in some areas of Yining, instead called *päga*, and the zone near the door that I recorded as *päga*, is in turn called *paltuk*, a word none of my informants recognized. This discrepancy is but one indication of how temporal and spatial variation in Uighur cultural vocabularies remain poorly understood.

in one corner, covered in a lustrous golden metal, duplicate gifts received by her daughters at their marriages, and left here. The *saray*, like the *dawanöy*, has a large glass-paned window on the wall facing into the courtyard; its light allows Abidam to bring several large potted plants in during the cold seasons. In one corner stands a *qamadan*, a cylindrical tin vessel capable of holding half again as much as the 40 to 50 kg of flour the household consumes in a typical month.

When visitors exit the *dawanöy* through its thin plank door, a brick patio carries them alongside Abidam's two rooms toward a set of steps leading down to the courtyard, then continues unbroken past the two similar rooms of her son's household. The patio is wide enough for a dozen family members to sit in the shade of the overhanging trellised grapevine and enjoy a meal, but only on a sunny day, for unlike most patios in *Zawut*, this one has no roof. Looking out over the courtyard (approx. 60' x 30'), a visitor's eye might fall first—at least in summer—on the broad-leaved grapevines laden with berries, or on the two small garden plots, Abidam's and her son's, where bright marigolds surround pomegranate trees, tomato and pepper plants, and rows of corn. Apricot, apple and peach trees, prized additions in many *Zawut* households, are absent here. Around the courtyard, though, are a number of other sites that figure centrally in household members' daily routines.

With the warm weather of late spring, *Zawut* residents shift cooking arrangements to an outdoor pavilion (*qayhana*, literally 'tea-house'), permitting them to keep the indoors cool and enjoy Yining's pleasant climate. A *qayhana* consists of a stove, molded from the courtyard's own clayey earth and painted with lime, and an adjacent raised sitting platform, roughly eight-by-eight feet, built of either earth or wood. Whereas coal is the main cooking fuel during winter, wood and coal are both used in outdoor stoves. Although many *qayhana* were quite elaborate,

here a simple wooden platform, a worn-out *kigiz* mat, and a makeshift roof of poles and tar-paper provide Abidam's household with all the comfort needed.

In the spring, residents must mend any damage to their stoves from the heavy snow of the previous winter, or else build the stove anew if the *qayhana* is to be shifted to a different site in the courtyard. These tasks are easily accomplished, though labor alone is not enough to complete them: Both Abidam and her son's wife mended or rebuilt their stoves in the spring of 1996, and in each case the women called all household members then present—plus visitors and neighborhood children—to gather around the new stove and to laugh out loud for a minute or so while the stove was being lit for the first time.¹³ While noting their belief that this ensures the smooth passage of smoke through the stove and flue, I also wish to point out here an indication that the objects and subjects of the domestic space—the hearth and home cooking, kin and neighbors—imprint that space, through ritual action and daily practice alike, in ways that might easily be missed at first glance. We may then be less surprised to discover that *mähällä* residents describe foods prepared by women at the domestic hearth as 'strength giving' (*kh_uwwätlik*;

13. Interestingly, Jarring's informant (*Materials IV*, 23, n. 1) gives *kuluñ* as 'the place just in front of the hearth (*oqakh*). This word is not found in other sources, but it is perhaps cognate with *külüñ*, the imperative form of the verb *kül-*, to laugh. For Grenard (*Mission Scientifique II*, 248), Uighurs' metaphorical use of 'stove' (*oqakh*, cognate with *ot*, 'fire') to denote 'family' suggests "la continuité nécessaire du feu domestique" deriving from "la culte des ancêtres et du foyer." If a stove needing repair suggests the threat of a break in the family's continuity, this may be why all family members present are brought together to laugh as a display of the family's continued prosperity and happiness. An important essay on ritual laughter is that of Propp, "Ritual'nyj smex v fol'klore." For more on ritualized laughter in other contexts of Uighur life, see Chapter 3.1, text at n. 7.

küqlük), whereas foods made by men for sale in the marketplace, where this ritual laughter is not performed, are ‘weak’ (*box; küqsiz*) and ‘false’ (*yalghan*).¹⁴

So that the women of the household may bake the staple *nan*, a leavened wheat flatbread, many courtyards contain a four foot high flat-topped mound of earth built around a locally made clay lining to form a *tonur*, an open-topped beehive oven.¹⁵ Not all *Zawut* homes had *tonur*, however, and the joint use of *tonur* was common. Each household bakes *nan*—a full day affair—only once every fifteen to twenty-five days, so that a number of families might easily share a *tonur* without conflict. Neighbors who borrow a *tonur* simply make sure it will be unused on a given day, bring their own firewood for fuel, and then present the *tonur* owner with the gift of a whole *nan* when they are done. Baking *nan* is a laborious and difficult process often undertaken jointly by two or three women. Women left permanently or temporarily without nearby kin often seek help in baking from a willing neighbor, again in exchange for an additional amount of bread.

The shared outdoor latrine (*obärni*¹⁶) in Abidam’s courtyard stood in a far comer, a six-by-six foot wide pit covered with a floor of thick planks, into which a four by fifteen inch slot had

14. See, e.g., the joke about false food given below on p. 201. The distinction between women preparing food for the home and men doing so in the market is widespread in Xinjiang. Katanov recorded the following informant’s quote in 1892: “*Nan* that is to be sold is made by men, *nan* that people eat themselves is made by women” (*satidighan nan bolsa, är kixi khilidu, özi yäydurghan nan bolsa, hotun kixi khilidu*) (Menges, *Volkskundliche Texte* I,46).

15. For a detailed account of Uighur bread baking and food preparation in the Yining area c. 1920-1940, see Golomb, *Die Bodenkultur*, 91-105.

16. From **Rus.** уборная.

been cut to permit the passage of excreta. The pit itself, I was told, was deep enough to last two years or more, at which point it would be cleaned in winter, chopped into blocks and removed once it was frozen solid, though I never saw this done. A waist-high wall of unpainted adobe bricks provided some privacy, but the only protection from the elements came from the overhead branches of a gnarled tree, which some women in the family were convinced was periodically haunted by ghosts (*jin*). Most outdoor latrines in *Zawut* were roofed over—virtually no *mähällä* homes had indoor plumbing—and an old book, a child’s discarded elementary school text, would be left there to use as toilet paper. At Abidam’s, one arrived with whatever scrap of paper was at hand. Beyond the use of this facility, residents did their daily toilet—washing face and hands, brushing teeth, and ablutions before prayer—squatting on the brick patio and leaning out over the earth below, pouring water from a small tin pitcher of water left there for that purpose.

Next to the latrine stood a long makeshift shed, consisting of a tar paper roof tacked over an assortment of timbers and bricks. Yakupjan’kam was stockpiling these in expectation of building a whole new house on the site in the coming year or two, as soon as he resolved a dispute with his trading partner that had tied up much of the profit he earned during a year-long trading sojourn in Almaty, across the nearby border with Kazakhstan. Amidst these building materials, a space had been cleared to store coal, coarse chunks of bituminous cut by hand at a small mine less than a day’s donkey-cart ride away. In the opposite corner of the courtyard stood a low one-room structure, built for **Abidäm’s** ailing elder brother to live in when he joined her household in 1990. It had been rented out after his death in 1992 to a local kindergarten class, an arrangement that brought its own world of activity into the courtyard daily.

High walls of *kesäk* and rammed earth surrounded the courtyard. Walls of seven feet or more were the norm in Yining, where every home was thus protected. Exterior house walls were

often built along property lines, though, and did double duty by forming a part of this perimeter enclosure. Each home had a strong gate of iron or thick wooden timbers, which was locked tightly at night. These entryways presented formidable facades, though local burglars easily circumvented them by digging through adobe exterior walls straight into empty homes. On either side of the front gates of most homes, two small sitting ledges were often built, where residents could sit and watch their children play, or their neighbors come and go.

SAINING BOUNDARIES

Architecture is nothing if not: (1) *an extension of the body*, a modality that the body expresses to ~~try~~ to satisfy the need for totality; (2) *a metaphor of the body*, a modality that the body expresses to symbolize itself. A replica – and a double.

Donatella Mazzoleni¹⁷

The prominent entryways of *Zawut* homes are a useful reminder that not all critical elements of homes are themselves spaces. Boundaries between spaces, such as thresholds and entranceways, are marked as significant in ways ranging from the mundane to the extraordinary. If habitat and habitus are linked, as Mazzoleni suggests in the quote above, then we will not be surprised to discover, as we do below, that spatial boundaries in the home are associated with the catastrophic transgression of bodily boundaries that mark life cycle passages, such as the parturition of a child from the mother's womb, or the departure of breath from the body at the passage from this world to the next.

An errant child is quickly snapped at if he or she unthinkingly sits or steps directly on the

17. "City and the Imaginary," 289.

bosugha, the wooden threshold of the doorway leading from the patio into the *dawanöy*.¹⁸ In a number of bodily practices and protective rituals this threshold figures as a critical site. Toenail clippings, for example, were carefully buried under the *bosugha*, based on the belief, in Abidam's words, that

on judgment day they will grow into thick barrier of Bellthorn(*khoñghurakhtikän*), and keep the infidels, the *hitay* [ethnic Han Chinese] out of the house.”

Another link between bodies and *bosugha* was highlighted when Abidam's eleven year-old granddaughter was sick with the mumps. Abidam had the girl lie down with her head on the threshold, then simultaneously wiped her booted foot several times against the child's neck and sained verbally. Abidam stressed that this ritual—performed on three consecutive days—could be done effectively only by a woman who had given birth many times, in her own case, fourteen times. Perhaps it is because a woman marries into her husband's home (crossing over its threshold) and there acquires status by bearing children, that this birthing gives her a spiritual

18. Although my informants never stated the consequences of this action, Katanov recorded in 1892 several Uighur informants stating identical taboos against sitting or standing on the threshold (*bosugha*). In their accounts, such actions were said to result in: foot ailments; a growth on the buttocks; the loss of friendship between offender and homeowner; poor results from one's business activities. The phrase “Go stand on a threshold!” was also given as a generic insult. Menges (*Volkskundliche Texte* II, 74-79).

19. Hogberg (*Ettoch annat från Kinesiska Turkestan*, 48, as cited in Jarring, *Mutters of Ethnographic Interest*, 17) recorded circa 1907 that nails were buried under the threshold. According to his account, Satan appears on judgement day riding his ass *marr-dadjal*, of which every hair is the string of a musical instrument, and nails buried under the threshold grow into thorny hedges that block doorways to prevent people from running out and joining in the music.

power to use that threshold to heal as well.

Abidam described another more elaborate threshold ritual, one she was told many times had been performed upon her by her parents soon after her birth. The following paraphrase is based on a number of conversations about this practice in general.

At the birth of a child, a passageway is dug out *underneath the threshold* of the parents' house, and the newborn is passed through it, passed by the mother from inside the house to the father outside. The father then 'purchases' the child by handing back to the mother a small amount of wheat bran (*kepäk*), which symbolizes something of insignificant value." Next, the child is taken up to the roof and lowered down through a skylight (*tüñlük*²¹) from the father back to the mother.

The ritual action here not only suggests the symbolic devaluation of the child to evade the evil

20. Compare with Jarring, *Moen Collection*, 12, in which a small quantity of wheat bran symbolizes an item of insignificant value. Abdukerim Rahman *Uyghurfolklori* includes *kepäk* among the most ancient, specifically Uighur (ie., not borrowed from Arabic or Persian) names. Although he does not suggest the connection, it is likely that such a name comes from the practice of using bran to 'purchase' the child. This exact custom was practiced by Muslims in Bengal, as noted by Temple, in his 1883 *Dissertation on the Proper Names of Panjâbîs*. Citing an unnamed article by Dr. Rajendra Lâla Mitra, Temple states (p. 26): "Dr. Mitra also observed that in Bengal there was a birth custom...of giving away the *machhai* [i.e., a child born to a woman whose previous children have died] and buying it back at a low price varying from one to nine cowries...hence the names *Ekkauḍi* ('1 Cowry'), *Tinkauḍi* ('3 Cowries')..."

