

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ILLUMINISTS: POPULAR SONG AND THE WAKING OF THE UYGHUR NATION

Anthropologist Stevan Harrell once stated: ‘The answer to whether the subaltern can speak is that the subaltern can speak on the sufferance of the civilizer’ (1994: 34). According to this thesis, peripheral peoples have a voice only when granted one by the centre, and the centre grants that voice only on condition that peripheral peoples speak in its favour. Yet in some contexts it has been possible to promote an alternative politics through the vehicle of elite or popular cultural forms. In 1930s Algeria, for example, Islamic reformers of the Algerian Association of Ulama (AAU)<sup>1</sup> found fertile ground in popular culture—specifically, poems, especially those recited orally—as they sought to mobilise Islam for nationalist purposes: ‘The major themes found in these works are a celebration of the past glories of Islam; the portrayal of the enemy as a powerful demon, an unbeliever (Christian France) who violates the law of Islam; the belief that the current humiliation in Islam at the hands of the unbeliever will be avenged’ (Esposito 1984: 82–83). Such a strategy is not without precedent in Xinjiang. As Bellér-Hann points out, legends about folk heroes, Muslim saints, historical events, and so on, have long been communicated in oral form via a technique of memorising which formed the core of formal and informal learning: ‘Orally transmitted tales and songs were potentially the property of all, they could be repeated at home and handed down to the next generation’ (2000: 32–33, 39). Uyghur intellectual elites of the 1920s employed a ‘poetry of resistance’ and oral recitation as a way to disseminate political ideas and encourage Uyghur nationhood against a backdrop of heavy taxation by Chinese warlord governors, Yang Zengxin and Jin Shuren (Rudelson, 1997: 146–53). Moreover, conditions of accelerated modernisation since the early eighties have paradoxically favoured the continuation of oral transmission rather than its disappearance. Literate Uyghurs regard the official

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<sup>1</sup> The AAU, founded in 1931 and formally organized on May 5th, 1935, was a body of Muslim religious scholars who, under French colonial rule, advocated the restoration of an Algerian nation rooted in Islamic and Arabic traditions. The Association was heavily influenced by the views of Muslim jurist and reformer Muḥammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905).

media as unreliable owing to high levels of state censorship, and find orally circulated information far more credible than written sources. Indeed, oral transmission has been the only way to spread news concerning violent incidents provoked by the state family planning policy, such as attacks on hospital staff or local officials for the part they played in the performance of forced abortions on Uyghur women (Bellér-Hann 2000: 73, 84). From the late 1980s through the 1990s, orally transmitted popular culture played an important role in the mobilisation of Uyghur national identity in the context of dramatic political change at domestic and international levels. Political dissidence in Xinjiang, unable to find voice in the form of official associations, found alternative expression in the historical novel, folk song, humour, stories and oral histories (cf. Harris 2002, Smith 2007, Dautcher 2009 and Bovingdon 2010). It was in this context that the late Uyghur novelist, poet, and historian, Abdurehim Ötkür, became a symbol of Uyghur aspirations to national independence. In September 1996, an estimated ten thousand Uyghurs attended Ötkür's funeral in Ürümchi's Döngköwrük district; they carried his casket high above their heads, and stopped traffic for four hours. The works of certain folk singers from this period similarly struck an emotional resonance with the Uyghur populace, and in some cases transcended underlying social divides of oasis origin, occupation, generation, political orientation, level of education and degree of religiosity. By focusing on the inter-ethnic boundary between the Uyghurs and a monolithic Han 'Other', these singers blurred to a significant degree intra-ethnic divides within the Uyghur group itself. At the same time, the hierarchy of older/younger sibling inherent in state rhetoric surrounding Han-minority relations (Harrell 1994; Bovingdon 2002) was challenged and re-cast as a relationship of coloniser to colonised. This chapter deals with the third—and arguably most effective—means of symbolic resistance operating during the mid-1990s: the dissemination of ethno-nationalist ideologies via Uyghur popular song. It opens with two examples of the state's preferred type of minority artist—whom I term the 'musician-comprador'—before going on to discuss the advent of 'new folk' and the possibilities for mass mediation of ideas furnished by the pop music cassette. Through an interpretation of key songs chosen from among the repertoires of two rival 'Voices of the Uyghurs', Ömärjan Alim and Abdurehim Heyit, I show how lyrical metaphor served to:

- a. re-cast the fraternal relationship (as represented by the state) between Han Chinese and Uyghurs as one of coloniser and colonised;

- b. condemn the ethnic ‘treason’ committed by indigenous Uyghur leaders (perceived as ‘collaborators’);
- c. critique the internal backbiting thought to characterise the Uyghur community;
- d. draw explicit links between the physical territory of Xinjiang and Uyghur cultural icons;
- e. awaken the Uyghurs’ sense of nation; and
- f. promote strategies for the effective mobilisation of popular nationalism.

At the same time, new folk paradoxically doubled as a locus for Uyghur disunity, as cross-cutting identifications of social class, religiosity and locality created divides between its two main protagonists. In the final section of the chapter, I draw on interviews conducted with the two musicians and/or their close friends and family members to demonstrate the social, religious and regional bases of the discord between them.

#### 4.1. *The Musician-comprador*

As Harrell (1994: 34) outlines, from the state’s point of view, the ideal form of the subaltern voice is the ‘compradore elite’, a term which denotes members of peripheral or colonised peoples who willingly participate in the civilizing or colonising project. China’s compradors tend to be linked to professional song-and-dance troupes [Ch. *gewutuan* 歌舞团], state-sponsored organisations known for the co-optation and control of traditional art forms and minority representation. Minority nationality artists who have trained in these troupes since 1949 learn how to present their ethnic identities in ways acceptable to the Chinese state (Baranovitch, 2001: 362-66). When they perform at official live or television shows, the choice of works is normally vetted by troupe leaders and by the local Cultural Bureau (*Wenhuaaju* 文化局), the state organ responsible for monitoring the arts (Mackerras, 1985: 71-2). Lyrics contain messages of ‘nationality unity’ (Ch. *minzu tuanjie* 民族团结), that is, unity among China’s fifty-six nationalities, and often promote the government’s minority policies (Harris, 2004: 9). Below, I consider two prominent examples of the musician-comprador in contemporary Xinjiang: Baha’erguli and Kelimu.

*Baha'erguli* (巴哈尔古丽)<sup>2</sup>

Bahargül Imin was born in Khotän in south Xinjiang. There, she joined the regional culture troupe in 1977 as a dancer, solo singer and presenter before becoming a 'soldier-musician' within the Xinjiang Military District culture troupe in 1980. In 1981, she entered the Shanghai Music College to learn singing under the direction of a Han music professor. Seven years later, in 1988, she entered the PLA Arts College under the tutelage of a Uyghur music professor. Across her career, Bahargül has won a number of prestigious awards. In 1984, she was named 'Outstanding Vocalist' at the first ever National Young Singers Television Awards (*Quanguo qingnian geshou dianshi dajiangsai* 全国青年歌手电视大奖赛), while in 1986 she came second in the Minority Song category at the same event. In 1995 she won the Bronze award at the China Central Television (CCTV) Chinese Music Contest, and she has twice won the highest accolade in the Chinese arts sphere (in 1996 for one of four songs she recorded for MTV, and again in 1997): the 'Best Works Award' (*Wu ge yi gongcheng jiang* 五个一工程奖) conferred by the Central Ministry of Propaganda.<sup>3</sup> Bahargül has been officially categorised as a Grade 1 performer (*yiji yanyuan* 一级演员) in the PRC.<sup>4</sup>

Bahargül's best known songs include 'Our Xinjiang is the Most Beautiful Place' (*Zui mei de hai shi women Xinjiang* 最美的还是我们新疆), 'Girls and Boys of the Tianshan' (*Tianshan ernü* 天山儿女), 'Hello Ürümchi' (*Wulumuqi, ni hao* 乌鲁木齐, 你好), 'Please Taste a Piece of Hami Melon' (*Qing ni chang kuai Hami gua* 请你尝快哈密瓜), 'Anarkhan, My Black Eyes' (*Ana'erhan, wo de hei yanjing* 阿娜尔汗我的黑眼睛) and 'Those who Visit the Borderlands Don't Want to Leave' (*Ren dao bianjiang bu xiang zou* 人到边疆不想走). A glance at just two of these provides immediate insights into her popularity with state authorities. While she appears in Uyghur traditional dress in the music video for 'Our Xinjiang is the Most

<sup>2</sup> Information about Bahargül's career is taken from her online profile on Chinese website hudong.com: <http://www.hudong.com/wiki/%E5%B7%B4%E5%93%88%E5%B0%94%E5%8F%A4%E4%B8%BD> (accessed 5th January 2012).

<sup>3</sup> The *Wu ge yi gongcheng jiang* (五个一工程) is a project initiated in 1992, and originally awarded a prize for the best works in the following 5 categories: drama (including traditional Chinese opera such as Peking opera, dance and musicals); film; TV series; books (social sciences only); and theoretical articles (social sciences only). From 1995, two more categories were added: songs and radio series. However, the award is still called *Wu ge yi gongcheng jiang*.

<sup>4</sup> The title *yiji yanyuan* is awarded to performers considered to have made an outstanding contribution to the sphere of arts and culture. Performers with this status are issued with a special subsidy by the PRC State Council.

Beautiful Place', and is surrounded by professional dancers—male and female—performing traditional Uyghur dance, she sings the song in Chinese (not Uyghur). This in itself is not necessarily problematic, given the multilingual quality of contemporary urban Xinjiang. However, she delivers the song in a typically Chinese vocal style, and the lyrics appear to suggest a Han settler's perspective on the region rather than a local one. Lines such as 'I've roamed many places, but our Xinjiang is the most beautiful place' evoke the notions of internal (Han) migration from East to West as well as Han 'ownership' of the Western regions; later on, 'Lights twinkle in the New Oil Town in the Tarim' offers hope to migrants for a more prosperous life; while one of the closing lines 'A piece of precious [valuable] land has attracted the attention of the world' conjures up rivalries over Xinjiang's natural resources, both past (the 'Great Game' of the early twentieth century) and present (foreign bids for oil exploration). The central and oft-repeated phrase *women Xinjiang* ('Our Xinjiang') is itself problematic, blurring as it does the important distinction between 'local' peoples and newcomers.<sup>5</sup> While Bahargül's songs have been phenomenally popular with the Han Chinese audience, a post on a Uyghur exile web forum in 2005 illustrates the song's somewhat different impact on those who consider themselves indigenous to the territory:

I have recently travelled by express train between Ürümchi and Kashgar. I'm shocked to discover that all of its radio announcements on the train are in Chinese ONLY over the course of the whole trip. It even broadcast a song entitled as 'Xinjiang is the most beautiful place' by Bahargül both upon departure and arrival and even that song was also in Chinese! I felt like a stranger travelling in my hometown.<sup>6</sup>

The Han settler's perspective is conveyed still more clearly in a second song titled 'Those who Visit the Borderlands Don't Want to Leave', penned by Han composers Cui Zong and Tian Ge. In the first verse, Bahargül sings: 'I can't forget the walled New Town', 'I can't forget the desert oases', and even 'I can't forget the Qaramay oil', before going on to laud the beautiful fields and gardens of Qäshqär and the pastures of the Heavenly Mountains. The verse concludes with the words 'The apple tree branch has caught my sleeve and won't let go', further suggesting an attachment to the 'fruits' of the region. In the second verse, Bahargül proclaims: 'I'm in love with the

<sup>5</sup> See also Dwyer (2005: 30) on the term *Xinjiangren*.

<sup>6</sup> Post dated 27th April 2005 on the website of the Uyghur American Association (UAA) based in Washington. <http://forum.uyghuramerican.org/forum/showthread.php?940-Chinese-ONLY&s=b59fabb2993dae07ccd8a940ff74ac61> (accessed 5/1/12).

perfumed snow lotus;<sup>7</sup> I'm in love with the magnificent tamarisk;<sup>8</sup> I'm in love with the grapes of Turpan; I'm in love with the fine wines of the Ili valley', again underlining a focus on the region's superior natural environment and its produce. Ultimately, the song wraps up with the stereotyped image of local Turkic hospitality:

阿吾勤的老妈妈	Awuqin's old mum
Awuqin de lao mama	
拉住了客人	Pulls a guest into her home
La zhu le keren	
拉住了客人	Pulls a guest into her home
La zhu le keren	
不松手, 不松手	And holds his hand fast! Holds his hand fast!
Bu song shou, bu song shou	
拉住了客人	Pulls a guest into her home
La zhu le keren	
不松手	And holds his hand fast!
Bu song shou	
纵然是人在千里外	Even when I'm a thousand miles away
Zongran shi ren zai qian li wai	
一颗心还在新疆留	A piece of my heart remains in Xinjiang!
Yike xin hai zai Xinjiang liu <sup>9</sup>	

The whole is accompanied by the inviting (or ominous) refrain *Lai, lai, lai, lai, lai ...* (Come, come, come, come, come ...). Uradyn Bulag provides a vivid description of a similar representation in Inner Mongolia, in the form of a gigantic statue of a Mongol 'hostess', standing before the Hohhot municipality building with a ritual scarf and wine cup in her hands, and intended to symbolise the warm Mongolian welcome to the Chinese 'guests'. In this case, the host-guest roles are in reality reversed given that the Han population in the city now stands at 90 per cent of the total (2002: 15). Later in this chapter, I will contrast these ideas with what Ömärjan Alim has to say in his song 'Mehman Bashlidim' [I Brought Home a Guest].

<sup>7</sup> *Saussurea*: a genus of perennial herbs in Eurasia and North America, having mostly pink or purple tubular flowers gathered in heads that form a common inflorescence. Most species are found in the subalpine and alpine zones of mountains, growing in meadows and mountain tundras and on stony slopes, screens, and cliffs.

<sup>8</sup> *Tamarix chinensis*: a shrub or small tree of Eurasia, having small, scale-like leaves and clusters of white, pink or red flowers.

<sup>9</sup> Lyrics and sheet music retrieved from [www.tom163.net](http://www.tom163.net) (accessed 5/1/12). The translation is this author's.

Popular reaction to Bahargül in the regional capital Ürümchi was mixed. Interviewed in 2002, Zunun, a service industry employee in his thirties, described her as an ‘army musician’, and her role within the PLA as one of ‘singing songs to raise the troops’ spirits’. Perhaps this explains why Bahargül sings mainly about the beauty (and booty) of the region, in an effort to convince local troops that the ‘new dominion’ is worth protecting and hardships worth enduring. In this sense, the songs can be seen as directed at both Han troops and Han settlers, all the more so in the aftermath of the 2009 Ürümchi riots and subsequent paranoia surrounding alleged syringe attacks.<sup>10</sup> While this informant conceded that Bahargül’s tendency to sing in Chinese rather than Uyghur rendered her less appealing to some sectors of Uyghur society, he also highlighted the attraction for many Uyghurs of her ‘sonorous’ voice. A second respondent, Jelil, an observant graduate in his late twenties, claimed in 2002 that Bahargül had lost popularity within the Uyghur community following her divorce from her Uyghur husband and subsequent remarriage to a Han Chinese: ‘No-one likes her now. Before, she was married to a Uyghur, a good man with a good job. They had two beautiful children. She was really blessed [*bäkhklik*], you know? But then she became friends with this Han who produced her show [...] So I don’t want to listen to her songs.’ In Jelil’s view, Bahargül’s fall from grace was precipitated by the social stigma surrounding her divorce and exogamous marriage (or, more precisely, her remarriage to a Han).<sup>11</sup> He refuted the suggestion that her delivery in Chinese was off-putting for the Uyghur audience, pointing out that she also sang songs in Uyghur, and that even had she sung entirely in Chinese, some groups of Uyghurs would have continued to like her, for example, the Chinese-educated (*minkaohan*) youth.<sup>12</sup> I have explored the increasing irrelevance of language mode in the sphere of popular culture elsewhere (Smith Finley, 2011b). Certainly, I was able to find online footage of Bahargül performing Uyghur folk songs in the Uyghur

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<sup>10</sup> See Smith Finley (2011a: 83–84) on the breakdown of confidence among Han residents following the Ürümchi riots in 2009.

<sup>11</sup> I discovered later in an interview with a close family friend that Bahargül’s situation had in fact been quite complex. According to this friend, Bahargül had been very unhappy with her first (Uyghur) husband because the combination of her showbiz lifestyle with his male pride and jealousy had caused the two to quarrel endlessly. Interestingly, this respondent’s own mother was a performing artist, whose marriage had similarly ended in divorce as a result of subverted gender roles: ‘My mother was always out and about socialising, and my father couldn’t bear it. Even though he’s a *minkaohan*, he’s still a Uyghur man, right?’

<sup>12</sup> See Baranovitch (2007b) on the popularity among Uyghur youth of pop idol, Arken Abdulla, who sings apolitical songs in both the Chinese language and the Uyghur language.

language and, judging by the related discussion threads, this seemed well received by at least some Uyghur fans. One post tagged to the ‘Mudänkhan’ video on YouTube in 2007 read in Uyghur: ‘Sizge kop rehmet!!! [Thank you very much!] This is my favorite Uighur classic. I can’t get myself off this piece since I found it yesterday. Bahargul sings it very well!!!’<sup>13</sup>

In addition to promoting the notion of Han belonging within the Western regions through the performance of songs that uphold Chinese national integrity, Bahargül has otherwise proved useful to the authorities by acting as ambassador for China’s Islamic population on significant political occasions. In 1979, she went to Pakistan as part of a China youth delegation, where she performed ‘Long Live Pakistan’ in Urdu to great local acclaim. In 1985, she performed the ironically titled ‘Sweet Song to Greet our Honoured Guests’ at the 30th anniversary celebrations of the establishment of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. This choice of song involved a double meaning since, in one sense, the ‘honoured guests’ referred to were the Chinese politicians who had travelled from Beijing to join the regional celebrations; however, the underlying reference to ‘guests’ in a broader sense—Han settlers in Xinjiang—is unmistakable. While the artist may or may not have chosen this song herself, she nonetheless proliferates the idea of ‘peaceful liberation’ of Xinjiang by acquiescing in the song’s delivery (again, contrast this with Ömärjan Alim’s *Mehman*, discussed later in this chapter). In 1986, Bahargül joined a Xinjiang artists’ delegation to the UAE and Saudi Arabia, promoting the state’s preferred image of a China in which Muslims flourish; and in 1992 she attended the World Festival of the Chinese People (*Shijie huaren jie* 世界华人节) in Hong Kong, representing the Uyghur group as a ‘Chinese people’, or at least as a willing Muslim minority in the majority Chinese nation.

