

Down a Narrow Road

Identity and Masculinity in a Uyghur Community
in Xinjiang China

Jay Dautcher

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My eyes opened I came into the world And saw your beautiful face narrow road	<i>köz echip alemge törelgende men xu güzel hösningge bakhtim tar kocha</i>
Like to my dear mother's breast I clung to you And you embraced me narrow road	<i>jan anamning baghridek baghringgha men khanmidim, baghrimni yakhtim tar kocha</i>
When I pass along the length of you I could gaze upon you forever narrow road	<i>boyliringdin ötkenimde herkhachan telmürup toymay kharaymen tar kocha</i>
How can they call you narrow an entire world is within you The fragrance of wild basil blooming narrow road	<i>kim seni tar deydu kхойning bir jahan gül chichек reyhan puraysen tar kocha</i>
Overflowing with the kindness of a thousand sweet-tempered mothers Your love sets me aflame narrow road	<i>sende xushxuy ming anining mehri jem shunga men ishkhingda yandim tar kocha</i>
Whether I find myself in Paris or Istanbul My soul is a bonfire of longing for you narrow road	<i>meyli parizh meyli istanbulda men séghinish khelbimde gülxan tar kocha</i>
You are the dear mother who bore me narrow road You are the mother who raised me narrow road Protector of so many promising young girls and boys You are a beautiful and beloved land narrow road	<i>méni tughkhan jan anamsen tar kocha meni östürgen anamsen tar kocha shunche berna khiz-yigitke pasiban bir güzel dilber makansen tar kocha</i>

Narrow Road by Yasin Muxpul

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Support received from many individuals and organizations was critical in allowing me to complete this work, and I welcome this opportunity to acknowledge their help.

As a student at Beijing Normal University, Zhang Zichen and Zhong Jingwen introduced me to Chinese folklore. At the University of California Berkeley, Alan Dundes, James Bosson, Stanley Brandes, Tom Gold, Laura Nader, Aihwa Ong, Jack Potter and Fred Wakeman all helped train me as a social scientist and helped me secure the funding that allowed me to complete this research.

In Yining I am grateful to my host family for their generosity, and to the men, women and children in *Zawut* and adjacent *mehelle* who made my year there so memorable. Local historian Is'hakh Basiti explained to me much about Yining culture. The research and administrative staff of the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences (XASS) in Urumqi, my official hosts, and Abdüshükür Turdi, Liu Bin, Ismayil Tömür and Guo Taishan in particular, kindly shared their insights and institutional resources.

Organizations that provided financial support for my field research in Xinjiang include the Anthropology Department, Graduate Fellowships Office and Vice Chancellor's Office of the University of California Berkeley, the Social Science Research Council, the Committee for Scholarly Communication with China, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Finally, the support and encouragement of many friends and mentors, enabled and inspired me to complete the research and writing of this book. Folklorist Alan Dundes, historian Cheryl Barkey and anthropologists Suzanne Gottschang, Lyn Jeffery and Bahiyyih Watson read early drafts of my writing, and Stevan Harrell and Ralph Litzinger gave detailed readers reports on the manuscript; all provided valuable comments which I have taken to heart. Editor John Ziemer and his staff gave their support and assistance, without which the book would not exist. A special thanks are due to Gardner Bovington, from whom I have learned much during our many conversations about Uyghur history and culture. Lastly, Maria Stoilkova helped me make sense of Russian-language statistical records for Yining *circa* 1875-1876. Khurban Niyaz graciously reviewed and advised me on translations of some of the Uyghur-language materials contained herein.

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INTRODUCTION

Every story is a travel story

Michel de Certeau¹

If a man with no legs tells you he's going to
swim across the river, don't believe him

Uyghur aphorism recorded *circa* 1875²

I arrived in the city of Yining in northwest Xinjiang in the summer of 1995 with plans to conduct a year of ethnographic research into the marketing practices of Uyghur merchants. I had arranged to live in a suburban neighborhood on the outskirts of town with the family of a Uyghur friend I had made almost a decade earlier when I lived in Beijing. As a field researcher I dutifully spent my first days in Yining wandering through its bustling markets, chatting with merchants and observing the flow of commercial and social activity. I had previously spent a year in Urumqi, Xinjiang's largest city, using that time to study Uyghur for six to eight hours each day and spending my nights socializing with Uyghur friends. Thus, by the time I arrived in Yining my language skills were sufficient to allow me to interact, as did the men, women and children around me, speaking entirely in Uyghur.

As the days passed, the conversations and personal dramas of my host family members and new friends from the marketplace quickly drew me into the rich life-world of an extended Uyghur family, a Uyghur suburban neighborhood, and the larger Uyghur community of Yining. Immersed in the language and lore of their daily lives, I realized how poorly existing scholarly works on Uyghurs, works that focused almost exclusively on Uyghur ethnonationalism and Uyghur-Han relations, had prepared me to understand my subjects' daily lives. I expanded my research focus beyond the topic of Uyghurs' economic strategies under market reforms and allowed myself to be drawn into everything and anything of interest to my new Uyghur family and friends.

This book presents the results of my attempt to make sense of everyday life in the predominately Uyghur suburbs of Yining,³ and to situate that understanding into a broader account of Uyghur culture and social life. My goal is to provide an ethnographic thick description of Uyghur culture of a kind I wish had been available to me prior to my

fieldwork. In four sections I explore topics ranging from child rearing to wedding practices, from informal socializing to market activities and forms of religious devotion. Uniting these topics is, first, an emphasis on the role folklore and personal narrative play in helping individuals situate themselves in and create the communities and social groups in which they participate. A second thread connecting the materials presented here, and in turn the analyses I offer of them, is that they demonstrate how myriad external forms of social life in Uyghur communities are in critical ways shaped by the male individual's concern to advance his position in an agonistic world of interpersonal status competition.

In one sense, the book deals not at all with what is usually characterized in ethnographic literature as ethnicity per se. Instead my narrative is framed around the terms *identity*, *community* and *masculinity*. *Identity*, because I seek to portray how Yining's Uyghurs experience and express a set of individual and collective identities organized around concepts of place, gender, family relations, friendships, occupation, and religious practice; for most of them, living as they did beyond the control of state work units, where normative ethnicity discourse is embedded deeply into all administrative practice, explicit ideas of ethnicity rarely came into play. *Community*, because in virtually every aspect of their daily lives the individuals and families I knew were drawn into dense and overlapping networks of face-to-face social relationships that bound them into a single social body, a community united as much by a shared engagement with local differences as by the features of daily experience members had in common. *Masculinity*, because my account is weighted toward describing the lives of men and the place of men's status competition within daily life in the community. As a member of my host household I interacted each day with the women of a large Uyghur family, listening to and participating in women's private conversations about spouses and children, about their work inside and outside the home and other aspects of their lives. During my year I believe I collected as much information from women as I did from men, however the lives of men and women's views about men and their relationships with them were typically at the center of these conversations. While my account draws richly on women's voices, it does so to examine the lives of men.

In Section 1 I introduce the reader to Uyghur community life by examining the importance of place and space as bases for individual and collective identities. In Section 2, on gender and the life cycle, I examine the concerns expressed by Uyghur men and boys regarding the cultivation and performance of a masculine habitus. In the section's first

three chapters I focus in turn on gender and child rearing, childhood play, and adult relationships, emphasizing in each the position of boys and men in these activities. In the next two chapters my focus shifts exclusively to the lives of adult men, and in particular to two masculine institutions, nicknaming and the *olturash*, in which men's abiding concern to build up and maintain personal status by symbolically dominating other men figure centrally. In Section 3 I consider the role of marketing and merchant culture as a domain in which men compete for status through their efforts to achieve wealth and position in the local community. In Section 4 I offer an account of vernacular Islam among Uyghurs, and consider how men's competition for status shapes local religious sentiments and practices.

Most of the ethnographic materials presented here come from informal conversations conducted in Uyghur, and are rendered here in English based on interview notes and field notes recorded within one or two days of the actual conversations. Longer passages quoting from those conversations were transcribed from video and audio recordings of interviews or events. To evoke for the reader some sense of my experiences in the field I have incorporated field note excerpts into my narrative, sometimes editing them slightly for the sake of clarity but without altering the meaning. Throughout the book personal names have been changed to protect individuals' privacy, with the exception of people whose work as scholars, published authors or entertainers has made them public figures in Xinjiang. A glossary listing Uyghur terms that appear without adjacent explanation is provided in an appendix.

All translations from Uyghur and Chinese print materials are my own unless otherwise noted. Given the incomplete standardization of Uyghur orthography — each dictionary I purchased in Xinjiang seemed to offer new spellings for familiar words — I can only say that in transliterating informants' speech I attempted to match standard spellings as much as possible, but that my interest in capturing local pronunciation patterns has in some cases produced variant spellings. Monetary amounts are given in Chinese *renminbi* in units of *yuan* (known colloquially as *kuai*), or are given directly in U.S. dollar equivalents at the exchange rate of eight *yuan* to the dollar.

This book is intended for readers interested in a general ethnographic account of life in a contemporary Uyghur community. Readers more deeply interested in Uyghur studies may find value in the doctoral dissertation on which this book is based, which includes annotations on historical, etymological, linguistic and folkloristic details not included here, and which documents extensive connections between the folklore I

encountered in Yining and folklore collected between the 1870s and the 1950s throughout Xinjiang and recorded in works by authors such as Gunnar Jarring, N.F. Katanov, Albert von LeCoq, Sergei Malov, Karl Menges, N.N. Pantusov and W.W. Radloff. Taken together those references illuminate the fact that many of the beliefs, practices and oral folklore found in Yining are not unique to that area but are the vibrant contemporary expression of a shared cultural heritage that unites Uyghurs throughout Xinjiang. The extent to which geographical isolation, inter-oasis migration and other factors have shaped patterns of difference within this region of shared culture can only be determined when ethnographies of life in other oases are available for comparison.

Although this book tells a story about the lives of Uyghurs, that story is shaped through the lens of my experience as a first-time ethnographer engaged in field research. Because the book interweaves two stories, one about a Uyghur community, the other about my life in that community, perhaps a few words on this approach are in order. A good story, conventional wisdom suggests, is one in which the reader is taken on a journey of discovery. And a compelling ethnographic narrative might be compared to a journey from one side of a river to the other; a departure from the firm ground of the familiar, a traversing of the unfamiliar, and ultimately a return to the firm footing of a new understanding. Such a story would conjure up an idealized field research experience, in which the ethnographer plunges into a radically new environment, starts with no ground under his or her feet, and slowly gains confidence that he or she has arrived on a new shore, attained a secure epistemological footing in the host community's life-world. As a researcher in the field, however, I more often felt like the proverbial man with no legs attempting to swim across a river. In the beginning of my research I was challenged to participate in a complex social world in a language in which I was far from perfectly conversant. As a writer I struggled equally with a narrative form that presents as a linear coherent whole fragments of understanding and insight accumulated through a non-linear, disjointed and often quite disheartening process. The final point, as I see it, is not whether I as an individual have proven myself capable of swimming across the river or not, but whether there ever is the possibility of finding firm ground on the other, the Others', shore. For me, a commitment to social science inquiry has grown to include a willingness to accept that one swims as best one can, and hopes for landfall, as a sign of one's willingness to learn, to make mistakes and to grow.

CHARACTERS

Personal names used in the book have in most cases been changed to ensure individuals' privacy. The following individuals are primary characters in the story of my year in Yining.

- Abidem Seventy-six years old, the head of an independent household in a courtyard shared with the household of her son Yakupjan and his family. Abidem's living descendents include seven children, thirty-seven grandchildren and nineteen great-grandchildren, most of whom live within a few minutes walk from her house.
- Aysajan An orphan, eight years old, born to a young woman in her twenties who had married Abidem's older brother when he was in his eighties. After Abidem's brother died the mother fled, leaving Abidem to raise this child in her household, though without ever considering him to be a member of her family.
- Rahine Abidem's eldest living child, in her fifties, who lives in a rural village outside of Yining with her husband and nine children. Rahine visits her mother's home regularly.
- Aliye Abidem's second oldest child, in her late 40s, who is married to a hard working man (a second marriage for both) with whom she shares responsibility for running a successful vegetable stall near their home. Aliye and Anwarjan are raising two sons, Ablimit (age 15) and Ablikim (age 13), and a daughter Mewlüdem (age 16).
- Anwarjan Husband to Abidem's second daughter Aliye
- Yakupjan Abidem's eldest living son, whose family lives in a household separate from Abidem's in a shared courtyard. Yakupjan is a merchant, a fruit wholesaler who has also been active in cross border trade in Kazakhstan. Yakupjan and his wife Gülzire are raising four children, son Mehmud (age 18), daughters Xalidem (age 16) and Nuriye (age 9) and son Ilyar (age 7).