21. These were no longer common in *Zawut* residences in the 1990s. A photo of Yining c. 1922-1939 (Golomb, *Die Bodenkultur*, Plate 7), shows these feature on every home. They appear to be designed to allow for the exit of smoke from a fire or stove; perhaps their disappearance coincided with the use of fabricated sheet metal flue pipes.

eye or other maleficent influences, it also foreshadows the gendering of market exchange as a male sphere, in contrast to female domestic sphere, a division I revisit in the chapters of section four. Transforming the child into something purchased by the father can even be viewed as a particularly appropriate form of *couvade* for a community of merchants²² From these examples it should be clear that the domestic threshold is a site of rich symbolic meaning linked to many other aspects of social life, and that a more sustained analysis of the grammar and vocabulary of Uighur ritual action is highly desirable.²³

The insight of Mazzoleni quoted above, that bodies and architectural spaces are in some sense homologous, should not, I suggest, be taken as a reductive positing of links between spatial openings in the home and bodily orifices. Rather, by recognizing *a link between passages across architectural boundaries and the body's passage from one life cycle stage to another*, we can make sense of a number of ethnographic data. Just as the threshold plays a role in procuring longevity for a newborn and the recovery of health for an adolescent girl, the boundary between inside and outside the home articulates with conceptions of passage between life-cycle stages at the transition to death as well. If this boundary can be *undermined* successfully, the normal transition of the individual to their death can also be undermined, e.g., to secure the untimely death of that person. Malov, for instance, records (c.1913-1915) that among Uighurs in the Ili

22. In the case of **Abidäm**, she remembers her father as a prosperous dealer in livestock.

23. I note, for example, that Jarring finds three separate instances recorded by Swedish missionaries in 1907, 1917 and 1920, respectively (*Matters of Ethnographic Interest*, 7) in which a difficult labor is addressed by killing an animal *which itself must be stolen* and its blood *allowed to drip down through the skylight*. In these accounts we find again both themes of market exchange (here necessarily transgressed against) and of lowering through the roof.

Valley,

Prayers, called *yada*, are recited over a live frog, and after each prayer, the frog is pricked with a needle. After a few pricks, the frog dies, and is buried *under the gate* of the person on whom the spell is cast. The person soon grows thin, pale, and dies. Relatives have been known to find the remains of the frog when they searched *under the gate* of the deceased person's house.²⁴

By recognizing that this magic practice conjoins two passages, a passage outside the home with a passage to the 'other world' (*udunya*), we can also shed some light on the question of why a frog is used. As Molnar points out in his discussion of Frazer's notion of sympathetic magic, frogs are more traditionally associated world-wide with rain-charms, given their symbolic connection to water." In Northwestern Indian, for example, live frogs are raised into the air to draw forth water from the skies.²⁶ For Uighurs in the Ili Valley, a dead frog buried under the ground inverts this process, bringing a different kind of drought to an individual—the drying up of the liquid that symbolizes their life essence.²⁷

At a more quotidian level, household members regularly marked their passage out of the

24. My emphasis. This summary of Malov's findings, which he published in Russian only, is taken directly from Molnar, *Weather Magic*, 86.

25. Molnar, *Weather Magic*, 118-119; Frazer, "Roots of Magic," 292-295.

26. Frazer, "Roots of Magic," 293. This example was also noted by Molnar.

27. An analysis of the symbolic equivalence of 'liquids with living and drying with dying' is given by Dundes ("Wet and Dry"), who associates it with the evil-eye belief complex (which is found widely in Xinjiang). Menges (*Volkskundliche Texte I*, 117) notes, for example, that elderly persons in some parts of Xinjiang are called *khurutkha*, which is likely cognate *khurux*, 'to dry up, parch, wither', or *khurut-*, 'to cause to dry up'.

home and into the *mähällä* and market by saining themselves —reciting the protective phrase ‘*bismillahir rahmaner rähim*’—just at the moment they passed through the courtyard entrance. The special danger associated with transgressing the boundary between home (a space of reciprocal exchange among kin and guests) and the market (marked by agonistic haggling between strangers) is manifest in the following two examples. First, until a newborn undergoes a ritual protective bathing ceremony on its fortieth day, all visitors arriving from the marketplace must remain outside the *dawanöy* for several minutes, rather than enter directly. This practice was routinely followed by persons visiting Abidam’s home after her youngest daughter Sänämgül gave birth in January 1996, and during the forty day period Sänämgül rested at her mother’s house. To present the second example, I offer this field note passage.²⁸

January 1996. Abidam and I walked to ‘Fourstores’ today to buy flour. Each month she buys 30 kg of state-subsidized flour for around \$6.00, and buys more as needed from private merchants at \$8.00 for 25 kg.

The government people wouldn’t issue February’s flour a day early—whether Abidam didn’t know the date or the policy, I don’t know—but she bought the 25 kg anyway. I told her I’d go on ahead, and carried the flour home quickly, sat it in the house, then went back out to make sure Abidam was walking home safely on the icy roads. I bumped into Maynur (Abidam’s daughter, age 34), who was just passing by our little entrance alley.

“Did you go to get flour?” she asked.

“Yes, but just private, the government’s can’t be picked up until tomorrow.”

“Did you dump it in the *qamadan*?”

“Uh...yeah,” I responded, before really hearing her question, and then realizing that she had

28. In this and all subsequent field note passages, slight modifications have been made for grammar, and ellipses have been omitted whenever doing so did not substantially alter the meaning.

said ‘*qamadan*’, the tin flour bin. ‘Now why did she ask me that?’ I thought. Abidam walked up.

“So, where are you heading off to?” she craned her head at Maynur and squinted a disapproving eye. The younger woman, caught with her face powdered and made up, gave her explanations, and walked off arm-in-arm with a female friend. As soon as they were gone, Abidam turned to me and asked,

“Did you pour the flour in the *qamadan*?” When I told her I had not, she looked visibly relieved. I suddenly recalled having seen her saying ‘*bismillah rahmaner rehim*’ when dumping the flour, I guess that this is more than just a good idea. Both Maynur and Abidam had worried I would pour it without this blessing, perhaps endangering a month’s worth of food.

As can be seen here, the home is a space always concerned with safeguarding its blessing. This is something every child (or Anthropologists) learns if they are caught whistling inside the home, as they are quickly scolded for ‘driving away the home’s blessing (*bārikāt*).²⁹ For flour to safely be taken from the entangled domains of government and market place and situated into the home, such a transition itself must be protected. Saining over food is also a routine feature of domestic life, for example, each time noodles are dropped into boiling water. This is perhaps another reason why foods prepared at home by women—men and women alike agree—are ‘strength-giving’ (*khuwwätlik*)—whereas market foods, prepared by men without saining, are ‘empty’ (*box*).

FLEXIBLE HOMES, FLEXIBLE **HOUSEHOLDS**

Although the spatial ordering of homes in *Zawut* manifests a distinct cultural logic, the logic

29. Cf. the same belief in Menges, *Volkskundliche Texte* II, 78: “If one whistles in the house, demons take the house’s *bārikāt* away.”

of that spatial order includes dynamic as well as static elements. In Abidam's *öy*, for example, the continual reorganization of domestic space included seasonal reconfiguration, such as in the annual relocation of the cookstove outdoors, as noted above, as well as a spatial flexibility connected with the changing membership of the household, and the changing statuses of and relations between those members.

Spatial arrangements revealed the evolving boundaries of the social ties between family members, in particular between parents and children. In late autumn, for example, I discovered that Yakupjan'kam had ended his rental arrangement with the kindergarten when he spent a day building a wooden *supa* platform in the former schoolroom. He and his family then used the converted room as a winter time *dawanöy*, i.e., as their cooking and eating space, and as a sleeping space for him, his wife, and the younger of their four children. This smaller room was easier and less costly to heat, and might have afforded an occasional private moment for Yakupjan'kam and his wife, but a more obvious motivation was to permit Yakupjan'kam to get away from his eldest son, **Mähmud** (age **18**), who continued to sleep in the regular *dawanöy*. A sharp animosity between father and son grew throughout my stay—the two virtually never ate in each other's presence, for example—which ended ultimately in a fist- and knife-fight between them. Trouble had been brewing “ever since **Mähmud**'s nose had swollen up,” Abidam explained, referring to the period after puberty when many parents see their children as becoming hard to handle.³⁰

Later that year, in the spring, I returned from a three week trip to find Abidam's *qayhana* dismantled completely, and her garden plot from the previous year bricked over. Abidam had been even more surprised than I to discover these changes, which her son had made while she

30. Note the symbolic displacement of the sexually mature genitalia to a ‘swelling nose’

had gone to Ürümqi, a fifteen hour bus ride away, with her adult daughter Anisä, who sought medical treatment. Yakupjan'kam had decided to continue using his winter *dawanöy* for sleeping throughout the summer, and felt that his mother's longtime *qayhana*, which stood right between that building and his own *qayhana*, would be in the way; so he simply destroyed it. As for the bricked-over garden space, he used it all spring and summer as a convenient spot to wash his motorcycle, at least a weekly event, since men in the *mähällä* liked to keep their machines clean.

Reorganizations such as these highlight the difficulties multiple households faced when sharing one courtyard. Such multi-household courtyards were common, indeed the norm, in *Zawut*, and judging from the street-comer gossip, most households had their share of ambient antagonisms such as those described here.

Just as spatial organization was flexible, so too was household composition. When I arrived in August 1995, Abidäm Nasreddin, in her late seventies, still maintained a separate hearth and an independent household, home to a changing cast of relatives. On my arrival, she was living with a boisterous ten month-old grandson Abdüxükür, first-born son of her youngest child Sänämgül (age 27). Abidäm had been raising the boy for six months, ever since Sänämgül tipped a basin of boiling water onto herself, and needed to recover from a bad scalding.³¹ Sänämgül, like most of Abidäm's other children, lived just a few minutes walk away, and she stopped in daily for a meal or a visit to see her son. Another resident was sad-faced Aisajan (age 8), considered by all to be an orphan (*yetim*). When Abidäm's elder brother was in his seventies,

31. Abidäm provided this childcare largely without recompense, a fact she occasionally grumbled about, though the child's parents would occasionally give Abidäm small amounts of cash to help cover expenses.

he had taken as his eighth wife—he needed someone to clean and cook for him—a twenty-four year old woman from Aqsu, a town in Southern Xinjiang. The young bride soon bore a child, and when Abidäm's brother took ill soon after, she ran away, abandoning the boy to Abidäm's care. Though Abidäm did not view Aisajan as kin—no one in the family did—she had raised him on her own since then, keeping him fed and clothed on what little money she had. My arrival in July 1995 brought the household count to four. In January 1996, Sänämgül delivered her second child, daughter Tāwsiyā, and for the next six months mother and child lived primarily in our home.

The arrival of new children was not the only reason for changing household composition. In the early 1990s, Abidäm had also welcomed back into her home her daughter Maynur, then in her late twenties, who stayed for two years, in between divorcing her first husband and then marrying the same man. Maynur and her husband still fought frequently, and she returned to stay for days or weeks at her mother's house, an addition of three people, since her daughters (ages 9 and 12) were sure to be around much of that time.

Members of the household of Abidäm's son Yakupjan'kam, like the members of Abidäm's household, will reappear throughout the following chapters, so I introduce them here by name. Yakupjan'kam himself, age 43; his wife Gülzirä, age 40; their four children, girls Mahirä (age 9) and Halidäm (age 16), and boys Ilyar (age 6) and Mähmud (age 18).

CHANGING LIFESTYLES: MOVING UP AND MOVING OUT

For the residents of *Zawut* and adjacent *mähällä*, a number of far more permanent changes in the spatial configuration of domestic life were also underway. These changes can be summarized as 'moving up', and 'moving out'. By 'moving up' I refer to the shift towards

constructing new two or three story private residences in the *mähällä*, where single story residences have long been the norm. By ‘moving out’ I refer to the situation of those few Uighur families for whom employment at a state work-unit leads to their moving from suburban private dwellings into concrete high-rise apartment buildings (*lupañ*, from Ch. 楼房 *loufang*) in the paved city center.³²

MOVING UP

Nowadays these merchants are earning so much money that they are not only putting up fancy houses in this world, but they are thinking ‘In the next world I want to do the same thing,’ and they have started building their graves to be just as fancy.

One merchant lays out **fifty** thousand *koy* to have a fancy mausoleum built for himself. He gets this master-bricklayer to come, the bricklayer was a master at speaking³³ as well, and so he brings the guy over to the spot, and gets all the materials brought over. The bricklayer works for about a month, then the merchant drives up in his big [Volkswagen] Santana, and asks,

“Master, is it all completed?”

“Nothing is missing, everything is all completed. The only thing missing is you.”

Muhtar Hesam, Yining ‘jokester’ (age 18), private recording

As more and more *mähällä* families prospered from trading in the private markets of Xinjiang and Central Asia in the 1990s, the building of new houses in Yining became common.

32. The impact of apartment buildings being newly built in the *mähällä* is discussed in the following chapter.

33. *Gäptä usta*, literally ‘a master at speech’, implying skill in verbal interactions.

