‘Making Culture Matter’: Symbolic, Spatial and Social Boundaries between Uyghurs and Han Chinese

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This article illustrates how Uyghurs in the 1990s defined and reinforced contemporary Uyghur national identity in relation to Xinjiang’s growing Han Chinese population. Adopting Barth’s theory of fluid and negotiable ethnic boundaries, it focuses on the root of change. While Uyghurs are currently activating and exaggerating certain religious differences—in particular the avoidance of pork—as a means of ensuring symbolic and social segregation from the Han, those criteria did not prevent interaction to extent in the past; nor do they prevent Uyghurs from making concessions when it is in their best interest. It is argued that it is not religious-cultural differences per se that is the root of increased tensions between Uyghurs and Han Chinese, but changing social, political and economic contexts: on the one hand, growing Uyghur perceptions of socio-economic inequalities between themselves and the Han (the ‘internal factor’) and, on the other, vast changes within the international political arena since the late 1980s (the ‘external factor’).

Introduction

In 1989–90, Justin Rudelson carried out the first prolonged anthropological fieldwork to be conducted among the Uyghurs of Xinjiang. Since that time and particularly in the mid-1990s, a number of scholars have been able to conduct long-term research in the region, and the fruits of their efforts are now beginning to appear. Some existing

1 The system employed by Reinhard Hahn in Spoken Uyghur (University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1956) adopted to transliterate Uyghur terms, as I consider this to be closest to local pronunciation. However, there are some intriguing features in the system: the consonant ‘g’ is replaced with ‘gh’, and the consonant ‘d’ with ‘ch’.

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

Throughout this paper, a number of theoretical assumptions are made. First, I adopt the central notion that ethnic identities (and symbols of those identities) must be selected by group members themselves, this process being called self-ascription. An ethno
only be defined and structured from within, and only those ‘objective’ diffi
sidered significant by the actors themselves are taken into account.8 De Vos pi
of potential criteria for cultural difference, including racial uniqueness (soi
etically inherited difference), place of origin, economic independence (community organisation within the plural society), religious beliefs and prac
cultural forms (e.g. food, dress, dance) and language. In choosing some or
criteria as symbols of identity, group members define the way in which they
themselves from other groups.9 This set of cultural criteria is rarely maintained
entirely through time and space. Most ethnic groups include cultural forms in
are clearly excluded in the present. Similarly, while a group spread over
vard territory will display regional diversities of cultural practice, self-iden
group member may nonetheless continue.10

The second assumption made is that ethnicity is not isolated (i.e. at
primordial sense), but relative. In other words, ethnic distinctions cannot ex
vacuum of contact and information, but rather entail social processes of ex
incorporation embedded in the construction and maintenance of ethnic bounda
can only be ‘insiders’ where there are also perceived to be ‘outsiders’. E
therefore only develop if an ethnic group is in regular contact with another group
from whom it considers itself substantially different (or against whom it has res

to differentiate itself): ‘I identify myself with a collective we which is then cor
some other ... What we are, or what the other is will depend upon context:
boundaries—like ethnic identities themselves—are fluid and negotiable and
change shape and vanish in relation to changing social, political and economic
Accordingly, group members may employ different cultural criteria at different
order to define themselves against different groups.13

This theoretical framework is particularly useful when considering the
Uyghur of Xinjiang, because it takes account of the notion of change. Central t
is the idea that while Uyghurs are currently employing certain religious-cultural
in order to dictate and control patterns of interaction with the Han Chinese,
differences apparently did not prevent Uyghurs from interacting with the Han
(in a different socio-economic context). Nor do those differences stop Uy
interacting with Han Chinese in the present context when it suits them to do so.

On Uyghur–Han relations of the vast socio-economic changes occurring in Xinji

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3 See Beller-Hann, 'The Peasant Condition in Xinjiang' on Uyghur peasants, 'Crafts, Entrepreneurship and
Gendered Economic Relations in Southern Xinjiang' on gendered economic relations, and 'Making the Oil Frac
tor' on the vexation of the dead in southern Xinjiang; Roberts, 'Negotiating Locality, Islam, and National
Culture in a Changing Borderlands' on the makroq ritual in the Ili valley; Smith, 'Four Generations of Uyghurs'
on ethnic-political ideologies among Xinjiang's urban youth; and CesarO 'Consuming Identities' on food and
identity in Ürümchi.

4 Dru C. Gladney, 'The Ethnonymity of the Uighur', Central Asian Survey, vol. 9, no. 1 (1990), pp. 1-28; Gladney,
'Relational Alterity: Constructing Dungan (Hui), Uyghur, and Kazakh Identities'; Justin Jon Rudelson, Oasis

5 Gladney, 'Relational Alterity: Constructing Dungan (Hui), Uyghur, and Kazakh Identities'.

6 Since this article was submitted and accepted for publication in July 2001, I have had the good fortune finally
to meet Ekkio Beller-Hann. In our subsequent communications, I became aware of her (then forthcoming) chapter
on Uyghur-Han relations, also dealing with strategies employed by Uyghur to reproduce ethnic boundaries via
the boundaries, Beller-Hann, Temperamental Neighbours: Uyghur–Han Relations in Xinjiang, North-west
China', in G. Schlee (ed.), Imagined Difference: Heritage and the Construction of Identity (LIT Verlag, Minster,
Hambug, London, 2001). With regard to similarities between our data and the theoretical frameworks we adopt
to express these data, I would note that we carried out fieldwork at the same time in Xinjiang independently of
one another and wrote our respective pieces unaware of the other's work: Coincidental similarities in approach
may therefore be considered mutual validation of our assessment of ethnic relations in Xinjiang. Indeed, the two
articles can be treated as complementary, since my ethnographic material is based mainly on fieldwork in Ürümchi
(population 90 per cent Han, 10 per cent Uyghur), while that of Beller-Hann focuses on a small oasis town in
southern Xinjiang (population 40 per cent Han, 60 per cent Uyghur). This difference in geographical focus and
population composition accounts, I believe, for certain differences in our interpretations.

7 The material presented here first appeared in Chapters 9 and 10 of my as yet unpublished PhD thesis 'Changing
Uyghur Identities in Xinjiang in the 1990s'. Funding for postgraduate study was kindly provided by the Economic
and Social Research Council, Swindon, UK.
past ten to fifteen years has hitherto been given insufficient attention in the anthropological and sociological literature. This paper will argue that Uyghurs in the mid-to-late-1990s are activating and exaggerating religio-cultural differences between themselves and the Han as a means of demarcating a unified ethnic identity in relation (or in reaction) to increased competition from Han immigrants in the spheres of education and work and growing perceptions of socio-economic inequalities.