INTRODUCTION

Gülzire	Wife to Abidem's son Yakupjan.
Anise	Fourth eldest child of Abidem, in her early forties, married to Ablimit Hajim
Ablimit Hajim	Husband of Anise, Ablimit (also known as Haj'kam) is a shopkeeper equally devoted to accumulating wealth and presenting himself as pious Muslim. Ablimit and Anise are raising four sons and one daughter. Their eldest child Ablet (age 16) has recently begun a ten-year program of Qur'anic study.
Maynur	Abidem's fifth oldest child, this thirty-four-year-old mother of girls Mahire (age 12) and Mukerrem (age 10) divorced her husband after he hospitalized her with a severe beating, but ultimately returned to and remarried the man, a flashy reseller of used cars.
Memetjan	Sixth eldest child of Abidem, age thirty-three. At age thirteen Memetjan was selected to receive education and training in Uyghur music at the Central Institute of Nationalities in Beijing, where he grew up and now works as a teacher and performer of Uyghur music.
Senemgül	Abidem's youngest living child, age twenty-seven, Senemgül married her sweetheart Téyipjan and has recently had two infant children, son Abdüşhükür and daughter Tewsiye.
Téyipjan	Husband of Senemgul

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Uyghur terms are romanized using Latin Script Uyghur, equivalent to *Uyghur Kompyutér Yéziqi*. Chinese terms are romanized in pinyin. The following guide provides clues for the pronunciation of personal names and other Uyghur terms commonly used in the book, and draws in part on examples taken from Hahn, *Spoken Uyghur*.

The letter *a* is pronounced as the initial *a* in ‘aqua’. The letter *e* is pronounced as in ‘get’. A final syllable containing the letter *e* is usually stressed, giving Abidem (ah-bee-DEM), Anise (ah-nee-SEH), Aliye (ah-lee-YEH), Ablet (ah-BLET) and so forth.

The letter *h* is unaspirated, as in ‘hour’ and sounds close to a pause or stop, giving Mahire (ma-ee-REH) and Rahine (ra-ee-NEH). The term *mehelle* (‘neighborhood’) is thus pronounced much like three English words ‘met-et-let’ minus their final consonants.

The letter *é* is pronounced like the *e* in ‘me’ and the letter *i* is pronounced like the *i* in ‘pick’, giving Téryipjan (tea-yip-JAN).

The sounds for *x*, *gh* and *kh* are challenging for English speakers. The letter *x* is pronounced as the *j* in the Spanish *joven* (‘youth’). The sound of *gh* is similar to the *r* in the French *radio* (‘radio’) or the German *rohre* (‘tubes’). The sound of *kh* is similar to the *ch* in the German *acht* (‘eight’). Less linguistically adventurous readers may wish to pronounce *x*, *gh* and *kh* as *h*, *g* and *k*, respectively.

Place names with established spellings have been retained, including Ili (EE-lee), Urumqi (u-ROOM-chee) and Aqsu (AK-su).

1 LOCAL IDENTITIES OF SPACE AND PLACE

Just as social groups reside in space, space itself inhabits a world of social categories and relationships. In the following three chapters on identity and place in Yining I describe the spatial relations of home and neighborhood, suburb and city, and show how these create a sense of belonging that lies at the foundation of Uyghur identity. Though the focus here is on identities based on space and place, other dimensions of personal identity that are examined more fully in subsequent chapters (gender, class, occupation and religion), are foreshadowed here.

Zawut mehelle, the neighborhood I describe, is the pseudonymous neighborhood I lived in during my field research. The house and courtyard I lived in, although tucked away on the corner of a narrow and dog-legged dirt lane on Yining's periphery, stand here at the center of my narrative. As the home I learned to know best, it was central to my experience of local life.⁴ Moreover, as the home of Yining-born Abidem Nasréddin, who hosted me during my research, it was the social hub of a large extended kin network of native Yining residents. Abidem 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 learned from during my research. Many of the families in her kin-group lived just minutes away in adjacent neighborhoods. Hence it was a rare day when several of her children or grandchildren did not stop in to visit, to share a meal or some recent gossip.

The following three chapters unfold by paralleling the expanding awareness of space I imagine a *Zawut* resident might develop as he or she travels through life. Thus, I begin with the home, the house and its courtyard, where infants take their first steps toward becoming persons. Then I describe a typical Uyghur *mehelle*, or residential neighborhood, 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 the activities and social dramas that will be examined in more detail in the three sections that come after. Indeed, the description of these spaces 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. In this section, though, the main focus is on space and place.

Finally, some comments are in order regarding the generality of the account offered here. Many Uyghur residents of Yining remember and sometimes speak of *mehelle* boundaries in places where Yining's urban center now stands, where Uyghur residents' adobe homes and walled courtyards have given way to concrete apartment buildings that house the increasing numbers of ethnic Han who work and live in the city. Though many Uyghurs still organize their perceptions of the city-center through the remembered grid of its *mehelle*, ever fewer Uyghurs live there, and many of the sites that gave those *mehelle* their names and their distinctive characteristics have been torn down in the state-sponsored push to modernize. As a result, the notion of *mehelle* as a *kind* of space has emerged in Yining, a space associated with the many dozens of suburban neighborhoods that encircle Yining's urban center. To the casual observer, as well as in the eyes of the Uyghur families who live in them, this ring of neighborhoods remains a predominately Uyghur 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 these *mehelle* possess subtle differences in form and feeling, the description of life in *Zawut* given here could apply equally well to most of them. When I use the phrase '*mehelle* residents', I refer to Uyghur residents of all Yining's *mehelle*, but not to residents of *mehelle* in other cities and towns in Xinjiang, about whom I make no claims.

For the Uyghurs who live in the *mehelle*, for the children who spend their days playing in their narrow lanes, attending school, 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 factories, who visit kinfolk bearing gifts and gossip, for all of the residents of Yining's *mehelle* the home remains a central place, the place from which all of the day's activities begin and the place to which they all return. The home is where my story begins.

1.1 THE BLESSED HOME: RESIDENCE AND IDENTITY IN A UYGHUR NEIGHBORHOOD

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

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

Senemgül, describing her mother
Abidem’s house

The physical arrangement of domestic and residential spaces in *Zawut* cannot be understood without situating those spaces in the wider social order that encompasses them. 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* (‘household’). One idiom for expressing the marriage of young adults and their formation into a conjugal unit is to say they have become ‘homed-and-stoved’ (*öylük-ochakhlikh*), or simply ‘homed’ (*öylen-*), 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.

Uyghur 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 topped with locally made adobe brick or of fired brick. Their flat roofs are simply made; poles are laid over roof joists, then covered with mats of reeds, a layer of straw, a layer of soil, and a topping of cinder or gravel. Though their rectilinear layouts vary, all homes are based on a single socio-spatial theme: A conjugal unit requires a two-room structure, an all-purpose *dawan* for living, dining and

* The Uyghur term *beriket* (‘blessing’) is cognate with the widely known Islamic concept of baraka.

sleeping and a *saray* for entertaining guests. This division into one room for family use and one room for guests arises from the sharp distinction made between the informal interactions of kin, friends and neighbors that take place in the *dawan* and the more formal visits and gift exchanges of the *saray*, which are described using the terms ‘making guests’ (*mehman khilish*) and ‘being guests’ (*mehman bolush*).

Fitting this pattern is the home of Abidem Nasréddin, a woman who maintains an independent hearth and residence in a courtyard shared with the household of her eldest son Yakupjan. The main spaces in Abidem’s home — and the floor plan of her son’s home is identical — are its two adjoining rectangular rooms, the *dawan* and the *saray*.

Abidem’s *dawan* is perpetually ‘full’, not with material objects, 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 overhead rough-hewn wooden beams. A few objects peek out from above the rafters, including a cloth bundle containing the shroud Abidem has been sewing in preparation for her eventual passing into the next world. This *dawan* is typical of such rooms in its further division into two adjacent sections, the *supa*, a twelve-by-fifteen foot platform raised twenty inches above floor level, and the *tapsa*, a six-by-fifteen foot floor made of brick. The *supa* here is built of solid earth, though in many homes *supa* have planked-over storage spaces inside. The *supa* is covered with mats of *kigiz*, a locally made thick wool felt, over which are laid carpets of soft wool or acrylic fiber. Carpets have colorful geometric or floral designs. In well-to-do homes such carpets are often hung on walls as well, but the adobe walls in Abidem’s modest *dawanöy* are bare, except for a whitewash of lime. Even the single carpet on her *supa* is a bit too small, and the frayed *kigiz* protrudes in a fifteen inch swath running along 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 Uyghur households, their designs, Uyghurs 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.

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 casual visitors seated on thin cotton pads placed directly on the *supa*. Sleeping takes place on the *supa* on

bedding, more cotton pads, sheets and blankets, that is stowed 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 Uyghur spatial arrangements is their reproduction of the concern over personal status that emerges everywhere in local social life. Virtually all things in Uyghur 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, and the *tör*, or seat of honor, is the room's most important spot. Just as a person's lap is formed only when they sit, the seat of honor at a social gathering is not a permanent physical spot in a room, but is created by the presence of those gathered. At social gatherings in Yining participants typically sit in as circular an arrangement as possible; when men socialize, for example, they routinely monitor and comment on how well they are maintaining a physical symmetry. Despite this apparent egalitarianism, all such circles contain an inherent asymmetry. That spot on the seating platform 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 it — is usually the point most distant from the edge of the *supa* adjacent to the floor. That edge, known as the *lep*, is the *supa*'s least prestigious part, and although it too is conceptually, not physically, demarcated, at Abidem's the protruding and well-worn *kigiz* appropriately marks that space.

On the fired brick floor a coal stove, hand-crafted of steel by a local stovesmith, provides heat during the cold winters, and serves as cookstove then as well. Near the stove a hand-made galvanized tin water pail and a tin ladle made by the same stovesmith and purchased at his market stall are used to bring in clean water from a spigot in the courtyard. Against the end wall of the floor opposite the door hangs a thin cotton sheet, hiding a set of sturdy wooden shelves filled with bowls and jars of rock salt, homemade hot-sauce, sweet milk curd, refined sugar, sheep fat, vegetable oil, and *dimidi* holy water. Just inside the doorway that leads to the brick patio is the *pega*, the least prestigious part of the floor, where one leaves one's shoes before stepping up to the *supa*.

The *saray*, on the other hand, though brimming with objects, is most of the time quite 'empty'. Where the living room is sparsely furnished but richly inhabited, the guest room is the opposite, richly decorated but on most days quite lifeless. The *saray* in Abidem's house has a carpeted floor, though many *saray* in Yining, perhaps most, have raised *supa* seating platforms. Abidem's *saray* also does double duty as a space for

storing various possessions. Here the walls are painted a bright sky blue, and the floor is carpeted. An iron bed frame holds a stack of cotton blankets — more than a dozen are on hand for overnight guests — each in a satin brocade cover hand-sewn by Abidem. Against one wall leans a low wooden table almost as long as the room is wide, on which Abidem spreads for guests a tablecloth and its offerings of hospitality. On a wooden desk, painted yellow and covered with oilcloth, sit two ceramic vases, one holds prepared sheep fat, the other a motley collection of papers including various state-issued booklets and documents. Beside these sit more than fifty small serving bowls in different patterns, smaller bowls for tea, larger ones for noodles, on hand for large gatherings of kin and other guests. A framed glass panel painted with the Arabic phrase ‘In the name of God the most merciful’ sits propped there as well. Two blanket chests covered in a lustrous golden metal sit in one corner, duplicate wedding gifts received by one of her daughters and left here. The *saray* like the *dawan* has a large glass-paned window on the wall facing into the courtyard; its light allows Abidem to move several large potted plants inside during the cold winter months. In one corner stands a *chamadan*, a cylindrical tin vessel capable of holding the 40 to 50 kg of flour the household consumes each month.

Visitors exiting the house through its doorway step out onto a wide brick patio, which connects to her son’s adjacent household, and down a set of steps leading into the courtyard. 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, one of many indications that this household is perhaps of more modest means than others in the neighborhood. 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 fruit, or on Abidem’s and her son’s separate small garden plots, 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 their cooking arrangements to outdoor pavilions (*chayxana*), permitting them to keep the indoors cool while enjoying Yining’s pleasant climate. A typical pavilion 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 *chayxana* are elaborate, here a simple wooden platform, a worn-out *kigiz* mat, and a makeshift roof of poles and tar-paper provide Abidem's household with all of the comfort needed.