And among people building new houses, as the joke above suggests, putting up highly ornamented two or three story homes became the norm. At times it seemed as if every lane in the *mähällä* had one or two households busy demolishing their single-story rammed-earth wall homes and building two story brick houses. Indeed, the house Muhtar sat in as he told the above joke had recently been completely rebuilt as an elaborate two story dwelling, with a spectacularly painted wooden balcony adorned with decorative woodcarvings. In the joke, the wise-cracking bricklayer takes the wealthy trader's own assumption, that the grave's completion is a desired thing, and turns it against him, by sneaking in the suggestion that the rich man's death itself is desirable.

Where a casual visitor might see these bright facades as signs of material prosperity alone, local residents saw one thing more; large houses also signaled a shift in residential patterns. Land was becoming increasingly scarce, residents said, a change they attributed to Han migrants coming to Xinjiang from elsewhere in China. Where once brothers would marry and establish independent residences away from their parents' *öy*, usually in the same or adjacent *mähällä*, now three and even four brothers had begun to accept the need to live with their families in a single courtyard.

Han labor crews were building most of these new Uighur homes. **Abidäm's** son-in-law **Ablimit Hajim**, for example, who was called **Haj'kam** for short, was having a large new house constructed in the spring of 1996, in preparation for the eventual marriages of his four sons. Through a Han middleman, he had arranged for a crew of eighteen men and women from Sichuan to build his new home for around 50,000 *yuan* [\$6,250]. Though Uighurs' reliance on Han homebuilders was not new, building practices themselves were changing, due to market

pressures.³⁴ Haj'kam, for example, opted for a roof made of pre-fabricated cement slabs, instead of the traditional wood and mat construction, when he learned that choosing the former would save him \$40.00.

Given the tensions revealed in the joke, which suggest some popular resentment of those wealthy merchants able to build such fancy new homes, it is not surprising that Haj'kam disavowed any interest in building a 'fancy' home. In fact, he went out of his way to present himself as building a plain house. Perhaps this was in part because he is a shopkeeper selling everyday items to his neighbors from a converted room in his house, as he may not wish appear to be earning too much from that business, or to be trying to elevate himself over his customers. "He has to ask the neighbors about every little detail," his wife Anisā griped to her mother one morning. "Even if we want to hang curtains in front of the windows, we have to ask every one of them what they think. He drives me crazy!"

This posture of having wealth but not wishing to attract others' attention to the fact is quite the opposite of many of Yining's marketplace traders, for whom fostering an appearance of wealth has become a critical element in their success. Haj'kam is also rumored to have substantial wealth lent out in support of the business ventures of other men, for which he collects interest of some kind. This is a common enough practice, but one still fairly stigmatizing under Islamic custom, especially for this veteran of the pilgrimage to Mecca, who prays five times a day rather than just once, as most men did. His never-ceasing efforts to impress his poverty on friends and neighbors are, Abidām suggests behind his back, 'ugly' (*suit*). In chapter 5.1, I will

34. Both Lattimore, writing in 1933 (*Chinese Turkistan*, 193), and Mannerheim (*Across Asia*), commenting on his visit to Xinjiang between 1906 and 1908, comment that Uighurs manifestly derived a sense of personal status from hiring Chinese to perform manual labor for them.

discuss further these tensions between religiosity and men's concerns to achieve status in the community. Another ongoing concern among *Zawut* residents is how the state increasingly seeks to collect new taxes and fees, including permit fees from people building new houses. Haj'kam knows that building inspectors of some kind have come several times to his house to speak with him, but each time he has slipped away out a back entrance, having no better strategy to avoid paying at his disposal.

After completing the house, Haj'kam will throw a *nāzir*, a large party for friends, family, and neighbors. This will be an occasion for guests to immediately reciprocate by presenting gifts.

Haj'kam looks forward to this, commenting in his gravelly and deadpan voice,

“When we have a *nāzir* in October, it won't be chaotic (*khalaymikan*). We won't be getting all sorts of things we don't need, like carpets.” He just wants cash. “I'm in debt for five thousand *yuan*,” he complains.

Most of the adobe and brick homes that stood in the *māhällä* when I visited in 1992 were indistinguishable in design and construction from Uighur residences in the farming villages surrounding Yining. Although many *māhällä* residents had been suburban dwellers, merchants and craftsmen, for generations, kin ties into surrounding villages remained strong, and domestic life in suburban and rural Uighur homes was in many ways quite similar. Newly built homes in Yining's suburban communities might have appeared different on the outside, but inside they retained the division between *dawanöy* and *saray* spaces. Their courtyards too provided the same facilities as before, cooking and baking went on much the same, and extended families sharing a courtyard is not a new practice. It was only when Uighur families moved out of the *māhällä* and into apartment buildings in the city, or when apartment buildings were built in the *māhällä*, and displaced residents (as sometimes happened) were moved into units in those

buildings, that the spatial bases of *Zawut* domestic life changed dramatically.

MOVING OUT

For the holidays, we were going to beat the *kigiz* in our apartment clean, but there was no one at home except me and my dad. So my dad went to the *Hänzu bazar* [a local market], and got four or five day-laborers to come. Well, they came, and we got the rugs outside, and they were beating away, ‘*gupgup gup*’. Tons of dirt was coming out, and one of them up and says,

“Hey Hesam’ka, this one must be from the *dawan!*”

Muhtar Hesam, Yining ‘jokester’ (age 18), private recording

For a small number of *mähällä* residents, full-time positions in state work-units brought the opportunity to reside in an apartment building. For most, this came with success in the state educational system, or as in the case of Muhtar (*raconteur* of the above joke), with the special status his father Hesam’kam enjoyed as a nationally known performer in a state performance troupe. The floor plans of these apartments were based on layouts designed and made standard throughout China by its ethnic Han majority, and did not accord with the patterns of traditional Uighur social life. For example, there was no *dawan* room with its raised *supa* platform. In all cases in which I visited Uighurs living in such apartments, rooms were filled with manufactured furniture, couches and chairs, considered in China to be ‘western’. In the joke given above, the day-laborer teases Hesam that although he lives in a new apartment, supposedly a more “modern” living arrangement, his rug is still as dirty as it would be even if he lived in a traditional house. The joke reveals local tensions about not only social stratification, but also changing patterns of social interaction, and how architecture disrupts residents’ capacity to

satisfy expectations about reciprocal visitation. Nor do apartment buildings provide facilities that would allow residents to bake *nan*, a staple and symbolically important food item not available in local markets.³⁵

PAVED STREETS AND OTHER CHANGES IN MĀHĀLLĀ SPACE

The impact of 1990s market success on *māhällä* was not limited to the building of new private residences. Heavy rains and melting snow regularly turned the lanes of *Zawut* to mud, and finely dressed residents setting off to market or on household visits were often seen picking their way carefully around deep ruts and immense puddles. Thus, it is not surprising that one noticeable change was much community-based interest in paving *māhällä* lanes. Yining's paved center was at the same time expanding outwards incrementally, it is true, eating away at the *māhällä* suburbs under Han-Party-state supervision, bringing an unwelcome tide of Han families, Han businesses and Han architecture in its wake. But even further inside the *māhällä* newly paved sections of macadam stood alone, like islands, connecting to dirt lanes at either end. These paved sections, reputedly financed by the wealthy Uighur merchants who lived adjacent to them, gradually obscured the distinction between paved city thoroughfares and the dirt or gravel lanes of the *māhällä*. While the benefits of such changes were plain to local residents, such improvements also signaled to local residents an increase in social stratification, an effect of the economic success of prosperous traders.

Consider, for example, the following joke, recorded in Yining's *māhällä* and circulated widely in local markets on a cassette of songs and jokes.

35. *Nan* sold in markets (*bazar nan*) is so different in taste and texture from home made *nan* (*öy nan*) that *māhällä* residents rightfully do not consider them to be commensurate in any way.

There's a guy who's started going with a new girlfriend, and so he goes to her *māhällä*.

Now, her *māhällä*, it is full of dogs, so he goes there, and a dog runs right up and starts chasing him. It's chasing him, and he's so scared that he falls down to the ground and starts grabbing for rocks. But the girl's *māhällä*, it has paved streets. He's grabbing all around, but his hands are coming up empty. He keeps grabbing, and still nothing, finally he gets angry, and says,

"I've never seen this kind of a girlfriend, one that ties up all the rocks and lets the dogs out!"

This narrative nicely expresses the class tension I allude to, here embedded in a story of courtship. Note how, in his final line, Muhtar uses the word 'girlfriend' as a metonym for the entire neighborhood, she is her neighborhood, a testament to the *māhällä*'s status as a critical unit of social identity. The young man visits her and sees that she lives in much a fancier neighborhood than he does; his humiliation is expressed in the attack of the dogs. He is afraid of the dogs, but cannot fight them off, deprived of his weapons, his power to fight back, by the paving, which represents the affluence and social position of her family. The punch line 'cracks' so well due to the perfect symmetry of its reversal—instead of tying up the dogs and leaving the rocks strewn about, here the rocks are fixed in place and the dogs are left out. In other words, the joke 'cracks' through its critique of the material and social changes associated with modernization and class differentiation.

To fully understand the issues raised in this joke, however, requires that we look more deeply at the affective importance of the *māhällä* as a unit of social identity in Yining. For this, I turn now to the next chapter, on the spatial and social organization of the *māhällä* suburban ring as a whole.

Chapter 1.2. Yining's *mähällä* as suburban periphery

Nowadays, all of you know, the traffic cops are stopping donkey carts, they won't let them pass and enter the city.

One day, what do I see, but some guy coming down the road from *Dön mähällä* driving a donkey cart. Right when he is about to come to the city police [who were posted every day at the boundary between *mähällä* dirt lane and city street], he unhitches the donkey, loads it into the cart, and starts pulling it himself!

Hesam'kam, Yining comedian

Just as the organization of home and courtyard reflect and reproduce many key features of Uighur social life, so too do the larger spaces of the *mähällä* embody and express a number of revealing features about Yining society. The message of the above joke—in my reading, that the state is 'making asses' out of Uighurs, or, to put it more generally, that 'natural' hierarchies of power are being inverted in the name of modernization—prompts us to consider more deeply Uighurs' feelings for the rapidly changing *mähällä*. In this chapter, I first describe some of the elements that anchor *mähällä* as social spaces. Next, I offer an analysis of *mähällä* names, in which I consider further the social bases for *mähällä* formation. Next, I discuss how diverse kinds of associational groupings and situational gatherings add structure to social life, binding *mähällä* into bases for Uighurs' segmentary spatial identity. Then I discuss the reproduction of

pan-*mähällä* identity through the institution of a popular local radio station.

ZAWUT MÄHÄLLÄ

To reach *Zawut* (lit. ‘factory’) *mähällä* from Yining’s central marketplaces, Abidäm and her neighbors would pass beyond the point where the city’s paved roads ended, and walk—for bus service ended there as well—another several hundred meters, along a winding, poplar-lined dirt road. The large manufacturing compound for which *Zawut* was named stood just across from where the twisted lane leading to Abidäm’s courtyard veered away from a large dirt road, which continued on towards the wide chasm of the Ili River several kilometers away. By the mid-1990s, the factory’s only sites of daily activity were its small health clinic, open to the community at large, and a booth where guards kept watch over its usually locked gate. In the evenings, men drifted out of the adjacent pool hall, or wandered over after an evening sitting around a pile of summer melons for sale to passers-by, and sat in the guardhouse smoking hashish, out of the sight of their neighbors, and laughing late into the night. Every Sunday morning, however, the gates were thrown open, and the factory’s large empty fields would show off a fresh new crop of battered television sets and immaculately washed motorcycles, all of them second-hand goods, brought by their owners to be sold through smooth-talking marketplace middlemen to other *mähällä* residents.’

Most roads in the *mähällä* are of dirt or gravel, and run from eight to fifteen feet wide. Virtually all are lined with rows of poplars on either side, their trunks whitewashed from the ground up to a level of four to eight feet. Behind the rows of trees flow small streams on either side, then the equivalent of sidewalks—raised dirt trails where residents can walk when the roads

1. In chapter 4.1 we will return to take a closer look at trading practices in such markets.

are muddy. In addition to these roads, narrow and twisted paths also weave their way through the *mähällä*. On either side of lanes and paths alike, the high walls surrounding individual courtyards rise abruptly, adobe and brick walls washed in white lime, or painted a rich sky blue. In poorer neighborhoods, homes are simply a bit smaller, a bit more densely packed, and outer courtyard walls facing the streets are left a dull, unpainted brown.

Like most of Yining's *mähällä*, *Zawut* had a number of new homes being built, fewer perhaps than the more prosperous *mähällä* immediately adjacent to it, but as many or more than most. Like most *mähällä* it had several small shops selling an assortment of daily-use items and everyday foodstuffs, convenient for residents who needed an item or two on short notice. Two health clinics operated in *Zawut* when I arrived, staffed by Uighur or Uighur-speaking Han nurses and doctors. In the spring of 1996, *Zawut* attracted a third clinic, set up by a Han doctor who rented a small room to ply his trade. This too was a trend throughout Yining—in the *mähällä* and in nearby villages Han doctors moonlighting from state hospitals set up private clinics and charged inflated prices for basic medicines.

