THE CONTEST OF THE FRUITS

جەڭى مېۋە









eds.
Guangtian Ha &
Slavs and Tatars

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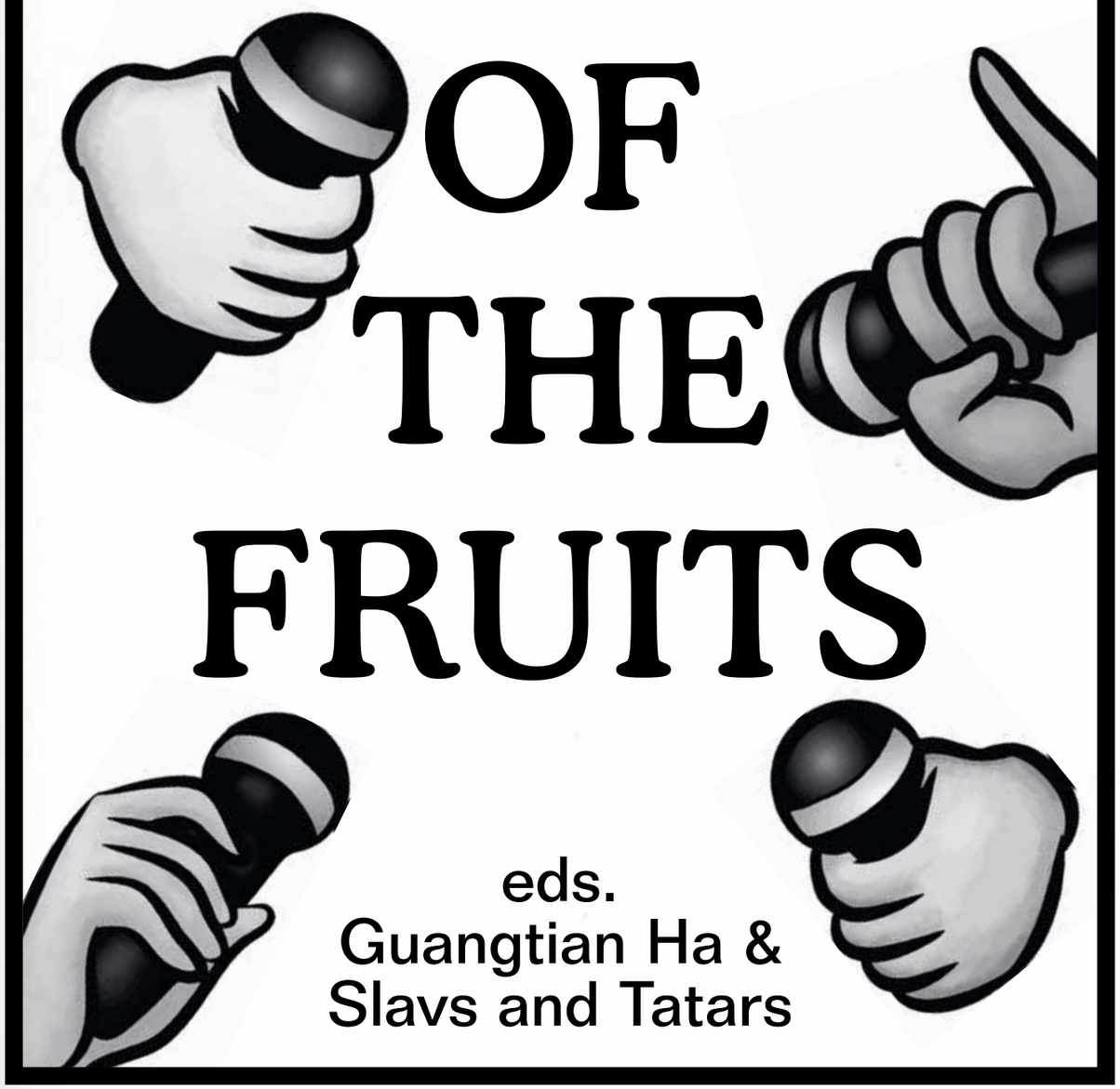
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THE جەڭگى مېۋە CONTEST OF THE FRUITS



eds.
Guangtian Ha &
Slavs and Tatars

هر کشی منینک دیسه اغزی مطلق قورورلار*

* Should anyone say, “This book is mine,”
their mouth will surely shrivel up.

Dedicated to Rahile Dawut

INTRODUCTION ..... 11 ..... كىرىش سۆز
EDS. GUANGTIAN HA & SLAVS AND TATARS
مۇھەررىلەر: گۇاڭتىيەن خا ۋە سلاۋز بىلەن تاتارز

THE CHANGING FACE AND FATE OF UYGHUR WRITING ..... 28 ..... ئۇيغۇر يېزىقىنىڭ ئۆزگىرىشى ۋە تەقدىرى
DAVID BROPHY
دېيۇد بروفي

WEST SIDE STORIES ..... 46 ..... غەرب تەرەپ ھېكايىلىرى
ALVIN LI
ئەلۋىن لى

COMPELLED SILENCE AND SOUND: THE ERASURE OF UYGHUR SOUNDSCAPES ..... 70 ..... مەجبۇرلانغان جىمجىتلىق ۋە مەجبۇرلانغان ئاۋاز: ئۇيغۇر ئاۋاز مەنزىرىسىنىڭ ئۆچۈرۈلۈشى
ELISE ANDERSON
ئېلىس ئاندېرسون

HORROR FROM ABOVE, SATIRE FROM BELOW ..... 88 ..... يۇقىرىدىن كەلگەن قورقۇنچ، تۆۋەندىن كەلگەن كومېدىيە
DARREN BYLER
دەررىن بايلېر

YOUR SALAD IS SMARTER THAN YOU ..... 108 ..... سىزنىڭ سالىتىڭىز سىزدىن ئەقىللىق
GUANGTIAN HA
گۇاڭتىيەن خا

“WE CAN’T DEFY THE SINGING OF THE CICADAS”: A CONVERSATION WITH POET TAHIR HAMUT IZGIL ..... 126 ..... «بىز تومۇزغىلارنىڭ سايرىشىغا تاقابىل تۇرالمايمىز» شائىر تاھىر ھامۇت ئىزگىل بىلەن سۆھبەت
BY MUSĀPIR, TRANSLATED BY SEHER & MUSĀPIR
مۇساپىر
تەرجىمە قىلغۇچىلار: سەھەر ۋە مۇساپىر

THE CONTEST OF THE FRUITS LYRICS ..... 139 ..... مۇشارەئىي جەڭى مېۋە
NASHTARR & ERIC SCHLUESSEL
نەشتەر ۋە ئەرىك شلۈسسەل

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..... 147 ..... پايدىلانغان ماتېرىياللار
IMAGE SOURCES ..... 152 ..... رەسىم مەنبەلىرى
CONTRIBUTORS ..... 153 ..... تەرجىمھاللار
IMPRINT ..... 156 ..... نەشر قىلغۇچىلار

CALLIGRAPHY ..... 19 ..... ھۆسنىخەت
SLAVS AND TATARS
سلاۋز بىلەن تاتارز

NINETY-SIX ..... 25 ..... توقسان ئالتە
MAIDINA KADEER
مەدىنە قادىر

THIS WORLD ..... 45 ..... بۇ دۇنيا
KÖRESH KÖSEN, TRANSLATED BY MUNAWWAR ABDULLA
كۆرەش كۆسەن
تەرجىمە قىلغۇچى: مۇنەۋۋەر ئابدۇللا

UYGHUR POP MUSIC ..... 49 ..... ئۇيغۇر ئاممىباب مۇزىكىسى
MUKADDAS MIJIT
مۇقەددەس مىجىت

EXORCISMS AND SACREDNESS ..... 65 ..... پاكلىنىش بىلەن مۇقەددەسلىك
FATIMAH ABDULGHAFUR SEYYAH, TRANSLATED BY AHMATJAN OSMAN
فاتىمە ئابدۇلغافۇر سەييام
تەرجىمە قىلغۇچى: ئەخمەتجان ئوسمان

AN EAR ON THE WALL ..... 85 ..... تامنىڭ قۇلقى
ABDUSHÜKÜR MUHEMMET, TRANSLATED BY MUNAWWAR ABDULLA
ئابدۇشكۈر مۇھەممەت
تەرجىمە قىلغۇچى: مۇنەۋۋەر ئابدۇللا

MESHREP ..... 101 ..... مەشرەپ
RACHEL HARRIS
رەيچىل ھارىس

LISTENING AND SAMĀʿ ..... 119 ..... ئاڭلاش ۋە ساما
GUANGTIAN HA
گۇاڭتىيەن خا

HIJRAN ..... 125 ..... ھىجران
MUNAWWAR ABDULLA
مۇنەۋۋەر ئابدۇللا

MY SHARE OF THE NIGHT ..... 137 ..... تۈندىن نېسىۋەم
AHMATJAN OSMAN, TRANSLATED FROM ARABIC BY JEFFREY YANG AND AHMATJAN OSMAN
ئەخمەتجان ئوسمان
ئەرەپچىدىن تەرجىمە قىلغۇچىلار: جەففرەي ياڭ ۋە ئەخمەتجان ئوسمان

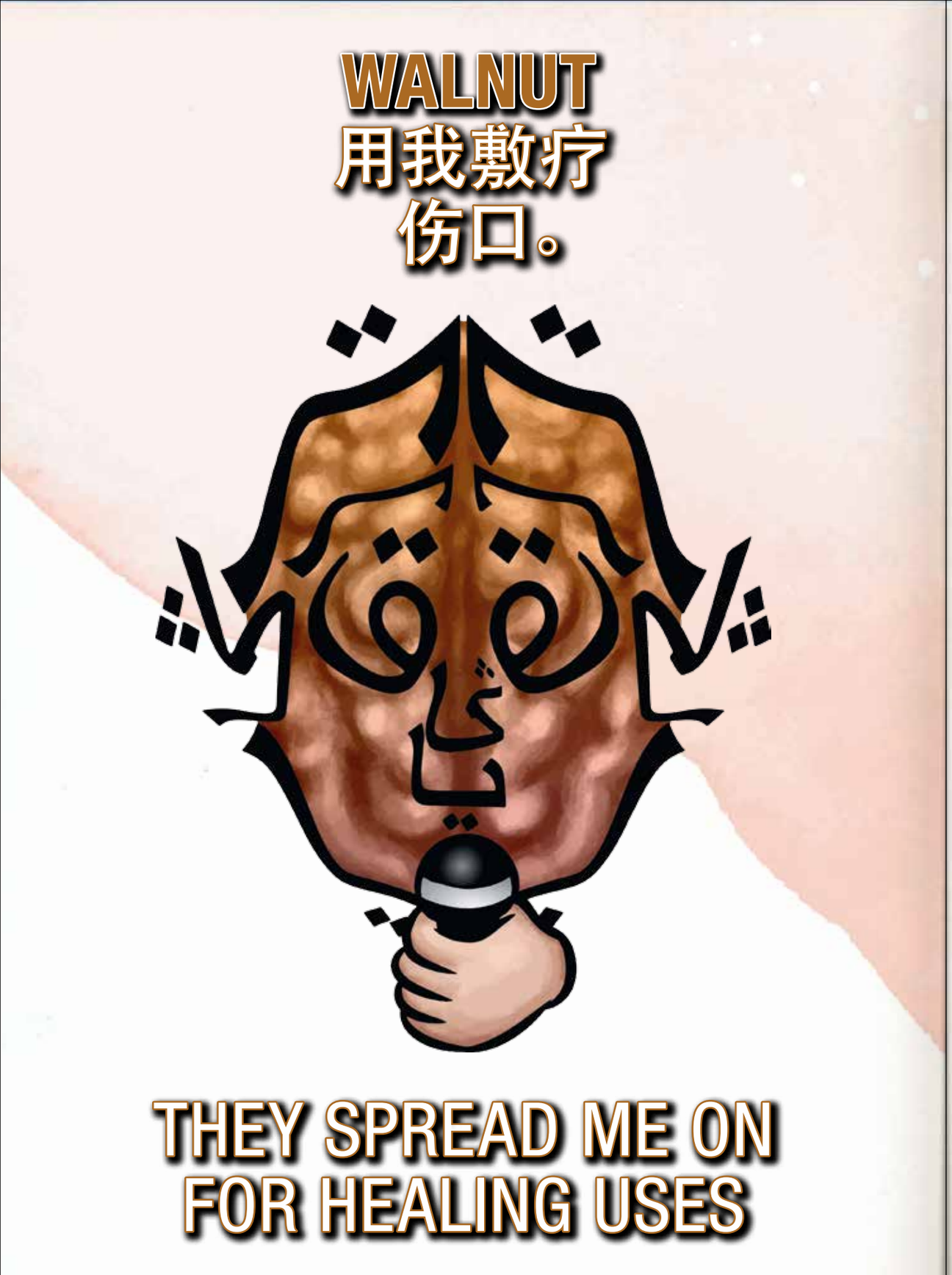
NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

In this book we have used common English names for well-known toponyms (e.g., Hotan) and have striven to remain consistent in our transliteration of other terms (such as meshrep). The history of multilingualism and successive language reforms in the Uyghur region—documented in the essays included herein—inevitably renders any such effort fraught with disputes and potential controversies. On this we adopt the venerable attitude of a Muslim qadi: Allahu aʿlam, God is the Most-Knowing.

GRAPE
公正地
看看我



LOOK AT ME
HONESTLY



INTRODUCTION

EDS. GUANGTIAN HA & SLAVS AND TATARS

Before anyone else,
your leaves droop and fade
All of a sudden
you've got no shade
—Apricot to Mulberry in
The Contest of the Fruits

In this orchard, I'm the boss
'cause my face is red and gloss
—Pomegranate to Walnut in
The Contest of the Fruits

The Contest of the Fruits is a seven-minute animated film adapted by Slavs and Tatars from the eponymous Uyghur poem. It stages a form of verbal dispute between two or more battling sides known as a *munāẓara* (more below).[1] Translated into English by Gunnar Jarring in 1936, this particular munāẓara is written in verse and peppered with proverbs and aphorisms. We do not know when Uyghur authors first began to adopt this literary form, but records show that fragments of munāẓara existed in the Eastern Turkish world as early as the eleventh century.[2] The genre has a complex origin that combines Arabic and Persian, as well as Sumerian and Syriac literary traditions. In Arabic the term means disputation, altercation, or competition, and is derived from the verb *nāẓara*, which means "to be equal." The opposing parties in a munāẓara are thus considered to be on the same level, so the victor is determined entirely by poetic competence.

Transcribed in the nineteenth century, the Uyghur munāẓara that lies at the heart of this project resembles a rap battle between fruits who expose major and minor differences between each other as they boast and dish out insults. The speakers "battle" without ever defending themselves against the witty put-downs from the other fruits; instead, they pile on, one on top of the other. The momentum picks up with each round, the pace quickening as the length of the rebuttal shortens. *The Contest of the Fruits* reads as though the fruits are collectively, insistently working toward some final resolution —or an orgiastic culmination of scandalous joy—by channeling social aggression.[3]

RUBBERY RESISTANCE

The Uyghur region has a strong tradition of mixing satire and the sacred. Known for his deft ruses and holy wit, the wise-man-cum-fool and folk hero Nasreddin goes by different honorifics across the Muslim world: Juḥā in the Arab world, Molla in the Persianate, and Afanti/Effendi/Ependi in the Uyghur region and China. Lesser known outside Central Asia but equally pan-regional is Bābā Raḥīm Mashrab

1. For the sake of orthographic consistency, in this introduction we use *munāẓara* to refer to the literary genre to which "The Contest of the Fruits" belongs. It must be noted that the same term in Persian and Turkic, not to mention Uyghur, is often transliterated as *munazara*. By using the transliteration of the Arabic term, our intention, apart from stylistic concerns, is to demonstrate the historical interpenetration of the Arabic, Persian, and Turkic literary traditions—an interpenetration that is increasingly under threat from empires, states, and some ideologically committed nationalists alike.
2. E. Wagner, "Munāẓara," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 2021): http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5507.
3. Throughout this publication we refer to the artistic project and publication with italics and the nineteenth-century poem in quotation marks. In citing the modernized rap, we use italics to indicate its place within the artistic project.

(1653–1711), a poet, mystic, and wandering Sufi who studied from a young age in Kashgar and served under Afaq Khoja, a religious and political leader who helped advance the spread of Sufi orders to China. Mashrab was an antinomian figure par excellence, whose hagiography includes episodes of scatology, genital mutilation, impudence, and nonsense.