### *Kelimu* (克里木)<sup>14</sup>

Kelimu was born into a musical family in 1940 in Turpan, east Xinjiang. His father, at one time Artistic Director for the local song and dance troupe,

<sup>13</sup> Posted by amina0311. <http://www.youtu.be/watch?v=e3GN6muuCho&feature=related> (accessed 5/1/12).

<sup>14</sup> Information about Kelimu’s career is taken from a number of online profiles posted on Chinese websites, including: <http://baike.baidu.com/view/1306300.htm>; <http://www.xuje.com/yxz/left28/index.html>; and [http://www.rwabc.com/diqurenwu/rw\\_detail.asp?people\\_id=4606&id=7652](http://www.rwabc.com/diqurenwu/rw_detail.asp?people_id=4606&id=7652) (all accessed between 6/1/12 and 8/1/12). See also the article posted at: <http://ent.sina.com.cn/v/m/2005-03-22/0935682674.html>.

was famed for his mastery of the *suona* [shawm],<sup>15</sup> while his mother was an acclaimed dancer. The young Kelimu is described in Chinese sources using the stereotype perennially applied to minority peoples of the Northwest and beyond: *nenggeshanwu* ('having a flair for song and dance'). At the tender age of eleven, he joined the army as a 'literary soldier' (*wenyibing* 文艺兵) and began to study dance, before moving to Beijing at 18. He is credited with being the first singer to perform Uyghur folk songs live in Chinese (in 1959), an act which purportedly 'helped Han people to learn about the Uyghurs', and which gained the praise of Chairman Mao himself. Kelimu was the first person from Xinjiang to join the Communist Youth League (1957), and would later become a member of both the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

Often seen on stage in full PLA uniform, Kelimu enjoys quasi military status and describes himself as 'a soldier in the service of the people'.<sup>16</sup> His willingness to give concerts in remote rural areas of China proper (famously, in a mountain village in Hunan), together with his aim of 'encouraging a deeper understanding of and positive outlook on life', have earned him the nickname 'the people's artist'. He also regularly performs for PLA border defences stationed in remote areas such as Tibet. In assuming the all-embracing identity of a proud *Xinjiangren* [Xinjiangese]—'Come, friends, come and see our Xinjiang! [*Lai ba, pengyoumen, kankan women de Xinjiang!*]'—it could be argued that he reproduces the image of the Uyghurs as 'benign hosts'. In this way, Kelimu, like Bahargül, fulfils the function of attracting new Han settlers to the West as outlined in the post-2000 Great Western Development campaign. For his artistic services—or

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<sup>15</sup> The *suona* is thought to have been developed from the Central Asian instrument known variously as *sorna*, *sumnay*, or *zurna*, of which the Chinese name is likely a transliteration. It has a conical wooden body like that of the European oboe, but incorporates a tubular brass or copper mouthpiece to which a small double reed is affixed, and a detachable metal bell at its end.

<sup>16</sup> Over the course of his career, Kelimu earned the nickname 'Soldier Afanti'. Afanti (阿凡提) is the Chinese transliteration of Āpāndi, a 13th century Sufi mystic, who appears in thousands of popular folk tales across the Turkic and Islamic world. For examples of these tales in the original Uyghur and English translation, see the website of the London Uyghur Ensemble at <http://www.uyghurensemble.co.uk/en-html/en-ependi-letipe.html>. Known as Nasreddin in Persian and Arabic, and Nasreddin Hoca in Turkish, this populist philosopher is sometimes witty, sometimes wise, but very often the butt of a joke. Nasreddin stories usually have a pedagogic nature. Although most are set in an early small-village setting, the tales, like Aesop's fables, deal with timeless concepts and purvey a pithy folk wisdom that invariably triumphs over all.

perhaps more accurately for his contribution to the safeguarding of a unified China—he was among the first cohort of ‘literary soldiers’ to be accorded the status of Civilian General (*wenzhi jiangjun* 文职将军).<sup>17</sup>

Although principally a singer (treble voice) and dancer, Kelimu is also an acclaimed songwriter, and has won national awards for such dubious compositions as ‘Uncle Qurban, Where Are You Going?’ (*Ku'erban dashu ni shang nar?*), ‘Lamb Kebabs Oh So Fragrant!’ (*Yangrouchuan xiang you xiang*), Afanti Song (*Afanti zhi ge*), ‘Tarim River, River of My Hometown’ (*Talimu he, guxiang de he*), and ‘Ode to the Beloved Party [CCP]’ (*Songge xian gei qin'ai de dang*). According to the artist’s profile published on baidu.com,<sup>18</sup> this song repertoire ‘brims with ethnic characteristics and humour’, and Kelimu ‘wears a smile wherever he goes.’ Needless to say, this representation does much to perpetuate the stock image of singing, dancing, smiling, joking ethnic person found in state and popular Han discourses (Blum 2001: 69, 74-5). Kelimu has twice performed in Chinese Central Television’s Spring Festival Variety Show (1998, 2008), and is said to be the ‘darling’ of his (Han) audience. His original songs have been performed and covered far and wide. Yet to what extent do his creations truly reflect the ‘authentic flavour of Xinjiang’ (*dididaodao de Xinjiang wei*), as claimed by his Han fan base? Consider the refrain in ‘Lamb Kebabs Oh So Fragrant!’:

羊肉串香又香	Lamb kebabs oh so fragrant!
今天吃了今天胖，	Eat some today, and you'll put on weight
明天吃了明天壮。	Eat some tomorrow, and you'll gain in strength
小伙子吃了羊肉串，	When a young man eats kebabs
浑身有力量；	His physique becomes strong
姑娘吃了羊肉串，	When a young lady eats kebabs

<sup>17</sup> The honorary title *wenzhijiangjun* (文职将军) was introduced in 2001. It makes provision for civilian army personnel at skills level 3 (on a scale of ten) to be accorded the status of Major-General. Civilian cadres at or above skills level 3 wear an upgraded uniform, including a cap adorned with gold cord and epaulets decorated with pine branches and the General's badge, and are addressed as ‘General’ (将军). Cadres at skills level 1 are accorded the status of Lieutenant General (中将军), those at skills level 2 the status of Major-General (少将军), and those at skills level 3 the status of Colonel or Major-General (大校、少将).

<sup>18</sup> The online Chinese-language search engine Baidu was founded in 2000 by internet pioneer Robin Li. The name Baidu (literally, ‘hundreds of times’) is inspired by a Song Dynasty poem, which compared the search for a retreating beauty amid chaotic glamour with the search for one’s dream while confronted by life’s many obstacles: ‘... hundreds and thousands of times, for her I searched in chaos, suddenly, I turned by chance, to where the lights were waning, and there she stood.’ <http://ir.baidu.com/phoenix.zhtml?c=188488&p=irol-homeprofile> (accessed 11/2/12).

更加爱新疆。

She loves Xinjiang still more!<sup>19</sup>

Far from conveying the complexities of Uyghur culture, religion and society to the Chinese audience, this song seems to serve rather as an advertisement to would-be Han settlers. The focus is firmly on food culture (produce)—particularly lamb kebabs—and the image conveyed is of a well-nourished lifestyle in a new land with which newcomers quickly fall in love. Certainly, the song contains underlying ironies (although it is impossible to discern whether Kelimu intends these). For example, the lines about putting on weight and gaining in strength might be interpreted as a jibe at Han men, whose slight and effeminate build is often ridiculed by their heftier Uyghur male counterparts (recall Chapter 2 on counter-stereotypes). Furthermore, the song as a whole evokes the controversial issue of Han settlers rapidly developing a taste for lamb and causing meat prices to rocket, much to the horror of locals who find themselves priced out of the meat market. However, the enduring effect is of a simplistic, comic and above all *harmless* representation of Uyghur culture, delivered in Chinese and punctuated by transliterated forms (Chinese phonemes) of friendly Uyghur words that Han Chinese are likely to know, for instance, *ya-ke-xi* (*yakhshi*, good) or *sa-la-mu* (*Salam*, greetings). As I observed while travelling between Ürümqi and Ghulja with a Han taxi driver in 2002, it is these ‘domesticated’ forms of Uyghur song that have proved most acceptable to the Han audience. My companion enthusiastically introduced the artist to me thus: ‘This is Kelimu. We Hans living in Xinjiang really like his songs; they’re brimming with ethnic flavour!’

Kelimu’s most recent project was a film broadcast during the Spring Festival 2010, entitled: *The Hometown Sonata: A New Year’s Comedy*. Describing this as the pinnacle of his career, Kelimu said he hoped the film would ‘make Xinjiang better known in China proper and across the world’. The project was, I would argue, deliberately constructed to reflect the state’s ideal political configuration of a (re-)unified Greater China, involving a mixed-ethnicity cast consisting of Kelimu, two Taiwanese artists Wu Qilong and Wu Chenjun, mainland Chinese stars Chen Lina and Wang Dongfang, and two child stars from Xinjiang, A’erfa and Zilalan. The interwoven ethnic fabric seemingly lacked only a Tibetan artist. Filmed on location in Turpan in 2009 and broadcast on 11th February 2010 by 35 provincial and city-level television stations across the PRC, the film entailed a comic look at contras-

<sup>19</sup> Lyrics retrieved from the PRC tourism website *Wulumuqi liyou* (Ürümqi Travel). <http://www.wlmqxj.com/gl/wh/1391.html> (accessed 8/1/12).

tive national (ethnic) customs. In the style of a comedy of errors, a music teacher runs into an arrogant female company director in ‘traditional and mystical Turpan’, where they encounter a group of ‘kind and generous children’ and an ‘honest ethnic uncle’ (played by Kelimu). According to the plot synopsis, the ensuing story is characterised by a ‘relaxed, happy, humorous and rich ethnic style’, creates ‘endless laughter’, and ‘plays an important role in conserving ethnic culture.’<sup>20</sup>

#### 4.2. *Popular Singers as Illuminists: The Advent of ‘New Folk’*

So much for the musician-comprador; however, this co-opted version of minority artist constituted only a single thread within the musical fabric of Xinjiang in the 1990s. Along with negative oral stereotyping (Chapter 2) and processes of inclusion and exclusion via ethnic boundary construction (Chapter 3), an alternative form of popular song—‘new folk’<sup>21</sup>—proved more effective in uniting Uyghurs against the Han than the earlier ‘poetry of resistance’, than competing attempts by regional intellectual elites to project a national consciousness in the late eighties (Rudelson 1997), and even than Islam. For the purposes of the following discussion, I adopt the third orientation of the term ‘popular’ as deployed in popular music and cultural studies: popular-as-populist (Kassabian 1999: 116-17). This approach focuses on ways in which artists and audiences express social and political positions through music production and consumption. Over time, discourses on the term ‘popular’ have gradually embraced the notion that audiences consciously engage with their popular culture, rejecting the Frankfurt School position that they are passive victims of a ‘false consciousness’ imposed by music producers as part of the dominant culture. In other words, the ways in which musical texts are used and interpreted are the ‘ongoing product of people’s attempt to represent their own experiences, and to speak in their own voices instead of hegemonic codes’ (Manuel, 1993: 8).

In the Xinjiang context, the popular-as-populist model requires modification to account for local political conditions: artists in democratic societies can be openly subversive and, indeed, deliberately seek sub-cultural capital through open rebellion. However, artists representing

<sup>20</sup> <http://baike.baidu.com/view/2973859.htm> (accessed 8/1/12).

<sup>21</sup> This term was coined by Harris in her survey of the popular music industry in Xinjiang (2002: 272).

dominated ethnic groups in the PRC cannot so readily challenge state hegemony. The Chinese empire is no stranger to the cynical use of music in nation-building; it has used popular music and song variously to assess the attitudes of the empire's subjects, to mobilise the nation against foreign invaders (most famously, the Japanese), and to represent the nation in a way that stresses ethnic inclusiveness (Tuohy 2001: 110-118; see also Perris 1985: 93-122). It has even employed musical repetition—daily broadcasts on television, radio and public loudspeakers—in its bid to create a 'voice of the people' (Tuohy 2001: 117; 123). Mindful of this and of the potential political repercussions of 'subversion' (in any form), 'new folk' singers remained purposely enigmatic when questioned about meanings and motives behind their texts. When in 2002 I met with family members of the artist Ömärjan Alim (discussed later in this chapter), they declined to discuss those of his songs which address the issue of indigenous collaboration with the Chinese state (beyond a discreet chuckle at the mention of the song title 'Barren Chickens'). In fact, Alim's wife seemed reluctant to discuss song content with me at all, observing only: 'People may understand the words in different ways ... it won't be the same for everyone.' They carefully explained that the artist did not write the song words himself. His songs, they said, were based on texts produced by writers and poets, and *brought to him by other people*. Presenting Alim as a willing minstrel who would perform anything so long as someone wished it, they denied any deliberate intent on the part of the artist: 'Ömärjan isn't responsible for what he sings; he doesn't know what it means. He's uneducated, isn't he, without knowledge [Uy: *bilimsiz; bilim yoq*].' It did not seem to matter that while it was common knowledge that any Uyghur—including uneducated ones—could grasp his song words, she claimed that Alim himself could not. I later learned that this line had been successfully used to defend Alim against charges of 'ethnic splittism' in court.<sup>22</sup>

The possibility of multiple interpretations meant that new folk singers could often avoid detection by the government censor. Even without the use of metaphor, the Chinese state has sometimes struggled to interpret song lyrics. State leaders in the 1980s and 1990s, for instance, were unable to reach agreement on whether rock singer Cui Jian's lyrics about the Chinese Communist Party's revolutionary heritage were patriotic or ironic (Tuohy 2001: 118). But, while song words remain on the surface ambiguous,

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<sup>22</sup> Personal communication (November 2002) with Rachel Harris, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

the people can—and do—read what they like into them, and their readings are invariably tempered by the social, political, and economic climate in which they live. This fact was readily acknowledged by a Han scholar, speaking in 2002, who observed: ‘They always write indirectly, so that if you confront them, they can deny that they meant what you think they did. What they write is nonsense, but people believe it. So it must be corrected’ (cited by Bovingdon 2010: 81). Regardless of whether artists were willing (or able) to claim agency, the act of consumption of their material by the Uyghur people was political: ‘a process of making meaning from, and contributing meaning to, popular culture’ (Kassabian, 1999: 115).

‘New folk’ music differs radically from that performed by state-sanctioned song-and-dance troupes, consisting mainly of solo recordings of contemporary compositions. In terms of performance style, it enjoys an expressive freedom afforded by the octave-based modal structure (usually heptatonic or pentatonic). Its unique rhythms, associated with the traditional folk singing style and traditional stringed instruments such as the *dutar* (two-stringed lute), are characterised by extensive use of asymmetry and syncopation. Moreover, its song lyrics address prevalent social and political issues, often borrowing or adapting lines penned by well-known—and less well-known—poets and writers. New folk was successful in conveying nationalist ideas in the nineties for a great many reasons. Firstly, it carried messages to the Uyghurs in their preferred cultural form. De Vos lists aesthetic cultural forms such as food, dress, music, and song as one group of ‘markers of cultural difference’ that might be selected by group members in the subjective definition of their group identity (1975: 9). Song and dance have been integral to Uyghur culture since ancient times and continue to be the mainstay and focal point of Uyghur social life, predominating at *olturush* (‘sittings’ or gatherings) in the home, birthday parties, Uyghur dance restaurants, weddings, *māshrāp* [gatherings for feasting, story-telling, and music-making],<sup>23</sup> university dance halls, and the bazaar

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<sup>23</sup> These days, women can take part equally with men in a non-religious form of *māshrāp*, intended to allow people to rejoice through the medium of the performing arts (Mackerras, 1985: 68). Up until the 1950s, however, participants were all male. The *māshrāp* functioned as a rite of passage into manhood, a vehicle for regulating moral, religious, and social etiquette, and a means of forming male peer groups. In the mid-late 1990s, the ‘traditional’ form of *māshrāp* was resurrected in the city of Ghulja, North Xinjiang, and among Uyghur communities in Almaty, Kazakhstan, with the modern aim of creating and maintaining Uyghur national culture (Roberts, 1998b: 675; Millward 2004: 16-17; Dautcher 2009: 272-282). Such *māshrāp* quickly came under government suspicion in the People’s Republic as popular arenas for the dissemination of separatist ideologies and literatures.

with its myriad cassette kiosks (Mackerras, 1985: 62-75; Smith, 1999: 231-33; Harris, 2002: 267-70). The saying, ‘When a Uyghur child can walk, he can dance. When a Uyghur child can speak, he can sing’ continues to be widely cited by Uyghur youth today; see for example a *New York Times* reporter’s conversation with Abdul Ghenni, a young Uyghur in Qäshqär ‘who had discarded the traditional skullcap in favor of a baseball cap worn backwards’ (Strauss 1999). Significantly, a love of, and flair for, musical performance is also one criterion by which Uyghurs differentiate themselves from the Han whom they often dismiss as dull and introverted (see Chapter 2 on counter-stereotypes).<sup>24</sup>

The orality of popular song also made it accessible to Uyghurs from all backgrounds, rural and urban. Although the late Uyghur novelist, poet and historian, Abdurehim Ötkür, was an undisputed symbol of Uyghur nationalist aspiration in the 1980s and 1990s, his media—poetry and the historical novel—were circulated predominantly in urban, often intellectual, spaces.<sup>25</sup> The extent to which his works reached the rural population—with its higher instance of illiteracy—must surely have been limited. Furthermore, the fact that the Uyghur language has undergone repeated script changes during the period of Chinese Communist rule means that Ötkür’s work—published in the Arabic script (‘Old Script’)—is inaccessible to a generation of Uyghurs educated in the Latin script (‘New Script’) between 1960 and 1982 (see Chapter 1). In contrast, song words, communicated orally, can be received and understood by all. In this way, new folk singers borrowed the poetry of Ötkür and other nationalist writers, adapted it for use in their song lyrics, and were able to transmit nationalist sentiments—originally expressed in written or print form—far beyond urban, intellectual circles and straight into the heart of the countryside.<sup>26</sup> There is an interesting comparison here with the Albanian nationalist movement during the period from the start of the Albanian War of Independence in 1898 through the declaration of an independent Albania in 1912 to its recognition by the Great Powers in 1918. Sugarman writes that villagers gained a ‘deep-seated

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<sup>24</sup> Mackerras remarks that the spoken play [*huaju*] popular among Han Chinese has singularly failed to make an impression among the Uyghur because it lacks music, the ingredient so essential to their cultural identity (1985: 66).