In the spring residents mend any damage done to their outdoor stoves by the heavy snows of the previous winter, or may build the stove anew if the pavilion is to be shifted to a new site in the courtyard. These tasks are easily accomplished, though labor alone is not enough to complete them: Both Abidem and Yakupjan's wife Gülzire 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 laugh out loud for a few minutes as it was lit for the first time. While noting their belief that this ensures the smooth passage of smoke through the stove and flue, this is our first indication that domestic spaces are imprinted with meaning through ritual action and daily practice in ways that might easily be missed at first glance. We may also be less surprised to discover that *mehelle* residents describe foods prepared by women at the domestic hearth as 'strength giving', whereas foods made by men for sale in the marketplace, where this and other rituals are not performed, are 'hollow', 'weak' and 'false'.

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. Not all *Zawut* homes have ovens, however, and the joint use of *tonur* is 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. Families who borrow the use of a neighbor's or relatives' *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, and women left permanently or temporarily without nearby kin often seek help in baking from a willing neighbor, again in exchange for a portion of bread.

The outdoor latrine shared by both households stands in a far corner of the courtyard, a wide pit covered with a floor of thick planks into which a slot had been cut. The pit itself, I was told, was deep enough to last two years or more, at which point it would be emptied in winter, when it was frozen solid and could be chopped into blocks. A waist-high

wall of unpainted adobe bricks provides some privacy, but the only protection from the elements comes from the overhead branches of a gnarled tree, which some women in the family are convinced is periodically haunted by ghosts (*jin*). No *mehelle* homes I visited had indoor plumbing, but most outdoor latrines were roofed over. An old book, perhaps a child's discarded elementary school text, would be left there to use as toilet paper. Residents perform 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 stands a long makeshift shed, consisting of a tarpaper roof tacked over an assortment of timbers and bricks. Yakupjan is stockpiling these in expectation of building a new house in the courtyard in the coming year or two, as soon as he resolves 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 local mine and delivered by donkey-cart. At the opposite corner of the courtyard stands a detached one-room structure, built for Abidem's ailing elder brother to live in when he joined her household in 1990. Since his death in 1992 it has been rented out to a local kindergarten class, an arrangement that brings its own world of activity into the courtyard daily.

High walls of adobe brick and rammed earth surround the courtyard. Walls of seven feet or more are the norm in Yining, where every home is thus protected. Exterior house walls are often built along property lines, though, and do double duty by forming a part of this perimeter enclosure. Each home has a strong gate of iron or thick wooden timbers that is locked at night. These entryways present formidable facades, though burglars easily circumvent them by knocking through adobe exterior walls straight into empty homes. On either side of the front gates of most homes, two small sitting ledges are often built, where residents can sit and watch their children play, or their neighbors come and go.

Saining Boundaries

Architecture is nothing if not [...] a metaphor of the body, a modality that the body expresses to symbolize itself. A replica — and a double.

Donatella Mazzoleni⁵

The prominent entryways of *Zawut* homes are a useful reminder that boundaries between spaces can also be critical elements of homes. Within Uyghur homes boundaries such as thresholds and entranceways are marked with significance through a range of bodily practices both mundane and extraordinary, practices that more specifically link these spatial boundaries with the transgressions 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 at Abidem's is quickly snapped at if he or she unthinkingly sits or steps directly on the wooden threshold of the doorway leading into the *dawan*. Uyghur informants recorded by Katanov in 1892 attributed consequences such as foot ailments, a growth on the buttocks, the loss of friendship and poor results from business activities to sitting or standing on the threshold; the phrase 'Go stand on a threshold!' was also given as a generic insult.⁶ In other bodily practices and protective rituals the threshold also figures as a critical site. Household members' toenails clippings, for example, were carefully buried under the threshold, based on the belief, in Abidem's words, that

on judgment day they will grow into a thick barrier of thorns and keep the infidels, the *xitay* [i.e., ethnic Han Chinese], out of the house.

Ethnographic materials recorded in southern Xinjiang circa 1907 attest to this as a widespread element of Uyghur folk belief; by one such account Satan appears on Judgment Day riding his ass *marr-dadjal*, of which every hair is the string of a musical instrument. On that day nails buried under a threshold grow into thorny hedges, blocking doorways to prevent people from running out and joining in the music.⁷

Another link between bodies and thresholds was highlighted when Abidem's ten-year-old granddaughter Mukerrem was sick with the mumps. After making the girl lie down with her head on the threshold, Abidem wiped her booted foot several times against the child's neck while saining (reciting the short blessing *bismillahir rehmanir rehim*) in order to protect from evil influence. Abidem stressed that this ritual, performed on three consecutive days, was effective only if done by a woman who had given birth many times, in her own case, fourteen times. The more a woman's body has itself served as a passageway into this world, the more powerful is her ability to use a threshold to heal.

Abidem described for me 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 her descriptions:

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, which symbolizes something of insignificant value. Next, the child is taken up to the roof and lowered down through a skylight from the father back to the mother.

The ritual action here not only suggests the symbolic devaluation of the child to evade the evil eye or other maleficent influences, it also foreshadows the gendering of market exchange as a male sphere, in contrast to the female domestic sphere. Transforming the child into something purchased by the father can even be viewed as a particularly appropriate form of *couvade** for a community of merchants; in the case of Abidem, she remembers her father as a prosperous dealer in livestock. 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 sustained analysis of the grammar and vocabulary of Uyghur ritual action is to be desired.⁸

The insight of Mazzoleni quoted above, that bodies and architectural spaces are in some sense homologous, should not 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 the transition from life to death. If this boundary can be undermined successfully, the normal transition of the individual to their death can also be undermined, for instance in order to secure their premature death. Malov, for instance, recorded circa 1913 that among Uyghurs in the Yining area:

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

* *Couvade* refers to a range of cultural practices in which men ritually imitate aspects of childbirth in order to take symbolic credit for newborn children.

find the remains of the frog when they searched under the gate of the deceased person's house.⁹

By recognizing that this magic practice conjoins two passages, the first from inside to outside the home, the second from 'this world' (*bu dunya*) to 'that world' (*u dunya*), we can also shed some light on the question of why a frog is used. As Molnár points out in his discussion of Frazer's notion of sympathetic magic, frogs are associated world-wide with rain-charms, given their symbolic connection to water; in Northwestern India, for example, live frogs are raised into the air to draw forth water from the skies.¹⁰ The symbolic equivalence of 'liquids with living and drying with dying' in connection with the evil eye belief complex found widely in Xinjiang suggests the link between water deprivation and death.¹¹ Elderly persons in some parts of Xinjiang, for example, are spoken of as *khurutkha*, 'dried up, parched, withered'.¹² For Uyghurs in this region, then, a dead frog buried under the ground represents an inversion of the rain-seeking ritual, an attempt to bring a kind of drought to an individual, the drying up of the liquid that symbolizes their life essence.

On a more quotidian level, household members regularly marked their passage out of the home and into the public space of neighborhood streets and marketplace by saining themselves, that is, reciting the protective blessing '*bismillahir rehmanir rehim*', at the exact moment they exited through the courtyard gate. 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 a number of ways. Until a newborn undergoes a protective ritual bathing ceremony on its fortieth day, for example, all visitors arriving from the marketplace must remain standing outside the home for several minutes. This practice was routinely followed by visitors to Abidem's home while her youngest daughter Senemgül rested there for forty days after giving birth to daughter Tewsiye. A second example is described in this field note passage.

Abidem 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 next month's flour a day early — whether Abidem didn't know the date or the policy, I don't know — but she bought the privately sold 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 Abidem was walking home safely on

the icy roads. Heading back I passed [Abidem's daughter] Maynur, who was walking on the main road past the turn off to our house.

"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 *chamadan*?"

"Uh ... yeah," I responded, without really hearing her question, and then realizing that she had said *chamadan*, the tin flour bin. In fact I had just sat the sack on the floor. 'Now why did she ask me that?' I thought. Abidem 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 in powder and make-up, gave her explanations, and walked off arm-in-arm with a female friend. As soon as they were gone Abidem turned to me and asked,

"Did you pour the flour in the *chamadan*?" When I told her I had not, she looked visibly relieved. I suddenly recalled having seen her saying '*bismillahir rehmanir rehim*' when dumping the flour [...] both Maynur and Abidem had worried I would pour it without speaking this blessing, perhaps endangering a month's worth of food.

The home is a space always concerned with safeguarding its blessing. A child caught whistling inside a home, for example, is quickly scolded for 'driving away the home's blessing (*beriket*)'. For flour to be safely removed from the entangled domains of government and marketplace and transferred into the home, the moment of transition must be protected. Saining over food is also a routine feature of domestic life for women, done 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', whereas market foods, prepared by men without saining, are 'weak' and 'empty'.

Flexible Homes, Flexible Households

The cultural logic that shapes the spatial ordering of homes in *Zawut* incorporates dynamic as well as static elements. In Abidem's household the frequent reorganization of domestic space was occasioned by seasonal requirements, such as the shifting of the cookstove outdoors as noted above, as well as by the changing composition of the household and the changing statuses of and relations between its members.

In the case of Abidem's household, spatial arrangements revealed the evolving boundaries of the social ties between her and her son. In late

autumn, for example, I discovered that Yakupjan had terminated 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 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 afforded an occasional private moment for Yakupjan and his wife, but the primary motivation behind its use was to permit Yakupjan to get away from his eldest son Mehmud (age 18), who continued to sleep in the home's main *dawan*. An intense animosity between father and son grew throughout my stay — the two avoided eating meals together, for example — ending ultimately in a fist- and knife-fight between them. Trouble had been brewing “ever since Mehmud’s nose had swollen up,” Abidem explained, referring to the period after puberty when many parents find their children hard to handle.

Later that year, in the spring, I returned from a three-week absence to find Abidem’s *chayxana* completely dismantled, and her garden plot from the previous year bricked over. Abidem too had been surprised by these changes, which her son had made while she had gone to Urumqi, a fifteen-hour bus ride away, with her daughter Anise who sought medical treatment. Her surprise gave way quickly to bitter silent angry resentment when she learned that Yakupjan, because he had decided to continue using his winter *dawan* for sleeping throughout the summer and felt his mother’s *chayxana* would be in his way, had simply destroyed it. When I asked him about bricking over his mother’s garden, he shrugged and laughed. “She gets all her vegetables free from Aliye anyway,” he said. Aliye did often bring over damaged and unsaleable produce from her family’s market stall, a bounty Yakupjan perhaps resented not sharing in, but he knew well that his mother valued the garden for its beauty and for the pleasure she derived from tending to it. As for the newly bricked-over space, Yakupjan used it all spring and summer as a convenient spot to wash his motorcycle, a weekly event, as men in the *mehelle* liked to keep their motorcycles clean. Reorganizations such as these highlight the difficulties households faced when sharing a courtyard. Such multi-household courtyards were common, indeed the norm, in *Zawut*, and judging from street-corner gossip most households had their share of ongoing antagonisms similar to those described here.

Just as spatial arrangements inside the home were flexible, so too was household composition. In the summer of 1995, Abidem, in her late seventies, still maintained a separate hearth and an independent household, home to a changing group of relatives. On my arrival in July,

she was living with a boisterous ten-month-old grandson Abdüşhükür, the first-born son of her youngest child Senemgöl. Abidem had been raising the boy for six months, ever since Senemgöl tipped a basin of boiling water onto herself, and needed to recover from a bad scalding. Abidem provided this child care largely without compensation, a fact she occasionally grumbled about, though the child's parents would periodically give her small amounts of cash to help cover expenses. Senemgöl, like most of Abidem's 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 Aysajan, eight years old, who was considered by all to be an orphan. When Abidem's elder brother was in his seventies, he had taken as his eighth wife — as one relative explained “he needed someone to clean and cook for him” — a twenty-four-year-old woman from Aqsu, a town in southern Xinjiang. The young woman soon bore a child, and when Abidem's brother took ill not long after she ran away, abandoning her child to Abidem's care. Though Abidem did not view Aysajan as kin, no one in the family did, she had raised him on her own since then, feeding and clothing him using what little money she had. My arrival in July 1995 brought the household count to four. In January 1996 Senemgöl delivered daughter Tewsıye, and for the six months after that Senemgöl and both her children lived primarily in Abidem's home.

Senemgöl was not the only one of Abidem's children who had returned to her mother's house for an extended stay. In the early 1990s, Abidem 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 remarrying the same man. Maynur still quarreled frequently with her husband, and she returned regularly to stay at her mothers for days or weeks at a time, an addition of three people, since her daughters ages ten and twelve were sure to be around much of that time.