Slavs and Tatars, ***Who are you?***, 2021, vacuum-formed plastic, acrylic paint, 64 × 91 cm.

At age seven, shortly after his circumcision, Mashrab was sent to school and taught the alphabet. The teacher asked the boy to pronounce the letter *a* (*alif*), which he duly did. When asked to pronounce *b* (*ba*), Mashrab answered instead, "Do you know what *alif* means? Why say ba?"

The teacher retorted:
"What do you think *alif* means?"

Mashrab replied,
"*Alif* means the One, that's why I won't say *ba*, it would be a sin."[4]

Just as Mashrab knew no home, wandering across Khorasan throughout his life, he also deliberately, outlandishly flouted conventions, social norms, and the like. This radical practice partly originated in the ninth century with the Malāmatiyya ("People of the Blame"), a group who constantly reminded the public of their imperfections, hid their piety, and lowered themselves. Originating also in Central Asia, the Malāmatiyya insistence on self-blame and pious hypocrisy can seem a world away from the bluster of our boisterous fruits. Alas, they both share a desire to test the limits of acceptability, via an unlikely alchemy of the absurd and the holy.[5]

Governments of course prefer to define down the practice and understanding of faith, yet codifying and regulating the expression of spiritual conviction is not easy, as religion is by definition slippery and elusive. Religious bodies often willingly cooperate, opting for the regulated and controlled, if not consensual, over the heterodoxical, wily nature of certain faith-based practices. Such disparate contemporary examples as Russia, Israel, France, and Iran all hew to a sadly similar script: when the secular and the holy collide, it leads to a hardening of positions, dogmas, and blows. We, on the other hand, are not looking to crystallize the sacred; we come not for amethyst and quartz, but, rather, rubber. A rubbery ability is often found in syncretic cultures; we prefer the term "the metaphysical splits": the splits of the mind, not only of the legs.[6] The attempt to wrap each cerebral lobe around multiple seemingly opposite, sometimes simply stubborn ideas.

From literature to liturgy, religion to ritual, Uyghurs demonstrate the

4. Alexandre Papas, *Mystiques et Vagabonds en Islam: Portraits de Trois Soufis Qalandar* (Paris: Cerf, 2010), 33–34.

5. In another episode, harking back to Nasreddin, Mashrab mounts his donkey backward. A mollah taps him on the back of his neck and reproaches him, "You dope, you're in violation of sharia by climbing your donkey backward!" Mashrab replies, "All these mollahs follow me, and in order not to be impolite by having my back face them, I ride the donkey backwards," Papas, *Mystiques et Vagabonds*, 116.

6. Derived from the Greek *synkrētismos*, the word has origins in ancient alliances (*syn* means together, *krēt* means Cretan) and, more generally, refers to a coalition of communities (*synkretizein* means to combine against a common enemy).



Imam Äskär shrine near Yarkand, Uyghur Autonomous Region in western Xinjiang, 2013.

importance of resilience as resistance against coordinated and aggressive attempts of erasure. Islam in the Uyghur region carries many examples of spillage into neighboring faiths, not to mention distinct chronologies. Stretching from one region to another, one timescale to another. Collapsing space and time, like Catherine the Great straddling from Saint Petersburg to Constantinople, or what the Russians wistfully called Tsargrad. A Turkic people with a majority living within China's borders, the Uyghurs face increasingly hostile and systematic attempts to drown them out with a sanctioned, Han-centric culture. Many of the contributions to this volume return in one way or another to the idea of elasticity, which allows people to stretch into the past in order to resist and absorb present assaults. Just as the margins are understood as a threat to the centers of governance, agility might act as kryptonite to the supposed superpowers of the state, which require a definable target to demonize and vanquish. The elasticity of Uyghur culture is evident in the extensive network of *mazārs* (shrines) and rituals of pilgrimage, which demonstrate an ability to navigate between saint worship, local forms of animism, and Sufi chains of cultural and spiritual transmission known as *silsilah* (سِلْسِلَة). Likewise, the Uyghur *tazkirahs*, or hagiography manuscripts, honor a diverse cast of saints: from a Persian literary hero (Siyāvush), to a Qarakhanid prince (Satuq Bughra Khan), to Shi'a imams (*al-Mahdi*).[7] The Chinese government's methodical

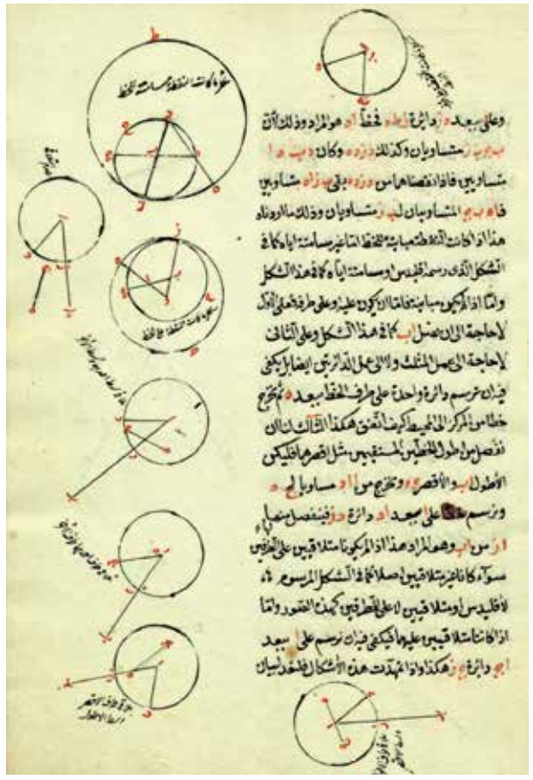
7. Rian Thum, *The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

assault on expressions of Uyghur identity, immaterial and material alike, including shrines such as Imam Asim and Ordam, urges us to reclaim the political (if not martial) origins of syncretism.

The current volume is one in a constellation of collaborations between Slavs and Tatars and Haverford College's Hurford Center and Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery; Twelve Gates Arts, Philadelphia; and the Philadelphia Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations. The project, generously funded by the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, explores humor, surveillance, and alphabets, among other aspects of Uyghur culture, with contributions by scholars, artists, critics, poets, and musicians. Particular attention is given to the oral tradition, as legacy and practice, especially in trying times—when the spoken word, as opposed to the message recorded and transmitted via digital media, becomes a form of resistance. As we have stated above, this tradition of the spoken word—from poetry to versified prose—represents a glorious strain of religious syncretism increasingly marginalized in a world fixated on inelastic ideological purities.

"THE CONTEST OF THE FRUITS" AS A SYNCRETIC MUNĀẒARA

There are two main types of munāẓara: the irreverent, playful dialogue (as exemplified by "The Contest of the Fruits") and the theological, philosophical disputation (as relates to a cognate genre, *mujādala*, meaning argument or quarrel). The latter kind of *munāẓara* can be fairly technical; and as the methods of debate evolved, the literature guiding those involved in a theological *munāẓara* became more coherent and refined. By the fourteenth century, a discipline



Mūsā ibn Muhammad Qādī Zadah, ***Sharḥ ashkāl al-ta'sīs***, a mathematics manuscript commenting on the *Ashkāl al-ta'sīs* by Shams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, 1413.

called *ādāb al-baḥth wa-al-munāẓara*, or the etiquette of inquiry and disputation, emerged. Greek logic was combined with Islamic theology to produce an ever more elaborate art of debate. Among those who perfected these techniques is Shams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī (ca. 1250–1310), whose *nisba* indicates that he (or his family) came from Samarkand, now part of Uzbekistan.[8]

An influential manual about the art of munāẓara, attributed to sixteenth-century Ottoman scholar Ṭaşköprüzade, provides a classic definition of the genre: "an insightful examination by two opposing sides concerning two things so that truth

8. Abdessamad Belhaj, "Adab Al-Bahth Wa-Al-munazara: The Neglected Art of Disputation in Later Medieval Islam," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (2016): 291–307.

can be revealed. Each side is to do his job and conform to etiquette."[9] This legalistic pursuit of fact through dialogue is a far cry from the first type of munāẓara, which is impertinent, mischievous, and more concerned with entertainment and catharsis than thesis and proof. "The Contest of the Fruits" has next to nothing to do with long-faced theological disputes or the dry business of Aristotelian syllogism. In the foreword to an early exemplar of the lighter variety of munāẓara, illustrious ninth-century Arab man of letters Al-Jāḥiẓ writes:

> Indeed, each kind of knowledge has a people that follow it and prefer it, and indeed the types of knowledge that exist are far too many to enumerate. Among them is lucid sense, and among them is foolish nonsense. [It is somewhat unfortunate] that when the topic of a speech is such that it causes laughter and amusement, and enters into the door of jesting, then [more often than not] foolery is replaced by sense and [lo and behold—] inverted is its nature. Then the words that were supposed to bring joy to the souls now cause them sorrow and distress.[10]

In the same work Al-Jāḥiẓ argues that a clear separation of sense from nonsense is tenable, and that nonsense serves only to relax those who have endured so much sensible discourse. He recounts an example from early Islam when Alī, the son-in-law of Muhammad (and, later, the fourth caliph of Islam), paid a visit to some conceited nobilities in Baṣra. "Who are these people in these houses?" Alī reputedly asked. "Best of best of the Arabs," came the answer. "Well," continued Alī, "then he whose father has a massive dick will be girded by it." Alī's sharp-witted retort was supposed to be received as a compliment: he was praising the fertility of the fathers of the nobles, and suggesting that such fertility guarantees a large number of children who are to be one another's protection. Yet the compliment was so crass as to qualify for an insult. The artfulness of the statement is that one hardly knows whether it is the one or the other, or both. To an Arab of the seventh century, Alī would appear to have delivered a perfect shutdown: a *jawāb iskātī*, or "silencing rebuttal."

The ridicule and mockery that suffuse "The Contest of the Fruits" have no particular target, even though the fruits are involved in a heated battle for palatable superiority. As a region prized historically for its agriculture, the Uyghur region serves as an orientalist trope of sorts: a lush landscape of fruits (melons and grapes are particularly cherished) populated by a Muslim people. The fruits offer variations on identity, be it among the oasis towns of Central Asia or even, read anachronistically, across the People's Republic of China. The poem is not a conventional joke. In "The Contest of the Fruits," overt humor is traded for witty jesting, and underlying aggression is conducted toward collective jubilation. No one, or perhaps everyone, is the butt of the joke, and thus everybody laughs.

THE POEM AND THE FILM

In adapting "The Contest of the Fruits" for the animated film, we've imagined the competition as the cornucopia of a Uyghur *meshrep*, with a juicy rap battle

9. Arif Syamsuddin, "The Art of Debate in Islam: Textual Analysis and Translation of Taşköprüzāde's *Ādāb al-Baḥth wa-al-Munāẓarah*," *Afkār* 22, no. 1 (2020): 187–216.

10. Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Risā'il Al-Jāḥiẓ*, 2nd vol., ed. Abd al-Salām Muhammad Harūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānajī, 1991), 91.



Grapevines behind **Emin Minaret**, in Turpan, central Xinjiang.

taking the place of the magnificent *muqam*, or traditional songs and dances.[11] The script is an open-ended *munāẓara*: written in rhyming couplets or *masnavī* with a meter known as *ramal maḥdhūf*, or hexameter lines. The fruits are rendered in calligraphic form, with the original Arabic-script Uyghur name providing each fruit's respective body. The Chinese government's assault on the Uyghur language—the language is banned in all educational institutions, from preschool through secondary school—is one on the body, both corporal and spiritual; as such the fruits' forms are an exegetic shout-out to Hurufism, the Sufi doctrine based on the mysticism of letters originating in fourteenth- to fifteenth-century Persia and Anatolia. The setting of the animation is Kashgar, the famed oasis town and Silk Road hub of Altishahr, the core Uyghur region predominantly known today as Xinjiang. A cast of fruits brag about their beauty, popularity, and medicinal qualities; they call each other out as poseurs, windbags, and has-beens. But there is no truth to be validated, no hierarchy to be enshrined, no outsider to be banished. The battle is an expression of the rambunctious pluralism that animates Uyghur culture, and that hinges on the nonstop exchange of ideas, stories, and creeds—not to mention berries, nuts, and legumes.

In the film, a compilation of brutal shutdowns—a torrent of aggression that doubles as a sign of conviviality—is delivered in unforgiving poetry. The lines are voiced by the rapper Nashtarr

11. See Rachel Harris's essay in this volume as well as her *The Making of a Musical Canon in Chinese Central Asia: The Uyghur Twelve Muqam* (London: Routledge, 2008) and Nathan Light, *Intimate Heritage: Creating Uyghur Muqam Song in Xinjiang* (Berlin: Lit, 2008).

(aka Young Nash), a diaspora Uyghur performer like many of his compatriots, who modernized and adapted the original verses. (The film is subtitled in Mandarin and English.) Paradoxically, as the battle progresses, as each contestant is in turn silenced by the next, the munāẓara gains force and momentum:

> These walnut's words,
> heard the pomegranate,
> And all at once he couldn't stand it.
> He came up, couldn't let it pass,
> And stepped up to the fight so fast:
> "They skin you and they strip you,
> "They're laughing as they ditch you.
> "I am the heart's desire!
> "Everyone who sees me is a sigh-er.
> "In this orchard, I'm the boss,
> "'Cause my face is red and gloss!
> "But I'll say no more,
> "Now I've done my chore."
>
> The jujube heard his telling,
> And he ran up yelling:
> "Oh, pomegranate, bless!
> "Maybe you should talk less.
> "Your face is blushing;
> "You did too much gushing.
> "They break you into pieces;
> "You're a frail fool.
> "I'm a rare jewel,
> "A healing tool!"

The quarrels of the fruits are heated, but none of them deign to return the put-downs; they let the following fruits pick a fight. There is aggression, yet no one takes offense. No final resolution is in sight, no victim singled out. In this collective celebration of words, we sense of course a ribbing of the more staid, scholarly Muslim debates, but also perhaps a distant echo of the Platonic symposium, where love is debated and which, incidentally, is also closed by the witty/foolish remark of an Alcibiades who bumped in, drunken and reckless. As a model for discourse, "The Contest of the Fruits" resembles a perverted version of the bourgeois public sphere. In classical formulation the latter is a cold-headed rational level field where sensible words and coherent reason reign supreme. Its apparent openness, however, is predicated on a concatenation of exclusions: it is a funfair—sans fun though—of heterosexual propertied men for whom speaking and arguing



Uyghur rapper **Nashtarr** aka Young Nash, still from the official music video for his track 谢帝.

ought to take specified, codified forms. The exchange of free reason ironically presupposes a profusion of oppression and unfreedom—a stark contrast to the spirit of our quarrelling fruits.[12] Have bourgeois politics been a mishap, an unfortunate misunderstanding, a dreary perversion of a mode of argumentation and identification that is much more irreverent, creative, lively, and unconstrained (despite the conventions of language and etiquette)? As we stretch our faces and scratch our heads, as we acknowledge that fact-checking seems utterly powerless in the face of disinformation and conspiracy theories, as we imagine politics remade in the image of the munāẓara, the fruits laugh and banter on.

LESS LAUGHTER, LESS LIGHT

Overexposure is the curse of our times. White light beams out of our screens, a mesmeric echo of the white walls of museums and galleries. The regimes of transparency ushered in by modernity have found renewed mana with the increasing turn to surveillance, be it state or corporate. One could be forgiven for thinking that the increase in blind spots is a mere byproduct of an obsession with transparency, a side effect, indicated by a warning in small type, of the narcotic of lucidity. The words of the philosopher Norman O. Brown, trolling the founder of modern public relations, Edward Bernays, ring true: "Mysteries are intrinsically esoteric, and as such are an offense to democracy: is not publicity a democratic spirit?"[13]

Ironically, an excess of exposure might allow people to resist, maneuver, and breathe, even in the centers of power, under the noses of the authorities, as suggested by the Uyghur saying, *Chiraq tüwi qarangghu* ("It is dark near the lamp"). Where the light is brightest, indirect modes of expression—satire, rumor, gossip, jokes—are key: they pave generous, heuristic lanes that facilitate both hard-hitting criticism and plausible deniability.[14]



Slavs and Tatars, ***The Alphabet*** (*Uyghur kril yéziqi*), 2021, vacuum-formed plastic, acrylic paint, 64 × 91 cm.