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

It is crucial next to outline the background to the present ‘local situation’ in Xinjiang. Over the past century, the region Westerners once called East Turkestan has been formally incorporated into China, and the resulting increased Uyghur interaction with the Chinese state and the Han Chinese people has played a significant role in shaping modern Uyghur identities. Following the conversion to Islam of the last remaining Buddhist Uyghurs of Gaochang in the mid-1400s, the ethnonym ‘Uyghur’ was abandoned and for the next 500 years Uyghurs identified themselves using terms denoting social group (e.g. ‘merchant’) or oasis origin (reflecting the geographical isolation of the region’s disparate oases). It was only in 1821, when the Qing dynasty began to encourage mass Han immigration to the region in an effort to incorporate it into the Han Chinese realm, that Uyghurs began to unite against the perceived dominant hegemony. Yet the ethnonym ‘Uyghur’ did not reappear until 1921, when Soviet advisors at a conference in Tarzaki proposed that the name ‘Uyghur’ be used to designate all those people hitherto known by names denoting oasis origin. This proposal was duly adopted in 1934 by the then Xinjiang provincial government.

Drawing on fieldwork carried out in 1989–90, Rudelson has emphasised the continued predominance of local oasis and social group identities over other identities in Xinjiang. Yet my fieldwork data of 1995–96 suggest that, since the time that Rudelson was conducting research in Turpan, contemporary Uyghur identity has undergone significant changes, in response both to changing international politics (the collapse of Eastern European Marxist–Leninist parties in 1989, the disintegration of the USSR in 1991 and the subsequent formation of the republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States, CIS) and to changing socio-economic circumstances within Xinjiang itself. Certainly, Uyghurs in the 1990s and beyond like to distinguish between the unique features of different oases, and these differences evoke a certain atmosphere of local competition. For instance, all Uyghurs prefer their particular hometown, and insist that it is better than the others. However, such assertions rarely take the form of an attack and do not seem to stem from some powerful ethnic sentiment. Uyghur attitudes towards Han immigrants are by contrast characterised by disgust, anger, bitterness, passion and a strong sense of injustice. This paper argues that traditional oasis rivalries may now have been largely (but perhaps temporarily) eclipsed by a new religio-cultural and socio-economic threat: Xinjiang’s Han Chinese immigrant population. If we follow this theory, then oasis differences such as regional foods, styles of dress or wedding practices become less significant when confronted by alien cultural practices and economic competition from without. The fact that the vast majority of criticisms made to me by Uyghurs were levelled not at Uyghurs from other oases but at Han Chinese immigrants is indicative of the emergence of just such a new ethnic dichotomy in Xinjiang.

The present consolidation of Uyghur identity across the region and reinforcement of ethnic boundaries vis-à-vis the Han can be attributed in ‘internal factors’ (in addition to changes in the international political arena—factors). These are:
(a) the Chinese government’s policy of mass Han Chinese immigration to Xinjiang, largely as an attempt to stabilise this imp regioum. Immigration to the northwest has been facilitated over the past half by extension of the railway from Lanzhou to Ürümqi, and then from Ürümqi and on to Qašqar. Many new roads have been constructed in the region, : Ürümqi–Xotan desert highway, which was completed in recent years and now crosses the hostile Taklamakan desert. These improvements in communication with Han development of Xinjiang into a territory suitable for large-scale sett greatly speeded the immigration process. As a result, the number of Han immigrants into Xinjiang has drawn gradually closer to the number of local
Continued Han immigration to Xinjiang has had three visible effects on region. First, as the number of Han Chinese has grown, pressure on boundaries has increased, making religio-cultural differences harder to manage Han Chinese settled in areas separate from Uyghur ‘Old Towns’, and contact migrants and local people was limited. More recently, however, they have been not only in urban areas (Ürümqi and Han Chinese ‘New Towns’) but also in the countryside. Uyghurs have themselves begun to move into Han-dominates by new opportunities in education, employment and trade. The result is a hij of (intentional or unintentional) boundary crossing. Second, the increasing in has led to growing Uyghur perceptions of socio-economic inequalities between Han groups in Xinjiang (such that the unemployment rate among Uyghurs, for blamed on the increase in Han Immigrants). Finally, the growth of the Han population has had a profound effect on the immigrants themselves. Finding numerical majorities in some urban areas of Xinjiang (notably, Ürümqi and Han Chinese are now unwilling to adapt to Uyghur culture and, instead, expect Uyg to Han culture. This has led Uyghurs to complain of Great Han chauvinism discrimination.

The second internal factor contributing to the present consolidation of Uy vis-à-vis the Han is the de facto imposition of the Chinese language. O

16 Ibid., p. 4.
17 Rudelson, Oasis Identities.
18 Between 1949 and 1970 alone, the percentage of Han Chinese in Xinjiang increased from 24% to 40%.
19 See Michael Dillon, Xinjiang: Ethnicity, Separatism and Control in China (Durham University East Asian Papers No. 1, Durham, 1995), p. 31. A census carried out in 1995 showed there were 4,597,626 Han Chinese in the region (7.57% of the total population), while local statistics provided by the Xinjiang Statistical Bureau (June 1997) give a figure of 4,484,400 persons. According to estimates based on an official population count carried out in Xinjiang in 1996, Han Chinese totalled 6,424,400 persons. In the total population, while local statistics (including Uyghurs) totalled 10,468,500 persons (Xinjiang statistical communiqué for 1996. See Xinjiang riba Xinjiang Daily). Ürümqi, 14 May Monitoring: Summary of World Broadcasts (Asia Pacific), 7 May 1997, FEB/0485 WS2/8). This suggests that, although minorities in Xinjiang (like minorities elsewhere in China) have enjoyed preferential status, the introduction of the one-child policy in the early 1980s has resulted in a much lower growth rate for Han Chinese. The proportion of Han Chinese total population has remained stable at around 38–40% per year. This seems to corroborate Uyghur flow of Han immigrants to Xinjiang continues.
20 Attitudes of Han race and cultural superiority.
half-century, the Chinese language has been all but institutionalised in the spheres that matter: education, work and regional administration. As a result, urban Uyghurs find themselves increasingly caught in a web of socio-economic discrimination. To have a good chance to become fluent in Chinese and so be able to survive a university course, Uyghur children must normally go to a Han Chinese school.20 Uyghurs who fail to reach university (usually minkaomin21)—and even minkaomin who have been through university—are discriminated against by Han-dominated work units and companies who prefer to hire employees fluent in the Chinese language and well versed in Han culture (i.e. Han immigrants or minkaohan22). This has led to a higher unemployment rate among Uyghurs than Han, and increasingly bitter perceptions among Uyghurs that high-status, white-collar posts are all held by Han immigrants. The situation is worsened by the fact that many Uyghur parents are either afraid or unwilling to send their children to Han schools. On the one hand, Uyghur children often suffer ethnic discrimination at the hands of Han Chinese classmates. On the other, many parents wish to try to preserve Uyghur culture through Uyghur education. Uyghur resentment of the Han, then, emanates partly from a growing awareness that the de facto institutionalisation of the Chinese language has led to their effective marginalisation in a new urban social hierarchy created by Han Chinese for Han Chinese in developed urban areas.23