Members of the household of Abidem's son Yakupjan, like the members of Abidem's household, will reappear throughout the following chapters; these include Yakupjan himself, age forty-three, his wife Gülzire age forty, and their four children, boys Mehmud and Ilyar, ages eighteen and seven, and the two middle girls Xalidem and Nuriye, ages sixteen and nine.

Changing Lifestyles: Moving Up And Moving Out

For some residents of *Zawut* and adjacent neighborhoods a number of more permanent changes in the spatial configuration of domestic life were also underway, changes that involved both ‘moving up’ and ‘moving out’. By ‘moving up’ I refer to the shift toward constructing new two- or three-story private residences in the *mehelle*, where single story residences have long been the norm. By ‘moving out’ I refer to the situation of those few Uyghur families for whom employment at a state work-unit leads to their moving from suburban private dwellings into concrete high-rise apartment buildings in the paved city center.

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 *yuan* to have a fancy mausoleum built for himself. He gets this master bricklayer to come, the bricklayer was a master at speaking as well, and so he brings the guy over to the site, and gets all of 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.”

Muxtar Hésam, Yining jokester

As more and more *mehelle* 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. And in building new houses, as the joke suggests, putting up highly ornamented homes of two or three stories became the norm. At times it seemed as if every lane in the *mehelle* had one or two households busy demolishing their single story rammed-earth and adobe homes and building two-story brick houses. Indeed, the house Muxtar sat in as he told the above joke had recently been rebuilt into an elaborate two-story dwelling with an ornate decoratively carved and painted wooden balcony. 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 have seen these bright facades as a clear sign of material prosperity, local residents understood that large houses signaled a more complex shift in residential patterns. Land was becoming increasingly scarce, a change residents attributed to the impact of Han migrants coming to Xinjiang. Where once brothers would marry and establish independent residences away from their parents' home, usually in the same or adjacent *mehelle*, now three and even four brothers had begun to accept the need to live together in multi-story houses.

Han labor crews were building most of these new Uyghur homes. Abidem's son-in-law Ablimit Hajim, for example, whom family members called Haj'kam, 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 Uyghurs' reliance on Han homebuilders was not new — visitors to the region in the 1900s and 1930s commented on the presence of Han building crews¹³ and noted that Uyghurs derived an elevated sense of personal status from hiring Han as manual laborers — building practices themselves were changing due to market forces. Haj'kam, for example, opted for a pre-fabricated cement slab roof over traditional wood and mat construction when he learned the change would save him 300 *yuan*.

Given the above joke's suggestion of popular resentment against wealthy merchants building extravagant 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 express his intention to build a 'plain' house, perhaps in part because he was a shopkeeper, selling everyday items to his neighbors from a small store attached to his house, and did not wish to 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 Anise 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 pious shopkeeper's posture of having wealth but not wishing to attract attention to the fact is the opposite of that found among many of Yining's marketplace traders, for whom fostering an appearance of wealth has become a key element in their strategy for 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 local practice, but the stigma it carries under Islamic custom makes it a sensitive issue for this veteran of the pilgrimage to Mecca who prays five times each day, which is more than most *mehelle* men. His frequent heavy-handed attempts to impress his poverty on friends and neighbors, Abidem suggests behind his back, are *set*, ugly and embarrassing.

An ongoing concern shared by *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 at hand for avoiding making these payments.

Haj'kam often mentions his plans to throw a *nezir* once the house is complete, describing it as a large party for friends, family and neighbors who will present him with gifts. Haj'kam looks forward to this, commenting in his gravelly, deadpan voice,

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

Despite their considerable variation, dwellings in the *mehelle* whether new or old, plain or highly ornamented, for single or extended families, all were based around the architectural elements described in this chapter, a feature they shared with Uyghur peasant homes in Yining's surrounding farming villages. To review, these elements include high-walled courtyards containing fruit trees, grapevines and a garden plots, primary residences with rooms laid out in *dawan* and *saray* pairs, and outdoor clay ovens, earthen stoves and shaded eating pavilions for summertime use. Newly built *mehelle* homes might appear different on the outside, but inside and outside they provided the same facilities and permitted the same daily functions, such as cooking and baking, as before. Only when Uyghur families moved into apartment buildings in the city center did the spatial bases of domestic life change 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 *Xenzu 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, ‘*gup gup gup*’. Tons of dirt was coming out, and one of them up and says to my dad,

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

Muxtar Hésam, Yining jokester

For a small number of Yining’s Uyghurs, full-time positions in state work-units brought the opportunity to reside in apartment buildings. For most, this came with success in the state educational system leading to a government job assignment. In the case of the raconteur of the above joke Muxtar, the apartment came with the special status his father Hésam enjoyed as a nationally known performer in a state performance troupe. The floor plans of these apartments were based on layouts designed and made ubiquitous throughout China by Han, and did not accord with the patterns of traditional Uyghur social life. For example, there was no *dawan* room with its raised *supa* platform. In the few cases in which I visited Uyghurs 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 Hésam 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 it hints at the power of architecture to disrupt residents’ abilities to participate in the reciprocal visitation practices central to Uyghur social life. 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.*

* The *nan* sold widely in local markets (*bazar nan*) differs so greatly from home-made *nan* (*öy nan*) in both taste and texture that *mehelle* residents view them as fundamentally incommensurate. Buyers of market *nan* include restaurants and food stalls who serve it to customers, and local residents who serve it at large gatherings such as outdoor picnics or other social events.

Paved Streets and other Changes in Mehelle Space

The impact of 1990s market success on the *mehelle* was not limited to the building of new private residences. Heavy rains and melting snow regularly turned *mehelle* lanes to mud, and on such days finely dressed residents setting off to market or on household visits could be seen stepping their way carefully around deep ruts and immense puddles. As I passed a particularly treacherous intersection one day walking with Abidem, she recalled a childhood memory of witnessing a horse so hopelessly mired in the mud at that same location that it broke its leg and was killed on the spot by its owner. Given the considerable inconvenience mud caused residents, it is not surprising that increased wealth led to widespread interest in paving *mehelle* lanes. At this same time Yining's paved city center was expanding outwards incrementally, encroaching on the *mehelle* suburbs and bringing with it a tide of Han families, Han businesses and Han architecture all of them equally unwelcome to Uyghur residents. But even deep inside the *mehelle*, new sections of paved road stood isolated, connecting to dirt lanes at either end. These paved sections, financed by the wealthy merchants whose homes fronted onto them, increasingly obscured the former sharp distinction between paved city thoroughfares and the dirt or gravel lanes of the *mehelle*. While the benefits of such improvements were plain to local residents, these changes also signaled an increase in social stratification, an effect of the economic success enjoyed by Yining's more prosperous traders. This awareness was expressed in the following joke, recorded in Yining and sold widely in local markets on a manufactured cassette of songs and jokes.

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

Now, her *mehelle*, it's 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 *mehelle*, 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 of the rocks and lets the dogs out!" (Muxtar Hésam, Yining jokester)

This narrative nicely expresses the class tension I allude to, here embedded in a story of courtship. Note how, in his final line, Muxtar uses the word 'girlfriend' as a metonym for the entire neighborhood, she

is her neighborhood, a testament to the *mehelle*'s status as a critical unit of social identity. The young man visits her and sees that her neighborhood is fancier than his own. 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 presents a perfect symmetry in 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 loose — and the joke 'cracks' through its critique of the material and social changes associated with modernization and class differentiation.

In this chapter I have started to sketch out some of the ways that the household provides the physical and cultural space that lies at the core of the experience of being a *mehelle* resident. That picture is hardly complete, of course, and in the chapters that follow we will return often to household spaces as we examine in more detail the daily dramas that shape much of social life in these communities. Now, however, it is time for us to cross over the threshold of the house and pass through the courtyard gate in order to look at the space of the *mehelle* beyond the home, and to examine the profound affective importance the neighborhood holds as a basis for social identity in Yining. To do this I turn now to the next chapter, and its exploration of the spatial and social organization of Yining's *mehelle* suburban ring as a whole.

1.2 YINING'S *MEHELLE* 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 *Döng mehelle*
driving a donkey cart. Right when he is
about to come to the city police [who stood
each day at the junction of *mehelle* dirt lane
and paved city street], he unhitches the
donkey, loads it into the cart, and starts
pulling it himself!

Hésam Khurban, Yining jokester

Just as the organization of home and courtyard reflect and reproduce key features of Uyghur social life, so too do spatial and symbolic characteristics of suburban *mehelle* neighborhoods 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 Uyghurs, or more generally that former 'natural' hierarchies of power are being inverted in the name of modernization, prompts us to consider more deeply Uyghurs' feelings for the rapidly changing *mehelle*.

Zawut Mehelle

To return home to *Zawut mehelle* from excursions into Yining's city center, Abidem and her neighbors would pass beyond the point where the city's paved roads and bus service ended, and walk several hundred meters farther down a series of winding poplar-lined dirt roads. The manufacturing compound for which *Zawut* was named stood just across from where the narrow, dog-legged lane leading to Abidem's courtyard veered away from the larger dirt road, which continued on toward the Ili River several kilometers away. In the mid-1990s the factory's only sites of daily activity were its small health clinic, open to the community at

large, and the booth facing onto the street where guards kept watch over the factory compound's usually locked gate. In summer evenings men drifting out of the adjacent pool hall, or on their way home from a night spent sitting around a pile of summer melons for sale to passers-by, would step quietly into the guardhouse to smoke hashish and tell jokes late into the night. Only on Sunday mornings were the gates thrown open, and the compound's large empty fields would be filled with rows of used television sets and immaculately washed motorcycles, second-hand goods brought by their owners to be sold through smooth-talking marketplace middlemen to other *mehelle* residents.

Most *mehelle* roads are dirt or gravel and are from eight to fifteen feet wide. All but the narrowest are lined with rows of poplars on either side, their trunks whitewashed from the ground up to a height of four to eight feet. Next to each row of trees runs a small flowing stream, then a raised dirt trail where residents walk when roads turn muddy. In addition to these broader dirt roads, networks of narrower more twisted paths also weave their way through the *mehelle*. Entirely lining 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 rich sky blue. Poorer neighborhoods look much the same, except that homes are smaller, courtyards more densely packed together, and outer walls facing the streets are more often left a dull unpainted brown.

Like most of Yining's *mehelle*, *Zawut* had a number of new homes under construction, fewer perhaps than in the more prosperous *mehelle* adjacent to it, but as many or more than most. Like most *mehelle* it had several small shops selling an assortment of daily-use items and everyday foodstuffs, convenient for residents who needed such items on short notice. Two health clinics operated in *Zawut* when I arrived, staffed by Uyghur or Uyghur-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 *mehelle* and in nearby villages Han doctors moonlighting from state hospitals set up private clinics and charged inflated prices for basic medicines.

In more prosperous *mehelle* trash service was regular; ever-present piles of trash on the streets of poorer *mehelle* suggested services there were less comprehensive. As with other *mehelle*, electricity went out frequently in *Zawut*, much more often than it did in the mostly Han city center, where street wiring and transformers were better maintained. *Mehelle* residents were responsible for maintaining the single wires that ran into their homes themselves, and short circuits due to rain or snow

often seemed more the norm than the exception.

Although *Zawut* was in most ways typical of Yining's *mehelle*, certain differences did exist. *Zawut* had no mosques, for example, which provided centers for informal associational networks and reinforced a shared identity among their congregations. Men in *Zawut* invariably prayed at a large nearby mosque once a week, on Fridays, as did virtually all Uyghur men in Yining. In many *mehelle*, however, smaller daily-use mosques were also common. Wealthy merchants returning from the *haj* financed the construction of these small mosques, in part to promote the practice of performing five daily prayers. While there was no strict relationship between *mehelle* boundaries and the spatial arrangement of mosques, the congregations of Yining's larger mosques usually lived in adjacent neighborhoods, and mosques anchored those neighborhoods spatially as centers of daily and weekly activity. For more senior men, they were the central focus among all others; for younger men, pool halls and gaming rooms with mahjong tables, of which *Zawut* had several, were often a more important place to congregate.

Zawut also lacked the steam baths that *mehelle* residents visited on a regular basis, usually once or twice a week. Several nearby bathhouses served their needs, however, providing users with private suites (a changing room, a washing room and a steam-sauna room) for a fee of two to four *yuan* per hour. Although bathhouses were filled with men and women most days of the week, they were busiest on Friday mornings when 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.