In addition to oiling the wheels of resilience, humor—from the lighter, whiter variants to the heavier, darker ones—enables people to maintain an enchantment with the world, especially when faced with repeated, regular attacks on hope. "The stubborn enchantedness of the world is perhaps most telling in the parts of the world where the concrete efforts to disenchant it [are] extraordinarily organized and profound," writes Maria Elisabeth Louw in *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia*.[15]

12. In his *Communities of Violence* (1996), David Nirenberg argues against the false dichotomy of tolerance and violence in studies of conviviality and coexistence, notably the medieval Christian kingdoms of the Iberian peninsula.
13. Norman O. Brown, *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1991), 3.
14. In *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985), James C. Scott uses the term *infra-politics* to describe these utterances and acts, which are largely invisible to the public record but are, nevertheless, an important mode of dissent.
15. Maria Elisabeth Louw, *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2007), 53.

Slavs and Tatars has long been interested in the less-lit corners of the world: the edges of empires, the banks of ideologies, the borders of belief systems, wherever a putatively distinct thing, idea, or people is susceptible to spilling into another. Within the admittedly sweeping geographic remit of Slavs and Tatars—the area between the former Berlin Wall and the Great Wall of China—the Uyghurs occupy an important, notably liminal position. One of the first sedentary peoples of the Turkic steppes, they are situated at the furthest point in the Turkic-speaking world from Asia Minor. Nevertheless, theirs is one of the oldest Turkic languages. If modern-day Turkey, with its latinized script and Kemalist heritage (however diluted), is the westward ball in a Newton's cradle of Turkic peoples, then the Uyghurs sit squarely on the eastern edge of the pendulum.

Just as the Caucasus and Central Asia are often overlooked due to their Soviet past, China too often falls outside the self-representation of Muslims. A *ḥadīth* of Prophet Muhammad—"Seek knowledge even as far as China" (اطلبوا العلم ولو في الصين / "*Uṭlubū-l'ilm wa law fī-Ṣin*")[16]—is often cited to demonstrate the importance of science and education in Islam. One would imagine an easy segue into China, given the country's formidable economic strengths in engineering and manufacturing, among others. Yet, such a view occludes China as fecund ground for theological, if not conceptual articulations of Islam. Including the Middle Kingdom —and the over twenty million Muslims

16. This *ḥadīth*, of course, is of questionable origin and often considered *da'īf* (weak) by classical ḥadīth scholars, despite its popularity.

CALLIGRAPHY هۆسنخەت

SLAVS AND TATARS سلاۋز بىلەن تاتارز

Calligraphy is notable in that it is maximalist: it is to be looked at and to be read. It is to be read, but also, or most importantly, read out loud. It is decorative but also instructional.

The history of reading as a collective and oral phenomenon is so long that we don't measure it in years or decades—we need a terminology with far more zeros. Millennia of mass illiteracy were followed by centuries of waiting for print to become affordable.



Hui Masjid Qur'anic text over Mihrab, Huaisheng Mosque, Guangzhou, 1984. Sura 3:19, "Indeed the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam."

From inscriptions on Babylonian stelae to Greek boundary markers to an Akkadian tablet, reading was almost always intended for an audience.[1] Reading as we understand it today —that is, an intimate act performed alone at one's desk, in the train, or in a bathtub—is an infant idea, relatively speaking, not even a toddler one,

1. **Steven Roger Fischer, *A History of Reading* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 11.**

who live there—in the Muslim world is not inflationary, but rather activates the expansive use of regionalism. To do so is to move away from the monolithic conception of a religious community that, at worst, is reduced to the Middle East, and, at best, is defined by the unsavory Cold War acronym MENASA (Middle East, North Africa, South Asia).

THE PUBLICATION

In 2014, Slavs and Tatars created a body of work that hinged on one of the two classics of Turkic literature written in Kashgar: *Kutadgu Bilig* (The Wisdom of Royal Glory), Yusuf Khass Hajib's epic eleventh-century poem, written in Chaghatay, a precursor to modern Uyghur and Uzbek.[17] An astonishing example of the mirror for princes, the medieval genre of advice literature found in Christian and Muslim lands, *Kutadgu Bilig* is written in verse, not prose, which distinguishes the work from most comparable titles (from Ibn al-Muqaffa's *Kalīla wa Dimna* to Ghazali's *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* to Machiavelli's *The Prince*, to name a few). Employing characters with exuberant names such as Highly Praised (a statesman) and Wide Awake (his Sufi sibling, a mystic hermit), the book ponders the perennial debate between seclusion from society and participation in constructing the state. A good portion of the six thousand or so *masnavī* (rhyming couplets) consist of dialogues—a racy departure from Islam's

17. Slavs and Tatars' cycle of work—*Mirrors for Prince*—took *Kutadgu Bilig* as a starting point to examine the secular turn of political science since the Middle Ages. The eponymous exhibition was shown at the Kunsthalle Zürich in 2014, NYU Abu Dhabi, IMA in Brisbane and Blaffer Gallery in 2015. An edited volume of essays exploring the topic was published by JRP|Ringier and NYU Abu Dhabi Art gallery.

a neonate modern notion gaining steam only in the eighteenth century.

To reclaim the collective nature of reading and its performative act in an increasingly atomized world, we need not disavow the written word. To the contrary, the antidote lies in the very poison itself, admittedly an exuberant one, also known as calligraphy.

The letters of the Arabic alphabet have always had a particular importance in Islam, as the divinely revealed text extends both to its content and its form. No mere markings of sounds or phonemes, the letters moonlight as portals to other worlds, a profusion of metaphysical channels that would make Time Warner or Comcast blush. Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, the father of Arabic chemistry, assigned a numerical value to each letter and, depending on its order in the alphabet, one of four natures (hot, wet, cold, dry). Ibn'Arabî conceived of the most extensive science of letters in his *Futūḥāt Makkiyya* (*Illuminations of Mecca*), the most convincing arguments even going so far as to reconcile Greek philosophy and Semitic wisdom via the alphabet. If the universe is a book, a big, fat Qur'an,



Hui Mosque and Mihrab, Jiaxing, Zhejiang province in eastern China, 1985.

emphasis on unicity (*tawḥid*), as found in the monologues of most other Muslim mirrors for princes.

With *The Contest of the Fruits*, we turn to another end of the spectrum of Uyghur literature: satire and oral culture as opposed to the edified canons of statecraft and advice literature. In his contribution to this volume, Alvin Li discusses the phenomenon of rap in China, and the exceptional role of Uyghurs in this distinct part of pop culture. Given the restrictions on Uyghur language and expressions of identity, Li attempts to understand the limits of such soft power when up against a hard, technocratic state. In his careful tracing of the history of rap in China, Li reveals the remarkable, if somewhat odd, phenomenon of Uyghur rappers consistently receiving high acclaim with their multilingual (Chinese, Uyghur, and English) performances.

This translingualism, in particular its historical vicissitudes vis-à-vis the multiple alterations in Uyghur orthography—no doubt reflective of the inter-imperial geography of the Uyghur region—is taken up by David Brophy. In his essay, Brophy outlines a history of script changes in the Uyghur language, and describes how technologies of the past and present inform the politics of the alphabet, which are so crucial to protecting a cultural heritage under siege. In one of the many fascinating examples he offers, we read of another munāẓara, only this time the contestants are no longer juicy fruits, but a European Orientalist and a conservative religious scholar in Bukhara, arguing over the need for Islamic school reform in the early twentieth century. Yet in more recent times, such "reforms" have taken on a decidedly sinister turn, with the Chinese state working consistently to assimilate



Jana Traboulsi, ***Kitab al Hawamesh*** (The Book of Margins), 2017, offset print, 21 × 15 cm, edition 1,000 (cover illustration).

then the book is also a universe: "To speak about one is to speak about the other. Between these two universes—or rather two Books—is the intermediary: a person."[2]

The Kufic script, named after the town of Kufa in Iraq, was the first and only calligraphic style until the eleventh century: its geometric lines make it a favorite of those with a soft spot for strict silhouettes. The arrival of a rounded, cursive script accompanied an attempt to consolidate and fortify a literalist reading of the Qur'an. Ibn Muqla Shirazi is credited with inventing ***thuluth***, a rounded script literally meaning "third." As would be expected, there are at least three interpretations of the name: the third script to appear after Kufic and Muhaqqaq; the smallest width of the letter equals one-third the widest part; or one-third of each letter slopes. Jamal Elias claims this ideological turn accompanied a Sunni-sanctioned version, one aimed to get rid of ambiguity, especially that fostered by the perennial debate between the *zahir* (exoteric) and *batin*

2. Denis Gril, "Introduction," in Ibn'Arabî, *Les Illuminations de La Mecque*, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997), 25.

the Uyghurs into a Han-centric cultural world. "[T]here may eventually be little in the way of Arabic script signage to greet visitors on arrival in Xinjiang," Brophy laments.

This sorrowful tone is borne out in both Elise Anderson's and Darren Byler's texts. Anderson explores the role and impact of both compelled silence and compelled sound in the contemporary Uyghur soundscape, which is circumscribed by surveillance and prohibitions on calls to prayer and even speaking Uyghur. She shows the complex dovetailing of modes of state repression that seek not only to eradicate Uyghur culture, but also to refashion it in the image of a sanctioned ethnic caricature—often a sham that only reinforces the hegemony of Han chauvinism. Byler, working through a comparable conundrum, sees in Uyghur comedy a form of cultural citizenship. He reveals both the transnational genealogies of Uyghur humor and its latest cooptation—though incomplete—by the Chinese state. The emergence of smartphones and new media technologies has created new opportunities as well as engendered new risks. As state repression intensifies, observing how Uyghurs laugh encourages us to rethink the elasticity and limits of satire in extreme political conditions.

Co-editor Guangtian Ha builds on the subject of comedy with an essay on humor as survival and surrender, finding foolishness and satire in unlikely forms, ranging from multilingualism to foraging. And both circle back to the central theme of this volume: a contest between gregarious fruits that speak a language that is more than one. If there is something intrinsically funny about crossing worlds and being polyglots, something by nature



Slavs and Tatars, ***Lektor*** (*speculum linguarum*), 2014–present, multichannel audio, mirrored Plexiglas, speakers, carpet. Installation view at Villa Arson, Nice, 2020.

(esoteric) interpretations. Pointing to the architectural record and epigraphy as proof, Elias references Cairene architecture where the arrival of thuluth occurred only after Fatimid Ismaili rule, and the integration of the region into the wider Sunni world.[3]

Despite the central role of the Qur'an in Islam—arguably the most radical of the three Abrahamic faiths in its emphasis on scripture—oral transmission retains its primacy. Lest we forget, *al-Qur'ān* translates literally as "the Reciting" or "the Recitation." From *qira'at* (the extensive constellation of linguistic, morphological and syntactic rules of recitation) to *tajwid* (the art and elocution of recitation), one begins to understand why the Qur'an, despite being beautifully elaborated and transcribed, is a Book "to be heard rather than read."

Calligraphy is nothing less than an attempt to stretch across the aisle, like a strung out letter *sīn* س /s/ bridging the ostensible divide between what is read and what is spoken, China and Islam. After all, pen and paper first flowed westward from China. The Chinese calligraphic tradition is a distinct one: it should come as no surprise, then, that a particular style of Islamic writing in China, called *ṣīnī* script, would arise in the Ming period.[4] While the letters are often more rounded than the flowing tails of traditional Islamic decorative writing, the inscriptions are often contained in a square,



Mostafa Assadolahi, یک تخیل واقعی / ***yek takhayole vaghei*** (A true imagination), 2018, marker on paper, 15 × 21 cm.



Hui Qur'anic calligraphic art bordering the Mihrab, Yinchuan, Ningxia autonomous region in north west China, 1985. The Al-Isra sura 17:110, "Say, Call upon Allah, or Call upon the Most Merciful."

3. Jamal J. Elias, *Aisha's Cushion: Religious Art, Perception, and Practice in Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 252.

4. Haji Noor Deen Mi Guang Jiang, *Arabic Calligraphy in the Chinese Tradition: The Art of Haji Noor Deen Mi Guang Jiang* (Gansu: Gansu People's Publishing House, 2010).

resilient in such linguistic "splits" that mirror the metaphysical splits characteristic of Slavs and Tatars' work so far, then does comedy offer us a possibility of hope—for our future as much as it is for the future of the Uyghur people?

Interwoven with these essays are short reflections on calligraphy in Islam written by Slavs and Tatars, popular music by Mukaddas Mijit, mäshräp by Rachel Harris, the Sufi tradition of *samāʿ* by Guangtian Ha, and poetry by Fatimah Abdulghafur Seyyah, Köresh Kösen, Abdushükür Muhemmet, Maidina Kadeer, and Munawwar Abdulla. The publication closes with a conversation between poet and filmmaker Tahir Hamut Izgil and Musāpir, the pen name of a Uyghur researcher and media anthropologist based in North America. Diving deep into the literary and historical background that gave rise to the text of "The Contest of the Fruits," in this interview Hamut and Musāpir chart the trajectory of classical Uyghur literature in its imbrication with Arabic, Persian, and Turkic literary traditions, and situate this cosmopolitan outlook in relation to the political vicissitudes of the tumultuous twentieth century.

In fall 2021, an eponymous exhibition at the Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery will debut Slavs and Tatars' first film, the adaptation of "The Contest of the Fruits." A series of public programs, organized in advance of the exhibition and the publication of this volume, considered Uyghur culture with members of the Philadelphia community and the wider world online. The project also included a semester-long seminar on satire and spirituality at Haverford College in spring 2021, as well as a pop-up Bacteria Bar serving ayran at Twelve Gates Arts in Old City Philadelphia in fall 2021.



Façade of the Great Mosque, Huimin District, Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, 1983. The manjis seem to have been the reinforcement struts used by Han builders when the mosque was initially built in 1923. They were removed in the 1990s.*

or a vertical rectangle recalling Chinese, Korean, or Japanese scrolls, and sometimes a diamond, a forty-five degree variation on the square.[5] One could see in calligraphy an aggregate of sorts, that is, a collision of distinct, heterogeneous elements into a unified mass. The Arabic alphabet is used for several languages beyond Arabic itself: Persian, Swahili, and Hausa in central Africa, Harari in Ethiopia, Bosnian and even Belarussian. If we consider that the aesthetically ornate forms of calligraphy are meant to be performed, read aloud or to oneself, then we have an aggregate of languages and registers: affective, discursive, textual, and oral. The word for calligraphy in Arabic is *khatt* or trace, a fitting one given the role of calligraphy.

* See Dai Lin, "The Construction and Expansion of the Great Mosque, 1923–1925," in *Hohhot Huizu Shiliao* (Inner Mongolia Renmin Chubanshe, 2000): 286–87.

5. The Australian National University, "Islamic Calligraphy in China," *China Heritage Newsletter*, March 2006, http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/features.php?searchterm=005_calligraphy.inc&issue=005.

NINETY-SIX توقسان ئالته

MAIDINA KADEER مەدىنە قادىر

a blue painted city between once
taintless ethereal mountains—
north-west up there, stuffed in between
the now crowded streets
where she had once imagined her
great-grandmother's yurt could be.

on the twenty-seventh of May 1996,
rain poured softly onto the earth.
the giver, gave birth in the shadows
of four derelict, cement walls.
she heard the tune in their voices when
they said existing was resisting.
so the givers legs spread, pushing for
seventy-two hours,
as she had done for seven years past,
and seven years to come.
she pushed for life, waiting for a cry
louder than the streets.

slick with sweat, patched with dried tears stiff
on her silken skin,
the giver pushed to the sound of bitter clouds.
at three-thirty in the afternoon when I,
with my thick black hair,
held onto her pale crooked fingers—
she remembered then,
how I too would be defined by the
caramel dirt and poppy red blood
on gulja's streets.

she says I came crying for a home,
in ninety-six it all came with a storm.

MELON

你们若
已知晓



WHEN THEY KNOW,
THEY TESTIFY

ئۇيغۇر يېزىقىنىڭ ئۆزگىرىشى ۋە تەقدىرى

دېيۇد بروفي

ئۇيغۇر يېزىقىنىڭ ئون تۆتىنجى ئەسىردىن باشلاپ ئارقا-ئارقىدىن ئۆزگىرىشى ئىنتايىن ئاز سۆزلىنىدىغان ئەمما يەنىلا دۇنيا تارىخىنىڭ بىر قىسمىنى ئەكس ئەتتۈرۈپ بېرىدىغان بىر ئەھۋال. مەزكۇر ماقالىدە دېيۇد بروفي بۇ ئۆزگىرىشلەرنىڭ تىل ، مەدەنىيەت ۋە سىياسىي جەھەتتىكى مەنىلىرى ئۈستىدە ئىزدىنىدۇ، شۇنداقلا ئۆتمۈشتىكى ۋە ھازىرقى ئەرەب، پارس، تۈرك، كرىل ۋە ئۇيغۇر يېزىقلىرىنىڭ مۇرەككەپ ئىملا ئوبرازلىرى ۋە پەرقلىرىنى ئېنىقلايدۇ.