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

Boundary Dynamics (Symbolic, Spatial, Social)

Having provided the background to the local situation in Xinjiang, I shall now explore the dynamics of boundary maintenance between the two groups. This section examines those criteria for cultural difference that are ‘made to matter’, that is, employed by Uyghurs to emphasise their contrasive ethnic identities through the demarcation of a complex system of ethnic boundaries. Some of these boundaries are symbolic (cultural differences that are given symbolic meaning in patterns of interaction); others are more concrete (ensuring spatial and social segregation). Uyghurs across the region currently link their criticisms of the Han Chinese directly to the fact that Han are non-Muslims. Many of the cultural differences chosen to demarcate boundaries between the Han and their roots in Islam. In particular, Islamic avoidance of pork at the present time to enforce spatial and social segregation.24

Symbolic

The first symbolic boundary is constructed through language. Most Uyghurs prefer for the Uyghur language by making clear distinctions between environment and ‘the outside’, corresponding to times when they speak Uygh when they consent to speak Chinese. Although many urban Uyghurs, particularly, like, are fluent in or can speak a certain amount of Chinese, most emphasise is a language of practical convenience only. Tömür (a minkaohan in his forties) by a Han Chinese work unit in Ürümqi.25 He became very excited when I asks language he generally used, and outlined the boundaries of the respective lan ‘Oh, we may speak Chinese outside … but we all speak Uyghur as soon as we’re By ‘outside’, he meant environments where Uyghurs interact with Han Chinese speak Uyghur. These are usually state work units or private companies set Chinese that employ mainly Han staff and where all administrative paperw Chinese language. At home, however, almost all Uyghurs speak Uyghur. The rule in this case is that alk. minkaohan, who tend to have a stronger foundation in Ch their native language and often code-switch at home.

In university dormitories, minkaomin speak Uyghur to one another. The Uyghur to minkaohan roommates until the latter show signs of discomfort. The in a mixture of Uyghur and Chinese, or entirely in Chinese, until the point grasped. In this way, the rules are slightly altered to accommodate the minkaoh sometimes have problems expressing themselves in Uyghur, especially in acad sations.

On the street, it is taken for granted that conversations between Uyghurs at in Uyghur, whether the other person is an acquaintance or a stranger. In Uyghur-dominated Erdaqqiao district, Uyghurs always spoke to me in a breaking into Chinese only if they perceived that I could not understand. The b of the Uyghur preference to speak Uyghur came from ‘accidental’ obs interactions between Uyghurs. Once, while browsing in Ürümqi’s Hengshan store, I witnessed a Uyghur man approach the counter and, without looking talking to the store assistant (whom he assumed to be Han) in Chinese. Half his sentence, he glanced up, saw that she was Uyghur, and instantly switched in Uyghur. They both laughed, and he apologised for his mistake. The same thi on another occasion when I boarded a bus with Râwiw, a French language Ürümqi. She initially addressed the Uyghur bus conductress (whose face closer than usual to those of Han Chinese) in Chinese, but changed to Uyğ through the sentence and apologised. Râwiw is minkaohan and therefore pr confortable with Chinese than with Uyghur. Yet she was quick to correct

20 Some Uyghurs educated at Uyghur schools do reach university, and this number is likely to grow as a result of the implementation of the self-paid school system. However, these students generally struggle with academic texts (which are printed in Chinese) once there, and may take more years to graduate.
21 The term used by both Han Chinese and minority nationalities for a member of a minority nationality educated in their mother tongue at a minority nationality school.
22 The term used for a minority nationality educated in the Chinese language at a Han Chinese school.
23 The same issues seem to be relevant in Tibet. Tsering Shakya identifies Tibetan awareness that they have not benefited from economic reforms and will always be marginalised vis-à-vis Han immigrants as the impetus for post-1987 demonstrations by young urban Tibetans (“China-Tibet: Further Dialogue?“ East Asia Research Seminar, Leeds University, UK, 17 February 1999). Rural Uyghurs, on the other hand, have so far been relatively unaffected by Han chauvinist attitudes and Han competition for education and work, owing to the smaller number of Han immigrants in the countryside. They claim to have experienced an improvement in their standard of living since Deng Xiaoping’s Open Door policy took effect in the mid-1980s. Furthermore, they do not feel that their native language has been marginalised in their rural environment, where government decrees are still issued in Uyghur. These factors help to explain why the proliferation of ethno-political ideologies in Xinjiang has so far been a predominantly urban phenomenon.
24 Cesaro ‘Consuming Identities’ devotes a paper to analysing ways in which Uyghurs draw on prescriptions in order to strengthen boundaries between themselves and the Han Chinese. Her fieldwork during 1996–97, the year following my own.
25 The names of key informants and details of their occupations have been altered to protect their identity details of age, social group and hometown are retained.
Her action represented a public acknowledgement of mutual ethnic origin and of shared difference vis-à-vis the Han Chinese. Once, I was eating with Şohrat, a young male archaeologist from Ürümchi, in a Uyghur street restaurant in Turpan and was dressed in winter clothing typical of an Ürümchilik woman. As I had only just begun learning Uyghur, we conversed in Chinese for the sake of convenience. When we left, we overheard two old Uyghurs in the corner mutter: ‘But she’s a Uyghur girl! Why on earth is she speaking in Chinese?’ To them, it was inconceivable that Uyghurs should speak Chinese to one another while eating lunch in a non-Han environment.