One feature common to *Zawut* and surrounding *mehelle* was the gradual arrival of Han families into Uyghur neighborhoods, a situation brought on 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 factory. 'Great One Hundred Year Plan' proclaimed the banner that hung from the site's construction crane tower, a none too subtle reminder to local residents that the Han in-migrants had come to stay. *Mehelle* residents spoke bitterly about such changes, but did so without any references to legal institutions of property rights, suggesting that their deeply felt sense of ownership of the *mehelle* did not arise from actual property rights under Chinese law. Instead, from *mehelle* residents' perspective legal institutions were just another instrument used

by the state to strip them of access to goods they had long enjoyed.

Not every new building project in the *mehelle* was to house the growing Han population, however. On the west edge of Yining an intended tourist attraction had recently been installed by the local government in a Uyghur *mehelle*. The large, gated site contained a statue honoring Lin Zexu, a famous Han statesman who resided in the area in the nineteenth century after being exiled there by the Qing emperor. Soon after I first visited the site I was invited to be a guest at several nearby homes, whose residents recalled angrily how the government had taken land from Uyghur homeowners to build the monument. This in itself can be seen as an unintended but fitting tribute to Lin, considering that he was put in charge of Han colonization efforts in the area in 1844.¹⁴ It is also ironic that a statue of Lin, a Han national hero remembered for standing up to the British during the Opium War, now looks out over communities of Uyghurs for whom heroin addiction is a major source of social problems, and who widely blame the Han for permitting the illicit trafficking of a drug they see as a genocidal poison.

ONE MEHELLE IS STILL FIVE FINGERS

Like my neighbors I was always proud to tell new acquaintances that I was from *Zawut*. Not because it was full of decent, reputable people, which it was, but because I felt I shared their sense of belonging to a specific place, to a specific group of people. Other *mehelle*, of course, were no less meaningful for the people who lived in them. When I saw Uyghur men from Yining make each other's acquaintance in Beijing or Urumqi, the first question they invariably asked each other was which *mehelle* they were from. According to one Uyghur phrase one has a blood tie with one's *mehelle*, it is 'the *mehelle* where one's umbilical cord blood has been spilt' (*kindik khéni tókülgen mehelle*). Another indication of the *mehelle*'s significance as a social unit is found in a local belief regarding the practice of performing male circumcision, the *sünnet toy*. According to a version of that belief provided by Abidem, 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 *mehelle*. If we accept that here 'mother' and 'father' stand not so much as individuals but as representing entire kin lines, then *mehelle* is explicitly the next level of social identity beyond the kin group.

The importance of the *mehelle* as a basis for social identity among Uyghurs in other towns and cities in Xinjiang is likely to vary

considerably due to factors such as social structure and population size. One indication that *mehelle* identities are perhaps stronger in Yining than elsewhere is found in the liner notes of more than four hundred cassette tapes of Uyghur popular and folk music produced throughout Xinjiang that I collected during my stay. In those notes, biographical information about artists from Yining uniformly mention their *mehelle* affiliations, whereas biographies of musicians from other oases do so only rarely. This is not to suggest that *mehelle* are unimportant in other oases, on the contrary, informal interviews with residents of other oases suggested they did exist and mattered greatly to Uyghurs throughout Xinjiang.

Despite the genuine solidarity created by shared *mehelle* identity, residents understood that feelings of solidarity coexisted with an awareness of the many distinctions and differences that shaped local society, as the following field note passage suggests.

After dinner Maynur finished washing the dishes, then went out up to the big street. Abidem was upset about it. Our neighbor on the corner stepped out of her doorway in the dark, and Abidem asked her,

“Is Maynur at your place?”

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

“I knew it, she’s out in the street,” she said, referring to the *mehelle*’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 *mehelle* 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 (*bash khol oxshimaydu*).” There are all kinds of people in a *mehelle*.

A Taxonomic Survey of Yining’s Mehelle

During my research I mapped out the rough boundaries of several dozen of Yining’s *mehelle*. No maps or scholarly works in Uyghur or Chinese I could find acknowledged these boundaries or even listed the names of *mehelle*, despite the fact that for local Uyghurs they constituted perhaps the primary cultural categorization of both physical and social space. A review of some these names highlights the inherent dynamism of local communities and community identities; *mehelle* emerge, grow, decline, are displaced, and disappear, all under the influence of myriad

forces, including demographic change and socio-economic stratification. In the final analysis, however, *mehelle* boundaries are as much social as physical, and a review of *mehelle* names also reveals some of the social and economic bases for the organization of local communities, demonstrating that *mehelle* are shaped continually by local individuals, social groups and events.

Many *mehelle* take their names from a craft or trade group. Names for such trades combine the name of a product, for example, *naghra* ('kettle-drum'), with the agentive suffix *-chi* ('one who'). The resulting compound is usually an ambiguous one; in this example, *naghrachi* might refer equally to one who makes drums, one who sells them, or one who performs with them — hence my temptation to translate *naghrachi* freely as 'kettledrum-ist'. When providing *mehelle* histories, residents were often unable (or reluctant) to distinguish in such cases between communities of makers versus sellers. In the contemporary marketing of traditional handicrafts, some local craftsmen produce for their own retail operations only, some sell to merchants who engage in either retailing and wholesaling, and some do both. The use of the ambiguous suffix *-chi* is fitting then, in that it captures nicely this blending of roles. *Mehelle* whose names derive from crafts include *Naghrachi* ('kettledrum-ist'), *Namatmen* ('felt making'), where makers of a thick kind of felt lived, *Könchi* ('leather-worker'), *Khazanachi* ('cauldron-ist'), *Töpchi*, from a kind of hat made there, and *Takhchilikh* ('farrier').

Some *mehelle* are named after wealthy or prominent individuals. *Ghapaway Kocha* (*kocha* means 'street') is named after 'Ghapar bay', or 'Ghapar the rich man'. *Tajaway*, whose residents were said to include a large proportion of ethnic Uzbeks, is named after a rich man who lived there, and derives from *Taji* (*taiji* ?) + *bay*. *Kharaway*, residents suggested, derives either from *khara* ('black') + *bay* ('rich man'), in which case *khara* is perhaps a nickname, given its derogatory implications, or more likely from '*khari*' (the honorific 'one who recites the Qur'an') + *bay*.

Other *mehelle* are named after specific sites, which in many cases have long since ceased to exist. *Orda* ('palace') *mehelle* derives its name from the one-time residence of the *xakim beg*, a local official in the period of Qing rule (c. 1756-1911). *Consul* is an area in the city center named for the Russian consulate established there after a commercial treaty was signed in 1851. This wooded area with many buildings now operates as a state-run hotel. *Moyka*, according to informants, also takes its name from a Russian word, that for 'felt factory'. *Pen Zawut* ('plank factory') is a *mehelle* near the riverside. *Töt Dukan* ('four stores') takes

its name from a central crossroads with stores at each corner; *Üch Dukan* ('three stores') is likewise evident. *Térek Mazar* ('poplar shrine') takes its name from a saint shrine, or *mazar*, in the vicinity.

Other *mehelle* names relate to terrain and topographic features; indeed Uyghur place names throughout Xinjiang are typically based on 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 mehelle*, 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 reportedly created by extensive brick-making facilities that operated there long ago. The canal for which *Ara Östeng* ('middle [or forked] canal') *mehelle* is named, like many canals in and around Yining, was dug under Qing rule by corvée labor provided by Uyghur peasants and *mehelle* craftsmen. One *mehelle* 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 *Yeyingkha Su*.

Other neighborhoods, such as *Jigdelik* ('Oleaster orchard') and *Top Térek* ('poplar grove'), took their names from important local cultigens. Several prominent hillocks in the suburban fringe were named as *mehelle*, including *Döng* ('hill'), *Kharadöng* ('black hill'), and *Topadöng*. The latter may derive from *topa* ('soil') + *döng* ('hill'), or perhaps from *töpe* ('upper part') + *döng* ('hill'). In reviewing terrain features in *mehelle* names, I note also that cultural categories can act as perceptual and cognitive filters for human awareness of the landscape. It is a striking coincidence, for example, that of all Yining's neighborhoods 'black hill' *mehelle* was viewed by residents of other *mehelle* as having the highest proportion of men engaged in the kinds of manual labor referred to derogatorily as 'black work' (*khara ish*).

Numerous areas within Yining take names from particular markets located there, but not all named areas constitute *mehelle*. Market areas that were considered *mehelle* include *Alma Bazar* ('apple market') and *Chilan Xangza* ('jujube street'). *Bide Bazar* ('clover market') and an area called 'Chinese market', on the other hand, were spoken of more as locales rather than as actual neighborhoods. Residents referred to 'Chinese market' alternately as *Xitay Bazar* or *Xenzu Bazar*; the ethnic label *xitay* has mild connotations of derogation, whereas the term *xenzu*, from the Chinese term *hanzu* meaning 'ethnic Han', does not.

A number of *mehelle* names derive from translations or transliterations of non-Uyghur words, many of which have at this point

worked their way into popular Uyghur consciousness. *Hembeng*, a name deriving from Chinese *hanbing* ('Han soldiers'), was formerly the site of a military encampment.* *Khizil Bayrakh* ('red flag') was formerly a part of *Orda mehelle*, but by the mid-1990s it was considered a distinct *mehelle*, taking its name from a standard Communist-era symbol. This is an interesting semiotic shift away from *orda*, the 'palace' of a pre-Communist Uyghur official, to a symbol standing specifically for the Chinese Communist Party. One *mehelle* is called *Terekhiyiz*, a corruption of *Terekhi Yéza* ('Progress Village'), a name presumably bestowed decades earlier under state-mandated collectivization. One *mehelle*, a broad flat area on the banks of the Ili river, is called *Jirghilang*, probably taking its name from the Mongolian *jirghalang* ('enjoyment'), since this area is a popular picnic site. Also near the river is *Khongtaji mehelle*. *Khun Taiji* was the title of several Oyrat Mongol rulers in Ili. 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.

The above categories by no means exhaust the bases for *mehelle* naming. My inquiries into the origin of *Alte Shu'ar* ('six slogans') *mehelle* led to arguments among several middle-aged men until one Abdurishit 'the matchmaker' settled the matter with his account of how the 'six slogans' faction, a Republican-era political movement, had started there. Some *mehelle* arose when residents of a previous *mehelle* migrate *en masse*, as is reputedly the case with *Besh Kirem*, whose initial residents I was told came from the southern Xinjiang town of *Besh Kirem* near Kashgar. The circumstances behind the name of *Ayding* ('moonlight') *mehelle* was not known to the many *Ayding* residents I questioned, but this word's Mongolian origin suggests that the neighborhood may date to the 1700s.

Other *mehelle* names I elicited at least once but whose provenance I was not able to further identify, include *Sherkh* ('east'), *Pakha* ('frog'), *Teshlepki*, eponymous with its large bazaar, possibly from Russian *deshevki* ('low price, cheap stuff'), *Törem*, possibly from *teram* ('a branching off of one stream into many'), *Pushman*, *Paytima Kōrük* ('foot-cloth bridge'), *Bayköl*, *Bostan* ('oasis'), *Yéngi* ('new') and *Ghalibiyet Kocha*, which means 'victory street', though which victory is

* 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, *Zhongguo jingying xiyu shi*, 300).

referred to is not clear.

Most of the important questions one might ask about *mehelle* in Yining and elsewhere in Xinjiang remain to be answered. How fixed or fluid are the spatial boundaries of *mehelle* at any one point in time, or across time? What factors lead to the fission or fusion of neighborhoods? At this point I 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, *Ayding* 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, *Khexriman Kocha* ('hero street'). Perhaps one day sub-*mehelle* such as this one will be viewed as separate *mehelle*.

The Pan-Neighborhood Identity of the Ghuljalikh

Although good-natured rivalries between residents of different *mehelle* were often invoked in Yining's men's daily interactions, a strong sense of shared identity united the different *mehelle* vis-à-vis Uyghur residents of other cities. Inter-oasis rivalries are expressed widely in Xinjiang, often taking the forms of verbal teasing or folk rhymes by which residents of one locale insult residents of another, such as these two variant items I recorded in Yining regarding Kashgarians.