In more prosperous *mähällä*, trash service was regular, whereas in poorer *mähällä* ever-present piles of trash suggested services were less comprehensive. As with other *mähällä*, electricity went out frequently in *Zawut*, much more so than in the Han-dominated city center, where street wiring and transformers were relatively well maintained. *Mähällä* residents were largely responsible for maintaining the single wires that ran into their homes themselves, and short circuits due to rain or snow were the norm, rather than the exception.

If we compare *Zawut* to other nearby *mähällä*, certain differences do arise. First, *Zawut* had no mosques. Mosques provide organizational centers for a number of associational networks,

and reinforce the collective identity of the congregation (*khowm*).² Men in *Zawut* invariably prayed at a large nearby mosque once a week, on Fridays, as did virtually all Uighur men in Yining. In many *mähällä*, however, smaller daily-use mosques were also common. Wealthy merchants returning from the *haj* financed the construction of these small mosques, an action that effectively promoted the practice of five daily prayers. A close relationship existed between the *mähällä* and the parish, or more properly, the site of co-residence of the *khöwm*, the congregation. While there was no formal relationship between *mähällä* in Yining and the presence of mosques, mosques anchored the neighborhoods spatially, as they were a central focus of daily and weekly activity. For more senior members of the community, they were the central focus among all others; for younger men, pool halls and small rooms with mahjong tables were perhaps a more important site of activity.

Zawut also lacked the steam baths (*parmonqa*) that *mähällä* residents visited on a regular basis, usually once or twice a week. Several nearby *parmonqa* served their needs, however, providing users with private suites (a changing room, a washing room and a steam-sauna room) for a fee of \$.25-\$.50 per hour. Although bathhouses were filled with men and women most days of the week, business on Friday mornings was especially brisk, as men arrived to wash thoroughly before going to mosque. Men joked that Thursdays were the most frequent day for sexual activity between married couples, since the man would already be expecting to perform a full ablution (necessary after sexual contact) the next morning before praying at mosque.

Although most *mähällä* residents were Uighur, that situation was changing as Yining's Han population grew through in-migration. A large six story brick building was under construction on the northern edge of *Zawut*, a dormitory to house the Han workers of a new pharmaceutical

2. *Mähällä* residents used *khowm* in this sense, however most dictionaries render the term as 'clan'.

factory. Hanging from a construction crane tower, a huge banner read in Chinese characters “Great One Hundred Year Plan,” an ambiguous though none too subtle reminder that recent Han in-migrants had come to stay. *Mähällä* residents spoke bitterly about such changes, but did so without any references to legal institutions of property rights, suggesting that they understood little about their specific rights to land ownership under Chinese law. Instead, from the perspective of the *mähällä*, legal institutions were just another instrument used by the state to strip residents of access to goods they had long enjoyed. But it would be incorrect to suggest that market forces alone brought new buildings to so many plots of land in Uighur neighborhoods, as the following incident demonstrates.

On the west edge of Yining, an intended tourist attraction was recently installed by the local government in a mainly Uighur *mähällä*. The large, gated site contained a statue in honor of Lin Zexu, a famous Han statesman who resided in the area in the nineteenth century, after being exiled by the Qing emperor. Soon after visiting the site, I had occasion to be a guest at several nearby homes, whose residents recalled angrily how Uighur landowners had been stripped of their land when the monument was built. This was an unintended but quite fitting tribute to Lin, considering that he was put in charge of Han colonization efforts in the area in 1844.³ On the other hand, it is ironic that a statue of Lin, a Han national hero remembered for standing up to the British during the Opium Wars, now looks out over communities of Uighurs, for whom heroin addiction is a major source of social problems, and who widely blame the Han for permitting the illicit trafficking of what they see as a genocidal poison.

3. Fletcher, “Heyday,” 386.

Like my neighbors, I was always proud to tell people I was from *Zawut*. Not because it was full of decent, reputable people, which it was, but because I could share their sense of belonging to a specific place, to a specific group of people. Other *mähällä*, of course, were no less meaningful for the people who lived in them. When men from Yining made each other's acquaintance in Beijing or Ürümqi, the first question they invariably asked each other was which *mähällä* they were from. According to one Uighur phrase, one has a blood tie with one's *mähällä* directly, it is 'the *mähällä* where one's umbilical cord blood has been spilt' (*kindik kheni tökülgän mähällä*). Another indication of the *mähällä*'s significance as a social unit is found in a local belief regarding the practice of performing male circumcision, the *sünnät toy*. According to a version of that belief provided by Abidäm, if the ceremony is performed when the child is six, the religious merit (*sawap*) goes to the child's mother. If the ceremony is done at age seven, the merit goes to the child's father. If at age eight, all merit goes to the *mähällä*. If we accept that here 'mother' and 'father' stand not so much as individuals but as representing entire kin lines, then *mähällä* is explicitly the next level of social identity above the kin group.

It should be noted, however, that the importance of the *mähällä* as a unit of social identity uniform in other population centers in Xinjiang is likely to vary considerably due to factors which might include social structure and absolute population size. One indication of this is the following: In the liner notes of more than four hundred cassette tapes of Uighur popular and folk music produced throughout Xinjiang, biographies of artists from Yining uniformly mentioned their *mähällä* affiliation, whereas biographies of musicians from other oases did so only rarely. This does not demonstrate that *mähällä* are unimportant in other oases, of course. On the contrary, my own informal interviews with residents of other oases suggest that they did exist

and matter to Uighurs throughout Xinjiang.

Despite the solidarity demonstrated between neighbors in the *mähällä*, there are also important social differences within the *mähällä*, as the following field note passage suggests.

May 1996. Tonight Maynur finished the dishes, and went out up to the big street. Abidäm was upset about it. ~~Our~~ neighbor on the corner stepped out of her doorway in the dark, and Abidäm asked her,

“Is Maynur at your place?”

“No,” she replied. Abidäm turned to me,

“I knew it, she’s out in the street,” she said, referring to the *mähällä*’s main lane. “If she sits out there, I get all worried inside.”

“Why?”

“Well now, it’s ugly, isn’t it? There are all sorts of people walking by! My but the women in this neighborhood just love to sit out on that street,” she said scowling.

“Aren’t they all one *mähällä* of people,” I asked, just to press her. She raised her hand, clenched into a fist, then slowly uncurled her fingers.

“Five fingers, they’re all different (*bäx khol ohximaydu*).” There are all kinds of people in a *mähällä*.

YINING BASIC LEVEL

Throughout China the Party-state maintains a presence in the everyday life of its citizenry through the activities of local Residential Street Committees. These governmental organizations, technically categorized as ‘mass organizations’, were also present in Yining’s *mähällä*. From local residents’ point of view, however, these committees were known mainly by the periodic

visits made by the older Uighur women on their staffs. **Abidäm** herself had worked at a nearby committee for several years, after being asked to serve by other older women on the staff. Agents of these *asasiy khatlima* (literally ‘basic level [organs]’), as they were called by residents, wandered into **Abidäm**’s home only once every few months. On one occasion, they came by during a campaign to hand out doses of polio vaccine. Several months later, they came to deliver a small paper packet. After they left, **Abidäm** grumbled about having been obliged to buy \$.20 of rat poison for an ongoing campaign I had seen propagandized in a chalk drawing on a public blackboard as the “Patriotic Rat Extermination Campaign.” A Uighur man from the street-level police station also came by periodically to collect small (though usually unexplained) service fees of \$.40 to \$.60 per visit.

Residential Street Committees have been used by foreign scholars in China as research bases within host communities, since they can facilitate access to local knowledge and archived information. In my case, I chose to avoid contact with these government offices. First, I had other channels of access to local communities. Second, I did not wish to be seen as investigating any aspect of the government control apparatus. I could easily have pursued such a line of inquiry, and security organs could, with equal ease, have forced me to vacate **Abidäm**’s home. I did determine, however, that Yining’s basic level, under the supervision of the Municipal People’s Government, is divided into first and second municipal regions (*biringirayon* and *ikkinqi rayon*), each of which has three intermediate level offices (*banshichu*). The sub-districts of region 1 were *härämbagh*, *sayä boyida*,⁴ and *do6 mähällä*. Sub-districts for region 2 were *go6 köwrük*, *khazanqi*, and *kökqilik*.⁵

4. This is more likely *say boyida*, literally ‘alongside the dry river bank’

5. Based on informal interviews with a woman who worked at a municipal office overseeing street

A TAXONOMIC SURVEY OF YINING'S MÄHÄLLÄ

During my stay, I mapped out the rough boundaries of several dozen of Yining's *mähällä*. Each is, for its inhabitants, a basic category of collective identification. No available maps or scholarly works in Uighur or Chinese acknowledge these boundaries, or even document the names of *mähällä*, despite the fact that for local Uighurs they constitute a primary cultural categorization of both physical and social space.

Before I turn to the names themselves, one syntactical feature of *mähällä* naming requires a brief explanation. In local usage, a good deal of flexibility existed regarding whether or not the word *mähällä* was attached to the proper name—let us for a moment call it *x*—of a given neighborhood. That is to say, some neighborhoods were always spoken of as “*x mähällä*” and others always as just “*x*”, though for most *mähällä*, both forms were used interchangeably. I suspect these variations do not correlate with any semantic features of *mähällä* names, but rather, at least in part, with the syllable count of *x*. Names of one syllable were always combined with the word “*mähällä*,” for names of two syllables this was done less often, three syllables sometimes, four rarely or never. In this pattern I detect a tendency to limit total syllable count to six. In any event, as a consequence of this variability, affixation or omission of the word ‘*mähällä*’ in the names given in the following pages should not be taken to reflect anything other than my personal general impression of the more common usage.⁶

committees, and on personal observations of street committee offices located throughout the *mähällä*, it appears that basic level units in Yining are nominally organized along *mähällä* boundaries, most likely as those boundaries stood in the early 1950s. Basic level documents would thus be an ideal source of information on *mähällä* if they become available to researchers.

6. References to proper *mähällä* names in the dissertation (e.g., *Zawut*) are capitalized for the

A review of some these names highlights the inherent dynamism of local communities and community identities: *Mähällä* emerge, grow, decline, are displaced, and disappear, all under the influence of myriad forces, including those of demographic flux, socio-economic stratification and topographic variation. In the final analysis, *mähällä* boundaries are social boundaries, and a review of *mähällä* names also reveals some of the social and economic bases for the organization of local communities, demonstrating that *mähällä* are shaped continually by local individuals, social groups, and events.

Many *mähällä* take their names from a craft or trade group. Many names for such trades combine the name of a product, for example, *naghra* ('kettle-drum'), with the agentive suffix *-qi* ('one who'). The resulting compound is usually an ambiguous one; in this example, *naghraqi* might refer equally to one who make drums, one who sells them, or one who performed with them—hence my temptation to translate freely, with something like 'drum-ist'. When providing *mähällä* histories, informants were often unable (or reluctant) to distinguish in such cases between communities of makers versus sellers. In the contemporary local marketing of traditional handicrafts, some craftsmen produce for their own retail operations only, some sell to merchants who engage strictly in retailing and wholesaling, and some sell to both. The use of the ambiguous suffix *-qi* is fitting then, in that it captures nicely this blending of roles.' *Mähällä* whose names derive from crafts include *namatmän* ('felt making') *mähällä*, where resided makers of a thick kind of felt,⁸ *könqi* ('leather-worker') *mähällä*, *khazanqi* ('cauldron-ist'),

reader's convenience. As Uighur orthography does not distinguish capitals, I have chosen not to use them in this section.

7. For more on marketing relations, see Section 4.

8. *UED* defines *nāmät* as a **type** of thick felt.

naghraqi ('kettle-drum-ist') *mähällä*, *töpqi mähällä*, from a kind of hat made there: and *takhqilikh* ('farrier').¹⁰

Some *mähällä* are named after wealthy or prominent individuals. *Ghapaway koqa* (*koqa* = street) is named after 'Ghapar the *buy*', i.e., Ghapar the rich man. *Tajiway mähällä*, whose residents, Uighurs said, were mainly ethnic Uzbek, is named after a rich man who lived there, and derives from *Taji* {?} + *buy*. *Kharaway* derives either from *khara* ('black') + *buy* ('rich man'), in which case *khara* is undoubtedly a nickname, given its derogatory implications, or more likely, from '*khari*' (the common honorific 'one who recites the Quran') + *buy*.