Whether they want to or not, many Uyghurs are now forced to master Chinese if they are to compete with Han immigrants. However, they describe the decision to learn Chinese as a purely strategic career choice, claiming that the only way to get ahead in the Han-created urban society in Ürümchi is through fluency in Chinese. Learning Chinese is thus seen as a means of survival. Regarding the trend in recent years of putting Uyghur children in Han Chinese schools, Tomir said: ‘I’ll tell you, there’s only one reason why we learn to speak Chinese, and that’s just to get a better job!’ This view was echoed by Râwî and many other Uyghur parents in Ürümchi throughout the year. Aliyê, a female postgraduate studying dentistry in Ürümchi, explained: ‘We speak Chinese because of its dominant position in this society. There is no way around it. Uyghur is not as important as Chinese now’. Despite the acknowledgement, she spoke Uyghur at all times except when speaking to Han Chinese or when interrogating Uyghur and Chinese for the sake of minkaohan dorm-mates. Most Uyghurs (with the exception of minkaohan) prefer to read and write in the Uyghur script. Periodicals and journals containing minority-nationality literature have appeared all over Xinjiang since the early 1980s and the re-introduction of more relaxed minority policies. In 1986, at least 12 journals were being published in Uyghur in Xinjiang. In 1996, over 70 different publications appeared in Uyghur, indicating that there is a large audience of literate Uyghur who increasingly prefer to read in their native language. There are also many Uyghur language newspapers in addition to several Uyghur language television channels. Most southerners watch the Uyghur language channels in preference to the Chinese language channels, although Ürümchiliks (who tend to be at least semi-fluent in Chinese due to the large Han population in the city) also like to watch soap operas or dramas on the Chinese channels.

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

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

Time is another criterion through which Uyghurs (and other Central Asians) draw a symbolic boundary between themselves and Han Chinese. It is the very time which underlines their belongingness to the land vis-à-vis the Han Chinese Muslims, whom they perceive to be newcomers. While the watches and clock of Xinjiang’s population read 10 a.m., those belonging to the other half insist 8 a.m. Further investigation into this strange circumstance reveals that, while Han Muslims use China’s official ‘Beijing time’, Uyghurs, Qazaqs, Özbek others all use ‘Xinjiang time’, the local time congruent with the region’s position and two hours behind ‘Beijing time’. Anewir, a minkaohan interpreter from Ürümchi, explained: ‘You see, all the original inhabitants of Xinjiang use It’s what we’re used to.’ By ‘original inhabitants’, he indicated people of origin who have lived in the region for centuries. Over the next few weeks, I found that while official Han Chinese work units (companies, shops, railway stations, Beijing time’, the Central Asian peoples of the region were unanimous in the use of local time.

Uyghurs persist in using local time, despite the obvious inconveniences (i.e., the constant need to ask: ‘Do you mean Xinjiang time or Beijing time?’). On their persistence in using local time as opposed to Beijing time reflects a desire for old habits and practices. However, it also represents a symbolic rejection of Han hegemony and administration, all the more remarkable in the light of the incoherence caused to all concerned. It represents a symbolic boundary between the ‘origi Asian inhabitants and the Han Chinese and Hui Muslims ‘newcomers’. The time is further complicated by the fact that Hui Muslims regard ‘Beijing time’ as time as one and the same thing. When asked which system they used, they used ‘Xinjiang time’ or ‘Ürümchi time’. On closer questioning, it transpired that they used Beijing time but called it ‘Xinjiang time’. Like the Han Chinese, the Beijing time the standard time for Xinjiang as for all regions of China. This is a fact as the main mistrust between Uyghurs and Hui Muslims.

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

One factor that has led Uyghurs and other Central Asian Muslims in (particularly the south) to draw boundaries between themselves and the Han Chinese attitude towards birth control. Uyghur opinion on birth control is divided along urban–rural lines. Although many northern urbanities have begun to

'modern' conception of smaller families and are not particularly averse to family planning. Southerners and Uyghurs in rural areas abide by the Islamic notion that children are 'a blessing from Allah' and tend to be strongly opposed to Chinese Communist Party (CCP) birth control policy. Southern Uyghurs often enquired whether there was birth control in England, and wanted to know why Westerners usually had small families (that is, whether they were constrained by law). Tursun, one peasant in his thirties from a small village in Aqsu, lamented that Uyghurs could do nothing about birth control policy in Xinjiang 'because our king is the Han.' I asked another recently married young Aqsu woman how many children she would have if there were not mandatory birth control. He replied airily: 'Oh, twenty or thirty! It can't be helped.' Although this figure was exaggerated for comic value, he was clearly desirous of having lots of children. Perhaps more significantly, he considered pregnancy to be a matter out of his hands and dependent on the discretion of Xuda (Allah).

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

Tursun and Arzigil stated that those who have more than the legal quota of children face fines of 8,000–10,000 yuan (compared with the rural family's annual income of 5,000 yuan in a good year). They also confirmed frequent reports of pregnant women in the south being rounded up, loaded onto trucks and taken away for mandatory abortions. Those who do have more than three children are forced to send the fourth or fifth child to live with relatives elsewhere. Alternatively, the mother may give the child over to a childless woman to bring up as her own. Although a small minority of urban southern women would prefer to bear fewer children, for the vast majority of southern and rural Uyghurs, the issue of birth control has become the main focus of opposition to Han rule, if not necessarily to Han Chinese as individuals.

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

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

For Uyghurs and other Central Asian Muslims, national customs are almost inseparable from Islam. Past experimentation seems to have proved to many that marrying non-Muslims can be fraught with difficulty. Liu Lan, a 26-year-old erhuanci parents who had divorced twelve years before, explained that 'national sentiment had prevailed on the side of her Uyghur mother. Many older Uyghurs also reported that seen mixed marriages fail. A friend of Rawsia's concluded: 'Two separate races still have areas that are very different at the end of the day. These differences are resolved with love.' This woman was minkaohan. Although minkaohan are supposed to be culturally closer to Han Chinese, most nonetheless reject the idea of intermarriage.

In 1995 and 1996, young Uyghurs rarely had romantic relationships with Han. Those that did came under attack from Uyghur elders and peers. I spoke to a 19-year-old girl from Urumchili who had a Han Chinese boyfriend. She told me: 'It's really hard to even go out anywhere. If other Uyghurs see us together in public, they give us strange looks. If Uyghur men see us together on a public bus, they stare at us and hit us. Uyghurs don't care, but they still make comments.' The young woman's older sister (and Beijing) also planned to marry a Han Chinese. Under the weight of public disapproval, her mother would not allow her younger daughter's marriage to go ahead in Xinjiang. Though the Han boyfriend had given up pork and begun to learn the Uyghur language (thereby removing what barriers he could that might obstruct the match). She, however, to the elder sister's marriage, since the wedding would take place far away in Xinjiang, and her married life would be spent in Beijing away from the Han, suggests that rather than religio-cultural differences per se, it is the threat of disapproval expressed by the Han community that rules out intermarriage at present.