THE CHANGING FACE AND FATE OF UYGHUR WRITING

David Brophy

Dual-language signage in the Uyghur Region. This sign reads “创建平安肖尔巴格乡” (Create a safe Shorbagh Township). In the years since, many dual-language signs have been scrubbed, removing messages in Uyghur.

Arabic script signage is one of the first sights to strike any visitor arriving in Xinjiang from the Chinese interior, signaling their entry into a land tied to Islam for the last millennium. But should that visitor take a second glance, it will reveal a more complicated picture of a writing system some steps removed from its Arabic origins. While on the one hand linking the region to its religious traditions, today’s Uyghur script also reflects its engagement with



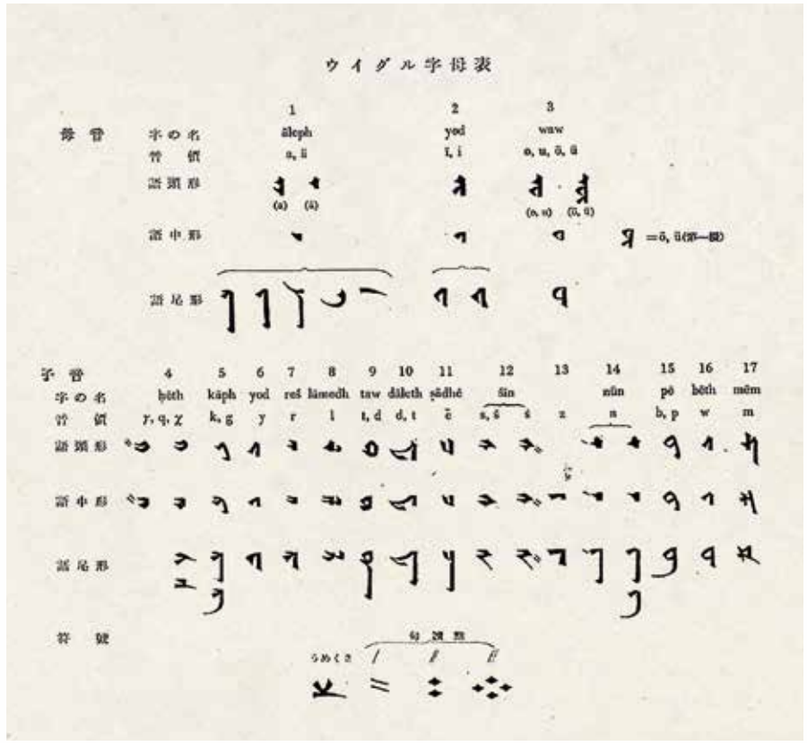
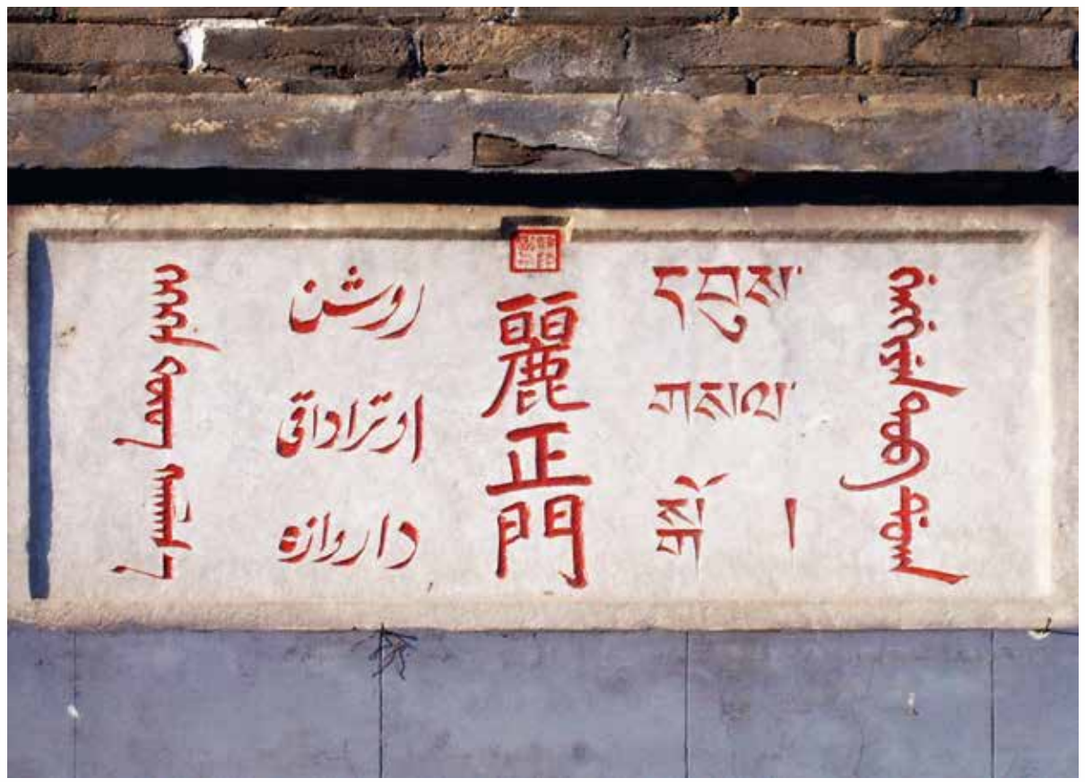


Table of Old Uyghur letters used in the Uyghur text of the multi-script Yuan dynasty inscriptions at Juyongguan (居庸關) pass at the Great Wall northwest of Beijing, built 1342–1345.

a flurry of modernist linguistic invention in the early twentieth century, and a sequence of script changes driven by political winds in both the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (PRC). The experience has made the distinctive script an important symbol of both religious and national identity for today's Uyghurs. These identities, of course, are very much in the sights of the Chinese Communist Party today. With their language now being marginalized and denigrated by new policies to assimilate Xinjiang's non-Han population to national, Chinese norms, the transmission of the Uyghur writing system is likewise facing a severe challenge. Sadly, should these trends continue, there may eventually be little in the way of Arabic script signage to greet visitors on arrival in Xinjiang.

THE "SCRIPT OF THE MULLAS"

The Tarim Basin, home of the Uyghurs, has always been a polyglot region with multiple coexisting scripts. In the sands of the Turfan oasis, philologists have discovered ancient manuscripts in as many as twenty different writing systems. Arabic script has likely



→
Lizhengmen, main gate of Qianlong's Summer Palace in Chengde, 1754. The name is engraved on the plaque in five languages (from left to right): Mongolian, Uyghur, Traditional Chinese, Tibetan, and Manchu. The Chinese characters are the imperial inscription of Qianlong.

سەبر قىلسا،
غوربدىن ھالۋا
پۈتەر.



If one has patience one can make *halva* of unripe fruit.

been present here since as early as the eighth century, and the earliest Turkic documents in Arabic script date to the Qarakhanid dynasty of the tenth and eleventh centuries. At that time, the horizontal, right-to-left Arabic functioned alongside the vertical Old Uyghur script (which now survives only for Mongolian and Manchu in China), and this Old Uyghur script may have had some influence on local Arabic orthography. Elsewhere, in Anatolia for example, adaptations of Arabic to write Turkic tended to follow Arabic principles and use diacritic marks to indicate short vowels. In Central Asia, by contrast, short vowels were written out in full, as they are in Old Uyghur (cf. *turur* "he is" in Old Anatolian Turkish تُرُر vs. Qarakhanid تورور).

The question of how exactly to write the Turkic language of the sedentary people of the Tarim Basin wasn't always as complicated as it is today. While striving for accuracy in their spelling of Arabic and Persian words, authors and copyists were not particularly fastidious in the way they represented the Turkic element of the new literary language that came to maturity in the post-Mongol period, that is, from the fourteenth century onward. Linguists call this language Chaghatay, but until the twentieth century, most locals referred to it as Turki. Chaghatay was a

written language, not a representation of the spoken word. If, as was often the case, a text was to be recited, the reciter would be able to vocalize what they were reading in their own way. This unity amid diversity made authors from the principality of Hami in the east, to the khanate of Khiva and the Volga region in the west, members of a common literary field.

Written in the flowing Nastaliq hand that was common across Central Asia, an elite form of this Chaghatay literary language was sustained in Islamic centers of learning, the madrasas of cities like Kashgar and Yarkand, where Turkic authors like Alisher Nava'i (1441–1501) were studied alongside Persian and Arabic classics. A more popular form of the language, written with less calligraphic care and attention to the niceties of spelling, was represented in the copying and circulation of shrine legends, guild manuals known as risalas, and popular literature. It is to this category that "The Contest of the Fruits" belongs, written in the traditional orthography that some Uyghurs refer to as *molla yéziqi* ("script of the mullas").

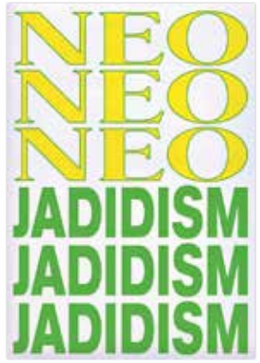
During Qing rule in Xinjiang (1756–1912), linguistic authority continued to reside in the madrasa, sustained by the courtly patronage of a new Qing Muslim aristocracy. Alongside this, though, we see the beginnings of an alternative tradition taking form in the Qing bureaucracy, where translators lacking a madrasa education inserted their language into the multilingual culture of Qing administration. Influenced first by Mongolian, then Manchu, and finally Chinese, the result was a form of "translationese" that was quite different from Chaghatay standards, and unique to the region. Although probably more a product of poor literacy than deliberate design, some features of texts in this tradition would become standardized in the twentieth century. We find here, for example, the representation of both long and short vowels in certain Arabic and Persian words. Had this bureaucratic register come to supplant madrasa norms, modern Uyghur might look quite different, but these Qing experiments never evolved into a new standard for a distinctly local form of Turkic.

Never as invested in communicating in Turkic as they were in Tibetan and Mongolian, Qing officials took little interest in the language and literature of Xinjiang. They did, however, include descriptions of Xinjiang's script in administrative handbooks. The earliest of these is glowing in its admiration of the intricacies of Arabic letters and diacritic marks:

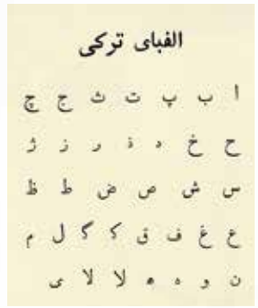
> Each letter can be modified by three signs to represent four different sounds … The letters themselves, plus the three modifications, thus combine to produce 112 letters. These can then be combined into 1,792 symbols. These combinations involve placing one letter beside another, or joining them, so as to complete the form and produce the meaning. Among the more than 1,000 letter combinations, what can be combined and the sounds they can produce is indeed a mystery! The most difficult thing to grasp is that words can have the same form but vary in sound, or may have the same sound but differ in meaning … It is truly the height of literary subtlety and complexity![1]



A 16th century Herat School miniature of **Mir Alisher Nava'i** (میر علی شیر نوایی, 1441–1501), also known as Nizam ad-Din Mir Alisher Nava'i (نظام الدین علی شیر نوایی). He was born into an educated and wealthy Uyghur bakhshi family in Herat. He is considered the most important poet of Chaghatay literature.



Despite its often anti-clerical nature, the reform impulse of Jadidism came from within Islam.



Page from ***Alifba-yi Turki*** (Turki Alphabet) by Ahmet Kemal.

This account is exceptional though; most Qing officials were dismissive of Muslim traditions of learning. By the end of the dynasty, confusion had even crept into Qing discussions as to whether the Arabic script was written from right to left or left to right.[2]

SCRIPT REFORM AND REVOLUTION

In 1909, Bukharan author Abdurauf Fitrat made use of the same genre as "The Contest of the Fruits"—*the munāẓara*—to stage a debate between a European Orientalist and a conservative religious scholar in Bukhara. Their fictional debate centered on the question of school reform, but in urging his interlocutor to change with the times, the Orientalist pointed to the evolution of Arabic script: "During the time of the Prophet and his companions the Qur'an was written in Kufic script on the shoulder blades of sheep. For a long time now they have been writing it on paper in the naskh script because it is easier, and still the sky has not fallen down. The question of studies is the same."[3]

Fitrat's debate was a manifesto in the cultural reform movement known as Jadidism. While advertising itself as a more effective method for learning Arabic, Jadidist schooling also elevated the "mother tongue" from its relatively lowly status in relation to Arabic and Persian. In the Tarim Basin, this led to a certain standardization of the local language, though without radical change to the script at first. The first linguistic textbook for reformed schools in Xinjiang was by a Turkish pedagogue, Ahmet Kemal, who was invited to open a school in Artush, outside Kashgar, during World War I. His *Turki Alphabet* represented little in the way of innovation on the manuscript tradition, adding only the distinction between ک *k* and گ *g*. The letter g was obviously available to the work's publishers in Orenburg, but may not have been at Kashgar's one and only printing press at the time, run by Swedish missionaries: their 1929 guide to orthography exhibits

1. Yunggui (?), *Xiyu Zhi*, Russian State Library, Department of Manuscripts, ca. 1765, no. 287/445/1–3.
2. See, for example, Shache Fuzhi, in *Zhongguo xibei xijian fangzhi xu ji* (Beijing: Zhonghua quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 1997), 10:645.
3. Abdurauf Fitrat, "Debate Between a Teacher from Bukhara and a European," trans. by William L. Hanaway, in *Modernist Islam, 1840–1940: A Sourcebook*, ed. Charles Kurzman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 253.

the same classical form of the script, but lacks the *g*. It is hard to say just how influential Kemal's book was: his school was soon shut down by provincial authorities who were wary of foreign influences on the local population.[4]

Works like these would be immediately legible to an Uzbek from northern Afghanistan, whose language continues to be written in the traditional script—the only such surviving in the world today. But they look old-fashioned to Uyghurs, who inherit the legacy of script reform initiatives that were beginning to emanate from the Russian Empire in this period.

Along with Xinjiang's Kirghiz and Kazakh scripts, today's Uyghur is the last surviving example of what was once a trans-Eurasian enterprise—to transform Arabic into a writing system scientifically suited to the sounds of Turkic languages, by adapting what is in essence a set of consonants into a system more resembling a Western-style alphabet. While retaining the "look and feel" of Arabic, this was a radical departure that would render much of Central Asia's classical heritage illegible in its original form. It set in motion decades of furious debate surrounding the choice of script, correct spelling, and of course, the most authentically Uyghur lexicon, all of which make the modern Uyghur language a visual repository of Eurasia's complex political history.

The fashioning of new scripts for the Turkic languages of Russia commenced with the proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries, and linguistic recordings made by Russian Orientalists. From the late nineteenth century onward, modernist Muslim intellectuals in Russia (as in Anatolia and Iran) became convinced of the inadequacies of the existing Arabic script and seized on the idea of modifying it to better represent the peculiarities of their own native Turkic. New communications technologies, particularly the proliferation of industrial printing presses in Muslim lands, also inspired innovation in linguistic representation.

Politically, the impetus here led in two, at times contradictory, directions. Some emphasized the possibility of constructing a common literary language for all Turkic-speaking peoples, advocating a lexical and orthographic middle ground. At the same time, some budding nationalists embraced the romantic notion that the living language of the village best expressed the national essence and set out to bring the written language into line with the spoken, ruling out any possibility of unity across the expanse of the Russian empire and beyond.

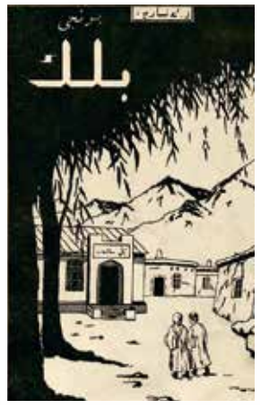
In the wake of the 1917 Russian Revolution, these trends made themselves felt among Muslim émigrés from Xinjiang living in the Semirech'e region of today's Kazakhstan, who then went by the name "Taranchi" (a term for Uyghurs from the Ili Valley).