<sup>25</sup> Ötkür’s novels were fictional accounts of events that occurred before the Chinese Communists came to power in 1949. In them, he expressed themes and ideas relevant to the present, escaping the censor by dressing these in analogous historical situations (Rudelson, 1997: 163-65).

<sup>26</sup> Harris gives examples in Ömärjan Alim’s work (2002: 278).

sense of themselves as being Albanian' only after nationalist poems were transformed into men's narrative songs (1999: 441-45). In this process, figures such as *çetë* [armed guerrilla unit] commander Sali Butka composed revolutionary poems that fused features of village song texts with nationalist themes in a form of folk poetry. Sugarman hypothesizes that *çetë* members, who were encouraged to become literate, began to sing the poems as songs, and that these were then taken up by fellow villagers when members returned home.

The third source of new folk's appeal was the capacity of its musical (sonic) texts to evoke emotion during a time of growing national awareness: the unique qualities of the vocal (predominantly a head voice but also articulated by nasal inflections) and the sounds of the *dutar* rendered it enormously affective. The traditional Uyghur singing style features subtle tone shifts of the melodic line, free melismatic ornamentation, and, as with other Turkic musical traditions, a tendency to employ ululations (an inflection that draws on howls and/or cries to give the tone a 'lift'). With Ömärjan Alim's and Abdurehim Heyit's songs being sung almost exclusively within a minor (and modally heptatonic) tonal structure, this voice sometimes evokes fragility and grief, sometimes rage and frustration. When combined with affective lyrical content, it can give rise to powerful emotions. On this subject, Harris cites a Uyghur song composer as follows:

A people who have suffered long oppression have soft hearts, they are easily shattered. There is much in their hearts that is unsaid. There is a special tragic note to their music. (2002: 273)

In a similar vein, *Time* journalist Matthew Forney characterised Heyit as the 'man of constant sorrow', in a reference to American political folk singer, Bob Dylan (2002).<sup>27</sup> The *dutar*, meanwhile, assumes an atavistic role as, like the Serbian one-stringed *gusle*, its sound 'travels across the dark centuries' (Thomas 1999: 172-3), linking Uyghurs with their ancestors and sustaining cultural continuity through the retention of traditional strumming patterns.

Unlike co-opted Uyghur artists Kelimu and Bahargül, who sing for the most part in Chinese and (arguably) become mouthpieces for China's all-inclusive national design, new folk singers sing in the Uyghur language.

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<sup>27</sup> The Dylan comparison was more recently evoked in relation to Uzbek political singer/songwriter Dadaxon Hasanov; or, rather, to borrow the author's words, it would have been applicable 'if Bob Dylan had been stalked by the KGB and played the *dutar*' (Kendzior 2007: 322).

This ensures that messages reach rural Uyghurs who may know little or no Chinese, and carries significant symbolic value. The Chinese state has frequently used vocal music as a vehicle for the dissemination of national standard speech (Mandarin) in the hope that local, regional, and ethnic loyalties will transform into national (Chinese) ones (Tuohy, 2001: 117). Where minority languages are retained in folk songs, the aim has been to represent ethnic diversity while lyrics stress inter-ethnic harmony. By favouring the Uyghur language, new folk singers in the 1990s not only challenged the assumed superiority of the Han language but also constructed an alternative (Uyghur) national voice. For these reasons, new folk became the ideal vehicle through which to reflect prevalent social and political concerns in Xinjiang and to construct and reproduce an alternative social, political and national consciousness. In presenting the phenomenon as a two-way process, I follow Susan Tuohy, who models musical nationalism in China as a ‘mutually transformative process of making music national and of realizing the nation musically’ (2001: 108-9).<sup>28</sup>

#### 4.3. *Cassette Culture and Mass Mediation of Political Messages*

Disaffection with Chinese rule—and with the Han migrants who represent it—had until now been strongest in Xinjiang’s urban centres. In the early-mid nineties it began to spread to rural areas via an affordable means of mass communication: the low-budget popular music cassette. As Peter Manuel showed in his study of mass-mediated cassette culture in North India, cassettes as a form of ‘new media’ are affordable, easy to produce, duplicate and pass on, and largely evasive of central control. This makes them the ideal vehicle for socio-political mobilization, even when banned by the censor (1993: 2-4; 238). A potent example of this process was observed in Uzbekistan following the Andijon massacre in 2005. A political protest song, composed by Dadaxon Hasanov and entitled ‘*Andijonda qatli om bo’ldi*’ [There was a Massacre in Andijon], was distributed throughout Uzbekistan on audio cassette almost immediately after it was recorded. Serving as a mode of reportage through which illicit information may be spread, it quickly became a ‘poem of witness’ (Kendzior 2007: 318). Hasanov, who had sung provocative songs about the *vatan* (homeland) since

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<sup>28</sup> Again, parallels can be drawn with processes observed in Albania. Sugarman sees Albanian literary figures as simultaneously *producing* the nationalist discourses of the Albanian Rilindja (‘rebirth’) and *being produced* as national subjects by them (1999: 421).

the 1970s, and whose works had been banned in Uzbekistan for two decades, was voted one of the most popular and respected figures in the country in 1991, a fact that attests to the prevalence and influence of underground music and media (Kendzior 2007: 324).

In Xinjiang, cassettes are transported from their place of production to large towns north and south of the Tianshan. Uyghur merchants then buy the cassettes from urban distributors and sell them in small rural bazaars. At each stage of the process, further 'pirated' copies pass from hand to hand. Moreover, as in China proper, growing numbers of young Uyghur men are leaving rural areas to look for work in urban centres (cf. Bovingdon 2010: 14 on political effects of educational and employment 'pilgrimages' to Ürümchi). These migrant workers become quickly familiarised with 'Us and Them'—Uyghur vs. Han—discourses (stronger in the city due to more intensive penetration by Han settlers) and with 'nationalist' songs heard at the bazaar. When they return to the countryside, a copy of the cassette may accompany them, or else the memorized song lyrics, in a process of oral transmission. The cassette is then played (or the song performed) in the rural home before relatives, neighbours and friends, and nationalist images and ideas are reproduced in rural settings. This 'performative' dimension renders popular song 'an active means by which to experience the nation' (Tuohy 2001: 109).

During this period, two key players emerged: Ömärjan Alim and Abdurehim Heyit. Like Inner Mongolian musician, Teng Ge'er (see Baranovitch 2001),<sup>29</sup> they began to try to subvert Beijing's control over the arts in the pursuit of an alternative ethnic and national agenda. As each competed with the other in his bid to become the primary 'Voice of the Uyghurs', they attracted varying degrees of attention from the state censor, being prohibited from public performance and having their works confiscated on an intermittent basis. While both succeeded to perhaps an unprecedented degree in uniting Uyghurs from a variety of backgrounds, an interrogation of their relationship to one another reveals religious and social tensions that acted to undermine their efforts.

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<sup>29</sup> Baranovitch writes that Teng Ge'er's 1989 release 'The Mongol' was still frequently sung in rural areas in the mid-1990s, suggesting that 'his alternative [ethnic] representation is accepted by a large portion of the people he claims to represent' (2001: 371).

4.4. *Ömärjan Alim: The People's Choice*<sup>30</sup>

During my visit to Ömärjan Alim's home in Ghulja in 2002, family members told me how Ömärjan had learned to play *dutar* the old way: not by formally taking lessons or studying music at college, but from his own father via the traditional method of oral transmission.<sup>31</sup> Asked why the artist enjoyed such popularity, his wife (who clearly sought to protect him) shrugged, gave an embarrassed laugh, and then replied: 'Who knows? It's impossible to say! I guess they like his voice, the way he plays.' Alim's 17 year-old daughter, however, was less discreet. Her response was: 'It's the content, the words.' Perhaps encouraged by her boldness, the mother added: 'Yes. His words are straight; direct [Uy: *ochuq*]; anyone can understand them.' This was a sentiment echoed by respondents from many different social backgrounds. Patimä, a *minkaomin* music seller in her thirties interviewed in Ürümchi in the same year, explained that Uyghurs (whom she referred to as 'We') liked Alim because the song words were 'very deep, very meaningful' [Uy: *mänisi chong*]. Polat, a *minkaohan* taxi driver in his forties interviewed in Ghulja in 2002, also identified content as the key to Alim's success: 'The meanings are pretty big, you know, heavy ... they reflect the problems between the Uyghurs and the Hans. The way all the power lies in the hands of the Hans.' Aliyä, a postgraduate student living in Ürümchi, had listened to Ömärjan's songs ever since entering high school in the late eighties. She proclaimed him 'well-known to everyone' in her southern hometown and, although unable to recite a whole song, claimed that if she saw the singer on television, she could immediately recognise the song and explain the content. Tashmämmät, a young male on vacation in Ürümchi in 2002, confirmed that Alim was 'very popular' in his hometown of Khotän, and moreover that Khotänese peasants were all familiar with his songs. Anarkhan, a middle-aged woman from Ürümchi working in the service industry, owned many of his cassettes released in the 1990s, and explained in 2002 that she and her husband loved Alim's ability to *affect*: 'When we hear his songs, it does something to us ... It gets us right in the chest, makes us feel really agonized [Ch. *nanshou*].'<sup>32</sup> Pressing her hands to her heart,

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<sup>30</sup> An extended paper relating to this section on popular singer Ömärjan Alim, and presenting additional song material, was previously published in Biddle and Knights eds. (Smith 2007).

<sup>31</sup> See Bellér-Hann (2000) on the tradition of oral transmission of knowledge in Xinjiang.

<sup>32</sup> This respondent was a *minkaohan* who had attended a Chinese-medium school during the Cultural Revolution; as such, she spoke in a mixture of Uyghur and Chinese during interview.

she described this as ‘a good sort of pain’. Her description suggested a clear identification with song content as well as a strong element of catharsis. Emotional release was also suggested by Häsän, a *minkaomin* teacher in his thirties from Kucha, interviewed in 2002, who had begun to listen to Ömärjan after starting university in Ürümchi: ‘His words say what is in the people’s hearts. When they listen to the music, they become broken-hearted.’ In this way, Alim’s clear and emotive vocals successfully solicited identifications among Uyghurs from disparate oases in the north and south, and from urban and rural, educated and working class backgrounds.

A 2002 study by Harris and Dawut demonstrated the important role played by catharsis in a ritual context. Focusing on pilgrimage events at the Ordam Mazar [shrine] festival, the authors describe a crowd of Uyghur pilgrims gathered to listen to a group of musicians performing ‘Tashway’, a mournful piece attributed to a nineteenth-century religious mendicant. According to their description, the *rawap* player is ‘on the edge’ and has a ‘raw voice full of emotion’; the audience gives a long cry when the piece comes to an end; and, later, a tranced dancer ‘weeps and shakes, speaking of his troubles as others weep at his words and make the movement of ritual cleansing’ (2002: 105-6). At a second gathering at the Imam Hasim Mazar, the authors find Uyghur women performing *monajat* songs (‘prayers of supplication’ associated with grief and mourning), causing other women at the ceremony to weep openly. On the basis of their observations, Harris and Dawut find that *mazar* festivals ‘serve as a focus of prayer and for the outpouring of personal grief’ (2002: 108; 112). Building upon this, I would argue that the audience’s experience of Alim’s popular songs may be characterised as an outpouring of grief at the level of the group, or indeed the nation.<sup>33</sup>

Another aspect which may have attributed to Alim’s popularity was his willingness to defy the state censor, at least as perceived by fans. Polat, a taxi driver interviewed in Ghulja in 2002, seemed almost proud as he talked about the singer’s political difficulties: ‘Alim’s been in trouble, I think. He hasn’t been allowed to sing or perform. They said his lyrics encouraged “ethnic splittism”. I heard that he was in America, in fact.’ Learning that Alim had not been at home when I visited his Ghulja residence, he questioned whether the artist had really been touring the south at that time, as

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<sup>33</sup> Forney draws a comparison between Uyghurs and other ‘oppressed peoples’ in history, such as the Irish, the Gypsies and the Jews, suggesting that Uyghurs ‘draw strength from music’ (2002).

his relatives had claimed, implying that he may in fact have been in prison.<sup>34</sup> By romanticising and making a martyr of the ‘people’s voice’ in this way, ordinary Uyghurs may attain, through them, a feeling of agency and control, a sense of satisfaction that they are resisting their plight (I return to this notion below in the discussion about Abdurehim Heyit’s followers in Qāshqār).

Perhaps the most famous of Alim’s songs—and one that was banned—is ‘Mehman Bashlidim’ [I Brought Home a Guest], released on the cassette *Pärwayim Päläk* [Why Should I Care?] in the early 1990s. ‘Mehman’, which is apparently modelled on a poem included in a cassette compilation titled *Pighan* [Rooster’s Cry] and published during the 1980s (mentioned in Bovingdon 2010: 95), employs an allegory in which the coloniser (Chinese state/Han settler) is depicted as ‘the guest who never left’ and the colonised (local Uyghurs) as slaves forced into the hostile desert:

<i>‘Mehman Bashlidim’</i>	<i>‘I Brought Home a Guest’</i>
Mehman bashlidim öygä	I brought a guest back to my home
Astigha selip körpä	And at the back, <sup>35</sup> lay down a cushion
Ämdi män kirälmidim	Now I cannot enter
Özäm yasighan öygä	The house I built with my own hands
Mehmanni qilip izzät	By making him a guest revered
Öydin ayrilip qaldim	I was separated from this home
Baghlardin orun tägmäy	Receiving no seat in the orchards
Chölgä kepilär saldim	I laid my cushions in the desert
Chöllerni qilsam bostan	I turned the deserts into oases
Mehmanlar tolup kätti	And still more guests, they filled that place
Shähini zhirip qoymay	Then lopped off the entire branch
Mewisini elip kätti	And took the fruits away
Mehman bashlidim öygä	I brought a guest back to my home
Astigha selip körpä	And at the top, lay down a cushion
Özi törgä chiqiwelip	He jumped into the seat of honour
Boldi hojayin bizgä	And boss became to us
Boldi hojayin bizgä	And boss became to us. <sup>36</sup>

It is not difficult to see this song’s appeal in the context of a growing Han migrant presence, increased ethnic discrimination and accelerated exploi-

<sup>34</sup> Given that a relative at Alim’s father’s house had earlier in the day offered to ask his wife to ring him in Aqsu so that I could speak with him directly, I consider that the family’s explanation on this occasion was the truth.

<sup>35</sup> This refers to the back half of the traditional *supa* platform, the best seat a Uyghur host can offer his guest.

<sup>36</sup> Translated from the Uyghur by the author (Smith 1999).

tation of local resources. Indeed, some have argued that the topic of mass Han migration has been fruitfully employed by ‘separatists’ as propaganda against the Chinese polity: ‘This situation is very useful for them to inspire anti-Han sentiment’ (Wang 2004). ‘Mehman’, like ‘Those who Visit the Borderlands Don’t Want to Leave’ (discussed above), depicts the Uyghurs as hosts; yet here they are represented as not ‘happy’ but disenchanting hosts: deceived, robbed and ultimately excluded in their own homeland. Uradyn Bulag uses the term ‘sheepishness’ to describe the peacefulness of the modern Mongols in comparison with their historical ferocity (2002: 3). In contemporary Xinjiang, too, this metaphor is often deployed. Uyghurs remark that they are too much like the sheep that grace their dinner table—naïve, docile, and apt to follow others’ lead—and joke that they should eat less mutton. As Tashmämmät, an intellectual in his forties from Qäshqär, proposed in 2004, this idea (arguably) reflects the tendency of Uyghurs throughout history to accept foreign hegemony at face value:

The Hans are a crafty race; their way of thinking is extremely sly. We [Uyghurs] say they show us their facade but not their rear ... What they say and what they are really thinking are two completely different things! The Uyghurs, on the other hand, are a simple and straightforward [*addi*] people; they are gullible, easily fooled. This is how the Hans have been able to control us.

Shökhvät, a male intellectual in his thirties interviewed in 2004, employed the same notion to explain events on the eve of the Communist takeover, asserting: ‘Uyghurs believed everything the Red Army said when they entered Xinjiang in 1949. Five years later, the political campaigns and purges had already begun; but by then it was too late.’