In the 1990s, young Uyghurs are under significant pressure from ethnic peers to conform to patrilineal norms.

**Spatial**

In each of Xinjiang's oases, there is a similar pattern of spatial segregation of Uyghur and Han Chinese. Each oasis has an Old Town (kona Sähür) and a New Town (yengi). The populations of the Old Towns are composed entirely of Uyghurs. The population of the New Towns is composed mainly of Han Chinese immigrants, but include a pro of Uyghurs employed in Han Chinese work units. The one exception to this is the Urumchili, where there is no division of New Town and Old Town. The entire city can be described as a New Town in which Han Chinese immigrants dominate all districts: the Uyghur district of Erdaqiao in the southeast and Erdaqiao, there are Han Chinese. Comparatively small numbers of Uyghurs are spread throughout the Chinese districts.

In this case, the boundary has been drawn by the Han Chinese. From the 19th century, the Chinese government sponsored a policy of settling Han in areas outside Uyghurs, or in New Towns that were constructed adjacent to the Uyghurs. In this way, they probably hoped to manage religious-cultural differences (in particular raising of pigs by the Han Chinese as against the Uyghur avoidance of pork) and s conflict. It is likely that the policy also made the prospect of immigration more ap

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30 This notion may have been enshrined by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) propaganda, which publicised the advantages of birth control and pointed out that many modernising Islamic countries (e.g. Iran) now practise birth control. Alternatively, Uyghurs may have absorbed the notion from television images of modern nuclear families in the West.

31 It is generally conceded that Islamic beliefs are stronger in the south than in the north of the region. Historically, the southern oasis of Khotan was greatly influenced by the Islamic centres of Bukhara and Samarkand, and Uyghurs today continue to make pilgrimages there. Rudelson, 'Oasis Identities', p. 49.

32 Tursun used the word paida ("king") in keeping with Uyghur tradition.

33 The derogatory term in Chinese designating children of one Uyghur and one Chinese parent. The equivalent would be 'half-breed'.

34 It has been suggested that Uyghurs perceived this norm of Han settlement as 'encirclement', a term to the obscuring of historical oasis divisions and a new focus on rivalry with the Han Chinese. Rudelson, 'Oasis Identities', p. 38.
to new Han settlers, many of whom were reluctant to move to Xinjiang, which they perceived as a distant and hostile territory.

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

Despite this concession, Uyghurs endeavour to ensure and maintain spatial segregation as far as possible. They do so by laying a deliberate emphasis on the Islamic avoidance of pork. Certainly, Uyghurs, as Muslims, should strictly avoid eating pork or coming into contact with pigs. Yet it appears that in the present context, Uyghurs are not simply adhering to dietary prescriptions for their own sake. Rather, they are actively employing dietary differences as a means to separate and segregate themselves from the Han. A middle-aged Uyghur doctor in Xotim observed: ‘There are still huge differences in culture between the two nationalities. For instance, food. A Uyghur will not eat pork, although the Han do. If a Uyghur ate pork, he would no longer be a Uyghur. It is as simple as that.’ Han immigrants in Xinjiang similarly cite Islamic dietary prescriptions as the main factor complicating interaction between the two groups at present. A young Han woman in Ürümqi explained that Uyghur rules governing diet were so strict that in the rare case of Han Chinese marrying Uyghurs, they must drink a bitter concoction to sterile their intestines and then convert to the Muslim diet. However, the rules surrounding avoidance of pork are not hard-and-fast. Uyghurs are constantly negotiating this boundary, which is permeated with contradictions and with concessions made in particular circumstances.

The boundary operates firstly on a symbolic level. The scandal surrounding zhuancha (brick tea) from the mid-1990s provides adequate demonstration. During 1995–96, several Uyghurs in Ürümqi told me they had ceased drinking brick tea, a tea imported from China proper and once popular among Uyghurs. Upon further enquiry, they explained that a Uyghur reporter had a few years earlier circulated some photographs, allegedly showing Han Chinese workers slaughtering pigs within a brick tea factory complex in China proper. They added that the pictures also showed Han workers trampling the tea leaves while sweating profusely. Although there was clear doubt surrounding the validity of the evidence, the ensuing scandal united many Uyghurs in a boycott of the product for five months, a boycott inspired not only by the alleged presence of pigs in the factory grounds but also by the vision of Han Chinese sweat soaking into the leaves. According to Şohrat, the young male archaeologist in Ürümqi, the Chinese government later launched a campaign to persuade Uyghurs to resume drinking brick tea (sales from the tea make up a large proportion of profits from three Chinese provinces, including Hubei and Hunan).

Subsequently, many people did not know what to believe, and brick tea lovers drink it once more.

The food boundary should in theory necessitate spatial segregation between Han Chinese in many environments. However, on close investigation, evident that Uyghurs employ dietary differences to ensure spatial segregation as it suits them to do so, and often make concessions if they stand to benefit. If one examines patterns of Uyghur patronage of different eateries, a number of contradictions emerge. In Ürümqi and urban areas of Xinjiang, signs outside state whether food served inside is hancan (‘Han cuisine’, including pork an ‘unclean’) or qinghen (‘pure and true’, avoiding pork and selling mutton and beef). Within this basic distinction, there are three types of restaurant:

1. Han-managed hancan restaurants which sell Han Chinese food including pork
2. Han-managed qinghen restaurants which serve Chinese- and Uyghur-style food
3. Uyghur and Hui qinghen restaurants serving ‘pure and true’ Xinjiang dish

Uyghurs avoid the hancan restaurant without exception. This is an understated fact in Xinjiang. Following my arrival in the city, Uyghurs at the local market attempted to dissuade me from entering hancan restaurants, arguing that Han Chinese were unsuitable for their establishments: ‘She doesn’t eat Han food! She eats meat don’t you?’ In this way, they tried to ensure that I would eat only qinghen food in Xinjiang and thereby align myself (culturally and politically) with them. It is different that I might well eat pork when in the UK; indeed, Uyghurs chose to eat pork that I did not. In this way, Uyghurs used the food boundary as a means to reject the Han but chose to apply the same rules to Westerners.