Kashgarian you dolt	<i>ksheshkherlikh khashang</i>
It has become springtime	<i>etiyaz boldi</i>
Throw away your ragged leather sandals	<i>chorukhni tashlang</i>
Make yourself a drum	<i>dumbakhni yasang</i>

Kashgarian you dolt	<i>ksheshkherlikh khashang</i>
Scratch my back	<i>dümbemni khashlang</i>
It has become springtime	<i>etiyaz boldi</i>
Throw away your ragged sandals	<i>chorukhni tashlang</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 Uyghur migration into the Ili Valley from different areas of southern Xinjiang may have given rise to divisions and cleavages within Yining residence and identity patterns, such as, for example, between descendants of Yining's original Uyghur settlers, known as *taranchi*, who arrived from Turpan, Aqsu and

Uch-Turpan circa 1755-1760, and arrivals from Kashgar who came more than a century later. Whatever the case may be, these inter-oasis rivalries are reciprocated, as this verse recorded in 1935 from a Kashgar native about the *taranchi* residents of Yining attests.¹⁵

A <i>taranchi</i> is a fool	<i>taranchi digen axmakh</i>
In his girdle he has flint and steel	<i>bélide iken chaxmakh</i>
Whichever town he is in	<i>khaysi sheherde bar dur</i>
He is ready to sell his own town	<i>özining sheherini satmakh</i>

Note that the specific insult leveled at Yining-area Uyghurs is exactly that they lack a sufficiently developed sense of local-place loyalty!

Aural Community and Radio Yining

For the proud residents of Yining's many distinct *mehelle*, there was more than just physical proximity and a shared tradition of mutual teasing that united them into a single social body. One local institution in particular was a key factor in producing a genuine sense of community among local residents.

Most mornings during my stay in *Zawut*, Abidem rose before dawn, performed her morning prayers, and began quietly attending to the first of the day's many chores. And always, at 6:30 A.M., she would turn on her radio to catch the beginning of the day's Uyghur-language broadcast. The year before, her grandson Mehmud, Yakupjan's eighteen-year-old son, had slipped in and stolen her prized radio to sell for spending money. There wasn't much that could be done about Mehmud, even his father couldn't control him; as for the radio, she went out and bought a new one immediately, for a new programming format begun *circa* 1993-1994 had quickly become an indispensable part of her day. From morning to dusk a mixture of Uyghur folk and popular music, humorous sketches, poetry readings and serialized passages from well-known Uyghur historical novels were presented in an all-Uyghur-language broadcast. As I walked through *mehelle* lanes and city streets, it often seemed to me that the entire Uyghur population of Yining was listening in; enough homes and market stalls played the station loudly that one was almost never out of earshot. This omnipresent 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

children as young as four or five. Always, though for no identifiable reason, they were asked to give (and gave) their full names and places of residence. Always the 'address' began with a *mehelle* name, then the child would give directions to their home: '...then turn left at Abdurishit'akam's store, it's the fourth courtyard on the right'.¹⁶ Few callers gave street numbers, since residents rarely used them. *Mehelle* doors often displayed three or four differently numbered state-issued plaques, as residents added new plaques each time *mehelle* lanes were renumbered but rarely bothered to remove the old ones. The children were usually asked if they were calling from home, and if so, to give their home phone numbers. In face-to-face interactions men beamed with pride whenever a young child showed she or he 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 privileged possessors of phones. As it cost 3,200 *yuan* [\$400] to install a home phone, a phone was a conspicuous marker of a trader's success in the marketplace.

Radio programs could also become sites of deeply felt emotional sharing between individuals, creating an intimacy that enhanced listeners' sense of community identity. One Sunday morning, a woman called an on-air request line. She gave her name and her age, fifty-three, to the program host, and tried unsuccessfully 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 'Narrow Road' for her?

The degree of her emotional openness, intense as it was, was not entirely exceptional for adult callers, and many shared intimate personal details about their lives. The song this caller named as her request immediately caught my ear, as it was one of my own favorite Uyghur songs, one I had heard sung live at informal gatherings of friends many times. To me its lyrics expressed beautifully the bond *mehelle* residents felt with the face-to-face social world and the physical space of the *mehelle*. In my reading the song 'Narrow Road' uses narrow *mehelle* lanes as a poetic figure for Uyghurs' materially modest but emotionally and spiritually rich origins.¹⁷ As the lyrics (given in the front of this book) make clear, not even the marvels of Paris or Istanbul can diminish the deep longing a Uyghur traveler feels in his soul for the narrow streets of his hometown.

The station's cultural programming had a special value for its Yining

audience as a background for the day's activities, even when the programs themselves were not a focus of attention. One summer afternoon, a passage from a novel set in the area around Yining, 'Waves of the Ili River' (*Ili dolkhunliri*), was being read aloud. Abidem broke off a conversation she was having on the *supa* with her next-door neighbor, commented to no one in particular that these were 'important words' (*muhim gep*), then returned to her chatting.

Mehelle residents identify strongly with Yining's long local musical tradition, and Uyghur-language music, much of it from contemporary Yining artists, made up a large part of the station's programming. Many songs played were about romantic love, a common theme in popular music. Songs popular during my stay included 'Cute Girl' (*omakh khiz*), 'Souvenir' (*yadikar*), 'Pretty' (*chiraylikh*), and 'Libra Flower' (*mizan'gül*, a woman's name). Not all favorite songs were songs of love and romance, however. The following anti-heroin song was 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

Local music cassette merchants explained to me that many popular songs in the mid-1990s dealt with issues of heroin use and addiction. Most of these songs had been recorded by younger male performers between the ages of sixteen and twenty, the period when youths, both male and female, became increasingly at risk for drug 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 fictive older brothers, as we will see in Section 2, to oblige 'younger brothers' to respect them.

Occasionally songs were aired on the program that residents understood voiced thinly disguised pro-Uyghur or anti-government

sentiments. One example was the following song, which expressed a distinctly ethnonationalistic yearning for independence and Uyghur autonomy.

Coming into the world, you met only with hardship
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 Uyghurs?

Some people, crying 'Uyghur', raise a shout
Some people, being Uyghur, prepare to rout
Doesn't your conscience burn, doesn't it drive you at all?
Tell me, my kind-hearted, peaceful Uyghurs

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 Uyghurs

Other songs played on the radio rekindled a sense of connection with local history. One gray winter morning, a distinctive nasal voice that Abidem knew well came through the radio, the voice of the blind singer Dawutjan, born and raised in *Zawut*, who had been a companion of her husband's throughout their lives. When Dawutjan began to sing 'Canal Song' (*östeng naxshisi*), a song she remembered first hearing more than sixty years earlier, she put down her sewing and looked off into the distance.

The bottom of the canal is hard, I chop but the spade can't cut through
The cruel, cold-hearted Beks* will not leave us alone
Chopping away at the canal, the spade it gets all bent
The poor, to do the rich man's tasks, from their villages get sent
The water in the rivers and canals, belongs to the *mirab*† alone
Nothing does he know of righteousness, his heart as black as stone
The *mirabs* ride on their ponies, and send water to the rich
If the poor but mention water, their heads are stuck in a ditch
Stop your digging, cruel masters, for the canal has filled with blood
Digging your waterway has starved us, and no one will give us food

* Beks were officials who ruled local Xinjiang society under Manchu supervision during Qing rule.

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

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

The radio station also served as a bulletin board for local happenings, one that was mostly but not entirely free of the formulaic phrases of state-scripted newscasts common in both Chinese and Uyghur media. Performances of a local children’s dance troupe, the Blossoms (*ghunchakhtar*), 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’ (*kirören güzeli*), a four-thousand-year-old archeological find that symbolized for many Uyghurs their ancient ties to Xinjiang’s land. The actual mummy on display, the tour’s museum-trained assistant confided to me, was “only from the thirteenth century.” One series of radio spots advertised English language classes opening up in the evenings at an elementary school; other ads praised local small businesses 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 1:00 P.M.,” an announcer said in a somber voice. “We hope that if you have news, you will call.” Abidem shook her head: “That makes five in one month. Three other kids have already disappeared in November alone.” Like many news items, this became a topic for virtually everyone in town to gossip about, and two days later I sat with a group of men in the marketplace listening as they weighed rumors that the children were stolen to be sold for their organs. Personal pleas from the missing children’s parents broadcast on the radio in the days that followed put to rest any thought in my mind that the story of the kidnappings was itself possibly only a rumor.*

For many *mehelle* residents this diverse daily radio programming, from the intimate personal narratives of listener call-in programs to the poems, songs and prose literature of Uyghur writers celebrating the delights of romantic love and the great history of the Uyghur people, provided a constant and immediate sense of participating in a local community of people with shared knowledge, shared beliefs, and a shared sense of belonging to the land of Xinjiang, a sense of belonging to

* One month earlier I had seen a dramatized television re-enactment of the recent capture in Urumqi of a gang of more than ten persons, all Han recently arrived from central China, who were arrested for stealing children to sell to unspecified buyers. Such dramatized real-crime programs are not widely viewed as fabricated, though such a possibility cannot be ruled out.

place that, in their minds, none but other Uyghurs could share in in exactly the same way.

In the above two chapters I have discussed the place of home and neighborhood as bases for individual and collective identity among *mehelle* residents; in so doing I have made only marginal references to the important contribution the state makes to shaping physical space in Xinjiang and the ways that space is experienced by local residents. In the chapter that follows I go beyond the home and the neighborhood to consider Uyghur ideas of belonging to the land of Xinjiang as a whole and to examine more carefully the state's role in ordering local identities of place.

1.3 DESETTLING THE LAND: THE DESTRUCTION OF UYGHUR CHTHONIC IDENTITY

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

Uyghur aphorism recorded circa 1875¹⁸

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 Uyghur peasants in the 1990s. In the oil painting reproduced on its cover, the shoulders and bowed head of a Uyghur peasant rise out of the earth, an image in which the landscape and the soil of Xinjiang figure as the body of the Uyghur people. A tear rolls off the peasant's cheek onto checkerboard fields below, suggesting that Uyghurs' suffering has irrigated the region's populated desert oases for millennia. This image alone makes a striking case for the power and depth of Uyghurs' feelings of attachment to place. In this chapter I examine Uyghur sentiments of belonging in Xinjiang, and I describe a largely hidden process of desettlement, a feature of Han rule in Xinjiang that threatens to dramatically reconfigure those sentiments.

To properly discern the ongoing desettlement of Uyghurs in Xinjiang it helps to first consider recent patterns of Han migration and settlement in the region and the impact of population transfer on Uyghur-Han relations. With an area equal to one-sixth of China's overall territory, Xinjiang offers a great promise of land for a country with rising population pressure. Much of Xinjiang is uninhabitable desert, the Taklimakan, surrounded by the snow-capped Tianshan and Kunlun ranges. Most current population centers are long-settled oases nestled between mountain foothill and desert's edge. When China's Communist Party took control of most of the region in 1949, 80% of the local population was Uyghur, a Moslem ethnic group of peasants, craftsmen and traders. At that time, only five percent of Xinjiang's population was Han, 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, by the late 1990s Han and Uyghur populations had grown roughly even at around eight million each.¹⁹ Han population transfer in Xinjiang has been praised by state planners for making important contributions to agricultural production, urbanization, and border defense, as well as to eventual Uyghur assimilation.²⁰ Such studies, however, fail to consider the lived experiences of Uyghur communities in the face of that same migration.

In contemporary Yining, Uyghurs and Han live in worlds of face-to-face social interaction that are almost entirely separate. Residential settlement patterns remain largely segregated.²¹ Uyghurs speak their own Turkic language, unrelated to Chinese, written in an Arabic script, whereas Xinjiang's Han populations speak either Mandarin or their home dialect, or both. Uyghur and Han rarely learn much of the other's language. Han consumption of pork and Uyghurs' 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 Uyghurs for practically all material resources. Han dominate the local state apparatus and through it gain preferential access to economic opportunity, capital, jobs and education.

Within Uyghur 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.²² And all the while, the transfer of Han populations into Xinjiang continues, as state 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 are the consequences of these demographic changes for Uyghurs in Xinjiang? One model available for use in answering this question is the concept of desettlement proposed below.

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, may be called chthonic identity.* Personal and collective attachments to place are a critical basis of identity in general, since claims to political entitlement are often understood and advanced through them. If a state can undermine the cognitive and material bases supporting this feeling of belonging, the ability of groups to advance claims to political entitlement is weakened.

To understand desettlement better, let us first consider the more familiar idea of resettlement. A state seeks access to land-based resources, finds its access impeded by the presence of some group of people, and responds by relocating that group elsewhere. In their new home, established cultural meanings of place and social uses of space 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. As a result, even relatively powerless groups can create strategies to cope with or to contest forced relocation, perhaps through hidden forms of resistance, perhaps through violence. States may silence protest through coercion or what anthropologist Laura Nader has called administrative controlling processes, but the unfortunate consequences of resettlement, alcoholism, delinquency and so forth, are harder to conceal, and are widely documented and investigated by scholars. Finally, third parties can engage with these processes in consequential ways, such as when the World Bank establishes mandatory guidelines for governments regarding the treatment of persons resettled as a result of bank-funded projects.²³ Resettlement, in sum, is a recognized concern widely addressed within both development activities and scholarly research.