The song ‘Mehman Bashlidim’ proved hugely popular among Uyghurs from all social groups in 1995-6, when respondents would forcefully communicate Uyghur attachment to, and rightful ownership of, the land. Both Shökhvät, a young male intellectual, and Rāwīä, a language specialist, accused Han Chinese of creating a ‘myth of origin’ regarding their presence in the region, and claimed that they frequently staged archaeological tricks in order to ‘prove’ it.<sup>37</sup>

Nor was this view restricted to the educated classes; migrant workers in Ürümchi were equally scornful of Chinese historiography, as when Batur, a baker, exclaimed indignantly in 1996: ‘They [the Hans] say they were here first. They even say it in the books they write. They say they have *always*

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<sup>37</sup> See also Bovingdon’s account of a lively exchange between two women—one Uyghur and one Han—on the question of indigeneity to the region (2002: 49-52).

been here!' A more recent example of this type of controversy concerns the origin of the mummies excavated at the Small River Cemetery No. 5 in the Tarim basin between 2003 and 2005, including the now-famous Beauty of Loulan. Li Jin, a Han geneticist at Fudan University, stated in 2007 that the mummies' DNA contained markers indicating an East Asian or even South Asian origin. In 2010, however, a team of Chinese scholars led by Hui Zhou of Jilin University published their conclusion that the people were of mixed ancestry, having both European and some Siberian genetic markers, and probably came from outside China. Li Jin was a co-author (Wade 2010). Hundreds of Western-looking Mummies had in fact been discovered in the 1970s by construction workers labouring on housing developments, roads and industrial sites in Xinjiang, but had been 'swiftly reburied' in the back rooms of a museum: a 'politically convenient place to stow the evidence and stonewall all the inconvenient questions they posed' (Pringle 2010).<sup>38</sup>

Harris has noted that Xinjiang's bazaars function as an 'unofficial pop chart', where the number of shops and restaurants playing a certain cassette provide a reliable guide to the latest hit (2002: 270). In the summer of 1996, one cassette by Ömärjan Alim blared ceaselessly from kiosks and eateries across Xinjiang: it was called *Qaldi Iz* [Traces]. In Ürümqi, Turpan and Kucha, in Qäshqär, Khotän and Aqsu, Alim's voice rang out in private and public, rural and urban spaces, temporarily turning this cassette into the Uyghur national soundtrack. A sound engineer involved in its production attributed its extraordinary success to Alim's ability to communicate with the peasants (Harris 2002: 278). But 'plain language' was clearly not the only source of the cassette's overwhelming popularity; this derived also from its lyrical content. As outlined above, when asked what they liked about Ömärjan Alim's songs, the vast majority of respondents indicated the song-words, which evidently articulated their situation as they saw it. Including the gentle title track, 'Qaldi Iz' [Traces], which draws on a poem and novel by the late nationalist writer Abdurehim Ötkür,<sup>39</sup> almost every song invites reflection on common grievances and is conceived within an implicitly or explicitly assumed framework of political opposition to the Han.<sup>40</sup> Yet the

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<sup>38</sup> Currently, the mummies can be viewed at the Xinjiang Regional Museum in Ürümqi, opened in 2005, where they are displayed alongside much more recent Han mummies, a decision viewed by one visitor as a political strategy to confuse chronology (Coonan 2006).

<sup>39</sup> For an English translation of the poem 'Iz' [Traces], see Allworth and Pahta (1988).

<sup>40</sup> 'Wäsiyät' [Testament], which tackles the social problem of drug abuse and addiction among young Uyghurs, might be deemed an exception, although many respondents related

album as a whole was not banned. Only the song 'Qaldi Iz' was restricted, receiving no airplay on regional radio, while Alim was instructed not to perform the song in public. Given that 'Qaldi Iz' was hardly the most controversial song in the collection, the authorities' reaction begs the question: why were the other songs not censored? There are several possible explanations. Perhaps the authorities had simply been unaware of the content. If this were true, it might indicate a strengthened sense of in-group loyalty during this period, with the result that no member translated the song words for the censor.<sup>41</sup> The title track 'Qaldi Iz', on the other hand, had come under immediate suspicion because it was based upon a celebrated poem by a known nationalist author. Alternatively, in-group informants may have considered the songs not worth reporting to the authorities given that the songs involved criticism of Uyghurs by Uyghurs, rather than of the Chinese state or the Han people.

Above, I analysed 'Mehman Bashlidim' as a metaphorical representation of the Han 'coloniser'. Following, I examine two songs taken from *Qaldi Iz*, the first dealing with the Uyghur 'collaborator' (those accused of placing personal ambition above ethnic loyalty), and the second reflecting the troubled quest for Uyghur national unity. Highlighting the singer's agency in group identity construction, I show how these representations reflected popular perceptions held among disparate groups of Uyghurs across the region, forging a common sense of 'emotional unity'. At the same time, it reproduced relational configurations of Uyghur identity in the cities, and went a considerable distance in creating a broad-based Uyghur national identity that might straddle both urban and rural communities.

### *The Uyghur 'Collaborator'*<sup>42</sup>

Three songs on *Qaldi Iz* dealt with the thorny subject of Uyghur indigenous officials, widely considered 'collaborators' in the politically charged atmosphere of the mid-nineties.<sup>43</sup> 'Tughmas Tokhu' [Barren Chickens] conveyed

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even this problem to a widespread sense of political impotence and to the absence of equal opportunities under the Han regime.

<sup>41</sup> This helpful observation was made by James Millward, following my presentation of a preliminary paper on *Qaldi Iz* to the 2003 Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in New York.

<sup>42</sup> I employ the term 'collaborator' in this chapter, although the closest equivalent to the original Uyghur term *maqulchi* ['person who says "OK"'] would be 'Yes-man'.

<sup>43</sup> For an in-depth treatment of *Qaldi Iz* as a complete work and its role in reproducing the Uyghur nation, see Smith (2007).

symbolic meaning on multiple levels, constituting at once an indictment of Han colonisation of the land, a blackly humorous critique of enforced birth control policy, and a dig at ineffectual and self-serving Uyghur cadres. The image of the parasite chicken—which devours the grain and gives nothing back—was evoked again in 2001 as Colin Mackerras observed that an improved economy in Xinjiang had heightened local resentment since Uyghurs ‘may have considered that the Han Chinese were battenning on what should have been their land’ (2001: 301). ‘Bāzilār’ [Some People] articulated popular Uyghur perceptions of the weakness and passivity of indigenous officials (and would-be officials), characterising them as ‘addicted to power’, ‘without conscience’ and as ‘stray dogs licking at the dog bowl’. The dog metaphor is traceable to the Qing colonial period, when indigenous officials were dubbed ‘dogs with human faces’ (Kim 2004: 34). It surfaced once more in the early seventies, when minority graduates of the Central Institute for Nationalities in Beijing were required to return to their communities and spread the word of Mao. Despite the attempt of the centre to ‘mask the issue of assimilation’ by training cadres in the traditional folkways, the latter were inevitably viewed as ‘agents of Han domination’ and as ‘running dogs’ of the Hans (Pye 1975: 506-7).<sup>44</sup> In the mid-1990s, the metaphor again appeared in the modified form of the ‘stray dog’, evoking one of Alim’s older themes: the displacement of Uyghurs from their homes and their ejection into the hostile desert. Although dogs in the wild exist in hierarchically ordered packs, living and hunting together as a team, the stray dog, once separated from the pack, becomes an opportunist who takes his chances. The domestic dog, meanwhile, may be characterised as parasitic, betraying his own kind to accept an easy life under a dominant race. Interestingly, the dog metaphor has also been employed by Uzbek artists. In the song he wrote about the Andijon massacre of 2005, political singer Dadaxon Hasanov depicts a brutal scene of civilians ‘torn apart like ribbons’ and ‘shot down on the command of dogs’ (Kendzior 2007: 324); meanwhile, in a poem about the same event, Uzbek poet Haydarali Komilov demands of the Uzbek military forces: ‘Do you have parents or are you a dog? You have bitten your own people, you wretches!’ (Kendzior 2007: 327).

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<sup>44</sup> The Chinese term *zougou* [‘running dog’ or stooge] was earlier used to describe Chinese nationals who collaborated with Western or Japanese imperialists. *Zougou* translates into Uyghur as *yalaqchi* [‘one who licks’].

In ‘Äwliya Dostum’ [My Immortal Friend], Alim explored the phenomenon of ‘social climbers’, that is, those perceived to collaborate with the Chinese state in order to advance their social status:

<i>‘Äwliya Dostum’</i>	<i>‘My Immortal Friend’</i>
{Äwliyadäk chaghlaysän dostum özängni Bashqilargha sanjisän näshtär sözingni} (x2)	You think yourself immortal, my friend Stinging others with your words
{Makhtay desäm azapliq dilim köyidu Makhtimaymän zadila tilim köyidu}	Should I praise you, my heart burns I can’t praise you, else my tongue burns (x2)
Way, way, way, way ... hiligär dostum (x2)	O, o, o, o ... my sly friend
{Shir aldida tülkidäk qilisän süküt Ämma chüjä aldida bolisän bürküt} (x2)	Before the lion you fall silent as a fox Yet before the chick, you’re an eagle
{Chiwin qonsa ghingshisän Kaltäk tägsä jim Shundaq khuydin bizläрни saqla Ilahim} (x2)	You whine if a fly alights on you But when struck by a stick say nothing Allah, save us, from this character trait
Way, way, way, way ... hiligär dostum (x2)	O, o, o, o ... my sly friend
Way, way, way, way ... äwliya dostum	O, o, o, o ... my immortal friend
Way, way, way, way ... älwida dostum	O, o, o, o ... farewell my friend
Älwida dostum	Farewell my friend

The first verse of ‘My Immortal Friend’ expresses the visceral inability (of a Uyghur loyal to his ethnic group) to kowtow to ‘social climbers’ for favours (‘my heart burns’; ‘my tongue burns’), and brims with scorn. The second verse condemns the lack of integrity of low and middle-level indigenous officials. We hear how they parade their superior status and act as though invincible before the ‘chick’ (the powerless Uyghur people), and yet become servile before the ‘lion’ (the Chinese state or higher-ranking Uyghur leaders). If a ‘fly’ (an ordinary Uyghur of average status) seeks their help, they ‘whine’ and make excuses; yet if struck by a ‘stick’ (variously interpreted by respondents as Han or higher-ranking Uyghur officials, or as a thick wad of cash), they are silent and complicit. In other words, such officials do favours only for those from whom they stand to gain. One respondent explained the ironic use of the word ‘immortal’ in this song with

reference to the saying '*Asman egiz, yär qattiq*' [The sky is high, the ground is hard]. In other words, those who over-reach themselves have further to fall. This notion, too, can be traced back to the early seventies, when the humble origins of minority cadres trained at the Central Institute for Nationalities (then chosen for their 'revolutionary class backgrounds') made them 'appear in the eyes of just about everyone as suspiciously opportunistic individuals [...] rude social climbers' (Pye 1975: 505-6).

All three songs ultimately evoke the social ideal of the 'man of the people,' summed up in the Uyghur proverb: '*Yakhshi är älgä ortaq, yaman är malgha*' [A good man is in touch with the people; a bad man only with property].<sup>45</sup> In addition to voicing keenly felt popular resentment, these songs appear to have been intended to prick the consciences of the officials themselves. Again, a parallel may be drawn with Albanian nationalism, with Sugarman hypothesising that the patriotic slogan 'Albania hates a traitor' was probably added to folk songs included in nationalist intellectual Mitko's 1878 collection long after the songs' creation, with the purpose of awakening and uniting the Albanian people (1999: 425). The notion of 'selling out' the nation has long been a central concept in Uyghur social and political life, where a large number of words are deployed to express national betrayal, for instance, *milliy kha'in* [ethnic or national traitor]; *milliy munapiq* [scum of the nation]; *wätän satquch* or *satqin* [person who 'sells' the nation]; and *maqulchi* [collaborator or 'Yes-man'].

Looking back at the period of Manchu rule, it is apparent that the Qing court was able to successfully co-opt existing local officials and bend them to its own agenda. Warikoo (1985) writes extensively on this topic, noting that native *begs* and Islamic clergy inherited their positions, frequently surviving changes in central government, and collaborated with one another in oppression of the common people. According to him, the Qing furnished native *beg* officials with government land grants and even allocated them bondsmen to cultivate the land. For their part, *begs* often exacted forced labour from the peasants, working alongside alien Chinese officials to line their own pockets, while ignoring the interests of the population. In this way, they became 'handy instruments of extortion' for the benefit of Chinese officials, who meantime appeared blameless. Their image cannot have been much improved in local eyes when they were

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<sup>45</sup> According to Ämät's annotation, the proverb implies that a man who thinks of his people and native place is pure while one who thinks only of the road to riches is selfish (2001: 399).

required after 1877 to wear official Chinese dress and sport pigtails (Warikoo 1985: 81; 96; 105-7).

In the early years of the PRC, the Chinese Communists often found themselves similarly allied with local minority elites and feudal landlords in Xinjiang and Tibet as they worked to convince local peasants that support for the Party was in their interests (Grunfeld 1985: 62). Once the new China had been consolidated, the Chinese government commenced to handpick trainee minority cadres according to the appropriateness of their political attitudes. Suitable candidates were sent to the Central Institute for Nationalities (now renamed the Central University for Nationalities) in Beijing, where they normally completed five years of political education before returning to their home regions to take up post. In this way, non-Chinese officials in Xinjiang are appointed only after having been indoctrinated and proven loyal to the regime. They are to all intents and purposes 'powerless' and do not necessarily represent the views of local people (Shichor 1994: 76). Those who do voice local dissatisfactions are swiftly dismissed from office. Colin Mackerras once observed that 'no Uyghur could rise to real power who espoused local nationalism' (1985: 77), and this remains the case today.

In the mid-nineties, amid an atmosphere of fast-growing desire for self-determination, the social (community) consequences of this 'powerlessness' sharpened. As later summed up by Nicolas Becquelin, the selective introduction of market mechanisms in the local economy (designed to encourage Han migration) institutionalised ethnic discrimination, and the erosion of minorities' preferential rights in education and state sector employment combined to leave indigenous officials—the 'mediating echelon'—unable to counter the local sense of being colonised (2004a: 373). With Han people far better placed than minorities to take advantage of local business opportunities, minority leaders and their deputies who 'stood silent' rapidly lost credibility (Sautman 1998: 99). When I conducted fieldwork in Xinjiang in 1995-6, the Uyghur general public had become extremely disillusioned with its indigenous representatives. Rāwiä was one urban dweller who despaired that Uyghur leaders did not stand up to central government, declaring in 1995: 'Our leaders say nothing. I don't know if they don't care or if they are just too scared. *I* would speak up about things if I were a cadre' [respondent's emphasis]. On another occasion, she suggested that Uyghur leaders were 'in no danger of execution', and demanded to know why they supported adverse policies proposed by Han officials. Similar views were recorded among rural Uyghurs, although these were

generally aimed at local, low-level officials. During my stay in rural Aqsu in 1996, Tursun, a peasant in his thirties, remarked ironically that much of the tax he paid made up wages for Uyghur cadres and labelled them 'parasites'. A wealth of information on the rural situation at this time can be found in Bellér-Hann and Hann's study (1999) of subsistence and subversion in southern Xinjiang. They found that large-brigade (*dadui*) and small-brigade (*xiaodui*) village officials, who are always Uyghur, were paid from taxes collected from local peasants, while township officials (*zibyluq*) did not engage in subsistence activities, but rather lived in state-owned accommodation, ate in restaurants, and even dressed differently from the mass of peasants (Bellér-Hann and Hann 1999: 13). Local peasants claimed that opportunities for corruption among township officials had increased across the decade, and frequently 'turned Marxist rhetoric about living off the surplus labour of others against the very people whose main qualification was to be well versed in these communist doctrines' (Bellér-Hann and Hann 1999: 23). Particularly during times of ethnic unrest, these individuals found themselves caught between two poles of mistrust:

The position of these [indigenous] officials became more precarious whenever the political situation became tense [...] there was the ever-present possibility that an official could be accused [by the state] of contributing to political resistance, 'splittism'. This factor, combined with the unpopularity of key policies and the unpleasantness of having to enforce them [...] meant that people did not actively seek these jobs (Bellér-Hann and Hann 1999:15-16).

During the 1990s, Uyghurs frequently criticized in-group individuals thought to co-operate too closely with Han authorities. Starting from the summer of 1993, some of these criticisms developed into direct action. A small number of militant Uyghur nationalists began to make assassination attempts on Uyghur cadres, police, soldiers and religious personnel, whereas previously they had targeted only Han cadres, public security officials and military.<sup>46</sup> According to Dilshat, a respondent who worked in the tourism industry in Qāshqār in 1996, a violent attack on a 'much hated' imam from the Heytgah mosque that took place in 1996 (one of his ears was cut off and his arms slashed with meat cleavers) was intended as a

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<sup>46</sup> Compare shifting boundaries in South Africa with regard to 'internal' and 'external' Others. In the 1970s, Inkatha encouraged their members to defend the Zulu kingdom against 'outsiders' (at that time the government, whites, Indians, and Xhosas). Yet in the 1980s, Zulus opposed to the Zulu kingdom were targeted as 'the enemy within' (Morris Szeftel, African Studies Seminar, Department of Politics, University of Leeds, 7/12/94).

warning to others not to 'listen to' (collude with) the Han hegemony.<sup>47</sup> Karim, a health professional from southern Khotän, supported this interpretation, stating in 1996: 'That imam's links with the authorities were rather too close'. Violence did not always stop with a warning either, so that in 1995 a Hong Kong newspaper reported (slightly sensationally) that the Uyghur separatist movement was 'an organisation like the "Palestinian National Liberation Front", often conducting activities such as assassination with their spearhead pointed chiefly at local government officials, especially those in the public security departments.'<sup>48</sup> Certainly, the number of assassinations of indigenous cadres rose significantly during the years 1995-1997 (the same was true for attacks on Han police and soldiers). In one particularly horrific incident in 1996, not reported in the Chinese press, a Uyghur cadre and three of his relatives were attacked and killed in his home in Kucha. Again, the nature of the attack was significant: assailants cut out victims' tongues before slashing their throats and then blowing themselves up with explosives (Beckley, 1997; Bellér-Hann 2000: 84). Incidents of this type provide the context for the closing lines of Alim's song 'My Immortal Friend'. While one reading of the parting shot 'Farewell my friend' suggests that Uyghurs must say goodbye to a bad character trait (the inclination to prostitute oneself for power and material advantage), a darker interpretation warns that it is Uyghur social climbers—the 'immortal friends'—who must bid farewell to their lives. As one respondent put it, the song's closing line then assumes the meaning: 'You die!' [Ölisän!]