If dietary requirements truly represented a hard-and-fast rule, one might expect Uyghurs would refuse to enter any establishment where food comes into contact with non-Han Chinese. Yet I found, for example, that Uyghurs eat in Han-managed qinghen under certain circumstances. Uyghurs from my work unit (minkhaohan) and I usually ate in nearby Han-managed qinghen restaurants when lunching with Han work colleagues. I also observed that groups of young Uyghurs (again, minkhaohan) liked to hold birthday parties and other special events in Han Chinese establishments, though they ate in Uyghur or Hui qinghen rest most other times. It is notable, however, that they were rarely if ever accomodated Han Chinese. The Han Chinese managers of these restaurants rarely confined Muslim diet themselves, and are evidently only interested in increasing profits excluding pork dishes from the menu, as they can attract both Han and Uyghur customers. When I questioned why Uyghurs should consent to eat in a restaurant whose managers and waitresses came into regular contact with pork at home and possibly also during lunch break (and which might therefore be considered ritually ‘unclean’), Şohrat, archaeologist from Ürümqi, countered: ‘But have you noticed that it is a certa Uyghur who goes there? Those who went to Han schools (minkhaohan). They’re in about things like that. And also, those who haven’t received a higher

35 Five or six-storey residential blocks that became popular in China after Liberation.
36 Cesaro (‘Consuming Identities’, pp. 230, 234) notes that Uyghurs in the 1990s defined categories of forbidden/allowed foods according to what people those foods were associated with and not necessarily according to whether they are explicitly forbidden in the Qur'an. In this way, articulation of the ‘food boundary’ can be seen as a form of Uyghur resistance against the Han people.
37 Cesaro ‘Consuming Identities’, p. 234 similarly notes a tension between what Uyghurs say they do and what they actually do.
38 See ibid., p. 231.
39 See also Cesaro ‘Consuming Identities’, p. 232. A computer programmer I knew in Ürümqi was plate with Chinese politician Li Peng's signature on it during a trip to Beijing. He refused it, saying you. It's not qinghen!”
They haven’t thought of all the implications, you see.’ He thus stated (albeit unwittingly) that the only type of Uyghur not to eat in Han-managed qinghen restaurants is the educated minkauom in like himself, of whom there are relatively few. One further wonders how he could tell minkaohan and minkauam apart just by looking at them. 40 

Uyghurs willingly eat in either Uyghur or Hui restaurants since both are qinghen. Yet given the choice, they will usually eat Uyghur rather than Hui establishments. Some Uyghurs explained that they were not so keen on the flavour of noodles served in Hui restaurants, complaining that Hui did not know how to cook laghman 41 sauce and always put in too many chilli peppers. 42 Uyghur restaurants are distinguishable by the sheep carcasses that hang outside, which indicate that meat sold there is halal (‘clean’).

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

Uyghurs often cite the problem of utensils, crockery and cutlery being ‘unclean’ as a key factor preventing them from visiting the homes of Han Chinese (and ensuring spatial segregation in the domestic sphere). 43 Yet here, too, there are many inconsistencies. For example, Uyghurs serve food to Han Chinese customers in Uyghur restaurants every day, meaning that their Uyghur customers come into contact with the same plates, bowls, chopsticks and spoons used by Han (who eat pork).

When I queried this point, Uyghurs usually responded by saying that there was no way around this problem, since they needed Han Chinese custom to keep their businesses ticking over. Söhrat, the archaeologist from Ürümchi, went on to insist that it was a different case when a Han ate in a Uyghur home: ‘On the few occasions that a Han comes to a Uyghur home, the bowl, dish and chopsticks he uses are thrown away afterwards.’ I subsequently asked a Uyghur in his late thirties in Aqsu whether he also followed these guidelines. He shrugged, said that he himself would just wash the crockery in hot water, and added that: such an extreme attitude was to be expected from a Qazargili. 44

Uyghurs also claim to feel disgusted by the sight of live pigs or by the smell of pork cooking. It is true that Han immigrants in rural areas have to raise pigs on all-Han settlements well removed from Uyghur dwellings due to the problem presented by the rural water supply. When I asked a Uyghur peasant from Aqsu prefecture whether Han Chinese

who lived nearby raised pigs, he replied decisively: ‘No, they can’t. They do all use the same water from the same rivers and streams. If they raised pigs, the drink from the streams, the meat would be washed in the streams ... then the flow downstream to us! That would cause big problems.’ It is also true that the Han do not come into physical contact with pigs. 45 Yet I got the distinct impression Uyghurs exaggerated their disgust regarding pigs and pork in order better to adapt to their dislike for the Han Chinese. For instance, one young female student in Ürümchi that she and her friends always went the long way round at the local market, passing a Han butcher’s stall. In practice, I never noticed her doing so until I strolled around the market. In Aqsu New Town, a Uyghur chef insisted with some that Han could not open many hancan restaurants there since ‘pork stinks cooking’. Nevertheless, this fact has not prevented hancan establishments from across Ürümchi. Nor does it prevent Uyghur petty entrepreneurs from selling directly in front of those establishments.

Social

With the exception of practical relationships formed within the work environment, do not willingly mix with Han Chinese. Accordingly, ethnic segregation is between the two groups in the home environment, on the street and in all social activities. If I asked Uyghurs whether they socialised with Han Chinese, the enquiry received a negative shake of the head, particularly so in the case of young people. Once more, the principle reason cited for this is the absence of social interaction between the two groups.

On a purely practical level, the Han Chinese inclusion of pork in daily life makes socialising in many situations that involve food impossible. The reality that Uyghurs simply do not want to socialise with Han Chinese, and use other means of ensuring not only spatial but also social segregation. The question here is whether for the sake of protecting their jobs or preserving harmony between the groups, where they are obliged to work with Han Chinese on a daily basis. A compulsion is reached in the workplace if Han Chinese agree to eat lunch with Uyghurs in restaurants. However, such compromises are rarely made outside the work unit and between Uyghurs themselves, for example in socialising with friends. The Uyghur woman in her forties in Ürümchi:

40 To an extent, it remains unclear which types of Uyghurs enter Han-managed restaurants and under what circumstances. Cesario ('Consuming Identities', p. 231) writes that Uyghurs tend to avoid Han-managed qinghen restaurants on the grounds that the food may have come into contact with a Han. This issue would certainly benefit from further research.

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

42 Cesario ('Consuming Identities', p. 230) also observed Uyghur reluctance to eat in Hui restaurants and attributes this to a lack of trust, arguing that Uyghurs invariably associate the Hui with the Han Chinese. This would correspond with my own findings on Uyghur responses towards the Hui preference for ‘Beijing time’ over ‘local time’.