Desettlement, as I use the term, emphasizes the conditions under which the social problems of resettlement occur without actual physical relocation. In Xinjiang the state seeks access to land-based resources in a region where sedentary Uyghurs are historically and culturally well situated. Even without moving them, it can displace them in other ways. If the cognitive maps, symbolic systems and social practices of Uyghur chthonic identity can be systematically reordered by the state, Uyghurs' capacity to articulate claims to political entitlement based on their sense of belonging is weakened. My argument, then, is this. In twentieth-century Xinjiang, the Chinese state seeks to undermine specific practices which bind Uyghur identity to place by literally disassembling the meanings of local identity and then reorganizing those meanings

* From Greek *khthonios*, 'of the earth'.

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

MONIKERS: SOCIONYMIC ANALYSIS AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

A first step in understanding Uyghur collective identity is an investigation into relevant *socionyms*. A socionym, in my usage, is any word used to name any social identity. In my usage this neologism is more inclusive than existing terms; for a social label to be an 'ethnonym', for example, the group named must arguably meet some set of characteristics necessary to be considered an 'ethnic group'. The more inclusive category of socionym, on the other hand, can be applied whenever an experience of shared identity of any kind is salient enough in some local life-world to be recognized through a linguistic marker. Socionyms, words that name social groups, are rarely disinterested objective labels, and often contribute to the social, historical and political processes of producing and ordering identities. In Xinjiang, socionyms link identity with soil and with local place in self-evident ways.

Prior to the 1920s, the word Uyghur was virtually unused in Xinjiang. Back then today's Uyghurs called themselves *yerlik*, literally 'of the earth or land', or more colloquially, 'locals'. Ethnographic materials recorded as early as the 1870s show us that the *yerlik* category included all of today's Uyghurs and excluded all other ethnic groups, such as Han (*xitay*) and Hui (*donggan*).²⁴ At the same time, a second set of identity terms was also in widespread use among today's Uyghurs.²⁵ Each term in that set was oases-specific, such that inhabitants of Kashgar, Turpan and other oases, for example, called themselves, and were called by each other, Kashgarians (*kheshkherlikh*), Turpanians (*turpanlukh*), and so forth. Exceptions to the otherwise uniform practice of building socionyms out of toponyms include *taranchi*, a term that can be roughly glossed as 'Turkestani agriculturalists of the Ili Valley', and *dolan*, a sub-ethnic Uyghur group in southern Xinjiang.

The use of oasis-specific names does not in itself imply a lack of collective *yerlik* identity among these groups. That various observers have made just such a leap shows what powerful instruments names can

be for legitimizing claims to identity in the discourses of state administration and academic research, and supports my argument here about the importance of state manipulation of identity-culture categories in Xinjiang.²⁶ The terms of this Uyghur-language, mainly toponym-based socionymic system referred only to Uyghurs (*yerlik*), and contrasted with other terms of identity such as Chinese (*xitay*) or Manchu (*menju*). In this naming system, a *xitay*, or ethnic Han Chinese, could not be also a ‘Turpanian’, regardless of how long she or he had resided there. Uyghur vernacular language marked Uyghurs as ‘of the land/place’, as the naturally embedded residents of the local landscape, and simultaneously marked ethnic others as being fundamentally and categorically 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. Adopting the term ‘Uyghur’, a socionym otherwise abandoned around the tenth century, the state constructed Uyghurs as one ethnic group among others in a conceptual set of ascribed statuses (i.e., ethnic groups) under firm state control. Removed from categories related to Xinjiang’s regional landscape, and repositioned directly into the nationscape, Uyghurs become, in one favorite official phrase, ‘one of fourteen ethnic groups who reside in Xinjiang’. In switching to an ascribed status system of ethnic identities the state sought to make non-Han groups more interchangeable, more commensurate, even if their ostensible equality consisted primarily in their being marked as equal in a system of symbols adopted to serve the interests of a nation-state. Since the 1920s, of course, Uyghurs have come to widely embrace the term ‘Uyghur’ as expressing a natural ethnic identity. Among themselves Uyghurs still use terms like *yerlik*, and *turpanlukh*, but the state is not indifferent to these uses — the socionymic categories Uyghurs used prior to ethnicity discourse in Xinjiang are now erased by the state; for example, they generally do not appear in contemporary Uyghur dictionaries.

The significance of these changes was brought into sharp relief for me when I considered the local effects of a propaganda campaign that ran nationwide in 1990s China. In Xinjiang, huge billboards promoted slogans that reintroduced earlier identity categories based on place, using both the encompassing term ‘Xinjiang person’ (*xinjiang ren*) as well as various oasis-specific terms, for example ‘Turpanian’ (*tulupan ren*), but now these terms were deployed in Mandarin Chinese, now they were inscribed around resettled Han populations. Over a period of seventy years this administrative manipulation of identity categories has

displaced a historic linguistic expression of Uyghur attachment to place, an effect achieved, ironically, each time the word Uyghur is invoked.

At a three-day conference in Urumqi in 1995 on ‘Cultural Anthropology and Xinjiang Culture’, party-state policymakers presented the model of cultural identity that presumably lay behind that widespread propaganda campaign. In their prescriptive model, culture and identity were presented as a series of concentric circles. The innermost circle on their chart, positioned at the core of what they labeled ‘Xinjiang person identity’ was an identity based on participation in the total ‘ethnic culture of Greater China’ (*zhonghua minzu wenhua*), a cultural identity shared by all diasporic Chinese worldwide. The second circle, concentric to the first, showed that the ‘Xinjiang person’ next identifies as a ‘Chinese person’ (*zhongguo ren*) sharing in a unified ‘National Culture’. As a resident of one of five northwest provinces, the ‘Xinjiang person’ then shares in ‘Northwest Culture’ (*xibei wenhua*) and identifies as a ‘Northwesterner’ (*xibei ren*). The next circle represented the specific identity of a ‘Xinjiang person’ (*xinjiang ren*), someone sharing in the common Xinjiang culture. Finally, the diagram showed, individuals share an identity with their co-residents, those from Urumqi are Urumqians (*wulumuchi ren*), those from Kashgar are Kashgarians (*kashi ren*), and so forth.

What about ethnic culture and ethnic identity? minority conference participants asked. The Han presenters explained to the dozens of ethnic minorities in the audience that ‘ethnic culture’ still presented a conceptual challenge to them, and admitted 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, at which attendance was obligatory. On that occasion, a Han Party leader lecturing to a room full of minority researchers reported that despite Uyghurs’ universal conversion to Islam more than 600 years earlier, and despite the fact that today virtually all Uyghurs are practicing Muslims, the “international scholarly community” was nonetheless in agreement in concluding that Islam had never had any cultural influence in Xinjiang, and that Islam was not relevant to any conceptualization of ‘Xinjiang culture’ (*xinjiang wenhua*), or of ‘ethnic culture’ (*minzu wenhua*) in the region. China is a highly centralized state, and it is hardly surprising that a model of identity aligned with state interests consists of concentric circles centered around a centering center.

In sum, the state-sponsored administrative manipulation of socronyms plays a key role in supporting the managed demographic reorganization of the region by establishing a new set of place-based

socionyms inscribed around, and thereby granting belonging to, new Han migrants.²⁷

MAPPING AND PLACE-MAKING

One challenge I regularly faced in my field research was simply following residents' directions for getting from place to place in the *mehelle*. "Go past the burned mosque," a friend would tell me, "wa—lk through *Khazanchi mehelle*, take a left, and go past the *noghay michit*." Eventually I learned where to find the 'burned mosque', which had been repaired thirty years earlier and showed no sign of damage. Because Uyghur speakers elongate and heighten the pitch of words to vary the degree of emphasis, the utterances "you wa—lk and turn left" and "you wa————lk and turn left" are used to indicate distinctly different distances. Because no maps of Yining's neighborhoods existed, the exact beginning and end of *Khazanchi mehelle* were also always open to debate. And finally, the *noghay michit* ('Tatar mosque') had been torn down in the early 1970s, making it even harder to locate! A native resident might have been able to follow such directions easily, but to me they were often more mystifying than useful.

Although the directions given above are hypothetical, the inclusion in them of two references to mosques is not arbitrary. Mosques not only anchored feelings of local community and shaped the social contours of *mehelle* boundaries, they also oriented residents spatially in the wider world. Mosques are built with a prayer niche (*khibla*) facing Mecca, physically situating local residents within the global community of Islam. *Mehelle* and mosques, then, were key elements in Uyghurs' cognitive maps, and key elements in the place-making processes through which Uyghurs organized their local neighborhoods both perceptually and physically.

The state's approach to mapping local place was quite different. 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 many maps were available to me: tourist maps, roadmaps for truck drivers, maps sold in bus stations, even highly specialized maps containing information on such things as pollution sources and resource extraction sites could be purchased locally, though only in restricted-circulation publications. And like naming systems, I suggest, these printed maps can be read as encoding prescriptive models for the imagining of social and political landscapes.

Despite this plethora of maps, maps of locales within Xinjiang (and here I include city maps, county maps and detailed provincial* maps) are printed only in Chinese, not Uyghur. This is especially striking given that most kinds of printed materials in Xinjiang, official and unofficial, are available in Uyghur-language versions. Uyghur writing and Chinese characters appear side by side on everything from street signs to candy wrappers. But maps with names in Uyghur are available only of the whole nation, or else as overly simplified maps of the province. With printed maps, as with socronyms, Uyghurs 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 Uyghurs their position as Chinese nationals and as residents of Xinjiang, but cannot be allowed to reflect to Uyghurs their embeddedness in *local* place.

Chinese-language maps of Yining and other locales within Xinjiang that do exist reveal significant lacunae. City maps of Yining, for example, ignore mosques and *mehelle*. *Mehelle* names and locations 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 that this is part of the state's vision for Xinjiang's future. Outside urban areas Uyghur place names throughout Xinjiang typically draw on terrain features, such as for villages named Forty Springs or Sand Hill. On Chinese-language maps such names, if they appear at all, are transliterated into Chinese, and if something of their phonology remains, the meanings are entirely lost. For example, 'Black Lake' in Uyghur is *Kharaköl*; in Chinese this becomes *ka-li-ku-li-hu*. In Mandarin such construction sound like one of two things, baby talk or the conventional phrases that represent sounds made by animals (such as, in English, 'cock-a-doodle-doo'). The effect is that Uyghur place names become a basis for the exoticization, infantilization and even bestialization of Uyghurs in the Han imagination. Not all Uyghur names suffer this fate, of course. Many ancient Uyghur 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.

The meanings of place for Uyghurs 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 Uyghur Autonomous Region without Uyghurs. City maps and road maps in

* Xinjiang's precise status is provincial-level Autonomous Region.

Chinese also facilitate Han mobility within and between Xinjiang's urban spaces. If Uyghurs wish to navigate their way through unfamiliar urban spaces, they must do so using instruments printed only in Chinese. Maps become one of a larger set of elements, together with things such as discriminatory zoning regulations and the coerced sale of Uyghur land into Han hands, which permanently affect Uyghurs' collective relationship with local place.

MAZAR: THE TOMBS OF HOLY MEN AND WOMEN

A third example of desettlement draws on the Uyghur 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. This practice is widely described for other parts of the Muslim world as *ziyarat* (from Arabic *zaur*, 'to visit, visitation'); in Uyghur vernacular the practice is called *tawab*.

One December day, Abidem announced to family members her intention to visit a nearby *mazar*. Her six-year-old grandson Ilyar, Yakupjan's child, was ill, suffering an eye irritation brought on by excessive home video game playing. As a result, Abidem and several other family members decided to visit a nearby *mazar*, a visit I recorded in my field notes.

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

Abidem, Aliye and I knelt down while Ablet [Abidem's sixteen-year-old grandson, who was studying to be an Islamic cleric] recited one verse from the Qur'an.

Abidem 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. Onto the branches of the trees that surrounded it, visitors had tied dozens of small tufts of cloth. Abidem stooped down and gathered up a handful of earth lying a few inches from the tomb.