Dru Gladney (1997: 288) suggested that in-group attacks and assassinations in the mid-1990s reflected long-standing 'divided loyalties' among the Uyghurs. While I agree that Uyghurs sub-divide themselves into many different groups, some of which may mistrust the others in certain situations, I would contend that the period prior to the 1997 Ghulja disturbances in fact constituted a time of unprecedented unity; a time when more Uyghurs than ever before shared a common desire to eject the colonial power. Seen in this light, the attacks reflect not intra-ethnic but inter-ethnic rivalry, with indigenous officials seen as quasi-Hans—willing representatives of the state—and traitors to the common ethno-national cause.

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<sup>47</sup> See Smith (1999: Appendix I) for a catalogue of ethnic disturbances in Xinjiang between 1949 and 1997.

<sup>48</sup> *Lien ho pao*, Hong Kong, 27 February 1995 in Summary of World Broadcasts (Asia Pacific), 1 March 1995, FE/2240 G/4.

At the turn of the millennium, the outlook for popular trust in officialdom was bleak. In Yee's 2003 study, 52.4 per cent of Uyghur respondents felt that cadre-people relations in Xinjiang were only 'fair' or 'poor', although distrust of Han cadres (39.5 per cent) surpassed distrust of Uyghur cadres at 23.5 per cent. Given the high sensitivity of the questions, we can assume that the true figures were considerably higher. Yee also stated that those who adhered more closely to Islam tended to view indigenous cadres—who are also CCP members—as 'traitors to their fellow Uyghurs' (Yee 2003: 449). Observing that cadres play a key role in maintaining harmonious ethnic relations between groups, he concluded that the lack of popular trust toward both Han and Uyghur cadres signalled a 'red light for ethnic relations' (Yee 2003: 441). Following the ethnic riots in Ürümqi in July 2009, the Uyghur-language website Uyghurlar.biz published a report which expressed 'deep sorrow for our Uyghur brothers and sisters' and declared seven days of mourning for the dead. In the subsequent online discussion, one forum participant accused the Uyghur head of the regional government, Nur Bäkri, of taking the Chinese government's side in the unrest, comparing him to a 'sword in the hands of a butcher' (BBC Monitoring, 2009). Earlier that same year, İlham Tokhti, Uyghur professor of economics at the Central University for Nationalities, had also levelled sharp criticism at Bäkri during the annual session of the National People's Congress after the latter spoke of 'a more fierce struggle against separatist unrest' in Xinjiang. Describing the leader as 'incompetent', Tokhti subsequently posted the following appeal on his personal blog, Uyghur Online:

My message to the Xinjiang government is, 'You should know that there is no peace without equal development between Han immigrants and native Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Similarly, there is no stability in the Uyghur region without freedom of speech.' My message to the central government is, 'Don't listen only to what the local government officials in Xinjiang say—listen to the people. Don't just make decisions based on government research—also look at independent research. This will be very helpful for protecting the unity of the nation, and the long-term prosperity of the country.'

In so saying, Tokhti drew two clear distinctions: firstly between the ideals of 'nationality equality' and 'freedom of expression' (as enshrined in the PRC Constitution) and local realities in Xinjiang; and secondly between what indigenous Uyghur officials *say* about the situation in Xinjiang and the truth. In a speech delivered on the first day of the riots, 5th July 2009, Tokhti's blog was targeted by Bäkri, who labelled its author an 'instigator of the clashes' along with exiled Uyghur leader, Rābiyā Qadir. Tokhti's final

entry before his disappearance (temporary house arrest) was published through a US server on the morning of 7th July and read simply:

As the editor of Uyghur Online, I want only to tell Nur Bäkri, 'You are right, everything you say is right, because you will decide everything. I have already offended too many powerful people, including yourself and others whom I don't want to and don't dare to offend. But right or wrong, there will be justice (Radio Free Asia, 8th July 2009).

Despite the local perceptions of indigenous leaders discussed above, it is of course impossible to categorise all Uyghur officials in black and white terms as either a 'man of the people' or a 'collaborator'. Interviews suggested rather that individuals occupy different points on a scale between altruism and self-interest, and that these positions are far from static.<sup>49</sup> An excellent example of this concerns a young male respondent in Ürümqi who joined the state police force between my first and second field trips in 1996 and 2002. He explained in 2002 that, in the wake of the Ghulja disturbances and the crackdown that followed, Uyghurs faced a 'fork in the road', at least until such time as China's domestic situation radically changed. They could choose either to accommodate to the state, with its associated risks of linguistic and cultural assimilation; or to continue to resist and ultimately face exclusion. While native Uyghur police are routinely mistrusted and even labelled 'dogs' by other Uyghurs, my interview with this individual suggested that his position and his motivations were complex. In particular, his descriptions of his everyday practices at work involved preferential treatment of Uyghur prisoners wherever possible and suggested his retention of a high level of ethnic loyalty.

### *The Bad Character Trait*

Two songs on *Qaldi Iz* dealt with the flawed national character, as perceived by group members: the tendency of Uyghurs towards political indifference and mutual betrayal. They were 'Ränjimäyli Özgidin' [Let's Not Blame Others] and 'Häs-rät' [Sadness], the second of which I reproduce below:

<i>'Häs-rät'</i>	<i>'Sadness'</i>
Bir anidin tughulghan	Born of one mother
Qerindashtuq äsli biz	Once compatriots we

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<sup>49</sup> See also Stan Toops' illuminating comparison of Uyghur leaders Tömür Dawamat and Ismail Amat, in which the former is characterized as a 'cipher' for state-generated rhetoric, while the latter is shown to pursue a viable political agenda that reflects the realities of the region (1992).

Qoydi bizni shu küngä	What's brought us to this day?
Osal päyli khuymiz	Our bad character trait
Miwä bärgän dărăkhni	Trees which bear fruit
Qurutmaqni oylaymiz	We leave to bleed dry
Kim qazansa nätijä	As we snap and gnaw
Shuni qishläp ghajaymiz	At each others' success
Daghdam yolgha patmaymiz	No room for us to tread one wide road
Tar kochidin qatraymiz	We hurry down our narrow lanes
Qiltaq qurup öz ara	Building traps for one another
Yequitmaqni oylaymiz	To cause each other's fall

In lamenting Uyghur national disunity in this way, Ömärjan Alim may be said (intentionally or not) to have assumed the role of 'illuminist' in the 1990s, providing a timely incentive for national enlightenment.<sup>50</sup> Respondents declared 'Häsärät' to be one of Alim's most emotive songs, its sadness deriving from a preoccupation with the Uyghurs' failure to unite (tendency to walk multiple 'narrow lanes' rather than one 'wide road') and the group's penchant for infighting. Two university graduates living in Ürümchi in 1996, Aliyā and Äziz, framed this problem in relation to another regional minority, explaining: 'The Kazakhs are a much better people than us. They are not jealous of one another. They fight big wars, we fight small ones'. Compare this idea with lines 7-8 of 'Häsärät', where we find another modification of the dog metaphor. This time, petty jealousies cause the dogs to fight over the spoils ('snap and gnaw at each other's success'). The two also quoted the Uyghur saying 'Paltining sepi yaghach tur' [The axe-handle is ever made of wood]. According to this image (which is somewhat reminiscent of the 'sword in the hands of a butcher' metaphor mentioned in the previous section), the axe blade symbolises the Chinese state as it oppresses the Uyghur people (the wood) with the help of Uyghur 'traitors' (the axe-handle). The perception of disunity was also reflected in the claims of some respondents that some Uyghurs worked for the state as political spies. Dilshat, who worked in tourism in Qāshqār, asserted in 1996 that certain local people were supplying information to the Chinese authorities 'in the hope of bettering their personal circumstances', creating fear and mistrust within the Uyghur community.

As discussed above, despite the fact that nearly every song on *Qaldi Iz* [Traces] was framed in the context of escalating Uyghur-Han estrangement

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<sup>50</sup> I borrow this term from the Albanian *iluminist*, connoting a poet who gives his life to spreading a message of self-elevation to his fellow countrymen (Sugarman, 1999: 447).

and a call to Uyghurs to mobilise (respondents agreed that the collection included ‘lots of dangerous songs’), the album was not banned. One final and rather sinister explanation (one that I speculate on elsewhere, Smith 2007) might be that the state *was* aware of the song content, but allowed the cassette to continue circulating in the hope that its focus on political passivity, self-interest and opportunism might paradoxically work to foster negative self-identity and low self-esteem among Uyghurs. After all, state officials had by that time learned that banning any but the most inflammatory texts and audio-visual media could work to increase their appeal and their popularity, turning the cassette’s creator into a political martyr.

#### 4.5. *Abdurehim Heyit: The Intellectuals’ Choice*

Abdurehim Heyit was born in Qāshqār in southern Xinjiang, where he began to study the *dutar* when he was six years old. At the age of seventeen he enrolled in a state-run music school, where he was encouraged to sing in an Italian operatic style, but found the training ‘foreign’ and far removed from the authentic Uyghur sounds of his childhood. In 1980, the school sent him to join the central song-and-dance troupe for minorities in Beijing, where he remained for two decades. In an article in *Time* magazine, Heyit described his life to date as a ‘constant artistic struggle’ (Forney 2002).<sup>51</sup> With his troupe tightly controlled by the State Propaganda Department, he was for many years prevented even from playing the instrument of his choice. When I met the artist in Qāshqār in August 1996, he was having difficulties releasing his latest album through Xinjiang-based producers, who are subject to greater scrutiny by the censor than their counterparts elsewhere, and was not permitted to tour. Two years earlier in 1994, he had managed to release his trilogy, *Mung-zar* [Sorrow], only by approaching a recording studio in Xi’an, a city located at a suitable distance to the east of the troubled region. The more political of his original compositions, for example, ‘Stubborn Guest’, a song about an old man’s plea to a lodger who overstayed his welcome (note the resemblance to Alim’s ‘I Brought Home a Guest’, discussed above), have been disseminated on privately manufac-

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<sup>51</sup> This article has now been removed from the *Time* website and archived, but is reproduced both in English and Uyghur (Latin script) on the website of a Uyghur exile organisation based in Washington, the Uyghur American Association (UAA). <http://forum.uyghuramerican.org/forum/showthread.php?27152-Mengguluk-Hesrette-Qalghan-Adem-TIME-2002-Yil> (accessed 21st January 2012).

tured cassettes, a process that involves paying extra money to the producers concerned in order to compensate their risk (Strauss 1999). Always careful to absolve himself of direct agency, Heyit told me in 1996, smiling: ‘They don’t like my song words. *They say* I’m a nationalist!’ [my emphasis]. As a professional musician, attached to a song-and-dance troupe, Heyit is theoretically required to appear in official, state-controlled variety performances on a regular basis. Yet he told me that he often declined to appear in these televised performances, remarking: ‘I don’t want to play the songs the producers ask me to play... and they won’t let me play the songs I want to play!’ In 2000, Heyit transferred back to the regional song-and-dance troupe in Ürümqi.

Despite the political constraints, Heyit’s formal training has enabled him to draw parallels between Uyghur and other musical traditions around the world. His complex compositions for *dutar* are influenced by Persian, Arabic and Turkish styles, ‘soaring and dipping along the Arabic scale[s]’ (Strauss 1999). The Arabic scales are not even-tempered; the 5th notes are tuned based on the 3rd harmonic, and the tuning of the remaining notes depends on the *maqam* being played.<sup>52</sup> This means that the same note by name may have a slightly different pitch in different pieces of music, depending on the melodic flow. The use of quarter tones is common, although these rarely fall exactly halfway between two semitones. My first encounter with Abdurehim Heyit in 1996 occurred in the Emin musical instrument store, located down a dusty alley in the Old Town of Qāshqār. As I pondered which *dutar* to buy, the singer happened to stroll past, and was immediately hailed by the store’s owner. In the eye-opening half hour that followed, I watched Heyit test the *dutar* I had selected (for its modest, unadorned appearance), and glue in an additional fret to create that all-important quarter tone. The rest of the afternoon was spent in a Uyghur restaurant with Heyit and a group of his friends, where we were honoured with a private performance. When I met up with him again in 2002, he spent some time explaining the similarities between traditional Uyghur melodies and certain famous Turkish and Japanese melodies. He also illustrated how his songs draw heavily on the Twelve Muqam (*On ikki muqam*), a set of musical suites found in varying forms across Central Asia and the Arab world

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<sup>52</sup> In Arabic music, a *maqam* is a set of notes with traditions that define relationships between them, their habitual patterns, and their melodic development. Each *maqam* has a different character which conveys a mood. Since classical Arabic music is mostly melodic (that is, it excludes harmony), the choice of *maqam* greatly affects the mood of the piece. <http://www.amukhtar.com/en/a/a3.html> (accessed 21 Jan 2012).

(see Harris 2007). Asked whether there were any similarities between Uyghur and (Han) Chinese melodies, his implicitly political response was: 'Some cultures are more alike than others'.

For Heyit, music constitutes one of the most important ways to transmit Uyghur culture and tradition across generations, and is an art form that enjoys enormous staying power: '[Young] people here can wear American T-shirts, but their hearts stay the same. The music, because it's such a symbol of the heart, changes slowly' (Strauss 1999). In 1999, he completed the first book ever written on classical Uyghur music. In interview in 2002, he stressed the importance of 'high culture' and was dismissive of some aspects of Uyghur popular culture; for example, when asked his opinion on the 'new flamenco' fusion popularised by Arken Abdulla (see Smith Finley 2011b), he replied that while fusion in itself is an acceptable art form, 'all musicians need a good grounding in classical and/or traditional music'. He later admitted that he could not tolerate electrified music at all, an attitude reminiscent of the uproar created within the folk music community when American folk singer Bob Dylan switched to electric guitar in 1965 (Yaffe 2011).<sup>53</sup> This attitude has been observed also among Uyghurs based in Kazakhstan, and reflects a defensive response to cultural threat, whereby 'any kind of musical innovation is heard as deviation from authenticity and evidence of the encroaching influence of the other culture' (Harris 2005: 642).

Abdurehim's formal musical training was frequently acknowledged by his audience. Jelil, an observant university graduate interviewed in 2002, described him as a 'first-class singer and musician'. Tahirjan, a migrant worker in his thirties from Aqsu, declared him in 2004 the best *dutar* player in Xinjiang, remarking that his fingers 'move like lightning' on the strings. Both he and Zunun, who worked in the service industry in Ürümchi, praised the artist's fine singing voice, describing it as resonant, sonorous and clear, and observing that he 'sings from deep inside and not from the throat.'

Those of his fans who observed orthodox Islamic practice drew attention to his 'high moral standing', that is, the fact that he practises *bāsh waq* (prayer five times daily) and abstains from alcohol and cigarettes. Abduke-

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<sup>53</sup> It would be interesting to know what sort of relationship Heyit has with his nephew, Marat; on the day this individual led a reporter for *New York Times* to Heyit's parents' house in Qāshqār, he wore a T-shirt emblazoned with the logo of the Western heavy-metal band, Kreator (Strauss 1999).

rim and his friend, both university students who grew up in rural Aqsu, asserted in 2002: 'Heyit is a good man! He writes good songs, and he is a good Muslim!' Heyit's religiosity, while reassuring to his fan base, was however threatening to the authorities. According to Heyit's most ardent fans in Qäshqär, those songs with religious (Islamic) overtones could be sung only in his living room; the state censor prevented their inclusion on cassette recordings, and he was forbidden to perform them in public. In 2000, he was photographed for the sleeve of *On Meeting* [*Uchrashqanda*] wearing a traditional Uyghur robe and boots, and sporting a full Islamic-style beard. Subsequently, Party leaders at his work unit (Ürümchi's song-and-dance troupe) made him remove this because it was 'too religious-looking'. Two years later, a slogan chalked onto the blackboard outside his office read: 'Resolutely re-educate in the battle against splittism' (Forney 2002).

Respondents highlighted the 'subtlety' of Heyit's work. Jelil, an observant graduate, compared him favourably against Ömärjan Alim, asserting in 2002: 'Abdurehim's lyrics are less direct, more nuanced, better phrased'. This subtle lyrical approach, however, may have contributed to the failure of Heyit's audience to grow beyond comparatively narrow parameters. Möminjan, a young man from Turpan in his twenties and studying in Beijing, appreciated Heyit's work very much, explaining in 2002 that his songs were 'extremely deep' [*nahayiti chongqur*]. He noted however that many people could not understand his song words, and his songs therefore may have held less appeal. In his opinion, it was necessary to have quite a high level of education or intelligence (*säwiyä keräk*) in order to grasp the underlying meanings. Whenever I met educated young people who admired Heyit, they generally qualified their comments in this fashion. This view was also reiterated in interviews I conducted with music stallholders in Döngköwrük, Ürümchi's Uyghur district, during August 2004. Respondents included both men and women, and their ages ranged from early twenties to late forties. Among them, several suggested that older people [*chonglar*] like Heyit's music the most because they appreciate his voice, but felt that he was not especially admired by the youth, who tended to listen to popular artists like Änwär Hakim, Abdullah Abdurehim (Xinjiang's so-called *nakhsha cholpan* or 'song star'), Möminjan or Tashmämmät Batur.