43 Whenever I was invited to Han Chinese homes, Söhrat and others tried to dissuade me from going: ‘You don’t want to go there! The Han eat pork, and the food will be cooked and eaten out of the same pans’. See also Cesario, 'Consuming Identities', p. 230.

44 The inference derives from the common perception that the Islamic faith is strongest in the southern oasis of Qazax. The respondent alluded to the fact that Söhrat’s original hometown was not Ürümchi but Qazax.

45 Once, a sleeper bus on which I was travelling was delayed by a flood across the road. Presently, a Han Chinese driver made it through the water from the other side and drove past us. One Han Chinese passenger was surprised to his neighbour that a Uyghur had been driving the truck. His companion was scornful: ‘When did you ever see a Uyghur transport pigs?’

46 Rodelsien, Qazax Identities, p. 63 identifies pork as the main factor influencing interaction between Han Chinese in Turpan: 'These social borders may appear invisible ... but they become salient in interethnic social, religious, and commercial interactions'.
At these times, he said, they always asked the Han guest: ‘Would you like something to eat?’ Such an inquiry indicates reluctance in Uyghur culture and is tantamount to stating that you do not wish to entertain a guest. Conventionally, a Uyghur host just produces tea and refreshments and enjoys the guest to tuck in: ‘Yüng! Iching!’ (‘Eat! Drink!’).

Ethnic segregation is plainly visible on the streets of Ürümchi and Xinjiang’s New Towns, where Han Chinese walk hand in hand, and Uyghurs arm in arm, but mixed groups are never seen. Similarly, Han Chinese rarely attend Uyghur social gatherings, unless in an official capacity (for example, a Han superior from the work unit might briefly drop in on a Uyghur wedding party to pay his respects, or a Uyghur businessman might take a Han businesswoman to a Uyghur dance restaurant). Certainly, there are any number of objective reasons why Han Chinese might find it difficult to participate in Uyghur social events. First, Uyghur gatherings provide an arena for Uyghurs to make music, sing, dance and generally take centre stage. A comparable love of public performance does not figure in the social lives of most Han Chinese, who do not consider themselves natural show-offs and tend to be less extroverted than Uyghurs. While many Uyghurs love to be in the limelight, Han Chinese are usually loath to be the ‘bird that sticks its head out of the nest’. Participation would also require that Han guests were au fait with traditional Uyghur music and dance. As Uyghurs like to honour special guests by asking them to dance or sing, one could easily imagine that Han guests might soon find themselves in an awkward and embarrassing position.

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

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

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

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

When Uyghurs have a death in the family, that’s when they most wish they had oth

47 These include Islamic ceremonies (weddings, funerals, circumsicisons, etc.), street-restaurant and house parties, group outings to the Uyghur dance restaurant or wating (Chinese dance hall), all Uyghur university dances, the mátıspan (a mass-outdoor gathering held during the hot summer months, where men and women feast, play dhtar, sing, dance, tell stories and jokes, and play games), and the rural orchard gathering. For a description of the historical origins and various forms of the mátıspan, see Zheng P칭, Lu Anji (trans.), Xinjiang: The Land and the People (New World Press, Beijing, 1989), pp. 134-7.

48 There is a strong feeling among urban Uyghur towards mukalla, a real group determining the between individuals, and providing unity and solidarity. Within the mukalla, obligations and respect placed upon individuals in return for support and services, so that members celebrate wedding together, organizes funerals and rituals together, and help one another when needed. Urban Uyghurs that mukalla life is disappearing in the big towns, particularly Ürümchi, thinking this the result of presence (Ayshe Eli, communication).
over the honour of female relatives, colleagues and classmates. Furthermore, they view Uyghur women as their monopoly and not to be won by Han Chinese.

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

Managed Interaction in the Workplace

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

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

There is a certain sense that appearances should be kept up and that harmony should be preserved in the workplace. Some Uyghurs employ humour to try to smooth the way. I once observed a conversation between a Uyghur academic and a Han academic. The Han asked the Uyghur if they would go to a meeting together or if he should go alone. The Uyghur replied: ‘Together, together! Of course we’ll go together ... after all, we are inextricably bonded, aren’t we?’ In this way, he attempted to lighten up relations with his Han colleague by making a joke at the expense of the Chinese government’s catchphrase ‘the unity of the nationalities’. On this occasion, the Han colleague was unsure whether to laugh or not and left the room in confusion.

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

Besides sometimes taking a work lunch together, the only other time Uyghur and Han colleagues socialise with one another is at events organised by the work unit (for example, meetings over lunch or national celebrations such as the fortieth anniversary of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in 1995). These events take place in working hours, and members of the work unit are obliged to attend. At meeting lunches, Han Chinese and most Uyghurs present tend to drink large amounts of baijiu (a spirit distilled from sorghum or maize) and make constant toasts. It is possible that alcohol and the act of honouring one another through frequent toasting further helps to smooth interaction. Beyond never visit the homes of Han colleagues, and Han Chinese rarely enter the hon colleagues. Han work unit members occasionally pay festival visits to Uyghur the Qurban and Rozi festivals, as a gesture of courtesy and a public display Uyghur culture. These interactions, too, are often managed with the help amount of alcohol.

Another arena where the two groups seem able to manage interaction a local market. Here, some Uyghurs and Han Chinese petty entrepreneurs have mutually beneficial working relationships. I regularly observed scenes in Ü Uyghurs and Han Chinese collaborated to increase one another’s business, de that one dealt with halal (‘clean’) meat and the other with haram (‘unclean’) Ürümqi market, Uyghur youths rent kebab stands in front of ‘unclean’ hanc To an extent, the location of these stands is undesirable for business, s customers never eat in hancan restaurants. However, Gönül and his fellow exploit the situation by attracting the custom of Han Chinese instead. They customers and encourage them to eat in the hancan restaurant in front of th that the customers will later call for some kebabs to be brought in. In return, managers of hancan restaurants recommend the Uyghurs’ kebabs.

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

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

Han: No, the groom has to carry the bride over the threshold! You lot don’t y

However, such exchanges do not seem to cause long-term offence, at least environment. Everyone is happy to continue warming their hands over the k charcoal embers and devour hot chestnuts. A good working environment established which remains fundamentally undamaged by religio-cultural differe Still, as with relationships between Uyghurs and Han Chinese in work un between these petty entrepreneurs do not extend beyond the working environm instance of Uyghur stallholders socialising with Han Chinese outside work market pools There, Gönül and others often played pool with Han Clay taking a break from work. However, the opponents said little to one another th game, which was characterised by a tangible element of ethnic competition. Wh was over, they thanked one another and went their separate ways.