ئادەم گۈلدىن نازۇك، تاشتىن قاتتىق.

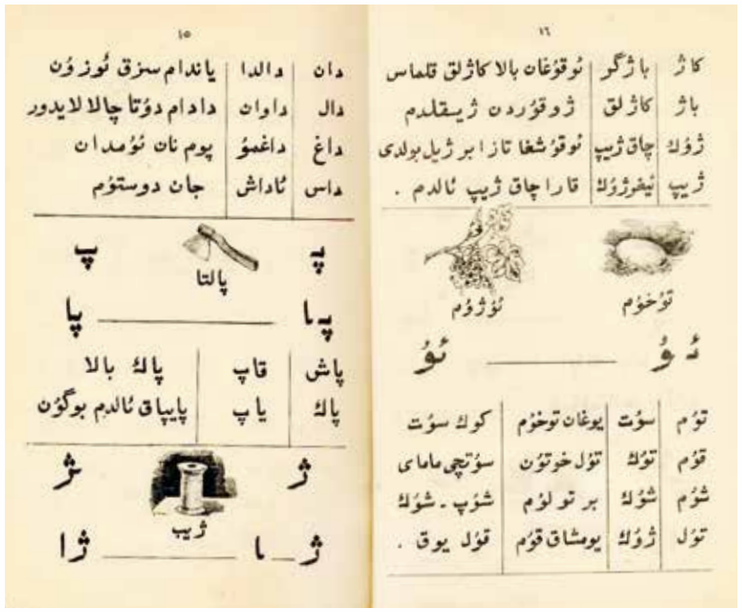


Man is more delicate than flowers and harder than stones.

4. Ahmet Kemal Habibzade, *Alifba-yi Turki* (Orenburg: Vaqït Maṭbuʿasï, 1915); *Kitab-i ʿIlm-i Imla* (Kashgar: Swedish Mission Press, 1929).



Birinchi Bilik cover and spread by Letip Ensari.



Influenced by radical Tatar intellectuals, the early 1920s was a time of cultural revolution among a minority of pro-Bolshevik Taranchis, who launched new publications in the "Taranchi language" with an orthography that embraced the principle of phonetic spelling. One of its distinctive features was to simply drop consonants that were not articulated (writing the plural suffix *-lar*, for example, as *-la*). A second prototype for the language of Xinjiang was put forward by Letip Ensari in Tashkent in 1924.[5] His system looks strange to us today, including a diacritical *wāw* above an unpointed tooth (بٗ) to represent *i* [ɪ], and above *yād* (بٖ) for the closed vowel *é* [e]. Moscow provided a third center for linguistic experimentation. Abdulhey Muhemmedi's 1926 *Methods of Writing Uyghur* presented a model that distinguished most, if not all, vowels in the Uyghur language. His system, for example, recommended the use of و for *o* [o], وٗ for *u* [u], and وٖ for both *ö* [ø] and *ü* [ʏ].[6] Finally, a fourth position was taken by Kashgaris in the Ferghana Valley, who insisted on a more faithful representation of the underlying morphology of words.

By the middle of the decade both Taranchi and Kashgari Communists were endorsing the need for a common "Uyghur" language, reflecting the consolidation of modern Uyghur nationalism among activists hoping to carry the revolution into Xinjiang. Nevertheless, they remained at odds on how to actually write this language. Almaty radicals attacked the Kashgaris for reproducing Uzbek spelling. The Kashgaris in turn criticized Almaty's phonetic spelling as too specific to their Taranchi dialect, and likely to be incomprehensible to people in Xinjiang. Amid the

5. Letip Ensari, *Birinchi Bilik* (Tashkent: Örta Aziya davnashr, 1924).
6. Abdulhey Muhemmedi, *Uyghurche Yéziq Yolliri* (Moscow: Tsentral'noe izdatel'stvo narodov SSSR, 1926).


ت ك پا پتتى سر ولايت كامپتى تاندىكى اويغور
كامونيستلەرى سىكسيەلەرى ھەم اويغور كامونيست پاشلارى
ولايت بيورالارينك ناشير ئەكارى
„КЕМБЕГЕЛЛЕР-АВАЗИ"
(Голос бедноты)
Орган Облбюро Уйгкомсекции при Джетысуйском Облгоркоме К. П. Т. и Облбюро Уйгкоммолодежи.
Адр.: Алматы, редакция «Кембегелер Авази»
كەمبەغەللەر آوازى
كامونيستارانچى تليە مەخسۇس گەزيت.

Voice of the Poor (Kembegheller Awazi), Uyghur newspaper published in Almaty from 1921–1932.

fierce polemics, though, certain standards were established that bring us part of the way to today's modern Uyghur. Some, but not all, redundant Arabic consonants were lost, with traditional spellings of Arabic words discarded in favor of more phonetic representations; initial vowels were preceded by the distinctive "hamza on a tooth" (ئ); short vowels were almost always written in all words, with the use of the Arabic letter *hā* ھ for *e* [æ]; the new letter ڭ was introduced for *ng* [ŋ] (previously written as نک). But differences remained, both within and between factions, as intellectuals vied for the mantle of linguistic orthodoxy. Not infrequently, editors of Soviet Uyghur publications simply threw up their hands and printed articles as they were submitted *öz imlasi bilen* ("in their own orthography").

In the late 1920s, at a time when unity on the reformed Arabic script was still far from achieved, the much-heralded campaign to Latinize the languages of Central Asia reset the debate. Latinization, "a great revolution in the East" as Lenin is said to have hailed it, was accompanied by a bruising campaign to lay down a linguistic line: adherence to a more traditional, morphologically informed orthography was deemed a rightist deviation, while an excessively vernacularized script was seen as swinging too far to the left. Young, Soviet-educated radicals took the campaign as an opportunity to attack and displace their Jadidist elders from their preeminent position as cultural arbiters.

One Uyghur was present at the First All-Union Turkological Congress in Baku, which initiated this campaign in 1926. The first effort to devise a Latin script version of Uyghur was made at a Samarkand meeting in 1928. This template proved unacceptable to Almaty intellectuals, however, who responded with a second conference in 1930.

As with any linguistic reform, the actual take-up of the new script was slow. Well into the 1930s, the old and new existed side by side in Soviet periodicals, with Uyghur newspapers like Almaty's *Kembegheller Awazi* (*Voice of the Poor*) running half a page in Arabic, half in Latin. Then, late in the decade, the rules were rewritten again, as Moscow decreed a shift to Cyrillic script for all languages of the Soviet Union.

a ئا	b ب	c ج
ç چ	d د	e ئې (ۋ)
ə ئە	g گ	ğ غ
h ھ	i ئى	j ژ
k ك	l ل	m م
n ن	ŋ ڭ	o ئو (ۇ)
ö ئو (ئۆ)	p پ	q ق
r ر	s س	t ت
u ئۇ (ۋ)	v ۋ	y ئۈ (ۋ)
z ز	ş ش	x خ
ž ژ	—	—

Letter table of the first attempt to latinize the Uyghur script, resulting from a meeting of Uyghur intellectuals in Samarkand in 1928.

ئات ھېرىپ قالسا بىر پىچاق، ئېشەك ھېرىپ قالسا بىر چۆچەك قوناق.



If a horse is tired, a knife will do, and if a donkey is tired, a bushel of corn.

ORTHOGRAPHIC RIVALRIES IN REPUBLICAN XINJIANG

Running through the background of this linguistic construction was of course the recognition that new standards for Uyghur would have to suit the language of Xinjiang itself. By the 1930s, the Soviet Union had enormous influence there, but Xinjiang had also become a place of refuge for anti-Communist intellectuals fleeing the repressive Stalinist cultural scene. Some of these lent themselves to the cause of the first East Turkistan Republic in 1933–34. Commandeering the Swedish printing press in Kashgar, this experiment in local state-building maintained the standard, classical orthography of southern Xinjiang's print media.

Rebellion in Xinjiang and the formation of the East Turkistan Republic heightened Soviet interest in the language there. In 1933, Vladimir Nasilov and Yaqub Ruzin authored a textbook of Xinjiang's Arabic-script Uyghur in Moscow. At the time, the Soviet Union was on the verge of intervening to help Ürümchi authorities crush the East Turkistan Republic, and their book resembles something of a vade mecum for counterinsurgency officers. Dialogues include interviews with detained militants. "Who do you intend to kill with that gun?" asks the interrogator in one lesson.[7]

In the wake of the collapse of the East Turkistan Republic in 1934, the Soviets consolidated their control of the province via the warlord Sheng Shicai. Some, but not all, elements of Soviet Arabic script orthography were now exported to Ürümchi, which for the first time in its history became an important center of Uyghur-language publishing. In publications from the late 1930s, for example, we find the addition of *g* and *ng*. The "hamza on a tooth" also came into use, but not for all words beginning with vowels, only those that would otherwise be written with a "dagger alif" (آ) in classical orthography (e.g. "man" آدم becomes ئادم). This mix of classical standards and Soviet innovations would characterize Ürümchi publishing until the 1949 Chinese revolution.[8]

The politicization of orthography only intensified in the 1940s, when the Guomindang gained control of the province, a move to which the Soviets responded by backing a new anti-Chinese rebellion in the north of Xinjiang, resulting in the formation of the second East Turkistan Republic (1944–49). Centered on the western city of Ili, much of the new republic's propaganda, including journals like *Sherq heqiqiti* (*Truth of the East*), was printed in the Soviet Union itself. These reproduced in their entirety the Soviet Arabic script standards of circa 1930 (that is, prior to Latinization), thereby laying down an orthographic challenge to provincial authorities.

7. V. M. Nasilov and Ia. Ruzin, *Uchebnik uigurskogo iazyka* (Moscow: Moskovskii institut vostokovedeniia, 1933).
8. Abdulghafur Damolla, *Untitled speech* (Ürümchi: Shing Jang Uyghur gezitkhanesi, 1936); Abdullah Damolla Muhammad Haji and Mansur Efendi, eds., *Jahangirlik ve Shing Jangda millet mes'elesi* (Ürümchi: Shing Jang Uyghur geziti metbu'asi, 1936).



Title graphic of the Uyghur newspaper ***Freedom*** (Erk), which was published in Ürumchi from 1946 to 1949. It was owned by Isa Yusuf Alptekin and edited by Muhammed Emin Bughra.

Truth of the East (Sherq heqiqiti), a publication from the second East Turkestan Republic (1944–1949).

The pro-Guomindang, anti-Soviet Uyghurs who were active in Ürümchi had brought with them their own literary traditions. In 1939, while traveling between Egypt and the Hijaz on pilgrimage, Abdulaziz Chingizkhan wrote a *Uyghur Grammar*, intending it for use in the Guomindang's Mongolian-Tibetan School in Nanjing, where a small cohort of Muslims from Xinjiang had recently been enrolled.[9] His orthography was classical, adding only *g* گ and *ng* ڭ. Much the same standard was maintained by Guomindang Uyghurs, first in Nanjing in publications like *Chini Türkistan Awazi* (*Voice of Chinese Turkistan*), then in Ürümchi in publications such as *Erk* (*Freedom*). These circles also experimented with Anatolian Turkish forms in morphology and sentence construction, reflecting a prevailing cultural pan-Turkism.

In the late 1940s, linguistic debates thus became freshly polarized along the lines of the East Turkistan Republic-

9. ʿAbd al-ʿAziz Makhdum Chingizkhan, *Uyghur Sarfi* (Cairo: Matbaʿat al-murabbawiyya, 1939). Whether this work ever made it back from the publishing house in Cairo to Nanjing is unknown, but the work survives in libraries outside China.



Linguist **Ibrahim Muti'i** (on the left) with **Abdulaziz Chingizkhan** (on the right). Likely photographed in the late 1940s.

Guomindang rivalry. In 1949, a front-page article in *Freedom* outlined what its editors saw as the basic differences, attacking the Soviet orthography as a foreign, Uzbek contrivance: "The orthography adopted in *Truth of the East* and the books published in Uzbekistan is their own Uzbek affair. Currently their orthography is to write things the way they come out of the mouth. Here, the orthography that the nationalists are promoting pays attention to preserving the unity of the language. Instead of just writing things the way they're spoken, it avoids disrupting the original form of the word."[10] Provincial chairman Masud Sabri himself gave speeches on the question, endorsing certain reforms to the classical script, but rejecting the Soviet template.[11] In 1948–49, Ibrahim Muti'i published a new orthographic standard in *Xinjiang Daily*, but by this time, the Guomindang's star was well and truly fading. While *Freedom* insisted that "not adopting the orthography of the Soviet Uyghurs is not the same thing as being anti-Soviet," it was inevitable that with the victory of the Chinese Red Army in 1949, the Ili faction would win the orthography war in Xinjiang.

FROM OLD TO NEW AND BACK AGAIN

China's 1949 revolution may have resolved the political status of Xinjiang, but it was to exacerbate the instability surrounding the question of script. In the early 1950s, Soviet linguists met to finalize recommendations for a reformed Arabic script for what was soon to become the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. In the 1951 *Concise Orthographic Rules for Literary Uyghur on the Basis of Arabic Script*, the last remaining redundancies in the Arabic script were done away with.[12] The letter *ʿayn* ع was replaced with the "hamza on a tooth" (for example, the word scholar now became ئالیم instead of عالیم). The letter *ḥā* ح was replaced by *hā* ھ (*story* became ھېكايە in place of حېكايە). These proposals in turn provided a starting point for intellectuals in Xinjiang, who endorsed a revised version of this script in 1954.[13] Adopting almost the entirety of the Soviet model, they fiddled slightly with the use of letter *yād* (ي): from now on, the *yād* was to strictly represent the consonant *y* [j]. Where it had previously served as a vowel *i*, an unpointed tooth would suffice (ى). For the closed vowel *é* they introduced a new letter (ې).

This is the system that prevails today, but its implementation was quickly sidelined by a new proposal in the mid-1950s to convert all the Turkic languages of Xinjiang, including Uyghur, to Cyrillic. At a 1956 conference in Ürümchi, delegates

10. "Milletchiler zadi kimge qarshi?" *Erk* (March 2, 1949): 1.
11. Mesʿud Sabri, "Mesʿud Sabri Efending imla heqqide bergen qonfirans," *Shingjang geziti*, (July 28, 1948): 1; (July 29, 1948): 1; (July 30, 1948): 1.
12. *Uyghur edibi tilining Erep élipbesi asasidiki qisqiche imla qa'idiliri* (Alma-Ata: Qazaq Éli zhurnalining neshriyati, 1951).
13. *Uyghur edibi tilining qisqiche imla qayidiliri* (Ürümchi, n.p.: 1954).



enthusiastically endorsed a script that aside from one small detail was identical to the Soviet Uyghur script (where Soviet Uyghur had h, Xinjiang Uyghur would use x). The move would have bridged the half-century long orthographic divide between the two communities.[14] The enthusiasm for Cyrillic also reflected the fact that most leading Uyghur intellectuals at the time had received their education in the Soviet Union and saw Soviet Uyghur culture as a prestige standard. Yet in the eyes of Beijing, such cultural preferences were indicative of dangerous political deviations. The idea that Communism in Xinjiang would mirror Soviet norms manifested in persistent calls throughout the 1950s for the formation of a "Republic of Uyghuristan," akin to neighboring republics such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. When the party launched a campaign to root out "local nationalism" in 1957, it was inevitable that the question of script would be implicated. The 1956 decision was quickly set aside, and to my knowledge, no Uyghur publications were ever printed in Cyrillic in Xinjiang. There was to be no orthographic reconciliation between the two versions of Uyghur existing on either side of the Sino-Soviet split.

The alternative to Cyrillic that Beijing now endorsed was China's own Latinization initiative for the nation's languages, the best-known product of which is the Pinyin transcription of Mandarin Chinese. The so-called "New Script" (*yéngi yéziq*) was implemented in a stop-start fashion. The basic principles were approved at a conference in 1958, but the actual form of the alphabet was not fixed until the mid-1960s.[15] On the one hand, the policy was clearly a step in the direction of Sinification.

Recommendation for the English transcription of the word Uyghur.

The constant advances of the reform and opening policy and the growing trade and telecommunications exchanges between people in all sectors and the outside world, as well as increased activities in publication, news reporting and international affairs have for some time renewed the need for a uniform and normalized ethnonym for the major nationality of Xinjiang, known in its own language as [ujɣur].