Other *mähällä* are named after specific sites, which in many cases may have long since ceased to exist. *Orda* ('palace') *mähällä* derives its name from the one-time residence of the *hakim bug*, a local official in the period of Qing rule in the area (c. 1756-1911). *Consul* is an area in the city center named for the Russian consulate established there after a commercial treaty in 1851. This wooded area, with many buildings, now operates as a state-run hotel. *Moyka mähällä*, according to informants, also takes its name from a Russian word, that for 'felt-factory', though I locate only *мойка*, 'washing', perhaps referring to a part of the felting process." *Pun zawut* ('plank factory') is a *mähällä* near the riverside. *Töt dukan* ('four stores') takes its name from its central crossroads with stores at each corner; *üq dukan* ('three stores') is

9. Informants were less certain about this item.

10. Though *takhqi* means literally farrier, i.e., "one who shoes horses," in 1990s Yining the term *takhqi* referred to blacksmiths generally; their ranks at that time seemed to not be differentiated between those who shod and those who forged farm implements and other iron tools, such as coal-tongs. Blacksmiths are also often called *tömürqi*, literally 'ironsmith'.

11. ORD, 241.

likewise evident. *Terak mazar* ('poplar shrine') takes its name from an actual *mazar*, a saint shrine, in the vicinity.

Some *mähällä* names relate to terrain and topographic features. Indeed, Uighur place names throughout Xinjiang are typically based on named terrain features. Such terrain features, however, should not be considered irreducibly 'natural'. Landscapes in Xinjiang have been transformed by human activity for millennia, and terrain features in the immediate Yining area are no exception." One sub-section of *moyka mähällä*, for example, was known widely as *azgal*, meaning 'hollow', in the sense of a slight depression or ravine. That hollow, noticeably lower than surrounding neighborhoods, was created by extensive brick-making facilities that operated there long ago. Or consider *arqa östän* ('middle [or forked] canal') *mähällä*. The *östän* in question, like the many such canals that flowed through and around Yining, was dug under Qing rule by *corvée* labor provided by Uighur peasants and possibly urbanites as well.¹² One *mähällä* in which the bed of a canal spread out widely into a shallow creek, was known as *yeyikh su* ('spreading water'), or in one variant *yeyiñkha su*. Other neighborhoods, such as *jigdälik* ('Oleaster orchard') and *topteräk mähällä* ('poplar grove'), took their names from important local cultigens. Several prominent hillocks in the suburban fringe were named as *mähällä*, including *dot?* ('hill') *mähällä*, *kharadön* ('black hill') *mähällä*, and *topadön*. The latter may derive from *topa* ('soil') + *dön* ('hill'), or perhaps from *töpä* ('upper part') + *dön* ('hill'). In reviewing terrain features in *mähällä* names, I note also that cultural categories can act as

12. Lattimore, in "Inner Asian Approach," usefully reviews the extent of manmade changes to Xinjiang's geography.

13. Informants stated that Yining had 13 *östän*, a partial list of which includes: *gholqä östän*; *tax östän*; *ara östän*; *khax östän*; *ara boz östän*; *sän dawan östän*; *jirghilañ östän*; and *akh östän*.

perceptual and cognitive filters for human awareness of the landscape. It is a striking coincidence, for example, that of all Yining's *mähällä*, residents of 'black hill' were viewed by informants to be the most commonly engaged in the kinds of manual labor men referred to derogatorily as 'black work' (*khara ix*).

Numerous areas within Yining take names from particular markets located there, but not all such areas are *mähällä*. Market areas that were considered *mähällä* include *alma bazar* ('apple market') and *qilan hañza* ('jujube street').¹⁴ *Bidä bazar* ('clover market')¹⁵ and an area called 'Chinese market', on the other hand, were spoken of more as general areas rather than as *mähällä*. Local Uighurs referred to the latter alternately as *hitay bazar* and *hunzu bazar*; the ethnic label *hitay* has mild connotations of derogation, the term *hänzu* does not.

A number of *mähällä* take their names from non-Uighur words, many of which have at this point worked their way into popular Uighur consciousness. *Hämbäñ*, a name deriving from Ch. 汉兵 *hanbing* ('Han soldiers'), was formerly the site of just such a military encampment.¹⁶ *Khizil bayraqh* ('red flag') was formerly a part of *orda mähällä*, but by the mid-1990s it was considered a distinct *mähällä*, taking its name from a standard Communist-era symbol. This is an interesting semiotic shift away from *orda*, the "palace" of a pre-Communist Uighur official, to a symbol standing specifically for the Chinese Communist Party. One *mähällä* is called *täräkhiz*, a corruption of *täräkhiz yäza* ('Progress Village'), which is presumably a name

14. *Qilun* is Uighur for the Chinese date, *Zizyphus sativa*, and *hañza* is from Ch. 巷子 *hangzi*, 'alley'.

15. Specifically, Red clover (*Trifolium praetense*).

16. Han soldiers were garrisoned in Ili soon after the installation of the Manchu military governor there in 1762, as many as 10,700 of them by 1771 (Zeng Wenwu, *Zhongguojingying xiyu shi*, 300).

bestowed only decades earlier under state-mandated collectivization. One *mähällä*, a broad flat area on the banks of the Ili river, is called *jirghilañ*, probably taking its name from the Mongolian word for ‘enjoyment’, since this area is a popular picnic site. Also near the river is *khõntaji mähällä*. *Khun taiji* was the title of several Oyrad rulers in Ili.¹⁷ These two Mongol borrowings highlight the fact that the Ili River valley was under Mongol influence for centuries prior to Qing rule. To what extent current residential patterns might reflect Mongol-era divisions or conceptualizations of space and neighborhood are important concerns, but are not addressed here.¹⁸

The above categories by no means exhaust the bases for *mähällä* naming. The origin of *altä xu ’ar* (‘six slogans’) *mähällä* was a source of argument among several middle-aged residents of Yining until one Abudrixit ‘matchmaker/*elqi*’, explained with conviction that the ‘six slogan’ faction, a political movement, had started there. Some *mähällä* take shape when residents of a previous *mähällä* migrate en masse, as is reputedly the case with *bäx kiräm* in Ili, whose initial residents, I was told, primarily came from a Kashgar *mähällä* of the same name.” The origin of *aydiñ* (‘moonlight’) *mähällä* was not known to many of its own residents, but this word’s Mongolian origin suggests that the identity of this neighborhood too may date as far back as the 1700s.

17. Light, *Slippery Paths*, 187. Mannerheim (*Across Asia I*, 223) describes a visit to different area, a lake approximately 20 miles SW of Yining, which was called *Kungtaidji-kul* (*köl* = ‘lake’).

18. For a brief note on Mongol terms regarding the neighborhood, see the entry for *aimaq* in Ligeti, “Vocabulaire Sino-Ouigour.”

19. Jarring (*Materials II*, 161, citing Skrine, *Chinese Central Asia*, 209 n. 2) refers to *bäx kiräm* as a town near Artush, to the northeast of Kashgar.

Other *mähällä* names elicited at least once but which I could not subsequently confirm nor further identify, include *xärkh* ('east') *mähällä*, *pakha* ('frog') *mähällä*, *täxläpki*,²⁰ *töräm*, possibly from *täram* ('a branching off of one stream into many'): *puxman*, *paytima körük* ('foot-cloth bridge'), *bayköl* (from Mong.?), *bostan* ('oasis'), *yeñi* ('new') *mähällä*, and *ghalibiyät koqa*, which means 'victory lane', though from which victory it is not clear.

Virtually all of the important questions one might ask about *mähällä* in Yining and elsewhere in Xinjiang remain to be answered. How fluid are the spatial boundaries of *mähällä* at any one point in time, or across time? What factors lead to the fission or fusion of neighborhoods? At this point we can only conjecture that critical junctures are likely to be marked by such things as the construction of a new building, or the emergence of a charismatic merchant. In the mid-1990s, *aydiñ mähällä* was one of Yining's most prosperous neighborhoods, with a great concentration of successful merchants, whose prominence and building activities created a number of named subdivisions within it, such as, *khähriman koqa*. Perhaps one day sub-*mähällä* such as this one will be viewed as separate *mähällä*.

THE PAN-NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY OF THE *GHULJALIKH*

Although inter-*mähällä* rivalries are potent within Yining, there is a tremendous sense of unity among all Yining Uighurs vis-a-vis residents of other cities. Inter-oasis rivalries are expressed widely in Xinjiang, often taking the forms of verbal teasing or insults by residents of

20. This neighborhood was said to be located in the easternmost suburbs of Yining. It is quite distant from the city-center retail market of the same name, and I am aware of no link between the two. See p. 311 for a possible etymology of this name.

21. Jarring, *Materials I*, 12 n. 3.

one locale upon residents of another.²² While an extended analysis of these materials is not possible here, I attest to this pattern by offering one item recorded in Yining regarding Kashgarians.

Kashgarian you dolt	<i>khäxkhärlikh khaxañ</i>
It has become springtime	<i>atiyaz boldi</i>
Throw away your ragged leather sandals	<i>qorukhni taxlañ</i>
Make yourself a drum	<i>dumbakhni yasañ</i>

Kashgarian you dolt	<i>khäxkhärlikh khaxañ</i>
Scratch my back	<i>dümbämni khaxlañ</i>
It has become springtime	<i>ätiyaz boldi</i>
Throw away your ragged sandals	<i>qorukhni taxlañ</i>

Before we can assume that the sentiments expressed in these verses deal strictly with rivalries *between* residents of different oases, however, we must first consider the extent to which waves of Uighur migration into the Ili Valley from different oases in Southern Xinjiang may have given rise to divisions and cleavages *within* Yining residence and identity patterns, such as, for example, between descendants of original *Taranqi* settlers from the mid-1700s and arrivals from Kashgar who came more than century later. To demonstrate that these inter-oasis rivalries are reciprocated, I offer below as a counterpoint a verse Jarring recorded in 1935 from a Kashgar

22. Some related materials from Xinjiang have been published, see e.g., Bang and Marquart, *Osttürkische Dialektstudien*, 16-18. The term *Blason Populaire* was used as early as 1884 to describe folkloric items of group stereotyping, and continues to be used to this day. See, e.g., Gaidoz and Sébillot, *Blason Populaire*; Dautcher, *Blason Populaire: An Annotated Bibliography*.

native about Ili Valley residents.²³

A Taranqi is a fool	<i>taranqi digän ahmakh</i>
In his girdle he has flint and steel	<i>helidä ikän qahmakh</i>
Whichever town he is in,	<i>khaysi xähärdä bar dur</i>
He is ready to sell his own town	<i>öziniñ xähärini satmakh</i>

Note that the specific insult leveled at Yining area Uighurs is that they lack a sufficiently developed sense of local-place loyalty, as is suggested in the comment that they would sell, in other words “sell out”, their home town.

BUILDING AURAL COMMUNITY: RADIO YINING

Every morning Abidäm rose, performed her morning prayers, and by 6:30 A.M. she would turn on her radio to catch the beginning of the day’s broadcast. The year before, her grandson Mähmud, Yakupjan’kam’s eighteen year-old son, had slipped in and stolen her prized radio to sell second-hand for spending money. There wasn’t much that could be done about Mähmud, even his father couldn’t control him. As for the radio, however, she went out and bought a new one immediately; a new programming format begun in 1993-1994 had quickly become a major local institution, and an indispensable part of her day. In this she was not alone. From morning to dusk, a mixture of Uighur folk and popular music, humorous sketches, poetry readings, and serialized passages from well-known Uighur historical novels formed part of an all-Uighur language broadcast. Walking through *mähällä* lanes and city streets, it often seemed that the entire Uighur population of Yining was listening in. Certainly, enough homes and merchants’ stalls played radios that one was almost never out of earshot of the station. This omnipresent

23. *Materials II*, 130. I have modified Jarring’s translation slightly.

soundscape not only created a unique sense of aural community in itself, but the content of the broadcast also unified local knowledge about the city's happenings.

Talk radio was an important part of each day's programming. A main feature of such programs was having small children call in, often as young as four or five. Always, though for no reason ever made clear, they were asked to give (and gave) their full names and places of residence. Always the 'address' began with a *mähällä* name, then usually they would give directions to their homes, e.g., '...then turn left at Abdulrixit's store, it's the fourth courtyard on the right'.²⁴ Few gave street numbers, since the latter were rarely used by residents. *Mähällä* doors often displayed three or even four differently numbered, state-issued plaques; residents added the new plaques issued each time *mähällä* lanes were renumbered, but never removed the old ones. The children were usually asked if they were calling from home, and if so, to give their home phone numbers. In person, men smiled proudly whenever their young child showed that he or she had memorized their home phone number, and I suspect that Yining's collective pride in its children was similar to that of individual parents: Not just pride in the child's intelligence, but pride in their own status as new owners of phones. At 3,200 *yuan* [\$400] to install a home phone, these were conspicuous markers of a trader's success in the marketplace.