49 He used the Chinese term lihhkai to describe the notion of Uyghur and Han Chinese being inextricably linked to one another, the same term frequently used in CCP propaganda to encourage the ‘unity of the nationalities’. 50 In the 1980s, it was apparently common for Uyghurs to visit their Han Chinese colleagues at h Chinese Spring Festival. However, this kind of social exchange has become very rare rece communication. 51 The occurrence of an ethnic group establishing mutually advantageous patterns of transaction wi (e.g. trading relations) has been termed ethnic symbiosis. Barth, ‘Introduction’, p. 20.
The Underlying Factor: Perceived Socio-Economic Inequalities

Important as symbolic boundaries are, it is the ‘food boundary’ which has become the primary means of drawing ethnic distinctions between Uyghurs and Han Chinese in the 1990s, allowing Uyghurs to ensure spatial and social segregation between the two groups on a day-to-day basis. Yet they often compromise this boundary, and usually in situations where they stand to gain socially or financially. Uyghurs find jobs in Han work units and move to New Towns in order to secure a home, a steady income, and a livelihood. Uyghur restaurant owners oblige their Uyghur customers to use the same chopsticks, cutlery and crockery as Han customers because they need (or want) the extra custom. Uyghur students choose to share dorms with Han Chinese students because their studies and career chances will improve if they speak better Chinese. Uyghur petty entrepreneurs co-operate with their Han counterparts at the local market as a strategy to improve business and so forth. In situations where they stand to benefit, Uyghurs often forego the supposedly hard-and-fast rules surrounding concepts of ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ food (and people), and can forge relatively amicable relationships with Han Chinese, at least on the superficial level. However, the compromises made in these situations are not extended to other situations. Presumably, it should be possible to invite Han Chinese to Uyghur social events, provided that they conform to Uyghur dietary habits for the duration. But Uyghurs are clearly not willing to do this. Even in the Han Chinese dance halls, where Uyghurs and Han might share a love of ballroom dancing, they choose to sit separately.

Yet there is evidence that there was less social segregation of Uyghurs and Han Chinese in the past. In the 1990s in their thirties or forties told me that, during their childhoods, they had sometimes entered the homes of Han Chinese playmates. At that time, differences of diet had been ‘managed’ whereby Uyghur children were allowed to play in Han Chinese homes so long as they did not eat or drink anything while there. At the present time, however, there are almost no instances of Uyghur children socialising in this way. Similarly, giving up pork was once the prerequisite for a Han Chinese to marry a Uyghur, but this is no longer enough. Whether purely for religio-cultural reasons or for other reasons, public disapproval has made intermarriage practically impossible in recent years. That Uyghur children no longer have Han Chinese friends and that intermarriage between adults is no longer an option suggests that, in addition to long-standing religio-cultural differences, there are other new factors making the estrangement between Uyghur and Han adults more pronounced, and leading Uyghurs to keep themselves and their children segregated. Most salient among these is a growing awareness of socio-economic inequalities. In the present context, urban Uyghurs have begun to emphasise religio-cultural differences and use them as symbols to demarcate ethnic boundaries between Uyghurs and Han Chinese in what is actually an articulation of demands for ethnic equality in education and work, and the control of Xinjiang’s natural resources.

Conclusion

Uyghur national identity in Xinjiang in the 1990s defines itself in relation to Han Chinese immigrants in an ‘Us and Them’ dichotomy. In emphasising the failure of Han Chinese to adhere to Islamic social laws, Uyghurs define the differences between themselves and the non-Muslim Han along religio-cultural lines. On another level, however, they define themselves as an ethnic group in competition with Han Chinese in a new urban social hierarchy. To state that increased interaction between Uyghurs and Han Chinese is necessarily conducive to increased ethnic tensions would be too simple. The fact is that the proportion of Han Chinese immigrants within Xinjiang’s total population had already grown to 40 per cent (roughly equal to somewhat questionable official estimates in 1996). Yet instances of ethnic conflict did not begin to accelerate until the end of the 1980s. Similarly, we hear that just one generation ago, Uyghur children were allowed to play in each other’s homes, that intermarriage between and Han was common across the region, and that Uyghur colleagues visited Han colleagues at home during the Spring Festival.

What is clear is that Uyghur attitudes towards Han settlers have changed significantly over time (while religio-cultural differences have existed between them all along). It is said that the Uyghurs originally welcomed the Han Chinese with open arms. Uyghurs in the 1990s say they want the influx of Han immigrants to stop. The Uyghurs distinguish between first-generation and new Han immigrants further confluence of heart. The distinction is reflected both in the way Uyghurs speak about and new settlers, and in the nature of the relationships they enjoy with each. The relationships they have with original settlers are characterised by a willingness on the part of Han Chinese to learn the Uyghur language and adapt to Uyghur customs (for Han Chinese giving up pork). Worsening relations with new Han immigrants, on hand, result from a growing unwillingness on the part of the Han to embrace or to adapt to Uyghur culture.

Over and above the Great Han chauvinist attitudes prevalent in urban Xinjiang, the daily reality of the marginalisation of Uyghurs in education and work that makes contemporary Uyghur–Han relations. Since working in Han Chinese work companies requires fluency in Chinese (and, unofficially, acceptance of the Han在中国), many Uyghurs have been excluded from the Han-dominated labour market a default. Unqualified for white-collar jobs, Uyghurs end up doing blue-collar jobs in traditional agricultural roles. The result is widespread resentment at Han privilege. Televised publicity of ‘success stories’ of Han Chinese immigrants, add daily sight of Han Chinese living in clean new housing and driving (and apparently brand new cars, only exacerbates these feelings. Although Han Chinese have a new urban job market in Xinjiang, as well as putting mechanisms in place to benefit exploitation of the region’s natural resources, few urban Han believe that they profited from these developments. Uyghur standards of living are at least as probably substantially better than they were before 1949. However, urban dissalement from the fact that Uyghurs now have something to compare themselves with. Finally, the ‘contamination effect’ of the vision of the adjacent CIS republics is underestimated. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the collapse across the border of six independent Muslim republics (Azerbaijan, Qazakhistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan), the Uyghurs, the Tatars and the Uighurs became the only Central Asian Muslims in Xinjiang without an independent homeland after their ethnic group. Since that time, the mass media have enabled U;
sit and watch as their newly independent Muslim cousins took control of their social, political and economic structures and of the exploitation of their abundant natural resources.

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