At present, there is utter confusion on how to render and use in English the name of that nationality, with no fewer than seven different spellings attested: Uyghur, Uygur, Uighur, Uighuir, Uiguir, Uigur and Weiwuer. This situation causes a number of problems in our work and daily lives. Therefore, the Terminology Normalization Committee for Ethnic Languages of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region based on research and consultations with relevant experts on this issue recommends that the spelling Uyghur, corresponding to the pronunciation |ujɣur|, be used as the English transcription of the word.

Government organizations and individuals are invited to conform to the present notice.

The Terminology Normalization Committee for Etnic Languages of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

Alongside their visual resemblance to pinyin, Uyghur publications in the new script exhibit a higher level of lexical borrowings from Chinese than is standard today. At the same time, the script also gave a nod to earlier Soviet Latinization efforts, of which Pinyin itself was one offshoot. Apart from Pinyin's characteristic x for *sh* [ʃ] and q for *ch* [t͡ʃ] (the word *chüsh* "dream," for example, was written *qüx*), Soviet precedents were drawn on for sounds not existing in Mandarin Chinese, for example, the Latin letter ɑ for *gh* [ʁ] (as in *ujɑur*). The modified Cyrillic ҝ was enlisted for the *q* [q] sound.



Cloth face mask protesting Chinese oppression of Uyghurs. Light blue background references the East Turkestan flag.

As in the Soviet Latinization campaign of the 1920s, the New Script was accompanied by strident rhetoric, denouncing those who stood in its way as class enemies and saboteurs. Ultimately, though, the political ructions of the Mao era were to be the campaign's undoing, as the Cultural Revolution put a halt to most education and publishing, and linguists themselves were dispatched to the countryside. The disruption came at a sensitive time for the politics of script along the Sino-Soviet frontier. In 1970, Soviet Kazakhstan began publishing an Arabic-script newspaper, *Kommunizm tughi* (*Flag of Communism*), for clandestine distribution in Xinjiang, part of a Soviet propaganda campaign to destabilize the PRC. At this time, therefore, Arabic script was not simply a symbol of religious conservatism; it also carried pro-Soviet connotations. In the face of this renewed battle of writing systems, Autonomous Region government chairman Seypidin Ezizi recalled a committee of Uyghur linguists from the countryside for consultation on reviving and promoting the New Script campaign. Soon enough, though, his collaborators found themselves sent back to the village for re-education.[16]

Failing to gain ground in these conditions, the original decision to replace the Arabic script by the early 1970s was first

14. E. R. Tenishev, *U Tiurkskikh Narodov Kitaia: Dnevniki 1956–1958* (Moscow: Nasledie, 1995), 16.
15. For discussion, see Uluğ Kuzuoğlu, "Codes of Modernity: Infrastructures of Language and Chinese Scripts in an Age of Global Information Revolution," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2018), 407–13.
16. Aliya Abudurezike, "Xiandai Weiwuer wenxue yuyan zhengzifa yanbian Shi," (MA diss., Minzu University of China, 2017), 91.

revised, and then eventually revoked following Mao's death in 1976. In 1979, a decision of the Xinjiang People's Congress permitted the simultaneous use of both New and Old Script. The embarrassing implications of the decision were of course not spelled out, but in reality, this was the beginning of the end for the Pinyin hybrid. As the cultural policy of the early 1980s swung back in the direction of accommodation to local preferences, Arabic script was fully reinstated. This time, the perceived deficiencies that had motivated the shift to Pinyin were remedied with the final additions to the script. With the inclusion of two new diacritic marks above the *wāw* (ö ۆ and ü ۈ), all vowels in the language could now be represented clearly and unambiguously. What we see in Uyghur today, therefore, is the result of decisions made in the early 1980s, not only to revive, but also to again reform and upgrade the evolving standards of Arabic script orthography.

The decision to shift back to Arabic remains controversial, and many accounts note strong opposition to the Pinyin script. One Chinese linguist, for example, believes that romanization was "completely rejected in Uyghur and Kazak communities."[17] On the other hand, some adult Uyghurs who were educated in the late 1970s or early 1980s express a preference for the New Script, and identify its Latin letters with world languages such as English as much as with Chinese Pinyin. The scrapping of the New Script is said to have been a sore point among PRC linguists at the time, who preferred to blame the Autonomous Region government for poor implementation than take into consideration the cultural politics of the period.

With this, the question of script choice was seemingly resolved once and for all, and the letters fixed. Old debates continued, though, between phonetic representation and the morphological principle. Initially, the "new old" script maintained prevailing standards, which was to depict graphically many of the shifts that the sounds of Uyghur are liable to undergo depending on their position in a word. To give one example, when the suffix *-liq* is followed by the possessive suffix *-i*, the combination is pronounced not *-liqi* but *-lighi*, a softening of the hard consonant *q*. In the 1980s, and in reforms made in 1993, sound changes like this were enshrined in official spelling rules, but since then the trend has been to shift back toward a system that maintains the original morphological form of a word. According to the reforms of 2009, for example, this suffix is now written *-liqi*. In the case of borrowings from Arabic, the effect of this trend has been to move back in the direction of their historical spelling. For example, in the 1980s the word for *economy* was written with a devoiced final *t*, that is, as *iqtisat*. Today, its dictionary form is *iqtisad*, resembling more closely the Arabic *iqtiṣād*.

ئاتىنىڭ كۆڭلى بالىدا، بالىنىڭ كۆڭلى ئاتىدا.



Father's heart is on the child, child's heart is on the outside.

→
Isa Yusuf Alptekin was a Uyghur politician who initially sought autonomy for Xinjiang via collaboration with the Chinese Nationalist Party (Guomindang). He represented Xinjiang at Central Government meetings in Nanjing and Chongqing, and from 1947–1949 served as secretary general of the Xinjiang provincial government, before the CCP took control of the region. From that time on he lived in exile, meeting with world leaders and attending international conferences in support of an independent East Turkestan.

17. Minglang Zhou, *Multilingualism in China: The Politics of Writing Reforms for Minority Languages, 1949–2002* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2003), 308.



CONCLUSION

The circuitous route to the present described here has put considerable distance between literate Uyghurs and their classical literature. To engage with works like "The Contest of the Fruits" in their original requires specialized study that is available in only a handful of universities in China. This barrier can be overcome by editions in modernized spelling, but only a fraction of the written heritage has received this face-lift, and much of Xinjiang's manuscript tradition remains neglected in disparate collections in China and around the globe. In the field of calligraphy, by contrast, the rupture has been less severe, with the reformed Arabic script serving just as well as the old for this respected art form.

While the age of script reform has seemingly ended, computing has continued to spur orthographic invention. As an auxiliary for the digital world, the Uyghur Latin Script hews closely to English spellings, including digraphs like **sh** and **ch**.[18] Today, when Uyghurs use the English keyboard online, some follow these

18. My own transcriptions for this essay follow the pre-2008 version of the Uyghur Latin Script. The 2008 reforms replaced é with ë, but this has not been widely taken up.

standards, others incorporate Pinyin spellings, while many simply transcribe their own pronunciation as they see fit. The need for Latin has in fact diminished of late, as Unicode fonts and input systems for Arabic-script Uyghur have become available. Google Translate now includes Uyghur, though with little accuracy as yet. Developments like these represent a growing recognition of the Uyghur language outside China, but from a low starting point: options for outsiders to study the language remain limited.

The pressing question today is how Uyghur will fare in a Chinese political environment increasingly hostile to the use of "minority" languages. As Elise Anderson describes in this volume, the public use of Uyghur can now be deemed an indicator of potential disloyalty. Children are prohibited from speaking the language in kindergarten. The mother tongue has been confined to a marginal position in the so-called "bilingual" school system, where it is intensely policed: two authors of Uyghur-language textbooks were recently given suspended death sentences for separatism. The drive to inculcate knowledge of Chinese among the often monolingual rural population has been among the motivations for interning possibly upward of a million people in mind-numbing re-education camps across the region. Accounts indicate that laws mandating the use of Uyghur in public signage are now being disregarded, and the script has been erased from some signs that previously included it.[19]

What exactly the status of the Uyghur language and script will be when the dust settles from this intense campaign of repression remains to be seen. Obviously, though, in circumstances such as these, it is hard to imagine many among the rising generation of Uyghurs in China acquiring full literacy in their mother tongue, or mastery of its script. While the story of Uyghur in the twentieth century was one of frenetic linguistic construction, therefore, so far the trend of the twenty-first has been more in the direction of linguistic destruction. In the face of this assimilationist pressure, Uyghurs outside China have taken up the task of documenting and maintaining their language, and it is a task that deserves support.

19. Darren Byler, "The 'Patriotism' of Not Speaking Uyghur," *SupChina*, (January 2, 2019), https://supchina.com/2019/01/02/the-patriotism-of-not-speaking-uyghur/.

THIS WORLD بۇ دۇنيا

KÖRESH KÖSEN, TRANSLATED BY MUNAWWAR ABDULLA
كۆرەش كۆسەن
تەرجمە قىلغۇچى: مۇنەۋۋەر ئابدۇللا

This world is a good world
A prison-for-sorrow world
Plenty of wisdom in its hold
A secret, silent world

This world is that kind of world
The foxes stalk the leopard
The lions have left, extinct
The monkey-becomes-Sultan world

This world is that kind of world
The eagle-reined-in world
The owl calls the Azaan yet
The raven-becomes-Muezzin world

This world is that kind of world
The thirsty lie in the deserts
The intellects work the fields
The tyrant-becomes-Khan world

بۇ دۇنيا ئوبدان دۇنيا ،
قايغۇلۇق زىندان دۇنيا.
قويندا ھېكمەت تولا،
ئۇندىمەس پىنھان دۇنيا.

بۇ دۇنيا شۇنداق دۇنيا ،
تۈلكىلەر ئۇۋلايدۇ يىلپىز ،
يولۋىسى كەتكەن تۈگەپ،
مايمۇنى سۇلتان دۇنيا.

بۇ دۇنيا شۇنداق دۇنيا ،
بۈركۈتى تەزگەن دۇنيا.
ھۇۋقۇشى توۋلايدۇ ئەزان،
قۇزغۇنى مۇئەززىن دۇنيا.

بۇ دۇنيا شۇنداق دۇنيا ،
ئۇسسىغان چۆلدە ياتار،
ئالىمى كەتمەن چاپار،
زالىمى خاقان دۇنيا.

غەرب تەرەپ هېكايىلىرى

ئەلۋىن لى

ئۇيغۇر رەپچىلىرىنىڭ ھازىرقى زامان جوڭگو مۇزىكا سەھنىسىدە كۆپلەپ ئوتتۇرىغا چىقىشى بىر كۆرۈنەرلىك ھادىسە. بۇ ماقالىدە، ئەلۋىن لى خىپ-خوپنىڭ جوڭگودىكى تارىخىنى تەسۋىرلەش بىلەن بىرگە دۇشمەنلەشكەن سىياسىي مۇھىتتىكى ئۇيغۇر رەپچىلىرىنىڭ تىل ۋە سەنئەت جەھەتتىكى ئىنچىكە پەرقى ۋە ئۆزگىچىلىكىنى ئىپادىلەيدۇ. بۇ ماقالە كۆپ مەدەنىيەتلىك ، كۆپ تىللىق ، كۆپ دائىرىلىك ۋە ئالاھىدە تالانتلىق ئۇيغۇر مۇزىكانتلىرىغا ھۆرمەت بىلدۈرۈش بىلەن بىرگە ئۇيغۇر خەلقىنىڭ ئىجتىمائىي ئادالەتسىگە بېغىشلانغان.

WEST SIDE STORIES

Alvin Li

With the rise of Chinese rap becoming old news, the spotlight in the past two years has turned from urban rap centers like Beijing and Chengdu to the rap of Xinjiang. On October 5, 2018, *The Rap of China* aired its second season finale. After premiering in 2017, the reality TV competition had achieved incredible commercial success, reaching more than 200 million viewers per episode and successfully bringing rap to the national mainstream. Departing from the first season's tight focus on the question of what counts as authentic Chinese rap, the second season centered around performances by four rappers from the autonomous region of Xinjiang, and concluded with a final battle between two Uyghur rappers—Air from Kashgar and Nawukere (or Lil-Em) from Ürümchi, with the former ending up the victor.

The sudden popularity of *The Rap of China* risks painting a false narrative of rap's development in China, as though its artists had risen to stardom overnight, when in fact a fledgling underground rap scene had been active in many cities—among them Ürümchi in Xinjiang—for nearly two decades. While other non-US localities, including Asian neighbors such as Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, had by then enjoyed popular rap scenes for almost a decade, the fermentation of hip-hop[1] culture in China came late, around the dawn of the new century. Early Chinese rap was marked by linguistic heterogeneity and lenient state regulation. Despite low visibility and a small market share, its crossover into China's politically circumscribed mainstream culture—governed today by the flux of the market economy on the one hand and increasing state surveillance on the other—presents a new set of challenges for the country's aspiring rappers, especially Uyghur MCs seeking to fashion an authentic voice for the minority national self.

As I researched this essay, I noticed an interesting detail: from lyrics to song titles to promotional materials, many rappers from Xinjiang have adopted the nomenclature "West Side"—not in Uyghur ("غەرب تەرىپى") or Chinese ("西部"), but English—to refer to their home and its rap scene.[2] Evidently a homage to "West Coast" hip-hop, I found this choice of collective identification remarkably provocative in both linguistic and cultural terms, for it is suggestive of the multilingualism and global imagination at the heart of Uyghur rappers' effort to develop a strong regional identity. What does this tell us about the future of Uyghur rap vis-à-vis the increasing state repression

1. As a cultural movement, hip-hop encompasses rapping, break dancing, DJing, and graffiti. In this essay I focus specifically on rap.
2. "West Side" appears in the song titles and lyrics of many rappers and groups, such as Air, Nawukere, AThree, Yiltiz, and After Journey; on the lips of those interviewed across Xinjiang in the web documentary series *Speak Out*; and in the name of parties organized by Uyghur rappers in Beijing as early as 2013.

of the Uyghur language? What follows is a brief history of rap in China, with particular attention paid to the emergence, evolution, and prospect of Uyghur rap amid the changing language politics and increasingly surveilled cultural climate of a post-socialist nation. It can be observed that, as China presses on with its assimilationist policies in Xinjiang, Xinjiang rappers are negotiating between a heightened need to maintain authentic Uyghur identity and a growing sense of participation in a multiethnic, multilingual hip-hop community, sometimes with surprisingly original and inspiring tactics.

THE RAP SCENE IN GREATER CHINA: LATE 1980s TO 2000s

The earliest instances of rap in Chinese emerged from pop and rock musicians in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Beijing at the end of the 1980s. Taiwanese singer Harlem Yu's song 報告班長 ("Yes, Sir"), touted by his record label as "the first Chinese rap song," was released on an EP and featured in the soundtrack of the film *Report to the Squad Leader* in 1987, shortly before Taiwan ended its thirty-eight years of martial law. Cantopop singer George Lam released 對話 ("Talking About"), a Cantonese adaptation of Mixmasters' 1988 single "Don't Cha Wanna Be Loved," on his 1989 album 長青歌集; Cui Jian, the so-called "Father of Chinese Rock," also incorporated rap into the song 不是我不明白 ("It's Not That I Don't Understand") on the album 新长征路上的摇滚 ("Rock 'N' Roll on the New Long March"), which was released in February 1989, months before the Tiananmen Square incident crushed the democratic dream of a generation of Chinese. The soundtrack of a military drama aimed at promoting army recruitment in a country still under martial law, an adapted urban love duet in what was still a British colony, a song about post-reform China's great acceleration released on an album that nodded to China's Communist legacy—each of these three first instances was rooted in the political and economic realities of its respective locale, despite them all being part of the same historical configuration, namely that of China's transition into modernity. Evolving sociopolitical realities would continue to shape hip-hop culture in each of these regions thereafter.



Cao Fei, ***Hip Hop: Guangzhou***, 2003, single-channel video, 5:4, color with sound, 3:28 minutes.

Writing at the turn of the twenty-first century, author and researcher Tony Mitchell acknowledged the roots of hip-hop in cultural movements in ethnic minority communities in The Bronx in New York City, but observed that by the 1990s rap was no longer simply an expression of African American culture, having grown into "a vehicle for global youth affiliations and a tool for reworking local identity all over the world."[3] While the anthology from which the above quote is excerpted does not cover Greater China, Mitchell's analysis applies equally well to the evolution of rap in the region. The rise of rap in Taiwan, for instance, is best recorded in the work of anthropologist Lin Hao-Li, who was heavily involved in its early development himself as a promoter. According to Lin, the ban on dance clubs during nearly four decades of martial law hindered the dissemination of soul, funk, and disco—genres that are foundational to rap—and thus presented a major obstacle to the introduction and appreciation of rap in Taiwan. In consequence, hip-hop in Taiwan took on a more visual orientation, propagating itself largely through music videos featuring breakdancing, parties, and hip-hop clothing.