The radio station was also a site of deeply felt emotional sharing between individuals, another reason it fostered an enhanced sense of collective identity. One Sunday morning, a woman called an on-air request line. She gave her name and age (53), and tried unsuccessfully

24. DeCerteau (*Practice of Everyday Life*, 115-122) calls such walking directions an "alphabet of spatial indication" to suggest their role as constituent units of narrative actions that form 'itineraries', a category he opposes to 'maps'. My discussion in 1.3 suggests just such an opposition in how spatial relations are indicated through narrative and how the state maps local places.

to choke back her tears. Sobbing, she said,

My dad died when I was five, tomorrow is my mother's birthday..she helped me to marry..(sobbing)..Could you play *Tarkoqa* ('Narrow Streets') for her?

The degree of her emotional openness, though intense, was not altogether exceptional for adult callers. The song that she requested, however, was quite special, for its lyrics expressed perfectly the link between *mähällä* residents' feelings of membership in a local community with their feelings about the *mähällä* itself. The song *Tarkoqa* uses the narrow lanes of the *mähällä* as a poetic figure for the profound difficulties residents faced throughout their lives, yet, as one verse makes clear, not even Paris or Istanbul are as wonderful as the narrow streets of one's one neighborhood.

The value the station's programming held for its Yining audience did not always require that the broadcast be a focus of attention. One summer afternoon, a passage from a novel set in the Ili Valley, *İli dolkhunliri* (Waves of the Ili River), was being read aloud. Abidäm broke off a conversation she was having with her next-door neighbor, commenting to no one in particular that these were 'important words' (*muhim gäp*), then returned to her chatting.

Yining residents identify strongly with a long local musical tradition, and music, much of it from Yining artists, is a large part of the station's programming. Many of the tunes were of romantic love, a common theme in popular music. Among these were songs like 'Cute Girl' (*omakh khiz*), 'Souvenir' (*yadikar*), 'Pretty' (*qiraylikh*), and 'Libra Flower' (*mizan gül*, a woman's name). Not all were simple songs of love, however. Consider one anti-heroin song performed by the well-known child singer *Abdukhahar*.

Heroin, don't smoke it, my dear older brothers

Your lives, don't throw them away, my dear older brothers

What has it given you, heroin, except for disaster?
Don't expect any good from it, my dear older brothers
Your beautiful youth, you only get one chance
In this world, people cannot blossom on poison
Heroin has brought mourning to so many homes
Open your eyes, blind, dear older brothers
Because of you, mother and father wander like vagrants,
Waiting for the time of bread and sweet pears,
When you rejoin the ranks of the living, like everyone else,
You too will enjoy the beauty of life, my dear brothers

Numerous songs about heroin addiction were extremely popular during the mid-1990s.²⁵ Most of these songs were recorded by younger male performers between the ages of sixteen and twenty, exactly that age when youths, both male and female, first started facing a risk of heroin addiction. The above song, however, was popularized by a ten year-old boy. Having a 'younger brother' pleading with 'older brothers' to respect themselves is powerfully ironic, since it is the ritual job of such fictive 'older brothers', as we will see further in coming chapters, to *force* the younger ones to respect them.

Other songs aired on the program included some widely acknowledged to voice pro-Uighur sentiments, their anti-government messages but thinly disguised. Consider, for example, the following, a song voicing a distinctly ethnonationalistic yearning for independence and Uighur autonomy.

Coming into the world, you met only with hardship

²⁵. This claim is based on the comments of local cassette tape resellers, not on radio play.

Did you foresee that Destiny itself would betray you?
 When nothing good appears, you make not a sound?
 Won't you say something, you kind-hearted, peaceful Uighurs?
 Some people, crying 'Uighur', raise a shout,
 Some people, being Uighur, prepare to rout.
 Doesn't your conscience bum, doesn't it drive you at all?
 Tell me, my kind-hearted peaceful Uighurs.
 Some people would tell you that your fortune is tied to destiny
 As they prepare to put the pincers to your gullible heart.
 If you don't pay such treatment back, will you ever attain
 the prosperity you hope for?
 Tell me, my kind hearted peaceful Uighurs.

Other songs played on the radio rekindled a sense of local historical identity. One gray winter morning, a distinctive nasal voice that **Abidäm** knew well came on the radio, the voice of the blind singer Dawutjan, born and raised in *Zawut*, who had been a companion of her husband's before their deaths. When he began to sing "Canal Song" (*östän nahxisi*), a song she remembered first hearing more than sixty years earlier, she put down her sewing and looked off into the distance.²⁶

The bottom of the <i>östän</i> is hard	<i>östänniñ tegi khattikh</i>
I chop, but the spade can't cut through	<i>qapsam kätmän ötmäydu</i>

26. The text presented here is a translation of a version performed by **Abdulla** Jarulayov, as recorded in **Turghan** Xawdun and Ablikim Abdulla, *Ili hälkñ nahxiliri*. One unclear passage was resolved for purposes of this translation by rendering *toñqisi* as "cold-hearted."

The cruel, cold-hearted <i>bägs</i> ²⁷	<i>zalim toñqisi bäglär</i>
Will not leave us alone	<i>beximizdin kätmäydu</i>
Chopping away at the <i>östän</i>	<i>östänni qepiwetip</i>
the spade, it gets all bent	<i>kätmän khayrilip kätti</i>
The poor, to do the rich man's tasks,	<i>khämbäghäl haxar bilän</i>
from their villages get sent	<i>yurttin ayrilip kätti</i>
The water in the rivers and <i>östän</i>	<i>därya - östän suyigä</i>
belong to the Mirab ²⁸ alone	<i>mirab digän bax ikän</i>
Nothing does he know of righteousness	<i>adalätini bilmigän</i>
his heart as black as stone	<i>baghri khara tax iken</i>
The Mirabs ride on their ponies	<i>mirablar minär taygha</i>
and send water to the rich	<i>yakhilar suni baygha</i>
If the poor but mention water	<i>khämbäghällär su disä</i>
their heads are stuck in a ditch	<i>bexini tikhar laygha</i>
Stop your digging, cruel masters,	<i>östän qapmay zalimlar</i>
for the <i>östän</i> has filled with blood	<i>tolduruptu señini</i>
Digging your waterway has starved us	<i>ostän qepip aq khaldukh</i>
and no one will give us food	<i>bizgä bermäs unini</i>

Abidäm shook her head and sighed deeply, “Oh, back when the tyrants were in power, back then, the people really suffered.”

27. The term *bug* refers to the predominantly ethnic Uighur elite who ruled local society in Xinjiang under Manchu supervision at various periods of Qing rule (1644-1911).

28. The *mirab* was an official in charge of irrigation and water distribution.

The radio station also served as a bulletin board for local happenings, one that was mostly (but not always) free of the formulaic phrases of state-scripted newscasts, common in both Chinese and Uighur media. Schoolyard performances of local children's dance troupe, the Blossoms (*ghunqakhlar*), were periodically announced. A traveling mummy exhibit was touted for weeks during its stay in town, falsely billing one of its mummies as the 'Beauty of Loulan'. The famous mummy known by that name is a four thousand year old archeological find that symbolizes for many Uighurs their ancient ties to Xinjiang's land. The actual mummy on display, confided the tour's museum-trained assistant, was "only from the thirteenth century." Other radio spots advertised English language classes opening up in the evenings at a local elementary school, or praised small local businessmen, goldsmiths and leather jacket vendors, for their quality merchandise and friendly service.

Not all news items were so cheery. One day in late November, I first heard the news of missing children: "Two boys, ages four and a half and five and a half, were taken the day before yesterday at 1:00P.M.," an announcer read. "We hope that if you have news, you will call," he continued gravely. Shaking her head, **Abidäm** commented, "That makes five in one month. Three other kids have already disappeared in November alone." Two days later, a group of men sitting together in the marketplace began to talk about these announcements, adding to the discussion rumors that the stolen children were believed to be sold for their organs. While the motif of organ theft circulates widely in urban legends, personal pleas from the parents of the children broadcast on the radio put to rest any thought in my mind that the kidnappings themselves were not genuine." My purpose here, however, is not to engage with the content of

29. One month earlier, I had seen on a dramatized 'real police' television program a re-enactment of the recent capture in Ürümqi of a gang of more than ten persons, all Han, all recently arrived from Central

particular radio announcements, but to point out that over and over throughout my field research, topics of conversation in the marketplace frequently focused on news items that had been announced on the radio, and were heard by all.

Throughout this discussion of *mähällä*, it has been indicated in a number of ways that the state is by no means absent or unimportant in contributing to the organization of local places and of Uighurs' awareness of those places. In the next chapter, I turn to consider in more detail the state's role in ordering local identities of place.

China, who were arrested for stealing children to sell to unspecified buyers. Such dramatized programs are not widely viewed as fabricated, though such a possibility cannot be ruled out.

Chapter 1.3 Desettling the Land: The Destruction of Uighur Chthonic Identity

Hey you! If you would be a man,
a real man, then be as heavy as the land.

ay adäm, agar sän rast ärdäk

är bolsañ, yärdäk eghir bolghil

Anonymous Uighur informant, recorded in Yining in
the 1870s'

In 1996, a published audiocassette tape circulated widely in Xinjiang under the title *It's Hard Being a Peasant*. Its contents included a series of poems narrating the suffering of Uighur peasants in the 1990s.² In the oil painting reproduced on its cover, the shoulders and bowed head of a Uighur peasant rise out of the earth, imaging the landscape and the soil of Xinjiang as the literal body of the Uighur people. A tear rolls off the peasant's cheek onto checkerboard fields below, suggesting that Uighurs' suffering has irrigated the region's populated desert oases for millennia. This image alone makes a striking case for the need to look more deeply into Uighur expressions of attachment to place, and in this chapter, I will attempt to provide just such an analysis. As the title suggests, I will argue that identity of place for Uighurs is being

1. Pantusov, *Obrazsty*, Proverb #408.

2. Cassette merchants in Yining stated that this was one of their best sellers in early 1996. Bellér-Hann (in "Peasant Condition," 90) records that peasants near Kashgar knew of this tape, and told her that "the producers of the tape had been arrested and briefly imprisoned."

dramatically reconfigured through a long-term process that I label desettlement.

Before I turn directly to the thesis of this chapter, that Uighurs are being desettled from the land in Xinjiang, a very brief discussion of Han migration into the region and of ethnic relations between Uighur and Han might be useful. Xinjiang is fully one sixth of China's territory, a great amount of land for a country with rising population pressure such as China. Unfortunately, much of the area is uninhabitable deserts—like the Taklimakan—surrounded by the snow-capped Tianshan (in Uighur, *tāñritagh*) and Kunlun ranges. Most of its current population centers are long-settled oases nestled between mountain foothill and desert's edge. When the Communist Party took control of most of Xinjiang in 1949, 80% of the local population was Uighur, a Moslem ethnic group of peasants, craftsmen and traders. At that time, only five percent of the population was Han, Han being China's national ethnic majority. As a result of intensive migration by Han into Xinjiang since 1949, much of it state-sponsored under various Party policies, Uighurs and Han now number around seven million each.³ Studies of planned population transfer in Xinjiang focus on its role in strengthening border defenses as well as driving agricultural production, modernization, and/or urbanization, and often mention the possibility of eventual Uighur assimilation.⁴ Far less often have scholars considered Uighurs' own perspectives on these changes. Therefore, I note here briefly the limited extent of everyday ethnic interaction in my field site.

3. For more on population transfer into Xinjiang, see Rose Maria Li, "Migration to China's Northern Frontier"; Yuan, "Population Changes"; Tien, "Demographic Significance"; Freebeme. "Demographic and Economic Changes in Sinkiang"; For Han populations in the Ili Valley under the Qing, see, e.g., Xu Bofu, "Qingdai qianqi xinjiang diqu de mintun."