I also observed that fewer respondents were aware of Heyit compared with Alim, who seemed to be more of a household name. One exception to this was perhaps Heyit's hometown of Qäshqär, where he was well known to everyone in the community. There, songs like 'Stubborn Guest' and 'Silk' (described as a paean to Uyghur culture) were 'anthems' and

sources of local pride, and his latest cassettes were put on prominent display at the famous Sunday market (Strauss 1999). His celebrity was not this pronounced in other oasis towns, that is, it had not spread so far beyond intellectual circles. Zunun, a *minkaomin* in his thirties working in the service industry in Ürümchi, confessed in 2002 that he had not heard of Heyit before I brought the artist to his attention in 1996. On the other hand, he was familiar with Alim's songs, and claimed even to have recognised him in person in the street when the singer came to Ürümchi to give a concert in 1995. Anarkhan, a *minkaohan* in her late thirties working in the service industry in Ürümchi in 2002, also seemed unfamiliar with Heyit's work, although I gave her the background to his career. Nor had she heard of Osmanjan Sawut, considered 'the greatest poet since [Abdurehim] Ötkür' by Heyit, and a close friend of the artist. In the case of Sawut, the main barrier for Anarkhan was probably script: Sawut's poems were printed in the Uyghur Old Script (a modified form of Arabic), whereas Anarkhan had been educated in the New (Latin) Script during the Cultural Revolution. Those lesser educated respondents who had heard of Heyit were often familiar only with one or two of his most famous songs, for instance, 'Chillang Khorizim' [Crow My Rooster!], and could not reproduce Heyit's song words in full (though they could recite Ömärjan Alim's or Arken Abdulla's lyrics with ease). In a reflection of the comparatively incomplete dissemination of Heyit's work, Zunun remarked in 2002: 'Abdurehim Heyit is a great man, but not in the same way as Abdurehim Ötkür. The people who know Ötkür are many, but the people who know Heyit are few.'

All this said, Heyit was evidently much admired in intellectual circles in Xinjiang. When I visited him at home in 2002, he showed me a *ghäzäl* in classical Uyghur,<sup>54</sup> published in the scholarly journal *Xinjiang wenhua* [Xinjiang Culture]. The *ghäzäl*, entitled 'Abdurehim Heyitqa Bir Ghäzäl' [A *Ghäzäl* for Abdurehim Heyit], compared him to the great Uyghur poets and artists through history, underlining his role as a transmitter of culture across time, and stating that he had 'touched the hearts of the people'. During that visit, several of Heyit's friends and one relative came to pay

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<sup>54</sup> The *ghazal*, also spelled *ghazel*, *gasal*, or *gazel*, is a genre of lyric poem in Islamic literature. The *ghazal* developed in Arabia in the late 7th century from the *nasib*, which itself was the often amorous prelude to the *qasida* (ode). These enormously popular works were imitated not only in Arabic but also in Persian, Turkish, and Urdu poetry up until the 18th century. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/232525/ghazal> (accessed 21 Jan 2012). Among the Uyghur, this form of classic love poetry acquired the more general meaning of love song, and was reproduced as both a written and an oral genre (Bellér-Hann 2000: 40).

their respects, closely followed by one of Heyit's students and the poet Osmanjan Sawut. Two friends read the *ghäzäl* aloud with great reverence, before presenting the musician with the only existing double VCD of a concert he had given in Qäshqär the year before. Heyit subsequently treated us to a spine-chilling, impromptu performance on *dutar* in his front room. He first played *Ömüt* [Hope], the title track of his then current release, a powerful instrumental whose progression seemed to me to represent the feverish build-up to the Ghulja disturbances in 1997 and the gradual anti-climax and simmering down that followed them. Next, he announced that he would play 'Chillang Khorizim' [Crow My Rooster!], from the triple album *Mungzar* [Regret] (1994). The room was abuzz with excitement at this, and the dark and searing song with its rousing refrain of '*Oyghansun!*—Let her [the Uyghur nation] awaken!—was followed by loud applause and a grateful chorus of thanks.

Furthermore, it was Abdurehim Heyit—not Ömärjan Alim—who caught the eye of the international press. Prior to the *Time* article published in 2002, Heyit had already been profiled as 'a master of folk tradition with a fire for protest and poetry' and as 'one of the most important contemporary Uighur composers and musicians' by the *New York Times* (Strauss 1999).<sup>55</sup> The article had been brought to the attention of the artist, who kept a copy, preserved in plastic, in the original language. Most recently, in 2007, Abdurehim Heyit and Uyghur ghijäk master, Äkräm Ömär, were involved in a transnational collaboration with the Mike Del Ferro trio through the Jazz Bridges Western China project, an initiative of the American Voices collective which produced a joint performance and live recording of Duke Ellington's 'Caravan'.<sup>56</sup>

Partly because of the huge popularity of 'Chillang Khorizim', and partly because of his strong and sonorous voice, Heyit is sometimes dubbed the 'Rooster of Xinjiang'. The song is evidently a personal favourite of the artist, who became very excited when he learned that this song had been given special mention in the online version of *Time* magazine (Forney 2002). The

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<sup>55</sup> Reprinted as Neil Strauss, 'A Folk Star in China Blends Song and Protest,' *International Herald Tribune*, 2nd September.

<sup>56</sup> American Voices describes itself as 'engaged in cultural diplomacy through jazz, hip hop, country, Broadway, classical and other musical programs with over 80 countries around the world'. Their aim is to bring American musicians together with local performers of traditional musics around the world, and make video recordings of the ensuing gala concerts available on the internet. Their projects have involved musicians in Western China, Afghanistan, Iraq, Kazakhstan and beyond. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IoakWqlxv2A&feature=related>; <http://www.youtube.com/user/americanvoices> (accessed 21/1/2012).



Figure 11: Abdurehim Heyit, dutar virtuoso, Döngköwrük, Ürümqi (2002)

song words are adapted from a poem of the same name written by the great Uyghur poet and novelist, Abdurehim Ötkür, while the music is composed by Heyit:

*Chillang, khorizim!*

Nimä degän uzun kechä  
 Häjöp tang atmay qaldi  
 Chillang khorizim, chillang!  
 Tanggha qarap közüim taldi  
 Ukhlaj jahanim oyghansun!  
 Meni tashlap ukhlighan  
 Gülräykhanim oyghansun!  
 Chillang khorizim  
 Yarni chillap oyghiting!  
 Yüzigä qanat yeyip

*Crow, My Rooster!*

What a long night this is  
 Daybreak never comes  
 Crow my rooster, crow!  
 My eyes are weary, yearning for the dawn  
 Let my sleeping world awaken!  
 My sleeping sweetheart who forsook me  
 Let her awaken!  
 Crow my rooster,  
 Wake my sweetheart!  
 Spread your wings, stroke her face

Asta sipap oyghiting!	And gently wake her up!
Achsa yarim kirpigini	When she opens her lashes
Yänä uyqu basmisun	Let her sleep no more
Uyqu birlä män gheripni	Let her not return to sleep
Mängü tashlap kätmisun	Forsaking lonely me for good
Chillang khorizim, chillang!	Crow my rooster, crow!
Tang atidu däp, chillang!	Crow to tell that daybreak comes!
Tang aldida yaringiz	Crow to tell that
Sizni kütidu däp, chillang!	Your sweetheart awaits you before sunrise!
Chillang khorizim, chillang!	Crow my rooster, crow!
Chillang, bu gülistangha	Crow, to this flower garden
Oyghansa yarim khäwär bering	When my sweetheart awakes
Män baghri qangha	Tell suffering me
Oyghansa yarim khäwär bering	When my sweetheart awakes
Män baghri qangha	Tell suffering me

A signpost regarding the underlying message of the song is provided on the recorded cassette by a narrator, who introduces the song with this sentence in Uyghur: ‘The morning rooster wakes the people from their ignorant slumber’. In adding this, a clear link is provided between the ‘slumbering people’ and the corresponding metaphor in the song: the ‘sleeping sweetheart’. As a result, educated and less well educated respondents alike could understand immediately that the song concerned itself with the concept of national enlightenment—‘waking up the Uyghur nation’. An equally clear link connected this song/poem to the work of an earlier, influential Uyghur nationalist from Turpan: Abdukhaliq Uyghur (1901-1933) (Rudelson 1997: 145-154). As a child, Abdukhaliq had travelled with his father throughout China, Russia and Finland. Observing the political systems operating in other nations, he later returned to Turpan, where he established the Turpan Revolutionary Central Committee and attempted to bring enlightenment to his people through the vehicle of poetry. If we look at Verse 2 of one of his best-known poems, *Oyghan* [Awaken!], the ideas are similar to those expressed in Ötkür’s more recent poem/Heyit’s song:

Qop! Dedim, beshingni kötär	Stand up! I said, you, raise your head
Uyqungni ach	Wake up from your dream
Räqibning beshini käs	Cut the head off your enemy
Qenini chach	Spill his blood!
Köz echip	Open your eyes
Etrapqa obdan baqmisang	Have a good look around
Olisän ormanda	One day you’ll die in your sleep
Bir kün yoq ilaj	And lose your chance

The second song I want to discuss is ‘Bilim Ishqidä’ [On Knowledge], and is collected in Volume 2 of the privately released cassette trilogy titled *Mungzar* [Regret] (1994). Interviewed in 2002, the artist singled the song out as one of the best he had released to date (Forney 2002). The lyrics are an abridged version of an original poem by Uyghur poet Nimshehit,<sup>57</sup> written during the period of the Three Districts Revolution against Guomindang rule (November 1944):

*Bilim ishqidä*

Jahan rānaliri ichrā bilimdäk bir  
Bilimdäk bir güzäl yar yoq  
Bilimdin özgä tutqan yar bolur u  
Bolur u gahida bar-yoq

Kirip näpsingning käynigä  
Bilimdin özgä yar tutsang  
Beshinggha kälsä bir künlär  
U chaghda sän käbi khar yoq

[Missing sections]

Paraghät istisang  
Äsla bilimdin özgä yar tutma  
Sening qädringni saqlashta  
Bilimdäk yaxshisi hämkar yoq

Qara qashliq tolun aylar  
Sanga bir näcchä kün yoldash  
Ägär sän puldin ayrilsang  
Shu an tashlaydu hech ar<sup>58</sup> yoq

Guman qilma päläkni  
Härqachan bäkhtinggä chörgülimäs  
Bügün bay ätä sändäk  
Hech gaday yoq, bälki qärzdar yoq

Bilimdin özgä tutqan yar bolur u  
Bolur u gahida bar-yoq

*On Knowledge*

Among the beautiful loves in the world  
There is none so beautiful as knowledge  
Loves aside from knowledge  
Are fickle indeed

If you give in to lust  
And seek a love aside from knowledge  
One day when troubles come  
You will be worth nothing

If you seek comfort  
Seek no love except knowledge  
To safeguard your worth  
There is no better companion than  
knowledge

Beauties resembling the full moon  
May tend you a few days  
But when your wealth declines  
They'll desert you without shame

Have no doubt that fate  
Will not bring joy indefinitely  
You are rich today; but tomorrow  
None will have greater debts than you

Loves aside from knowledge  
Are fickle indeed

<sup>57</sup> A collection of poems in Uyghur by Nimshehit entitled *Yüräk sözi sha'irlar* [Words from the Hearts of the Poets] was published in 1980 by the Millätlär nāshriyati [Nationalities Publishing House] in Beijing. See entry online at the Open Library (a project of the non-profit Internet Archive, funded in part by the California State Library and the Kahle/Austin Foundation): <http://openlibrary.org/search?language=uig> (accessed 21 Jan 2012). A collection of Nimshehit's literary works was apparently also published by the Shinjiang khālq nāshriyati [Xinjiang People's Press] in 1995, but no further details are available at time of writing.

<sup>58</sup> *Nomus* [shame].

Bilimdäk bir guzäl yar yoq  
 Bilimdäk bir guzäl yar yoq

There is no love like knowledge  
 There is no love like knowledge

Once again, the song is introduced by the narrator, who sets the tone by observing: 'A boy who has studied is greater than his father'. The song should first be understood within the context in which the original poem was produced: during the height of the Jadidist movement to modernise Uyghur education, first imported by wealthy Uyghur industrialists and merchants who travelled in Central Asia, Turkey and Europe. The movement flourished in Xinjiang from the 1920s onwards during which time new teachers' colleges were established, new journals and newsletters published, and Turkic (and latterly Uyghur) nationalist ideas instilled in school pupils and readers. Many of those inspired by this 'Uyghur enlightenment' later became involved in the rebellions of the early 1930s (Millward 2004: 4).

Particularly since the 1997 Ghulja disturbances, the idea of empowerment through knowledge is again circulating in intellectual circles in Xinjiang. According to this ideology, if increasing numbers of Uyghurs can achieve a higher level of education, political awareness will grow, and Uyghurs across the region will develop a strong sense of ethnic identity and nation. As Jelil, an observant university graduate, explained in 2002:

The most important thing of all is knowledge. This is the foundation of everything ... our people need knowledge, education. Over time, the number of educated will grow and grow, until every Uyghur is educated! Through this transitional period, the educated ones will ensure that their own children are educated, and bring their influence to bear on uneducated people of the same generation.

This generational model for political mobilisation evokes an earlier model that had been touted during the mid-nineties: the belief (hope?) that the passing of the cautious older generations and the coming of age of the post-1980 youth would result in a united resistance against the Chinese state (cf. Smith 2000). The more recent model incorporates two new ingredients, in recognition that the passing of time alone will be insufficient: the first is knowledge; the second is peer influence or 'community pressure' (see Chapter 6 on selective endogamy for an illustration of this powerful mechanism). As Jelil pointed out in 2002, according to this way of thinking, one should not blame those Uyghurs who become informants or 'sell the nation' in order to save their own skins, for they are without knowledge [*bilimsiz*], unenlightened, and do not know any better: 'They do not see

things in the long term. We must forgive them and concentrate on educating them, our people.' This elitist attitude suggested that uneducated individuals were less likely to have a strong sense of ethnic identity or loyalty; yet this was not supported by my interview data, which showed that people from all walks of life could receive and appreciate the political messages conveyed in Ömärjan Alim's songs.

'On Knowledge' exhorts the listener to make knowledge his constant companion, warning against less enduring ('fickle') attractions ('loves'), such as women and material wealth. It urges the Uyghur people to seek knowledge when they are in need of comfort, rather than the alternatives. Here, one might read an undertone that pleads with young people not to seek solace in alcohol and drugs (see Dautcher 2004; 2009 on social pathologies) but to build their self-esteem ('safeguard your worth') through education instead. Male listeners are warned not to become distracted by women ('beauties resembling the full moon') who are attentive only in pursuit of personal gain ('when your wealth declines, they'll desert you without shame'). There are puritanical undertones here, deriving from Islamic morality, and possibly also a criticism of the artist Ömärjan Alim, who was at the centre of a scandal involving a nightclub in Ghulja during this period. The final verse underlines the transience of material wealth in comparison with knowledge ('you are rich today, but tomorrow none will have greater debts than you'). With reference to Islamic fatalism, it is emphasised that a person who prioritises his own physical or financial satisfaction over the well-being of his people will eventually see his luck run out (cf. earlier discussion of how 'social climbers' have further to fall).

The third song I will analyse is 'Män Aq Bayraq Ämäs' [I'm No White Flag], and is a very slight abridgement of another influential poem by Abdurehim Ötkür (the part in italics is omitted in the song version). Like the previous two songs, it was included in the trilogy, *Mung-zar* [Regret]. The first part of the song runs as follows:

<i>Män Aq Bayraq Ämäs</i>	<i>I'm No White Flag</i>
{Kümüsh käbi yaltiraq	{Glittering like silver,
Märwayittäk parqiraq} (x2)	Gleaming like pearls} (x2)
Bir choqqa bar asmangha	A mountain peak is in the sky
Mäghrur beshi taqashqan	Its proud head stretches up
{Buning eti Khantängri	{Its name the King of Heaven
Tiyänshängha jaylashqan} (x2)	It resides in the Tianshan} (x2) <sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> *Tianshan* is the colonial name in Chinese for the Heavenly Mountains dividing north and south Xinjiang. In the poem form, the original Uyghur language name is used: *Tängri-*

Mäshriqtin chiqsa aptap	When the sun rises in the east
Hämmidin awal bashlap	Its very first act is
Shu choqqini söyidu	To touch that mountain
Mängzigä yeqip mängzin	Cheek to cheek
Ötüp uning qeshidin	Then passes over its brow
Ghärpkä mangar andin	And heads to the west
{Kechä bolsa tolu ay	{At night the full moon does not pass
Ötmäydu bunda qonmay} (x2)	Without alighting on that peak} (x2)
Yättä yultuz häm Hükär	The seven stars and the Bear
Zuhäl bilan Mushtäri	Saturn and Jupiter
{Uni yoqlap ötidu	{They pay their visits
tazim qilip härbiri} (x2)	And make a bow one by one} (x2)
{Erimäydu qish-yazi	{Not in winter nor in summer
Aq shayidäk qar-muzi} (x2)	Thaw its silky white snows} (x2)
Kökrigigä taqaqliq	Upon its chest the snow lotus
Tabi'ätning ärkisi	Nature's treasure
{Tashni yerip chiqqan u	{Cracks the rock and grows on up
Möjjä qar läylisi} (x2)	The snow lotus, a miracle (x2)
{Shunglashqimu bu choqqa	{This peak sometimes is
bäzi bolup hörliqa} (x2)	A freebird <sup>60</sup> } (x2)
Körünidu közlärgä	Sometimes it resembles
Aq echilghan gül käbi	A white flower in full bloom
{Yaki bahar künliri	{Or on spring days
Aqqu qonghan köl käbi} (x2)	A swan lake} (x2)

Part One celebrates the magnificent beauty of the Tianshan (Heavenly Mountains) and its tallest peak, the King of Heaven, which may be read as a metaphor for the local Turkic people (if not necessarily for the Uyghur people alone), who, like this mountain, are anchored to the land. The worth of the Turkic people is represented by glittering silver and gleaming pearls; their proud demeanour by the mountain peak's upright stature. The rising and setting of the sun stresses continuity of the land and its people, with each blessed by the respect of the seven stars,<sup>61</sup> while the description of the hardy snow lotus may be seen to reflect the determined presence and courage of the people. The peak represents by turn the free spirit of the

*tagh*. The artist has changed the name in the song form, possibly in order to disguise the underlying nationalist content and thus avoid the censor.