The rap music that came out in 1990s Taiwan could be divided into two camps. One was represented by rap groups such as L.A. Boyz, made up of Taiwanese diasporans from California, featuring breakdancing and rapping mostly in English and Taiwanese Mandarin. The other comprised local musicians such as JUTOUPI and MC Hotdog, who used the new style as a vehicle for social criticism, oftentimes rapping in their native Taiwanese Hokkien. Lin emphasizes the role of the record industry, media, and the government in popularizing hip-hop in the late 1990s, domesticating this foreign phenomenon into a local cultural convention. At the same time, working against these forces was a group of underground hip-hop aficionados who, believing in a universally shared "musical and emotional foundation," considered themselves part of a global hip-hop community.[4] These universalists organized university clubs, threw parties, and sold imported records, mining the

3. Tony Mitchell, "Another Root—Hip-Hop Outside the USA," in *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA*, ed. Tony Mitchell (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 1.

4. Lin Hao-Li., "流行化、地方化与想象：台湾嘻哈文化的形成" (Popularization, Localization and Imagination: The Formation of Hip-Hop Culture in Taiwan), *Man and Culture* 37, (2005).

UYGHUR POP MUSIC ئۇيغۇر ئاممىباب مۇزىكىسى

MUKKADAS MIJIT مۇقەددەس مىجىت

When the Cultural Revolution (1964–1974) ended, Uyghur artists and intellectuals marched into the process of rebuilding an entire culture. The Muqam[1] Research Committee in the capital city of Ürümchi began recruiting young musicians from rural areas. The precious recordings of *muqam* masters from 1955 were replayed to educate the next generation of muqamists in the exact style of Turdi Akhun.[2]

Muqam performances were once again on stage without fear of punishment by Red Guards. The idea of reuniting Uyghur audiences around traditional muqam seemed approved by all.

However, the post-Cultural Revolution Uyghur youth had a slightly different idea of what music they wanted to listen to and how to define their musical identity. The "reform and opening up" policy of Deng Xiaoping allowed Western information to flood across Chinese frontiers, challenging the resilience of traditional cultures. Uyghurs also had to deal with this sudden torrent of new information about the "outside modern world."

This is probably why the excitement was mixed with confusion when Uyghur audiences discovered Exmetjan

1. The term *muqam* refers to classical musical suites (modes) formed by poetic, rhythmic, and melodic pieces. Theoretically, the Uyghur Twelve Muqam (the main historical repertoire in Uyghur musical culture) includes 360 pieces (songs and instrumentals) performed for a period of twenty-four hours, with poetry from Sufi poets of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.
2. Rachel Harris, *The Making of a Musical Canon in Chinese Central Asia: The Uyghur Twelve Muqam* (London: Routledge, 2008); Nathan Light, *Intimate Heritage: Creating Uyghur Muqam Song in Xinjiang* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2008).

musical depths of hip-hop culture to reposition themselves as part of a global movement. Lin's observations about internal heterogeneity and a simultaneous, if not sometimes conflicting, desire for local identity and global solidarity driving the early development of rap in Taiwan provide, as we will see, a particularly valuable point of departure to examine hip-hop culture across the strait.

In mainland China, the rise of hip-hop took almost a decade longer. This was largely due to setbacks caused by the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, in response to which the government increased its censorship of cultural expression. But Western music continued to arrive in mainland China in the form of pirated cassettes and *dakou* tapes and CDs—*dakou* means "punching a hole." These broken items, surplus from the Western music industry, were often sent to China for recycling only to end up being sold illegally, across major cities, from 1993 onward.[5] The nation had its first regular Hip-Hop Nights (Fridays and Saturdays) at the Kunlun Hotel's Crystal Disco in Beijing in 1992. While a few American rappers such as Q-Tip enjoyed some notoriety, the soundscape of the 1990s was still dominated by rock and pop (mostly imported from Taiwan and Hong Kong, with only a small portion produced in mainland China), and a local rap scene didn't emerge until around the turn of the century.[6] In 2001, China's ascent to the World Trade Organization

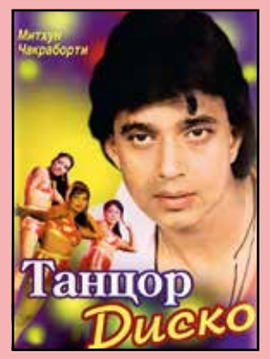
5. Jeroen de Kloet, "Popular Music and Youth in Urban China: The Dakou Generation," *China Quarterly* 183, (2005), 609–26.
6. Wai-Chung Ho, "Popular Music and Music Education in the City of Beijing," in *Popular Music, Cultural Politics and Music Education in China* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 47.

led to a relaxing of regulations for foreign companies wishing to do business in China. These improved economic conditions attracted more foreigners—along with their divergent tastes in music—while boosting eagerness and the inpouring of capital for cultural consumption among Chinese locals.[7] Further aided by the increasing availability of the internet, rap began to spread across the country throughout the 2000s in the form of *wangluo gequ* (internet-mediated songs).[8] In 2001, Yin Ts'ang, one of China's earliest hip-hop groups, was formed, consisting of MC Webber from China, Sbazzo (Chinese Canadian), and two Americans, 老郑XIV and Dirty Heff. That same year China's first rap battle, Iron Mic (then called Battle Grounds/Blazin' MCs[9]) was launched in Shanghai by Detroit transplant Dana "Showtyme" Burton. It remains one of the longest continuously running rap battles in the world. The rise of pop rap in the mainstream, owing to a few Taiwanese stars such as Jay Chou and Will Pan, also helped raise public awareness—albeit superficial—of the genre. In 2004 Jay Chou was invited to perform his hit song 龙拳 ("Dragon Fist") at the annual Chinese New Year's Gala,[10] marking the first instance of rap's official recognition by the Chinese state.

7. Catrice Barrett, "Hip-Hopping Across China: Intercultural Formulations of Local Identities," *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education* 11, (2012): 247–60.
8. For a more detailed account of the influence of internet-mediated songs on the development of rap in China, see Jin Liu's "Alternative Voice and Local Youth Identity in Chinese Local-Language Rap Music," *positions: asia critique* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2014), 263–92.
9. Ian L., "Hip-Hop from Detroit to China: The Iron Mic," *Smart Shanghai*, November 19, 2014, https://www.smartshanghai.com/articles/nightlife/hip-hop-from-detoit-to-china-the-iron-mic.
10. The annual Chinese New Year's Gala has →

Memtimin on television for the first time. He was playing on an electric guitar, the *muqeddime* of the Özhal muqam.[3] His sadly short life had a strong impact on the young musicians, igniting their desire to be part of the musical world stage.

Exmetjan was born in 1969 in Qaraqash, Hotan, in the Uyghur Region. He was known to be a talented child, and grew up playing various Uyghur traditional string instruments. There is little documentation about his childhood and his tragic death other than the street legends and some video clips from TV programs. He was a member of the Youth Modern Music Ensemble that was created in the 1980s in Hotan. With his friends, he was sent to Ürümchi to spend two years in bars and nightclubs to learn about modern music. But the most effective education these musicians received came from Babbar Subhash's 1982 Bollywood film, *Disco Dancer*. They reproduced a scene from the film in their graduation concert, playing as a band with guitar and drum sets. The concert was heavily inspired by the film in musical style, costumes, and even the bodily movements of the guitarist on stage. Exmetjan's death was equally symbolic, resulting from a cruel heroin addiction that affected many Uyghur youth throughout the late 1980s and 1990s.[4]



Soviet-era film poster for ***Disco Dancer*** (Babbar Subhash, 1982).

The late 1980s brought crucial changes to Uyghur youth music. The Western cassette industry played a huge role in this musical

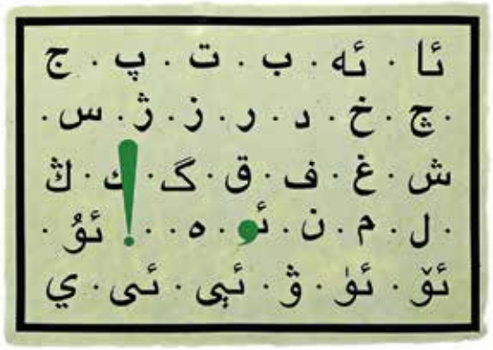
3. Uyghur Television, "Ozhal Muqamidin Parche Exmetjan Memtimin," accessed May 7, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gty11ET-nGg&list=PLMz6mfYQqhv7xhLm81SH-SGmFn7PaRxA8&index=1.
4. Sean R. Roberts, "Negotiating Locality, Islam, and National Culture in a Changing Borderlands: The Revival of the Mäshräp Ritual Among Young Uighur Men in the Ili Valley," *Central Asian Survey* 17, no. 4 (1998): 673–99, https://doi.org/10.1080/02634939808401063.



West China Expeditions, **Hami Museum**, a museum for folklore in the Uyghur region. It houses many artifacts including a permanent exhibition related to Uyghur muqam.

awareness. As a part of the opening up policy, Western cassettes were brought into the Chinese market. Censors seemed to have closed an eye to the black market by which *dakoudai* (illegal cassettes) were being distributed rapidly all over China. Uyghur youth discovered rock bands like Guns N' Roses, Pink Floyd, Jimi Hendrix, the Doors, the Beatles, and later Michael Jackson through these illegal cassettes. Thousands of teenagers felt connected to their music. VHS recordings of Western rock festivals and concerts caused widespread envy among Uyghur

FANGYAN RAP AND MULTILINGUALISM



Slavs and Tatars, ***The Alphabet*** (*Uighur*), 2018, screenprint on mulberry paper, 31 × 43.5 cm.

A remarkable characteristic of the Chinese rap scene is its multilingualism. It is important to note that Putonghua (Modern Standard Chinese, a dialect of Mandarin) has only been the country's lingua franca since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, and that China in fact contains hundreds of mutually intelligible languages, each of which in turn consists of many mutually intelligible dialects. Still widely spoken, most of these languages belong to the Sinitic group of the Sino-Tibetan language family, while others (especially those spoken by China's ethnic minorities, such as the Uyghur) belong to different language families altogether. With the exception of Putonghua, all the Sinitic languages and their dialects are called *fangyan* in

← been broadcast yearly since 1983 to a growing audience, via multiple TV channels and radio, in China and abroad. In 2012 it won the Guinness World Record for Most Watched National Network TV Broadcast. Its variety program typically mirrors what the Communist Party considers to be appropriate entertainment in line with socialist core values.

youth, who wanted the same collective musical experience. This particular need to experience and learn from different musical genres encouraged some musicians to reshape their artistic expression.

Esqer the Gray Wolf was the first Uyghur rock star to burst onto the national scene, earning recognition from the Han audience. His exotic look and fusion-style rock music (mixing Uyghur traditional melodies with Tang Chao style rock music)[5] created a curiosity around him and his music, and by extension, the region he came from. But in the region, only a young audience would find his music "cool."

Apart from Esqer, there was also an underground rock movement that started to flourish in the late 1990s. Motivated by a search for collective musical experience through recordings of Woodstock or MTV (which arrived by satellite), rock parties began to appear in venues across Ürümchi. Abandoned clubs and university recreational halls were populated by scores of young music lovers. The Puppets, Kiroran, Black Roses, or Tian Hua Ban were among the most memorable groups that produced homemade recordings and earned the respect of Uyghur youth. Their style was mainly rock and punk, influenced by American bands heard from illegally imported recordings. I still have numerous memories related to these rock parties, which offered me and my friends a taste of antiestablishment freedom difficult to imagine elsewhere in Uyghur society during that period.

However, this movement proved to have no future in Ürümchi. Many bands have since dissolved or changed beyond recognition. Some musicians moved to larger cities like Beijing or Shanghai to work in Xinjiang-style restaurants that offered "Uyghur music and dance" and were thus in need of these musicians. Some musicians discovered that a fusion

5. The famous rock and heavy metal band from Beijing from the 1990s appealed to young Uyghur musicians in the 1980s because of their unconventional style and use of a Western musical style to express Chinese themes. The attraction began with one of their songs featuring Uyghur traditional instruments: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWatSSlAilo&list=RDEMqhGmIsYN1q-dAuuoxT387w&index=2.

Chinese, a word that dates back at least to the Han Dynasty, when it first appeared in the eponymous work by the poet and philosopher Yang Xiong.[11] Literally meaning "regional speech," *fangyan* has been translated by Western linguists as either "regionalect" or "topolect" to articulate a different semantic range than the English notion of "dialect," the latter referring more specifically to "one of two or more mutually intelligible varieties of a given language distinguished by vocabulary, idiom, and pronunciation."[12] In contrast, the definition of *fangyan* is more ambiguous, referring to such inconsistent items as the living, vernacular language, one's mother tongue, and vulgar slang, among others. Shared by these varied interpretations is a sense of deviation from the standard, national language, and a distance from the center.

Of the earliest Chinese underground rappers and groups, Dumdue raps in Cantonese (a distinct language belonging to the Yue branch of the Sinitic languages), Co Cop Sol in Kunminghua (a dialect of Southwestern Mandarin Chinese), AFinger Crew in Teochew (a dialect of Chaoshan Min, a Southern Min language), and the Beijing-based Brassface, occasionally, in Guilin (another dialect of Southwestern Mandarin Chinese). This multilingual profusion led to a debate regarding the appropriate language for Chinese rap within its still underground community. In a two-part video series posted on YouTube in 2008 by Angela Steele, an American Fulbright Scholar then conducting research in China, rappers were interviewed on the subject. Unsurprisingly, MCs from and based in Northern China favored

11. Victor H. Mair, "What Is a Chinese 'Dialect/Topolect'? Reflections on Some Key Sino-English Linguistic Terms," *Sino-Platonic Papers*, no. 29 (September 1991).
12. Ibid.

of rumba flamenca (borrowed from the great Gipsy Kings) and Uyghur music could attract more clients. Musicians like Erkin Abdulla, who made his name out of this new form, became a rare success story among Uyghur musicians who gained a wider audience in China. Back home, this mixture of Uyghur traditional music and Western rhythmic vibrations also appeared more accessible to Uyghur audiences, as opposed to rock music, which some considered too loud. When I left Ürümchi for France in 2003, very few musicians were making music in a non-flamenca way.



Locals dancing on the People's Square in Kashgar, 2001.

The 2000s brought hip-hop, rap, and R&B to the Uyghur region. It started with a Beijing-born young Uyghur student bringing hip-hop dance to Ürümchi. This more inclusive movement proved extremely popular among young Uyghurs and gave rise to new performative styles that mixed Uyghur traditional music with hip-hop and R&B.

Some rap groups also achieved great renown by taking fusion to the next level, creating bilingual songs in Uyghur and Chinese. While this was not particularly new, the ambivalence of their lyrics created dangerous excitement among those who understood both languages. They were secretly seen as rebellious heroes who confronted the injustice that Uyghurs endured daily. Even today, video clips of their performances circulate widely among those who understand their coded messages.



Putonghua, which is largely based on the Beijing dialect and therefore shares many similarities with other northern tongues. "Well, the government is promoting Putonghua. They hope that even though we have fifty-five ethnic minorities, everyone will adopt it as a common language, the way people around the world are speaking English," Jiawei from the infamous rap group Yin3 observed.[13] In contrast, those from and based in the South defended their use of their native tongues. Vyan, from Guangzhou-based group Jiangzhe, made a case for Cantonese, citing its greater adjacency to ancient Chinese: "Why shouldn't we preserve this language?" Other stances were more pragmatic: "In terms of diversity within Chinese rap music, we should support rapping in *fangyan* …. But in terms of the market, if you don't speak Putonghua, you will be eliminated," FK Moses said. Steele's framing of the debate may have missed something very obvious: whether in *fangyan* or Putonghua, Chinese rap has been at least bilingual from the outset, given its origins and inspiration by recent English-language development and the country's linguistic richness.