4. Li Xichun and Niu Shuhua, "*Xinjiang chengshifazhan*."

In 1990s Yining, Uighurs and Han live in worlds of face-to-face social interaction that are almost entirely separate. Residential areas are largely segregated, but that's not the only problem.⁵ Uighurs speak their own Turkic language, unrelated to Chinese, written in an Arabic script, Xinjiang's Han populations speak either Mandarin only, or both Mandarin and their own home dialect. Uighur and Han rarely learn much of the other's language. Han consumption of pork, and Uighurs' strict observance of a pork-taboo, mean the groups cannot share food freely. Inter-group marriage is virtually non-existent. Unable to exchange words, food, or people, mutual understanding is minimal, and interactions are strained. Growing numbers of Han out-compete Uighurs for practically all material resources. Han dominate the local state apparatus, and through it, preferential access to economic opportunities, capital, jobs, and education. Within Uighur communities, anti-Han and anti-government sentiments run high. Popular demonstrations are increasing, and are increasingly violent. Islam has become a vehicle for political mobilization, despite a severe government crackdown on religious activities. The state is not unprepared for trouble, as more than one million Han military personnel live in the region.⁶ And all the while, the transfer of Han populations into Xinjiang continues, as research teams "scientifically" project Xinjiang's total resettlement capacity to be in the tens of millions of persons. More than one million Han have been scheduled for ultimate relocation from the Three Gorges Dam project alone. What impact do these demographic changes have on Uighurs in Xinjiang? One approach to answering this question is outlined in the pages that follow, under

5. Segregation of residential areas has been the norm in Xinjiang for more than a century. See, e.g., Zeng Wenwu, *Zhongguojingying xiyu shi*, 328; Lin En-hsien, *Qingchuo zai xinjiang*.

6. See, e.g., McMillen, *Chinese Communist Power*; McMillen, "Ürümqi Military Region"; McMillen, "Xinjiang and the Production and Construction Corps."

the rubric of desettlement.

THE DESETTLEMENT CONCEPT

Feelings of personal identity and group belonging are often grounded in metaphors of rootedness to land. The individual's attachment to place is reinforced through shared cognitive maps and embodied social practices that make place meaningful for a community. This aspect of identity, in which group members experience solidarity simultaneously with a social collective and with a physical place, I call chthonic identity.⁷ Personal and collective attachments to place are a critical basis of identity in general, since claims to political entitlement are understood and advanced through them. If a state can undermine the cognitive and transpersonal bases that support this sense of belonging, the ability of groups to advance claims to political entitlement is weakened.

To understand desettlement better, think first of what we mean by resettlement: A state seeks access to land-based resources but finds its progress blocked by the presence of a local social group, and responds by relocating that group elsewhere. In their new home, established cultural meanings of place and social uses of space—the bases of chthonic identity—no longer fit, and a sense of dislocation or crisis is produced as communities and individuals face unfamiliar difficulties. Several linked features of this process are worth noting. People know when they are being relocated. Thus, even relatively powerless groups often create strategies to cope with or to

7. My introduction of a number of new terms or rarely used relating to identity (desettlement, chthonic identity, and below, socionym) stems from a larger ongoing project of critically examining the theoretical framework used in anthropological analyses of the links between personal and collective identity.

contest forced relocation, perhaps through hidden forms of resistance, perhaps through violence. States may silence protest, whether through coercion or administrative controlling processes,* but the unfortunate consequences of resettlement — alcoholism, delinquency and so forth—are harder to conceal, and in fact these are widely explored in the anthropological literature. Finally, organizations like the World Bank establish mandatory guidelines for governments regarding the treatment of persons resettled as a result of their bank-funded projects.’ For better or worse, resettlement is at least a recognized and addressed concern within development activities and scholarly research alike.

Desettlement, as I use the term, emphasizes that the social problems of resettlement can occur without actual physical relocation. In Xinjiang the state seeks access to land-based resources in a region where sedentary Uighurs are historically and culturally well situated. If it cannot move them, it can displace them in other ways. If the cognitive maps, symbolic systems and social practices of Uighur chthonic identity can be systematically reordered by the state, Uighurs will lose some capacity to articulate claims to political entitlement based on their sense of belonging. To state my thesis, I need now only to restate that hypothetical in the indicative: *In twentieth century Xinjiang, the Chinese state seeks to undermine specific practices which bind Uighur identity to place, by literally disassembling the meanings of local identity and then*

8. The notion of controlling processes originates in the work of Laura Nader. See, e.g., Nader, “Controlling Processes.”

9. Requirements for borrowers include, for example, the creation of a “Resettlement Action Plan”. For a list of related World Bank materials, such as, e.g., “Resettlement Sourcebook Comprehensive Guidelines for the Resettlement and Rehabilitation of Project-Displaced People,” see World Bank website pages on Resettlement. <http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/essd/kb.nst>.

reorganizing them according to its own plan. As a result, Uighurs' capacity to define and defend their interests in the face of the state is diminished. To support this thesis, I present three examples from among the symbolic systems, cognitive maps and cultural practices through which Uighurs' feelings of attachment to place are reproduced, and consider how the state has attempted to reorganize these bases of Uighur identity. The areas from which these examples are drawn can be summarized mnemonically as monikers, maps, and *mazars*.

MONIKERS: SOCIONYMIC ANALYSIS AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

A critical first step in the semiotic analysis of social identity is an investigation into relevant *socionyms*. A socionym, **in** my usage, is any word used to name any social identity.” In its broadest sense, any word which members of a social group might put at the end of the sentence ‘I am a ___’ is a candidate for being a socionym. As elements of a symbolic system that includes but is not limited to language, socionyms are not merely disinterested objective labels, but representations that contribute to the production and ordering of local identities. In Xinjiang, socionyms link identity with soil and with local place in self-evident ways.

Prior to the 1920s, the word Uighur was not widely used.” Back then, today's Uighurs

10. In my usage, this neologism is far more inclusive than existing terms. For a term to be considered an ‘ethnonym’, for example, the social group thus named must typically meet certain characteristics, i.e., it must be considered **an** ‘ethnic group’. However, scholarly debates on ethnicity and the use of the label ‘ethnic’ in state administration in China, as elsewhere, have produced countless feedback effects on group members’ experiencing of their own identities. The all-inclusive category of socionym suggests no more than that the experience of **an** identity is salient enough in some local life-world to merit recognition through a linguistic marker.

11. Light notes, however (in *Slippery Paths*, 49) that Fletcher has described (in “China and Central

called themselves *yärlik*, literally “of the earth or land.” Ethnographic materials recorded as early as the 1870s show us that this term traditionally included all of today’s Uighurs and excluded all other ethnic groups, such as Han (*hitay*) and Hui (*doñgan*).¹² Another set of identity terms was also in use at that time among today’s Uighurs.¹³ Each term in that set was oases-specific, such that inhabitants of Kashgar and Turpan, for example, called themselves, and were called by each other, Kashgarians (*khäxkhärlik*), Turpanians (*turpanlukh*), and so forth.¹⁴ This in itself does not indicate a lack of collective identity among these groups. That numerous observers make just such an assumption shows only what powerful instruments names are for legitimizing claims to identity in the nation building discourses of state administration and academic research, and supports my argument here about the importance of state manipulation of identity-culture categories in Xinjiang.” The terms of this Uighur language socionymic system referred only to Uighurs, and contrasted with other terms of identity such as Chinese (*hitay*) or Manchu (*mänju*). In this naming system, a *hitay* (i.e., an ethnic Han person) could not be also a ‘Turpanian’, regardless of how long she or he had resided there. Uighur vernacular language marked Uighurs as ‘of the land/place’, as the naturally embedded residents of the local

Asia,” 364) one source showing that a Hami prince claimed in 1890s descent from “Uighur Muslims.”

12. Cf. Pantusov, *Obrazsty*. 141. Here I am suggesting that the situation cannot simply be read (as

13. See, e.g., Ghäyrätjan Osman, “Uyghur äjdadliriniñ millät nami.”

14. Exceptions to the otherwise exclusive use of toponyms as socionyms were *taranqi*, meaning roughly ‘Turkestani agriculturalists of the Ili Valley’, and *dolan*, another sub-ethnic group in Southern Xinjiang.

15. This is how most observers have read the situation. See, e.g., Gladney, “Ethnogenesis” (following Warikoo, “Chinese Turkestan”); Chvyr, “Notes on the Ethnic Self-Awareness of the Uighur.”

landscape, and simultaneously marked ethnic others as incapable of being locals.

In the 1920s this naming system was challenged when the Chinese state introduced ethnonyms and ethnic categories as instruments of nation building. Using the term ‘Uighur’, a socionym mostly abandoned around the tenth century, the state constructed Uighurs as just one element in a conceptual set of ascribed statuses (i.e., ethnic groups) under firm state control. Removed from categories embedded in Xinjiang’s regional landscape, and repositioned directly into the nationscape, Uighurs become, in one favorite official phrase, ‘one of fourteen minorities groups who reside in Xinjiang’. One way to understand the implications of this new ‘identity’ is through the analogy of ‘identity documents’. To document the identity of each individual, the state issues cards whose size, shape, and format are completely homogenous, and which cast each bearer as an interchangeable element of the set ‘citizen’. Imagine how different it would be if each citizen could make their own identity document, any size and shape they wished, affix any pictures or symbols they wished, and present them to the state, saying ‘here, this represents me, it is my ‘identity card’. In the switch to a system of ethnic identities, all groups are similarly made more interchangeable, commensurate. Their ostensible equality consists merely in being marked as equal in a system of symbols adopted to serves the interests of a nation-state. Since the 1920s, of course, Uighurs have come to widely embrace the term ‘Uighur’ as expressing a natural ethnic identity.¹⁶ Among themselves Uighurs still use terms like *yärlik*, and *turpanlukh*, but the state is not indifferent to these uses—the socionymic categories Uighurs used prior to ethnicity discourse in Xinjiang are now erased by the state. For example, they generally do not

16. However, the self-conscious corruption of the designation Uighur, from *uyghur* to *urghuy* suggests to me a sense of irony about the primordialness of the name. Rudelson (in *Oasis Identities*, 128) offers a different interpretation of this same phenomenon.

appear in contemporary Uighur dictionaries.

The significance of these changes is apparent only when we consider the local effects of a propaganda campaign that ran nationwide in 1990s China. In Xinjiang, huge billboards promoted slogans that now (i.e., seventy years later), re-introduced identity categories based on place— notions of being a Xinjiang person (Ch. *xinjiang ren*) or a Turpanian (Ch. *tulupan ren*)—but now these terms are deployed in Chinese, and now they are reinscribed around resettled Han populations. Over a scale of decades, the administrative manipulation of identity categories and the social engineering of local identities have erased linguistic bases for Uighurs’ attachment to local place, an effect, ironically, that is achieved each time the name Uighur is invoked.

At a three-day conference in Ürümqi in 1995 on the topic of “Cultural Anthropology and Xinjiang Culture,” Party-state policymakers presented the model of cultural identity that presumably lay behind this widespread propaganda campaign. In this prescriptive model, culture and identity are presented as a series of concentric circles. At the core of the so-called “Xinjiang person” identity is identity based on participation in the total ethnic culture of Greater China (*zhonghua minzu wenhua*). The “Xinjiang person” then identifies as a “Chinese person” (*zhongguoren*), i.e., as a PRC national, sharing in a unified “National Culture”. As a resident of one of the five northwest provinces, the “Xinjiang person” shares in ‘Northwest Culture’ (*xibei wenhua*),¹⁷ and is also a “Northwesterner” (*xibei ren*). At the next level, he or she is positioned

17. The phrase ‘NorthwestSound’ was widely used in the early 1990s in a government supported musical movement, Han composers reworked Xinjiang minority folk melodies and arranged them for Chinese orchestra. This movement was an initial attempt to create such a ‘Northwest culture’. Sidikhhaji Rozi, a prominent Uighur cultural critic, has pointed out the irony of Han attempts to create a Northwest

as a “Xinjiang person” (*xinjiangren*), sharing in the common Xinjiang culture. Finally, individuals have identity as fellow urbanites, those from Ürümqi are Ürümqians (*wulumuqiren*), from Kashgar are Kashgarians (*kashiren*), etc.

“What about ethnic culture and ethnic identity?” minority conference participants asked. Han presenters explained to the ethnic minorities in the audience that ‘ethnic culture’ still presented a conceptual challenge, and admitted that they were not sure where to fit it in, or if it fit at all. One thing, however, was made perfectly clear in a presentation to scholars one month later at the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences. On that occasion, a Han Party leader lecturing to a room full of minority researchers, argued that despite Uighurs’ near universal conversion to Islam between 900 and 600 years ago, and despite the fact that today virtually all Uighurs are practicing Moslems, the “international scholarly community” has nonetheless concluded that Islam has had no cultural influence in Xinjiang, and that Islam is not relevant to any conceptualization of “Xinjiang culture” (*xinjiang wenhua*), or of local “minority culture” (*minzu wenhua*). China is a highly centralized state, and it is not surprising that a model of identity in alignment with state interests consists of concentric circles centered around a centering center.