<sup>60</sup> *Hörliqa*: a legendary bird bringing freedom.

<sup>61</sup> The mystical number seven has played an important role in the myths and rituals of the Central Asian shamans. Here, it likely refers to the notion of traversing the seven celestial regions (the seven planetary heavens), which originated in Mesopotamia. The Altaic shaman is thought to mount and descend through the seven heavens, just as he passes successively through the seven underworld 'obstacles' (Eliade 1964: 274-279).

people (freebird), the flourishing of the people (flower in full bloom), and the tranquillity of the people (swan lake).

In Part Two, the melody changes direction and rhythm, becoming more agitated, and with the vocal frequently rising to the top of the octave. In this section a conversation ensues between the King of Heaven and a passing observer:

{Buni bilmäy bir janab Khantängriğä bir qarap} (x2)	{One gentleman, not knowing this Glanced up at the King of Heaven} (x2)
Däp tashlidi: 'Bu hoqqa	Said: 'This peak
Yiraqtin qarimaqqa	Viewed from afar
Okhshaydikän äI bolghan	Resembles the raised flag
Qoshun tutqan bayraqqa'	Of a surrendered army'
Khantängri buni anglap	Hearing this, the King of Heaven
Küliwätti qaqaqlap	Roared with laughter
Didi: 'Nädä chong bolghan	Said: 'Where did you grow up
Beshi qapaq janabsiz	To have such a muddled head?
Qulaq seling qalmighay	Listen well, the words you speak
Bu gepingiz jawabsiz	Cannot go unanswered
{Därwäqä män aq özüm	{I am all white, indeed
Saqal-chechim ham yüzüm} (x2)	My beard, my hair, my face} (x2)
Lekin härgiz ämäsmän	But I am absolutely not
Siz eytqandäk aq bayraq,	A white flag as you said
Tabi'itim, mejäzim	In both nature and disposition
Aq bayraqtin köp yiraq	I'm far from being a white flag

At the beginning of this conversation, the observer mistakes the tall, white peak for a white flag of surrender, raised by a retreating army. The King of Heaven's response is amused but also indignant: he retorts that if he is all white, that is because of his advanced years (an implication that he has been here for a very long time), and is certainly not a sign of surrender. He adds that his disposition is 'far from being a white flag', in other words not at all meek or vanquished. Meanwhile, the poet's choice of *beard*, *hair* and *face* appears to be deliberate: the Turkic people tend to grow beards, while the Han do not; Turkic people are more likely than Han to see their hair turn white; and Turkic people are at least partly Caucasoid, unlike the Han, hence the white face. The implication is that the people who have existed in this region for so long are Caucasoid, unlike the Han.

The next section of the poem uses many examples and illustrations to stress the presence of the mountain peak (Turkic people) in this region since ancient times as well as the part they played in the dawn of civilisation:

Adäm ata wä Hawa	When Adam and Eve
Jännättin chiqqan chaghda	Left Paradise
Tunji tughulghan oghli	Their first born son
Män idim bu zeminda	On this land was me
Boz echip uruq chachqan	I tilled the fields
Yeshil wada terimdä	Sowed grain in the spring
Nohning kemisi topanda	And when Noah's Ark
Yol tapalmay azghanda	Lost its way in the Flood
Aghzimda zeytun chishläp	I was the pigeon
Barghan käptär män idim	Holding an olive branch in its beak
Hayatliqning nishani	I was the bearer of news
Ashu khäwär män idim	Bringing signs of life
Qosh münggüzlük Iskändär	When Alexander the Great
Bashlap kalgändä khätär	Brought danger <sup>62</sup>
Uning ötär yolini	It was I
Tosup qoyghan män idim	Who blocked his way
Shärqliqning küchini	I who showed him
Tonutup qoyghan män idim	The strength of the East
Yipäk yükligän karwan	I who hosted
Qonghuraq jaranlatqan	The silk-laden caravans
Ashu qädim yollarda	Who rang the bells
Häm qoruqchi pasiban	On those ancient roads
Ash-tuz berip karwangha	I who gave food and shelter
Häm bolghantim sahipkhan	To the caravans
Äy janabiy muhtiräm	Hey, respected sir
Bilip qoyung shuni häm	Take note of this, what's more
Tarikh degän kitabning	The words in the book of history
Kheti määndä pütülgän	Were written about me
Ni-ni chegish tügünlär	Many mysteries
Mening bilän yeshilgän	Solved through me
Qäghäz, kompas, mätpä'ä,	Paper, compass, printing press
Dora degän möjizä	Gunpowder—these miracles

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<sup>62</sup> Alexander III of Macedon, better known as Alexander the Great, was born in Pella, the ancient capital of Macedonia in 356 BC. Educated by the philosopher Aristotle, Alexander inherited a powerful but volatile kingdom after his father, Philip, was assassinated in 336 BC. He quickly dealt with his enemies at home, reasserted Macedonian power within Greece, and then set out to conquer the Persian Empire. Against overwhelming odds, he led his army to victories across Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt without suffering a single defeat. His greatest victory was at the Battle of Gaugamela, in what is now northern Iraq, in 331 BC, following which he became 'great king' of Persia at the age of 25. Over the next eight years, Alexander led his army a further 11,000 miles, founding over 70 cities and creating an empire that stretched across three continents, from Greece in the west, north to the Danube, south into Egypt and as far to the east as the Indian Punjab. The area was linked together in a vast international network of trade and commerce, and united by a common Greek language and culture. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/alexander\\_the\\_great.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/alexander_the_great.shtml) (accessed 22 Jan 2012)

Mändin ötüp jahangha	Conveyed through me
Taralghan häm kengäygän	Spread across the world
Mädäniyät böshükin	The cradle of civilisation
Öz qolumda täwrätkän	I rocked with my own hands
Demäk ta älmisaqtin	You see, since the dawn of history
Beri barmän uzaqtin	Have I been here, so long
Shunga beshim aqarghan	That's why my hair turned white
Hätta kiygän tonum aq	Even my overcoat
Lekin härgiz ämäsmän	But I am absolutely not
Siz degändäk aq bayraq	A white flag as you said

This version of history, while true for the mountain peak, is selective when it comes to the Turkic people. Archaeologists have concluded that 4000-year old mummies discovered in the Tarim basin are of mixed ancestry, having both European and Siberian genetic markers. Meanwhile, historians tell us that the people today known as the Uyghurs originated on the steppes of what is now the Mongolian Republic, migrating west to the region now called Xinjiang only in 845 AD (see for example Barfield 1989). This of course raises the question of relative—and contested—indigeneity, and throws doubt upon the claims made in the poem with regard to Adam and Eve, Noah, Alexander the Great, and so forth. Probably, the poet's intention is to omit the earlier history of the steppe Uyghurs in favour of emphasising the ancient roots of his ancestors within the territory in which they now reside. In doing so, he imaginatively reinterprets the past in the present, creating a subjective authenticity which legitimises the temporary territorial claims of the Uyghur nation (cf. Hann 1991: 231). Yet it is certainly true that the Turkic people have been attached to the land *for far longer* than the Han, at least if we are talking about populations in large numbers. And it is also possible to argue that even if the steppe Uyghurs were not residing in Xinjiang before 845 AD, they subsequently intermarried and merged with the indigenous Indo-Europeans they found there to form one fused group. Also of note is the fact that the poet does not employ the term 'Uyghur' at all; this could be either because he hoped to avoid the censor, or because he rather espoused a Pan-Turkic ideology like so many other intellectuals born in the republican period.

The poem/song ends on a proud and triumphant note as follows:

Bu hör zemin wätinim	This free land is my homeland
Anga baghliq jan-tenim	Body and soul to it tied fast
Chach-saqalning aqlighi	The whiteness of my hair and beard
Tarikh qäsirining uli	The foundations of history's mansion
Kökkä taqashqan beshim	My head stretched high into the sky

Shu wätänning simwoli	The symbol of that homeland
Qara bulut tossimu	When black clouds obscure the blue
Chaqmaq kelip soqsimu	Or lightning strikes
Egilmästin bu beshim	I do not hang my head
Mäghrur turdi hämmä waq	But hold it high
Qandaq qilip män ämdi	How then could it be
Bolup qalay aq bayraq	That I've become a white flag?
Tabi'itim, mejäzim	My nature and disposition
Aq bayraqtin köp yiraq	Are far from being that
<i>Qälbim qizil chogh turup</i>	<i>With my heart red as embers</i>
<i>Qizil tughni kötürüp</i>	<i>Holding the red flag</i>
<i>Ketiwatsam märdanä</i>	<i>I walk on bravely</i>
<i>Nakhsham ghalib, yangghiraq</i>	<i>Singing a victory song</i>
Qaysi yüzüngüz bilän	How can you have the nerve
Meni däysiz aq bayraq!	To call me a white flag?

Thus, we are assured that the Turkic people will not shy away from troubled times, but will doggedly continue to hold fast to the land; the 'tall mountain peak' has not surrendered, nor will it. As noted earlier, in the song version performed by Heyit, four lines are omitted from the original poem (highlighted in italics above). These appear to frame the poem firmly within the context of socialist revolutionary resistance against the Guomindang (Chinese Nationalists) in the 1940s, thus the mountain peak is said to have a 'heart red as embers' and to 'hold the red flag', representing the allegiance of the local peoples to the Chinese communist saviours. This was very likely a ploy by Ötkür to avoid the political censor in the present by setting his epic in the past: a strategy he used repeatedly and to great effect in his historical novels (cf. Rudelson 1997: 163-164). The act of removing the lines re-positions this poem within contemporary times, indicting the current Communist aggressor in place of the past Nationalist one.

#### 4.6. *Religious and Class Cleavages*

As I hope I have demonstrated above, during the 1990s Xinjiang enjoyed two 'Voices of the Uyghurs', each of whom made an important contribution to raising political awareness and/or safeguarding the continuity of Uyghur tradition and culture. Yet as Breger and Hill observe: '... even within the ethnic community identities can be plural, cross-cutting, conflicting and contested, with different ideologies supporting them' (1998: 10). Given that the two artists appeared to be pursuing similar goals and that some—though not all—of their songs addressed similar themes (the host-guest

dynamic, collaboration versus non-collaboration), one might easily have assumed that they supported one another's efforts in the realisation of a common goal. This however was not the case, as interviews with the artists and close relatives and friends quickly proved.

During several meetings with Abdurehim Heyit in Ürümchi in 2002, I learned that he and his entourage of friends in fact held rather negative opinions of Ömärjan Alim. When first asked his thoughts on the other 'Voice of the Uyghurs', Heyit did not describe him as a 'friend' but stated simply that he knew him. He agreed—a little reluctantly—that the tracks on Alim's album, *Qaldi Iz*, were 'good songs', but lowered his gaze and did not elaborate. Seeing this, I enquired playfully whether there was an element of competition between the two men. Heyit shook his head vehemently at this, an action I initially interpreted as a sign of political caution (a desire not to be connected with Alim, who had by then run into political difficulties). Later, in a conversation with two members of Heyit's circle, I realised that the issue was more complex. Asked what he thought of Alim's work, Jelil, an observant graduate, commented in 2002:

You only have to look at the level of artistic merit ... you simply cannot discuss Alim and Heyit in the same breath. Abdurehim's music has many faces! It changes all the time. It moves on, develops ...! Alim's music always sounds the same, it always begins from the same basic structure; it is simply variations on a theme.

Uyghur poet, Osmanjan Sawut, added to this (in Chinese, for my benefit): 'Alim's material is really coarse [*cu de hen*]! It's like a slap in the face, too direct. The poetry is simple, elementary; the meanings too obvious.' Hearing this, it occurred to me that Heyit may have felt partly insulted by the suggestion that he could be compared to Alim. Jelil then remarked, almost as an afterthought, that Alim's methods were a bit 'dangerous' and so Abdurehim would certainly not wish to be associated with him. However, this was evidently far less salient than the question of inferior artistry.

In a subsequent meeting in 2002, I suggested that Alim's lyrics were perhaps *deliberately* simplistic in order to reach a wider, rural audience. This theory was however quickly rejected. Heyit and Sawut's indignant answer was:

He doesn't even write his own words! Someone else writes them for him! Some second-class poets in Ghulja ... Ghulja has never produced any brilliant poets. And Alim's *dutar* playing and his voice are totally inferior; they just don't make the grade!

To this, Jelil added that Alim had not received a college education, and therefore has no knowledge (*bilimsiz*) and is unable to read newspapers and scholarly journals. Heyit, on the other hand, had gone to college to study the arts, and reads newspapers and journals every day. Thus, in his view, the two could not be placed in the same category. The above responses indicated a sense of social superiority, linked to occupation/profession, based on Alim's lack of formal musical training and poor education; it was a type of class snobbery found both in traditional Uyghur society and in traditional Chinese society. Furthermore, the generalisation concerning Ghulja poets betrayed a strong element of 'hometown chauvinism', to use a term coined by Freeman (2011). The initial charge levelled at Alim—that he does not write his own song lyrics—might just as well be applied to Heyit's songs, many of which draw heavily upon the poetry of Abdurehim Ötkür. It seems that it was not the borrowing of poetry in itself that was anathema, but rather the borrowing of poetry *from Ghulja*. It is important at this point to note that none of those present were natives of Ghulja, but rather of Qāshqār, Qumul and so forth. When I ventured to suggest that Alim's end goal—to enlighten Uyghurs and encourage ethnic unity—at least was a worthy one, the two agreed, but again qualified the concession by questioning Alim's artistry: 'Yes, there is some good lyrical content. What he's saying, what he's trying to do, is good. But the vehicle through which he's doing it is sadly lacking.'

From here, the discussion developed into an intense debate on high versus popular culture, with our host, Saqim, continually trying to intervene in order to offer us food (and diffuse the contention). Abdurehim, while acknowledging that a person could not truly know a people or nation without speaking to individuals from all walks of life (including kebab traders) insisted that only high culture can sustain that people's cultural continuity through time: 'Look at the Twelve Muqam, for instance. It is the artists, poets, historians, musicians who will go down in history, who will be remembered; and, with them, the Uyghur people.' Jelil agreed strongly with this statement, adding that while high culture can represent a people, popular culture has no longevity and is quickly forgotten. Having in the back of my mind the comments made by ordinary Uyghurs regarding the inaccessible nature of Heyit's song words and vocal style, I asked how high culture could sustain a people if the majority of that people could not understand it. The two friends replied: 'Our 'high culture' *can* reach the peasants these days ... ten years ago, they could not have understood these song-words. But now they can.'

To what extent their brand of high culture truly made an impression on people outside of intellectual and artistic circles remains unclear. It is possible that some peasants might have possessed an educational level which allowed them to appreciate oblique meanings deeply embedded in metaphor, beautiful but impenetrable. We know for example that Uyghur teachers in rural villages and small towns were able to ‘read between the lines’ of local reportage published in literary magazines during the 1990s, considering this an important source of information about implementation and repercussions of new policies, cadre corruption, inequality and poverty (Bellér-Hann 2000: 83). It is perhaps more likely that Alim’s lyrics reached the peasants first and established a precedent, heightening political awareness in the countryside, and encouraging ordinary folk to listen to music and poetry in a more analytical fashion. However, on testing this hypothesis against the experiences of respondents, it did seem that on the whole Heyit’s work was less able to permeate people ‘from all walks of life’. To cite some examples, Zunun, a *minkaomin* in his thirties working in the service industry in Ürümchi in 2002, expressed a clear preference for Alim’s songs, and attributed the negative comments made by his competitor to class snobbery: ‘I still like Alim’s songs, no matter if Heyit and his friends say they are crude ... all my relatives in Bay [rural Aqsu] know Alim and like his songs. Heyit’s crowd *would* say negative things about him, because they look down on him!’ Aliyā, a postgraduate student interviewed in 2002, was similarly displeased at the criticism levelled at her favourite artist, and urged me not to convey it to Alim himself. In her view, Abdurehim Heyit was simply jealous of Alim’s stardom; she disagreed that the latter’s work was ‘crude’, pointing out that although he does not write his own song-words, he nonetheless selects which poetry to set to music: ‘He chooses lines that reflect what the people are feeling. That takes an intelligent mind, intellect.’ She also stated that Alim played *dutar* very well, which suggests that many Uyghurs may in fact appreciate the home-grown sound of a self-taught instrument.

Another seam of criticism centred on Alim’s perceived lack of morality. Saqim, a television director in his thirties who had previously produced Alim’s music videos, claimed in 2002 that although Alim was ‘great’ in the early years, he later ‘lost sight of his original aims’ and ‘began to walk a broken road [*buzuq yol*]’. According to him, the artist had begun to sleep around, despite being a married man with a family. Connected to this charge of philandering, Alim came under fire from several respondents for

not practising what he preached. Abdukerim, an observant university student from Aqsu, protested in 2002:

Alim's a hypocrite! You know how he did that song 'Aldanma Singlim' [Don't be Taken In, Little Sister]?<sup>63</sup> Well, a while after, he opened a disco-restaurant! And Uyghur girls went there, and drank and smoked and took heroin! What do you think of that! And some people went to see him and said 'Ömärjan, why do you sing about protecting our children, but then open this disco?' They beat him up. And he said he was very sorry and a month later had to close it down.