At home that evening Abidem rubbed some of the soil over Ilyar's eyes. Months later she would dissolve the same soil into water used to wash her newborn granddaughter Tewsiye in a ritual bathing ceremony. Ingesting *mazar* soil is a widely documented part of *mazar* visitation throughout Xinjiang and the surrounding area.²⁸ Archeological research

suggests that *mazar* sites in Xinjiang have existed for millennia as sites of healing power emanating from the earth.²⁹ When Buddhism flourished in Xinjiang between the second and seventh centuries C.E., local inhabitants cast these sites as Buddhist shrines. With the arrival of Islam beginning in the ninth century they were recast as Islamic shrines, and linked with Islamic saints legends. Beneath these surface changes, the power of these sites continues to come from, and to bind Uyghur identity into, the earth. Sites are seen as places where legendary ‘great’ (*ulugh*) Uyghur persons have been interred and absorbed into the earth, earth that can be gathered and absorbed into living Uyghur bodies. The recovery of countless dozens of well-preserved corpses from sites of ancient settlements on the periphery of the Taklimakan desert has provoked a strong response from Uyghur communities in Xinjiang. Desiccated mummies taken directly from the earth provide Uyghurs with potent ready-made symbols of their autochthonous identity. Uyghurs I spoke with unquestioningly understood these mummies to be their direct ‘Uyghur’ ancestors.

What role does the state play in shaping *mazar* practices? In the new landscape of Han modernity, the role for *mazar*, like mosques, is as tourist sites. When Abidem arrived at the *mazar* she commented that the eight-foot-high iron barrier that surrounded the site had been added since her last visit several years earlier. A plaque confirmed that the state tourism administration bureau had jurisdiction over the site. Tickets had been printed up to regulate entrance, the Uyghur gatekeeper told us, but had not yet been delivered, and he let our group in for free. As Abidem had done on previous visits, she presented the gatekeeper with a piece of cloth as a special gift. No longer could visitors prepare a meal in the *mazar*’s communal cooking pot, however, something Abidem described as one of the most critical elements in a successful *mazar* visit.

In the Chinese state’s exercise of administrative control over naming systems, map production, and the folk religious practices of *mazar* visitation in Xinjiang, a common outcome is discernible. That outcome is one in which Uyghurs are desettled from the land, symbolically dislocated from fully inhabiting local place. The processes described here are of course not unique to Xinjiang; on the contrary, the desettlement concept may be useful generally in emphasizing the perspective that chthonic identity, the inseparable feeling of belonging simultaneously to a group and 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 Uyghur 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. 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.

This concludes Section 1, and with it our close focus on the meanings of space and place for *mehelle* residents. In subsequent chapters the familiar spaces of home and courtyard, shady *mehelle* street corner and bustling city bazaar, do not disappear, but provide a backdrop for the diverse social dramas and personal narratives we will encounter as we examine other aspects of daily life for *mehelle* residents.

2 GENDER AND THE LIFE CYCLE

Five years ago, I asked my dad,
“Dad, how old are you?”
“I’m sixty,” he said. Then this year I
asked him again,
“Dad, how old are you?” and he says
he’s sixty years old.
“Huh? But, five years ago when I
asked, you said you were sixty. This year
how can you still say you are sixty?”
“My child, a lad (*yigit*) never goes back
on his word.”

Muxtar Hésam, Yining jokester

In the five chapters of this section I present ethnographic materials which bear on *mehelle* residents’ passage through the life cycle, and specifically on the formation and expression of masculine identity. In the first three chapters I examine three periods in the lives of *mehelle* residents: the earliest phases of the life cycle, the postpartum period and early infancy; late infancy and early adolescence; and courtship, adult gender relations and concepts of sexuality. In these chapters I rely on folklore and personal narratives provided by *mehelle* residents as a means to explore Uyghur ideas about the events and experiences typical of these periods of life. While these first three chapters address the experiences of both boys and girls, women and men, my presentation is shaped by a concern to provide background for the focus on masculinity that emerges in the remainder of the book. In the final two chapters of this section I begin that focus by examining two institutions that stand at the center of men’s everyday social interactions, the genre of festive gathering known as the *olturash*, and the nicknaming practices that bind male *mehelle* residents into a single community of men. Here, as in the sections on economic and religious life that follow, my emphasis shifts almost entirely to a concern with the lives of men.

The value of a life cycle approach for understanding the gendering of

Uyghur social life, and for understanding Uyghur masculinity in particular, is indicated for two reasons. First, because experiences in infancy, childhood and adolescence are widely theorized as being causally related to adult personality and social identity. Second, because *mehelle* conceptualizations of adult masculinity frequently and explicitly were linked to ideas about adolescence. This is suggested in the joke above, in which Hésam invokes his status as a *yigit*, a ‘youthful lad’, even at the age of sixty-five. To fully understand the connection between adolescence and adult masculinity that men listening to this joke would take for granted, a review of some basic categories of age, gender and kinship in Uyghur may be useful.

Age, Gender and Kinship in the Uyghur Life Cycle

Neonates are often addressed as *elley* before they are named, in a ceremony that typically takes place on the third or seventh day after birth. Uyghur dictionaries translate *elley* as ‘cradlesong’ or ‘lullaby’ and *elengle-* as ‘to cause to sway or rock gently’. Uyghur women have long used cradles and hammocks to swing babies back and forth gently. Infants are called *bowakh*, a word whose phonetic relationship with *bowa* (‘grandfather’) suggests that a special link exists between infant and grandparent.³⁰ Although published sources imply that *bowakh* is gender neutral, in Yining I observed the use of *bowakh* only for male infants; female infants were referred to as *böpe*, a term phonetically similar to *büwi*, an honorific used for older women. Given their phonological parallelism, it is likely that *bowakh/bowa* and *böpe/büwi* are paired terms used separately for males and females. Another gender neutral term for infant is *engge*.

In *Zawut* the most commonly used word for ‘child’ in general was *bala*. This word was used in such phrases as ‘my child’ (*balam*), or ‘the child of A’ (*A-ning balisi*). To emphasize the meaning of ‘small child’ or ‘adolescent’, *Zawut* residents used the singular *ushshakh bala* (‘small/slender child’) or *kichik bala* (‘small child’). The plural *ushshakhtar* (‘small/slender [ones]’) was often used alone as a term of collective reference. As a term for young boys and girls, *bala* by itself is gender neutral, and can be modified by the gender terms ‘boy’ (*oghul*) or ‘girl’ (*khiz*) to produce *khiz-bala* or *oghul-bala*.

In addition to these meanings, the word *bala* is also commonly used without modifiers to refer in earnest to any man middle-aged or younger, i.e., up to roughly the ages of fifty to fifty-five. Although *bala* is gender-

neutral when applied to children, as a reference to adults it is used only for men. Furthermore, whereas *khiz bala* ('girl-child') is used only for young female children, *oghul bala* ('boy-child') is a term routinely applied to a grown man, specifically in order to emphasize his masculine character beyond his generic status as a male. One Uyghur man, for example, in pressing me to give him my sunglasses as a gift, said, 'Come on, be an *oghul-bala*'. In this phrase an idealized adult male personality type is expressed using the metaphorical extension of a childhood status.

In the Mandarin Chinese vernacular of Xinjiang, Han have borrowed the Uyghur *bala* and given it a slightly different meaning. In Chinese, *balangzi* refers only to Uyghur adolescents. This Chinese form corresponds closely with the Uyghur *bala* + *-ng* = *balang*, the familiar form of 'your child'. For a Chinese speaker, however, this word resonates distinctly with the word *langzi* meaning 'wolf', so that *balangzi* becomes 'ba-wolf', a phrase that conjures up images of a dangerous animal, cruel and clever, that preys on unsuspecting innocents. And indeed, a Han woman born and raised in Xinjiang explained the word's two main meanings to me as follows. First, it is a derogatory term for Uyghur youths whom Han perceive to be dangerous, those who, in their eyes, loiter in public places, break the law and threaten the social order. Second, the term is used by Han parents much like the fictive American 'bogey-man' is used, to scare children into a desired behavior. A Han parent might say 'If you are not good, the *balangzi* will take you'. No amount of state propagandizing for ethnic unity is likely to undo the deep imprint of this child-against-child anti-Uyghur stereotyping. Interestingly, some Uyghurs have re-incorporated the word *balangzi* into their own Mandarin speech patterns, making the word a term of ethnic pride without any threatening or negative connotations.

The life cycle phase of being a *bala* ('child') ends at puberty (*balaghet*), though males continue to be called *bala* for decades, with a meaning roughly equivalent to the American colloquial term 'guy'. In the joke given at the start of this chapter, the sixty-five-year-old Hésam claimed to be a *yigit*, a term whose core meaning is 'a young man, a youth, a lad'. To be a *yigit* is to be virile and assertive. Its use in reference to older adult men finds perhaps its closest parallel in American English by the phrase 'one of the boys'. It is particularly ironic that Hésam asserts both his status as a 'youthful lad' and his respect for the code of honor that status imposes on him in order to deny his aging, since it is aging that marks his inevitable passage out of the community of adult men beholden to each other through those moral codes. When adult men call themselves *oghul-bala* or *yigit*, then, their

claim to a well-defined gender identity is inseparable from a simultaneous symbolic assertion of their adolescent status.

The most common term for ‘person’ is *adem*, which is used for both males and females. *Adem* is cognate with the biblical Adam, however, and conflates the meanings of ‘person’ and ‘male person’ much as do the terms ‘man’ and ‘mankind’ in English. A gender bias is evident here, then, in that the category of person becomes associated with men in a special way. A second term, *kishi*, is a slightly more vernacular and gender-neutral term for ‘person’. Standard terms for ‘man/men’ and ‘woman/women’ are *er/erler* and *ayal/ayallar*. These terms designate a gendered status and also suggest the life cycle status of a married individual: to call a man *er* is to imply his status as a husband; to emphasize simply that a person is an adult male, the compound *er kishi* (‘man-person’) is typically used. *Ayal* carries a trace of the meaning of ‘wife’, but is used in Yining vernacular as a general term for ‘adult woman’; *hotun* is more commonly used for ‘wife’. The term *yoldash* (‘fellow-traveler’) used by educated Uyghurs for their spouses, a term which suggests the Socialist-era Chinese *tongzhi* (‘comrade’), is not heard in the *mehelle*.

Many spouses in the *mehelle* freely use their partner’s given name as a term of address, although women with children often begin to both address and refer to their husbands as *dadisi*, meaning ‘[his/her/their] father’. It is perhaps significant that the possessive ending *-isi* leaves unspecified whose children the man has fathered. That is to say, women might at times expand this phrase by saying ‘child’s father’ (*balining dadisi*), but never ‘my-child’s father’ (*balanning dadisi*), suggesting her avoidance of any claim to the child, a claim she is indeed denied under patrilineal Uyghur kinship arrangements.

Zawut residents classify kin according to two main categories, *tughkhan* (‘consanguines’) and *khuda* (‘affines’). The term *tughkhan*, as the past participle of the verb *tughmakh* (‘to give birth’), means literally ‘birthed’. To say, ‘I am kin with that person’, then, is equivalent to saying ‘I am ‘born’ with that person’. On several occasions Abidem’s family members expressed the shared identity felt between kin using the proverb

Meat and fat are one kin	<i>gösh yagh bilen bir tughkhan</i>
The onion’s browning is browned	<i>piyaz köygénini köygen</i>

The meaning of this second line becomes more sensible in light of a variant collected in the 1930s.³¹

Meat and fat are one kin
It does no good to brown the onion

*gösh bilen yagh bir tukhkhan
piyazning köygéni bikar*

These items suggest that kin always remain kin, no matter how poorly they may treat each other, whereas a non-relative will never be viewed as a relation regardless of how much he may try to behave like one. Yakupjan one day quoted the above proverb while pointing to Aysajan, the orphan raised by Abidem, adding by way of explanation, “He is an onion.” Aysajan, who had lived with Abidem for all of his eight years, was indeed not treated at all like a family member. He was verbally abused many times each day — a typical day’s comments might include “you stupid cow, what are we doing raising you, too dumb to even stay alive”; “you corpse”; “so stupid he can’t even stick his fingers in his mouth” — mostly by Abidem, for whom he was a convenient scapegoat for her frustrations and physical suffering.³²

In addition to *tughkhan* and *khuda* relations, the category of *baja* was also widely known to *mehelle* residents; men are *baja* with each other if they are married to sisters. Men I asked all agreed that *baja* relationships were typically marked with latent animosity, but none was able to satisfy my request for an explanation. One man struggled for a moment, then smiled in triumph, and said

When one *baja* sees another *baja*,
His asshole itches,
He acts like he has scabies

*baja baja körse
khong khichishidu
khitirghulikh khilidu*

“Do you get it?” he asked, looking at me expectantly. “His asshole itches!” At the time his use of this particular metaphor to describe the behavior of a man uneasy in his relations with another man raised more questions for me than it resolved. In the chapters that follow, however, the opportunity to explore in-depth the vernacular metaphors *mehelle* men use to characterize both the normative and deviant masculine habitus will allow us to find an answer of sorts.