In the above section, I have shown that the state’s administrative manipulation of identity

Culture. This irony is exemplified in a Hong Kong court case, in which the Han founder of the ‘Worthwest Sound,’ Mr. Wang Luobin, sued the Taiwanese Pop star Luo Dayou (also Han), for releasing a “Uighur Folk Melody” for which he, Wang, claimed international copyright. See Sidik**h**aji Rozi, “Näpsinñi yeghiwal!” That article, an editorial in a Uighur language Ürümqi newspaper, was one of several allegorical attacks on Communist Party rule in Xinjiang published by the same author. After he was scheduled for re-arrest for those articles, Professor Sidik**h**aji fled to the United States in the fall of 1996, and has since received political asylum.

group names serves in part to symbolically dislocate Uighur attachment to place in Xinjiang, and that this socionymic engineering plays a key role in the managed demographic reorganization of Xinjiang by establishing a new set of place-based socionyms inscribed around, and thereby granting belonging to, new Han migrants.¹⁸

MAPPING AND PLACE-MAKING

During my field research, getting around in the *mähällä* of Yining, was always a challenge. People would offer directions: “Go past the ‘burned mosque’, walk thro—ugh *khazanqi*.” Uighur speakers elongate words and heighten their pitch to imply increasing degrees of distance. For example, the two utterances, “you wa—lk and turn left,” and “you wa——lk and turn left,” convey different degrees of distance, and a listener is supposed to know on this basis alone how far to go. Returning to the hypothetical directions: “Go past the ‘burned mosque’, walk thro---ugh *khazanqi*, then go left past the *noghay miqit*.” For anyone but a native resident, these directions can be hard to follow. The ‘burned mosque’ was repaired thirty years ago, and shows no sign of damage. The *noghay miqit* (i.e., Tatar mosque) was torn down in the early 1970s, making it even harder to locate. And *khazanqi*, what and where exactly is it? No maps of *mähällä* were available in Yining, as I noted in the previous chapter. Although the directions given are hypothetical, the inclusion in them of two references to mosques is not entirely arbitrary. Mosques not only anchored feelings of local community and helped shape the social contours of *mähällä* boundaries, they also oriented residents spatially in the wider world

18. I note that Gladney has suggested that “the categorization and taxonomization of all levels of Chinese society...represents a wide-ranging and on-going project of internal colonialism.” (“Internal Colonialism” 1998: 47). I encountered Gladney’s work after completing this chapter, and have not yet considered his argument in relation to my own.

Mosques are always built with the prayer niche (*khibla*) facing Mecca, thus they also situated local residents within the global community of Islam. *Mähällä* and mosques, then, were key elements in Uighurs' cognitive maps, and key elements in the place-making processes through which Uighurs organized their local neighborhoods both perceptually and physically.

Now, consider how the state maps local place. Throughout China the government regulates the production and circulation of printed maps, and Xinjiang is a militarized border region where maps are especially sensitive. Yet even in Xinjiang, a range of maps was available—tourist maps, roadmaps for truck drivers, maps sold in bus stations, even maps of things like pollution sources and resource extraction sites could be bought, though only in restricted-circulation publications. And like naming systems, these printed maps can be read as encoding prescriptive models for the imagining of social/political landscapes.

Despite the plethora of maps, local maps—a term I use only relatively, to mean city maps, county maps or detailed provincial maps¹⁹—are printed only in Chinese, not Uighur. This is especially striking given that most kinds of printed materials in Xinjiang, official and unofficial, are available in Uighur. Uighur writing and Chinese characters appear side by side on everything from streetsigns to candy wrappers. But maps with names in Uighur are available only of the whole nation, or else as highly simplified maps of the entire province. With printed maps, just as with socionyms, Uighurs are symbolically displaced from localities, shifted upwards along an imagined hierarchy of place, to be situated safely into the Han nation. Printed maps can show Uighurs their position as Chinese nationals and as residents of Xinjiang, but cannot be allowed to reflect to Uighurs their embeddedness in local place.

What of Chinese language maps that do exist? First, city maps of Yining ignore mosques

19. I say 'province' for convenience—Xinjiang is in fact a provincial-level Autonomous Region.

and *mähällä*. *Mähällä* names and locations, as noted above, simply do not appear anywhere in the cultural products of the state. Mosques are also missing, only mosques that have been turned into official tourist sites are represented on maps, suggesting this is the state's vision of Xinjiang's future. Outside urban areas, the Uighur toponymic vernacular imagines Xinjiang as a landscape of terrain features. Uighur place names typically focus on terrain features like "Forty springs," or "Sand hill."²⁰ Sometimes these names appear transliterated into Chinese on areal and provincial maps, but while something of their phonology remains, the meanings are lost. Black Lake, for example, is in Uighur *khara köl*. In Chinese this becomes *ka-li-ku-li-hu*. To a Mandarin Chinese speaker such a construction sounds like one of two things, baby talk, or the utterances, not of a person, but of an animal. Frogs, for example, say, *ji-li-gu-lu*. Compare these sounds with *ka-li-ku-li-hu*. Uighur place names become a basis for the exoticization, infantilization and even bestialization of Uighurs in the Han imagination. Not all Uighur names suffer this fate, of course. Many ancient Uighur names are simply replaced with completely new names in Chinese, names which de-emphasize the natural world, typically by conjoining a Han surname with some local man-made feature, such as the word for store or village.

Clearly, the meanings of place for Uighurs do not disappear with the printing of some maps, or even with the presence of settlers using a new set of names. But maps do more than reveal an official utopian Uighur Autonomous Region without Uighurs. City maps and roadmaps in Chinese also facilitate Han mobility within and between Xinjiang's urban spaces. If Uighurs wish to navigate their way through urban spaces en route to the Modern, they must do so in Chinese. But ultimately maps are just one of a number of elements, together with things such as

20. For more on the structure of place names in Xinjiang *see, e.g.,* Jarring, *Central Asian Turkic Place Names*, especially pp. v-viii; Niu Ruchen, *Xinjiang diming gaishuo*.

discriminatory zoning regulations and the coerced sale of Uighur land into Han hands, which permanently affect Uighurs' relationship with local place.

To summarize, *mähällä* boundaries form the basis for structuring Uighur collective identity beyond the kin group, and ground Uighurs firmly in a particular set of social-historical meanings of space. This *mähällä* system is not only being physically altered (as described in chapter 1.2), but also, through its erasure from official maps, symbolically disrupted. At present, any temporary affect this may have had on Uighur collective identity in Yining seems to have been to strengthen *mähällä* identity, a trend I will consider further in chapter 5.1, when I explore the role of *mähällä* identity in Islamic revitalization.

MAZAR: THE TOMBS OF HOLY MEN AND WOMEN

A third example of desettlement draws on the Uighur practice of making pilgrimages to local shrines. In Xinjiang one aspect of Islamic practice involves making situational pilgrimages to *mazar*, or tombs of holy persons, often for purposes of healing sick bodies.²¹ Widely described in scholarly literature as *ziyarat* (from Arabic *zaur*, 'to visit, visitation'), in local Uighur vernacular the practice is called *tawab*.

One December day, **Abidäm** announced her intention to visit a nearby *mazar*. Her six year old grandson Ilyar, Yakupjan'kam's child, was ill, suffering an eye ailment brought on by excessive home video game playing. As a result, **Abidäm** and several other family members decided to visit a nearby *mazar*, as recorded in the following field note passage.

The main tomb, a man's tomb, consisted of a large, well-made sepulchre draped with a black embroidered canopy, housed in a high (40') octagonal tower.

21. For more on the Uighur practice of *mazar* visitation in Xinjiang, see, e.g., Jarring, "Ordam-Padishah-System."

Abidām, Aliyā and I knelt down while Ablāt (Abidām’s sixteen year-old grandson, who was studying to be an Islamic cleric) recited one *sūrā* from the Quran.

Abidām and her group then left the main tomb, neither leaving nor taking anything, and went out to a much smaller tomb standing a few dozen yards away. This tomb, only half as large as the last one, was the tomb of a woman.²² Onto the branches of the trees that surrounded it, visitors had tied dozens of small tufts of cloth (*tugh*). Abidām stooped down and gathered up a handful of earth lying a few inches from the tomb.

At home that evening, Abidām rubbed some of the soil over Ilyar’s eyes. Months later she would dissolve the same soil into water used to bathe her newborn granddaughter Tāwsiyā in a ritual bathing ceremony. Ingesting *mazar* soil is also a widely documented part of *mazar* visitation throughout Xinjiang and the surrounding cultural area. Consider this account

Toutefois, si on desire être plus pres encore du saint, il convient de prélever une pincée de terre ou de poussière sur sa tombe, de l’absorber et, aussitôt, le malade ressentira le premier effet bienfaisant de la puissance de la saint, le souffle vivifiant, les effluves régénératrices qui s’échappent du tombeau.²³

Archeological research suggests that *mazar* sites in Xinjiang have existed for millennia as sites of healing power emanating from the earth.²⁴ With the rise of Buddhism in Xinjiang, local inhabitants cast these sites as Buddhist shrines, then after the ninth century, they were recast as Islamic shrines, linked with Islamic saints legends and so forth. But the power of these sites continues to come from, and to bind Uighur identity into, the earth. Sites are seen as places

22. Several month’s later Abidām explained that at this site there had originally stood the graves of two women, Būpatimā and Büzörām, which were later combined into one.

23. Castagné, “Culte des Lieux Saints,” 48.

24. Le Coq, *Buried Treasure of Chinese Turkestan*, 93.

where legendary ‘great’ (*ulugh*) Uighur persons have been interred and absorbed into the earth, then that earth is gathered and absorbed into Uighur bodies.²⁵

How is the state intervening? In the new landscape of Han modernity, the only place for *mazar*, like mosques, is as tourist sites.²⁶ When we arrived at the *mazar*, Abidäm commented that the eight foot iron barrier built around it had been added since her last visit several years earlier. A plaque confirmed the tourism office’s jurisdiction over the site. Tickets had recently been printed up to regulate entrance, the Uighur gatekeeper had been told, but had not yet arrived, and he let the women in for free. As she had done on previous visits, Abidäm presented this man with a piece of cloth as a special kind of gift. No longer could visitors prepare a meal in the *mazar*’s communal cooking pot, however, something Abidäm described one of the most critical elements in a successful *mazar* visit.²⁷ I left wondering how things will be when the

25. The recovery of countless dozens of well-preserved corpses from ancient settlements on the periphery of the Taklimakan desert has provoked a strong response from Uighur communities in Xinjiang. Desiccated mummies, taken directly from the earth itself, provide Uighurs with potent ready-made symbols of their autochthonous identity. Uighurs I spoke with unquestioningly understood these mummies to be their direct ‘Uighur’ ancestors,

26. Contrary to the view I attribute here to the Chinese state, Olson has shown convincingly (in “Türbe and Evliya”) that *mazar* visitation can play an important role in the lives of women in modernizing societies.

27. As one early account confirms (Castagné, “Culte des Lieux Saints,” 50): “Le premier soin de ceux qui élèvent un *mazar* consiste à le munir d’un ‘*kazan*’ ou chaudron, lequel a un caractère sacré, tout comme un ciboire ou un calice. C’est dans ce chaudron ou cette marmite que sera préparé le repas rituel en commun des pèlerins. *Ces derniers sont tenus, s’ils veulent que leur visite soit profitable, d’offrir ce qu’il faut pour ce repas rituel*” (emphasis added).

gatekeeper is a Han.

CONCLUSION

A common outcome is discernible in the Chinese state's exercise of administrative control over naming systems, map production, and the folk religious practices of *mazar* visitation in Xinjiang. That outcome is one in which Uighurs are desettled from the land in the region, symbolically dislocated from the land around them. Many of the processes described here, however, are certainly not unique in Xinjiang. Desettlement emphasizes the perspective that chthonic identity — inseparable feelings of belonging to a group and to a place — is always shaped within fields of power. Groups everywhere experience social dislocation as the spatial organization of daily life is transformed around them, often by forces outside their control or perception. The intentional reorganization of identities by powerful actors like states is a widespread feature of the modern world. In the case of Xinjiang, it can be argued that desettlement points to a coherent pattern of state intervention in local identities, one which, in my opinion, does not bode well for the region's future. In Xinjiang, state efforts to reorganize local identity undermine Uighur attachment to place, and although their final impact is unclear, it is apparent that they are intended to serve as **an** ideological prop for the managed demographic reorganization of the region.²⁸ Only further ethnographic examination **of** the links between symbolic and material processes in the interplay of culture power and identity can help us to better understand these processes and their outcomes.

28. John Agnew has discussed the phenomenon of nation-state-oriented social science discourse with the erasure of place generally. See "Devaluation of Place in the Social Sciences."

This concludes section one, and its more focused discussion on the meanings of space and place. In subsequent chapters, the scenes described here will not so much fade from view, I hope, as form a necessary backdrop for the wide range of social dramas that I will consider. To begin to those stories, I turn now to section 2, which deals with the life-cycle and the gendering of social identity in the *māhällä*.