If female visitors to this establishment had indeed taken heroin, this made the artist double the hypocrite in the public's eyes; one of his best loved songs exhorts young people not to fall prey to drug addiction. Asked about the disco rumours, a male restaurateur who had migrated to Ürümchi from Aqsu to find work, replied in 2002: 'Yes, they say that Uyghur girls go in there and go wild. I think it probably is true; the story wouldn't be circulating otherwise. Rumours don't appear out of nowhere, do they?' Yet other respondents reacted angrily to the suggestion, as when Aliyā, a postgraduate student, told me in the same year:

I don't believe at all what others said about Alim running around with other women. I watched him with his wife every day here at the *Yixueyuan* [Medical College] hospital [...] and he was attentive from dawn to dusk. I watched him go back and forth from her bedside.

The close details of the scandal were hard to verify; however, it was clear that something of this type had occurred. Restaurateurs living in Alim's hometown of Ghulja stated in interview in 2002 that Alim had previously bought a *ristoran* (high-class dance restaurant—somewhat different from a disco or nightclub) in the town, but that he no longer owned it. The artist's wife, interviewed in 2002, corroborated this story, but was irritated by and scornful of the criticisms:

You heard he took all sorts of girls in his disco, right? That was before. Just for one month. Actually, it wasn't even his disco. One of his friends opened it and he sang there every night for a month. And then he stopped. That's

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<sup>63</sup> 'Aldanma, Singlim' was a didactic song warning young Uyghur women not to mar their youth by frequenting discos and consorting with (often Han) men. It alludes to a small minority of young women in Ürümchi who are said to have adopted 'bad modern ways', where modernity is perceived to have been introduced by the Han and as running counter to Islamic social mores. Some girls, known in Chinese as *sanpei xiaojie*, have assumed a role comparable to that of the Japanese 'hostess', drinking, dancing, and, in rare cases, sleeping with Han businessmen for money.

it. It's all a pack of lies [*yalghan*]. There are always all kinds of stories flying around about famous people—singers, dancers ... all rubbish.

When I asked whether she thought this behaviour might stem from jealousy, she responded with an emphatic affirmative in Uyghur: 'Hä---!' Thus, another irony was suggested: a section of Alim's audience, which had once identified closely with his songs condemning in-group envy, was now itself succumbing to the 'bad character trait'. Abdukerim, an observant university student, also questioned the artist's morality in 2002, citing an occasion when fans at a concert in Aqsu waited an eternity for Alim to come on stage, only to be told that the singer was 'ill' and would not be playing that night. In fact, Abdukerim claimed, the artist had been inebriated:

We could see him, backstage, swaying around, blind drunk! It was only a small place, you could see everything. The people were furious! 10 yuan a ticket is a lot, but I paid it because I wanted to see him so much. Everyone smashed the windows in Alim's car that night!

While this last claim was likely an embellishment, it is easy to imagine how this experience could create disillusionment, especially among fans who observed orthodox Islamic practice. The artist's wife confirmed in 2002 that Ömärjan did not practise *bäsh waq*, exclaiming: 'Goodness me, no! What, with him drinking and all? You can't drink and still pray! Oh yes, he drinks, smokes, has a good time [*oynaydu*]. You see, he never learned how to pray as a child. He wasn't taught.'

In 2002, in a changed environment where possibilities for combining music and politics had dwindled, Alim stood accused by some of 'selling out'. His double release *Häsät Qilma* [Don't Fall Prey to Envy, 2002] contained no explicit reference to the Uyghur/Han conflict, focusing instead on in-group social problems. As the artist's wife explained: 'The words reflect problems in society, people's everyday lives. For instance, this song [then playing on the family's video recorder] exhorts people not to waste food when the peasants are starving.' Asked whether the lyrics were aimed at the Han banqueting culture (*yanhui wenhua*), she and Alim's sister retorted in sarcastic tones: 'Hey, Uyghurs do it now too!' This indictment of in-group failings, while appreciated by some as a necessary stage of awareness-raising or vehicle for catharsis, was easily interpreted by others as a shameful expression of low self-esteem, an act of 'hanging out the Uyghurs' dirty washing'. One might speculate that, following the political trouble generated by earlier songs, Alim was dismissed from his work unit as a warning, then instructed to continue in a castrated form. In this way, the

state was partly successful in orchestrating the hero's public fall and weakening his status and power as an ethnic martyr. A similar political strategy was employed by the Uzbek government in 2005-6, when it released rebel poet Haydarali Komilov from prison, ordering him to publicly retract his poem on the Andijon massacre, '*Nima qilib qo'yding oqqadarlar?!*' [What have you done, you wretches?!], and to discredit the broadcaster who had dared to air it. As Kendzior observes, this manoeuvre fully demonstrated how threatening the Uzbek government considered poetry to be (2007: 328).

Alim was also condemned for becoming too attached to money and the 'high life'.<sup>64</sup> Saqim, a television producer, claimed in 2002 that the price of Alim's CDs had gradually risen until ordinary people could no longer afford them. He also asserted that the artist had latterly become very 'arrogant', and would do nothing for anyone unless they paid him.<sup>65</sup> These accusations were ironic indeed, given Alim's earlier song about the relationship between indigenous cadres and 'thick wads of cash' ('*Äwliya dostum*', above). The public perception that Alim cared only about self-elevation was not lessened by remarks made by his wife, for example, her admission that Alim often drank alcohol when in the company of top cadres [*chong bashliqlar*]; and her (unlikely) claim that her husband 'had never been in trouble with the state'. Jelil, an observant university graduate interviewed in 2002, blamed Alim's ethical decline on his poor education: 'We can forgive him and all those who "sell out". After all, they are without knowledge [*Uy. bilimsiz*]. His comment reflects the common belief that uneducated Uyghurs are less likely to maintain a strong sense of ethnic identity and loyalty (cf. the poem/song '*Bilim Ishqidä*', discussed above), but also a new sympathy for the rural class and a desire to support and inform (rather than patronise) Uyghur peasants. Ironically, this is exactly why Alim's 'plain words' played such an important role in 1996.

Other respondents did not accept that Alim had sold out; rather, they characterised him as a political martyr, and circulated rumours of his arrest

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<sup>64</sup> Another Ötkür poem adapted by Abdurehim Heyit and included in the privately released trilogy, *Mung-zar* [Regret], was called 'Khäjlä, kha'inlar, khäjlä!' [Spend, Traitors, Spend!]

<sup>65</sup> The family was apparently quite wealthy. Ömärjan's *loufang* home was located near the No.16 Primary School in Ghulja, and was lavishly furnished with shiny pouring vessels, leather sofas and intricate Islamic wall coverings. When we discussed the family's desire that Alim's daughter go abroad to study, and I warned them of the high tuition fees required of international students, her mother replied confidently: 'Oh, we have money! [*Uy. Pul bar!*] Money for this girl's study, we have.'

and persecution. They claimed (with evident pride) that he had been discovered by the censor and consequently warned by the government to cease singing songs that ‘threaten the unity of the nationalities’. Several reported that, despite being previously attached to the local song-and-dance troupe, Alim was no longer attached to a work unit (a circumstance which may have indicated state punishment in kind). A group of restaurateurs from Ghulja, who ran a fast food outlet in Ürümchi in 2004, confirmed this, adding that Alim was now a ‘businessman’. They rejected the idea that Alim had been arrested or imprisoned after the release of *Qaldi Iz* [Traces] in 1995, stating that he had incurred a stiff fine, but subsequently continued to release new compilations. They did not accept that the recent albums were more costly than earlier ones, or that the artist had in any sense sold out. Given the Uyghur proclivity to ‘hometown chauvinism’, it seems possible that fellow Ghuljiliqs might generally have been more sympathetic towards their oasis star, while criticisms tended to emanate from the oases of the religious south. Yet some of Alim’s southern-born fans, now situated in the regional capital, stood by him. Aliyā, for instance, claimed in 2002 that she could sing ‘any one of a thousand songs’ Alim had released since the mid-nineties. When asked to name her favourite, however, she chose not a new song but an old one, ‘Oghlum’ [‘My Son’]: a song about ‘teaching one’s son how to be a man’ (a man of the people).

Criticisms of Heyit were comparatively few, and mostly centred on the notion (discussed earlier) that he is too aloof, and his art too lofty, to reach the common man on the street. During a discussion held in 2002, Aliyā, a postgraduate student, and Häsän, a teacher, concluded that Heyit’s work was far less well known than Alim’s. They estimated that it reached the local populace in his hometown of Qäshqär,<sup>66</sup> plus the educated elites in urban centres, but enjoyed less influence beyond these parameters. Presented with the proposition that ‘high culture’ may in fact carry less impact than popular culture if it fails to resonate with people’s hearts across social classes, they were in full agreement.

Tahirjan, a migrant worker in his thirties from Aqsu, complained that Heyit was more prone to compromise than Alim, observing in 2004: ‘Heyit has a bit of a problem ... Some of his songs ‘look angrily’ at the government [*hökümetni güläydu*], but others seem to praise it. Ömärjan Alim, now *all* of his songs are uncompromising!’ He did however concede that

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<sup>66</sup> When Abdurehim Heyit performed in Qäshqär with the Xinjiang song-and-dance troupe in 2001, he followed his 45-minute act with an encore of equal length (Forney 2002).

artists in Xinjiang were obliged to try to maintain a fine balance between indicting the authorities and pacifying them. He also acknowledged the intensified monitoring of the arts that characterised the period since 2001: 'Heyit can't sing right now ... he can't say what he wants to say [*eytalmay-du*]'.

Having heard much from Heyit and his companions on Ömärjan Alim, I was curious to learn what Alim and his circle thought of Abdurehim Heyit. Disappointingly, during my 2002 trip to Ghulja, Alim was out of town, and I was able to meet only with his relatives. When I mentioned Heyit's name to Alim's wife, she was initially unsure to whom I referred. Her mother jogged her memory by singing a stretch of one of Heyit's songs, imitating his deep, operatic voice in a somewhat facetious manner. Alim's wife listened, clicked her tongue, then said dismissively: 'Ah—the one with the funny moustache? I think I know who you mean. No, I don't really like him.' She subsequently began to make excuses for her patchy knowledge, explaining that she herself worked in the People's Courts and so 'had little to do with music or the arts'. It was difficult to discern whether she was ignorant of all music and art, or whether it was rather the case that she was more familiar with popular than with high culture. It was evident, though, that neither she nor her mother was impressed by Heyit's religious piety, as symbolised by his facial hair. The gap between the two 'voices' derived not only from social (class) difference, related to educational level, but also from another tension in Uyghur society: the discrepancy between an observant and a secular lifestyle.

*Conclusion: New Folk as a Locus of Solidarity and Disunity*

The Uyghurs were arguably more united as a people and potential nation in the mid-1990s than at any other time previously: the result of common opposition to the Chinese state (and the Han migrants who are its symbol), constructed upon on a solid foundation of norms and values long shared by the in-group. However, there remained significant obstacles to a successful ethno-political mobilisation, the military power of the state aside. Only three social groups (and I present these as 'ideal types') fully subscribed to a separatist ideology in this period: young male intellectuals, young male petty entrepreneurs (often migrant workers), and unemployed males, all located in urban settings. Older people, women, and peasants, on the other hand, did not necessarily share these aspirations. Views on

Uyghur independence—and how to achieve it—differed significantly across generations, between urban and rural areas, and between men and women.<sup>67</sup> As Naby had predicted a decade earlier (1986: 245), the attitudes of the youth had indeed become more radicalised. Yet the old were not given to impetuous acts, and both they and the middle-aged bore the scars of their persecution during the Cultural Revolution period (1966-76). Many women believed that the Chinese state ‘would never let go of Xinjiang’, and felt it made better sense to focus on achievable goals, such as the attainment of equal rights for Uyghurs. Many of those living in the countryside had not yet been touched by competition from Han migrants for education, employment, land and resources, so that their grievances were less than those of urban Uyghurs (with the important exception of rural opposition to birth control). Few had begun to look beyond their immediate, everyday circumstances (agricultural subsistence) to consider the political future of the Uyghur nation.

That said, I believe that the dissemination of alternative representations of Uyghur identity via the medium of popular song, together with the oral circulation of counter-stereotypes against the Han and the maintenance of distinct ethnic boundaries, went a considerable distance towards the construction of a viable nationalist discourse. Owing to the new possibilities of the cassette tape and the increased movement of Uyghurs between city and country, that discourse, for perhaps the first time since the founding of the PRC, began to spread slowly to the countryside and beyond the educated elite. Confucius once said: ‘In altering customs and changing habits, nothing is better than music.’<sup>68</sup> Between 1991 and 1997, two Uyghur *dutar* players constructed and disseminated representations of the Uyghur nation that contrasted sharply with the carefully packaged images of colourful, ‘happy’, *passive* ethnic minorities produced by the Chinese state (Gladney, 1994; 2004).<sup>69</sup> These alternative representations, while not necessarily painting a nuanced picture of complex social conditions in the region, proved powerful reflections of popular grievance. Each artist produced strong identifications among his audience, and one of them succeeded in

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<sup>67</sup> See Smith (2000) for an analysis of generational differences in political attitude in Xinjiang in 1995-6.

<sup>68</sup> Confucius, quoted by Kong Yingda, *Liji zhengyi* (cited in Tuohy 2001: 107).

<sup>69</sup> I was fascinated during a stay in Kucha in 1996 to find a microcosm of competing musical nationalisms, with state-sanctioned, co-opted minority music blaring out of public loudspeakers in the predominantly Han-settled New Town, as independently-produced Uyghur pop musics blared from cassette kiosks in the predominantly Uyghur-settled Old Town.

creating an emotional resonance that reverberated among Uyghurs from all walks of life. Evidently, when taken too far by persons of a particular disposition, nationalist discourses can—and do—lead to violence both within and between ethnic groups, so that songs of nationalism may—as in the former Yugoslavia—‘reaffirm hatreds between different peoples’ (Hudson, 2000: 168). Thus, it could be argued that one extreme consequence of Alim’s songs against ‘collaborators’ (and one perhaps unforeseen by the singer himself) was an increase in violent attacks and assassination attempts on Uyghur cadres and religious personnel.

The steady growth of nationalist sentiment culminated in the (then) worst instance of unrest in Xinjiang since 1949. On 5th–6th February 1997, a peaceful protest took place in Ghulja against the execution of thirty young Uyghur separatists, the arrest of a hundred Muslim students with allegedly pro-independence views, and state suppression of perceived ‘illegal religious activities’ such as the male social gathering known as the *māshrāp*. The protest was sparked into a full-scale riot after security forces opened fire on the first line of demonstrators, killing a young child. During the course of the riot, some young Uyghur males attacked Han civilians on the streets and set their bodies alight. These disturbances were met by an intensified government crackdown in the political and religious spheres, and eventually the cultural sphere (Amnesty International 1999, 2007; Human Rights Watch 2001; Kellner 2002: 16–27; Millward 2004: 16–17). Those Uyghurs later detained on suspicion of separatism [*fenliezhuyi* or ‘ethnic splittism’] came from diverse backgrounds, and included secondary school teachers, peasants, merchants, a surgeon, a factory worker, a local Uyghur cadre, and the ‘millionaire businesswoman’ Rābiyā Qadir, this latter in a high-profile attempt to make a public example (Ch. *sha ji gei hou kan* or ‘kill the chicken to show the monkey’). Some said that Qadir’s arrest and incarceration (in 1998) had been made on the basis of information leaked to the Chinese authorities by internal ‘spies’, and attributed this behaviour to an in-group reluctance to see others achieve. Māryām, divorcee and music trader in her thirties from Ghulja, told me in 2002: ‘We can’t unite, Uyghurs. We’re always envious of others who do better [Uy. *bashqilarni körälmäy*], others of higher social status, and have to pull them down. Like Rābiyā Qadir. Even a woman of conscience like that!’

In 2002, a poet from Ürümchi named Tursunjan Emet recited a poem in Uyghur at the end of a concert at the Xinjiang People’s Hall in the regional capital. The Party committee subsequently ruled that the poem contained an ‘anti-government’ message and labelled the mere act of recital an ‘eth-

nic separatist crime'. Following this incident, the Chairman of the Xinjiang provincial government opened an investigation, vowing to purge all those who 'openly advocate separatism in the name of art'. In a move reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution at its height, cadres were instructed to use politics as the *only* standard when judging artistic and literary work. Emet went into hiding, and was later detained and subsequently released some weeks or months later (Human Rights Watch 2005). In the wake of this renewed cultural crackdown, Xinjiang's new folk singers were forced to search for an alternative means of expression. This period was so politically tense that, according to Abdurehim Heyit's friends, it was 'simply too dangerous to use nationalist lyrics'. The answer for Heyit was to resort to the power of music itself, or 'sonic nationalism'. The title track of his 2002 release, *Ömüt* [Hope], was a powerful instrumental, conveying by turns passion, desperation and determination. In the absence of lyrical metaphor, the *dutar* became a 'political instrument ... giving voice to the collective feelings of the group' (Cooke and Doornbas, 1982: 53). Asked in 2002 whether there was still hope for the troubled region, the singer responded as always in guarded fashion, yet his message was clear: '*Hayat bar bolsa, ömüt bar* [Where there's life, there's hope'].

PART THREE

'SILENCE': AFTER THE 1997 GHULJA DISTURBANCES