RAP IN THE UYGHUR REGION: EARLY DAYS

The multilingual makeup of Chinese rap is exceptionally pronounced in the Xinjiang scene. Located in the far west of China, bordering on Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, Xinjiang—the name means "the new frontier" (officially the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region)—is one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse places in China's Inner Asia, and its growing rap scene bears the traces of this multiplicity. As observed by many hip-hop scholars, global hip-hop cultures are composed of multiple circuits of flow.[14] While Xinjiang was made a province by the Qing dynasty in the nineteenth century, and has been an autonomous region of the PRC since the latter's founding in 1949, its geographical location and ethnic diversity (including the Turkic Uyghurs, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, Han, Tibetans, Hui, Tajiks, Mongols, Russians and Xibe) have given rise to a regional culture markedly different from that of China's east coast. Unlike the south-north flow of popular culture in eastern China during the 1990s and early 2000s (mostly through *dakou* CDs shipped first to Guangzhou and then distributed countrywide; see Mukaddas Mijit's essay in this volume), before the internet became locally prominent Xinjiang's cultural importation relied on inner-Asian hubs or "alternative centers," such as Khorgos, in the Panfilov district of Kazakhstan's southern Almaty region, across the border from Xinjiang. The rise of hip-hop in the Uyghur region was consequently inspired by an unusually wide pool of music, drawing as much from Turkic languages as from English and Chinese.

Xinjiang hip-hop culture arguably began with the founding of the dance group DSP in 2001, but the first rap group as such, Six City, was formed in 2003 in Xinjiang's capital city of Ürümchi. The group's moniker reflects a pronounced local consciousness, being a direct translation of the historical name for the Tarim Basin, Altishahr (ئالتە شەھەر)—site of the oasis settlements south

13. One should note, of course, that there are numerous dialects of the English language, some of which are quite distinct from one another.

14. See *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip-Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language*, ed. H. Samy Alim, Alastair Pennycook, and Awad Ibrahim (New York: Routledge, 2009).

of the Tian Shan mountain range.[15] "The Name Six City represents Xinjiang. As soon as you hear it, you think of Xinjiang," the group members commented during a 2008 interview with Angela Steele. When they first started, they were rapping only in English. Then founding member Zenjir started writing lyrics in Uyghur.[16] Since then, Six City rap has been a mix of English, Putonghua, and Uyghur.

At around the same time as Six City, other local acts such as Nurr and Qarakhan / P-Block[17] were also entering the fray. The scene was remarkably multilingual. While Six City rapped in Uyghur and English, rapper Big Smoke from the group Soul Clap rapped mainly in Russian (sometimes a bit of Putonghua too), having first been exposed to hip-hop culture while studying in Kazakhstan. Xinjiang rap's breakout year was 2008, when Six City wrote the song *Urra* ("Go!") for Xinjiang soccer fans, and was invited to perform it on TV by Xinjiang Television. The same year, the group Yiltiz (roots), which for many years rapped exclusively in Uyghur, was formed in Ürümchi. As Eliya, the Xinjiang correspondent for hiphop.cn, a now defunct forum and promotion agency backed by Swiss investors, observed: "[In 2008] there were websites, online BBS, countless rap groups and several performances every week."[18]

While largely ignored in most accounts of early rap in Xinjiang as well as in other parts of China,[19] women rappers were nonetheless present. Captured in Steele's brilliant 2008 web documentary series *Hip Hop in China: Ürümchi Rap*, the rap group Free Soul included members such as Rose (Alnaz), UZN (Uznar), and GNG (Gulnigar), who rapped bilingually in Uyghur and Putonghua.[20] Another group, named Mirror, included members Barbie (who at the time of filming had just graduated from junior high school), Dilara, and Merbie, who were both high school graduates. The participation of these young female rappers attests to the vibrancy of Xinjiang's early hip-hop scene.

UYGHUR RAP AFTER 2009

But then came the July 2009 riots in Ürümchi, which led to the termination of telephone and internet connections across Xinjiang by the Chinese state (and consequently the blocking of Facebook that continues to this day). For months, rappers in Xinjiang had nowhere to perform, and resorted to private house parties instead. Internet service did not return until 2010, and by then the local scene had already lost considerable steam, with many rappers

15. As scholar Ildikó Bellér-Hann observes, "It is likely that, in practice, Altishahr, or the 'Six Cities', did not actually refer to a definite number of cities; but foreign visitors nonetheless tried to identify them and the identity of the 'Six Cities,' was contested." *Community Matters in Xinjiang 1880–1949: Towards a Historical Anthropology of the Uyghur* (Boston: Brill, 2008), 39.
16. "新疆说唱江湖" (Legends of Xinjiang Rap), *Beijing News*, November 26, 2018, http://www.bjnews.com.cn/feature/2018/11/26/524742.html.
17. The name "Qarakhan" is a reference to the Kara-Khanid Khanate, a Turkic dynasty that ruled Central Asia from the ninth through the early thirteenth centuries.
18. Ibid.
19. The female rappers active in China during the 2000s that I was able to find online are Double.J, born in 1984 in Fujian and currently based in Taiwan; Guizhou-born and Shanghai-based singer, DJ, and producer ChaCha; as well as the late K-Bo. Considered the first female rapper in China, K-Bo was brutally murdered in 2010 by BigSnake, a member of the Shantou-based AFinger Crew. See "中国说唱编年史(中):中国Hip-Hop圈曾有大批网络歌手?" (A Chronology of Chinese Rap (II): The Many Internet-Mediated Rappers), zhihu.com, September 9, 2017, https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/29188914.
20. "Hip-Hop in China: Ürümchi Rap (Part 2)" and "Hip-Hop in China: Ürümchi Rap (Part 5)," YouTube, uploaded by dongting08, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9bb9xL4en0; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BG_3KXYMKYg&t=12s.

choosing to leave Ürümchi to develop their careers elsewhere, or simply giving up.

As the 2009 riots tainted the public image of Xinjiang among Han nationals and exacerbated already existing prejudice against Uyghurs, rappers from Xinjiang also increasingly faced discrimination. On November 27, 2010, a key event in Beijing made Xinjiang a byword among underground rappers nationwide. Ma Jun, a Uyghur rapper who studied film at the Beijing Film Academy, met the notorious Beijing MC David—the winner of Iron Mic's 2008 and 2009 editions—at Yugong Yishan, the city's principal music venue, for a final battle. It got heated in a matter of seconds, as David began by attacking Ma Jun's ethnic identity:

> David: What bothers me most is they know nothing but rioting / and their men are good at nothing but pimping.[21]
>
> Ma: You can say whatever you want / But don't you ever mess with my hometown / Xinjiang, the blood flows in my heart / I can send you to heaven in a blink of a fart.[22]

21. Originally in Chinese: "我最烦的地方就是今天他们只有打砸抢,那儿的男的他们只会嫖娼。" Translation my own. The line clearly refers to the July 2009 riots in Ürümchi. "IRON MIC 十周年总决赛 MC马俊VS大卫(马俊 牛逼)" (10th Iron Mic Finale MC Ma Jun vs. David (Ma Jun Dope), Youku, https://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMjkzMjYzNDIw.html?spm=a2h0c.8166622.PhoneSokuUgc_1.dtitle.
22. Originally in Chinese: "你说我什么都可以但是别说我的家乡,新疆,有一股血液在我的心中流淌,我可以让你的生命顺便就被放在天堂。" Translation taken from the web documentary "Iron Mic 2017 | A documentary of Chinese freestyle rap," qq.com, https://v.qq.com/x/cover/f79dyoyaj0k66wg/g0505a4otj5.html.
23. "Iron Mic 2017 | A documentary of Chinese freestyle rap," qq.com, https://v.qq.com/x/cover/f79dyoyaj0k66wg/g0505a4otj5.html.
24. While early hip-hop forums where these conversations took place such as the Xinjiang page on hiphop.cn are now defunct, the debates were discussed in the documentary series "Track's Flow," Youku, uploaded by DANK_TV, https://i.youku.com/i/UMjk0MDc3NTg4/custom?spm=a2hzp.8244740.0.0&id=723515.

Whereas David relied on swearing in Putonghua with a heavy Beijing accent (he referred to Ma as "Niya," meaning bastard, and repeatedly yelled "mabi," meaning "your mum's cunt"), Ma politely ascribed David's indecent use of language to a lack of education. At one point, Ma reworked lines from the ancient Chinese *Three Character Classic* into his lyrics:

> Fed without teaching, it's your father's fault / Taught to be unfilial, it's your mother's fault.

That night, Ma won the public vote. In a documentary on Iron Mic, released in 2018, Ma Jun remembers the battle and attributes its lasting popularity online —one version of the video on v.qq.com has been played over 6.4 million times— to the common experience of discrimination and exclusion many, and particularly Uyghurs, experience when they leave their hometowns for China's urban centers. "We are now standing in the teeth of the storm. We have a bad reputation in China." Ma confesses, "I think David did not understand that we Xinjiangers always want to prove that we are not what you think we are."[23] For many rappers in Xinjiang, Ma's victory that night was a symbol of hope. In 2014, Ma managed to establish a Xinjiang edition of the Iron Mic contests. The winner that year was Air, who, as mentioned earlier, went on to win the second season of *The Rap of China* in 2018.

As Uyghur rappers in Han-dominated cities like Beijing faced racial discrimination, those who stayed in Xinjiang after 2009 were being attacked by their fellow Uyghurs on a different front: for rapping in Putonghua instead of Uyghur.[24] One can speculate that underlying this criticism, in addition to unresolved ethnic tensions between Han and Uyghur

people, was the sense of an urgent need to preserve an authentic Uyghur identity in the face of increasing state repression of the Uyghur language. Consistent official efforts to promote Putonghua in Xinjiang since the 1950s had resulted in the establishment of many Putonghua-only schools, dividing the Uyghurs of urban Xinjiang into two linguistic subgroups by the 1980s: *minkaohan*, Uyghurs educated in Mandarin Chinese, and *minkaomin*, Uyghurs educated in Uyghur.[25]

The number of *minkaohan* soared as China transitioned to a market economy in the 1980s, a conscious decision taken by urban Uyghur parents to guarantee their children more opportunities in an increasingly Han-dominated society. Since 1995, however, state education policy has steered away "from relatively accommodative pluralism towards assimilative monoculturalism" and, following the 2002 implementation of a so-called "bilingual education" policy in Xinjiang (a euphemism for the imposition and mandatory use of Mandarin in what were previously minority-language schools or classes), rapidly institutionalized Putonghua as the sole medium of instruction in the region's education system by the mid-2000s.[26] While the first wave of Uyghur rappers active in the early 2000s were mostly born in the 1980s and early 1990s, and therefore would have been a mix of *minkaomin* and *minkaohan*, fewer Uyghur rappers in the early 2010s, having received education in the post-2002 era, were likely to be as fluent in their native tongue.

In *Track's Flow*, a 2012 low-budget web series produced by a group of local Xinjiang rappers, the host entered the homes and studios of local rappers for intimate conversations during which this debate on language repeatedly flared up. Surprisingly, many defended Uyghur rappers' right to Putonghua, arguing that they should be able to write and rap in whatever language they were most comfortable with. One of the interviewees, Nawukere (Lil-Em), declared in fluent Putonghua:

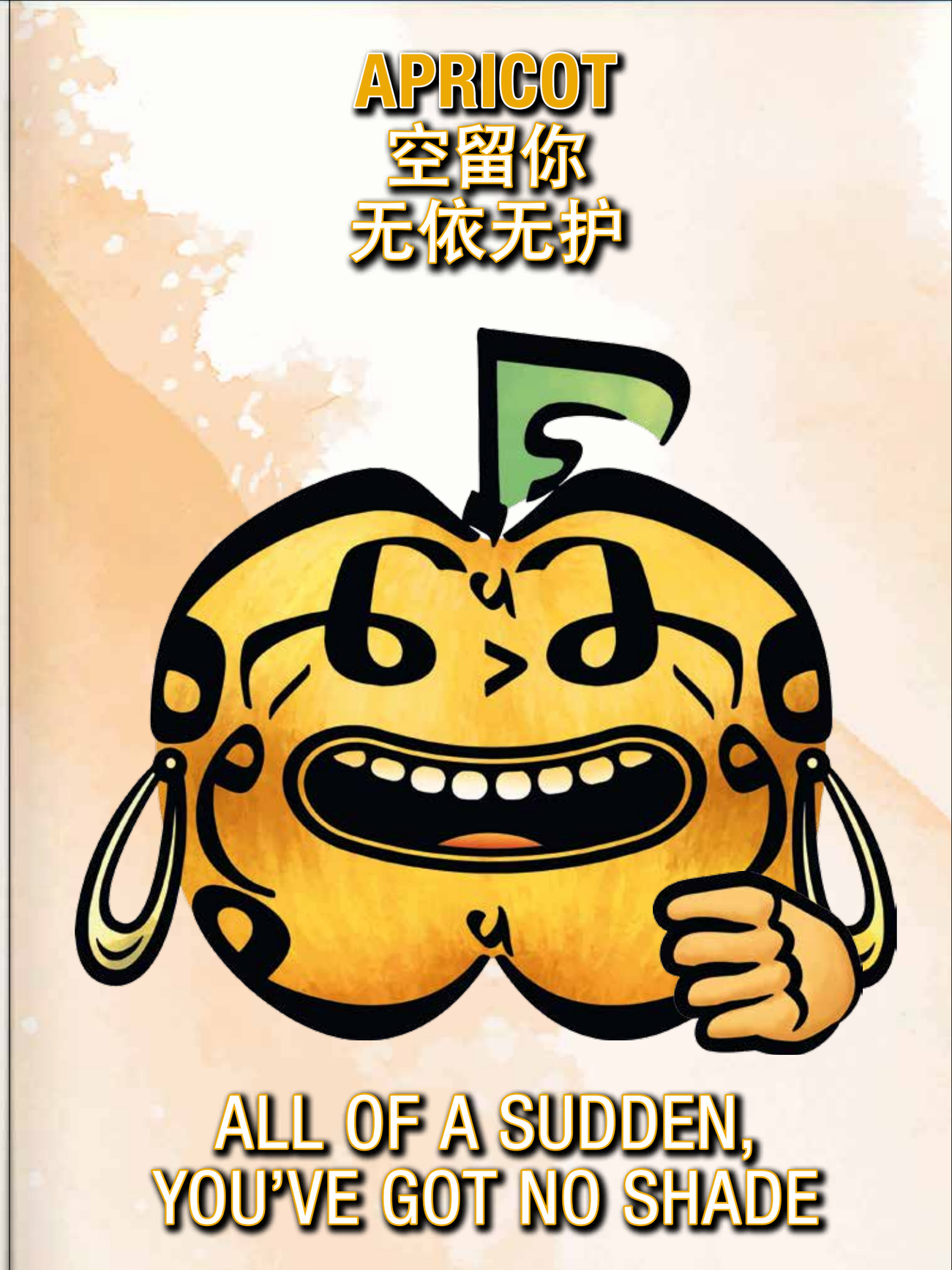
> I myself rap in Mandarin, English, and Uyghur … [But] I know a lot of fellow Uyghur rappers who are more comfortable with writing lyrics in Mandarin because they went to Mandarin-only schools … If, in our ethnic group, some rap in Putonghua, some in Uyghur, that only seems fair. What's most important is support![27]

Nawukere also positively acknowledged the popularity of Mandarin, suggesting it may in fact help Uyghur rappers introduce their music to a wider crowd. In the underground rap scene in a Xinjiang still recovering from the aftermath of the 2009 riots, while some fans saw the use of Putonghua in Uyghur rap as a kind of linguistic and cultural dilution, others, particularly those actively making rap music like Lil-Em, took

25. Joanne Smith Finley and Xiaowei Zang, "Language, Education, and Uyghur Identity: An Introductory Essay," in *Language, Education, and Uyghur Identity in Urban Xinjiang*, ed. Joanne Smith Finley and Xiaowei Zang (New York: Routledge, 2015). Further on *minkaohan* and *minkaomin*: "*Minkaohan* and *minkaomin* refer to examination in Mandarin Chinese and examination in a minority language respectively but are also popularly used as categories to denote individuals who have undergone these forms of schooling." See David Robin's essay "Between *Minkaohan* and *Minkaomin*: Discourses on 'Assimilation' Amongst Bilingual Urban Uyghurs" in the same volume.

26. David Robin, "Between *Minkaohan* and *Minkaomin*: Discourses on 'Assimilation' Amongst Bilingual Urban Uyghurs," in *Language, Education, and Uyghur Identity in Urban Xinjiang*, ed. Joanne Smith Finley and Xiaowei Zang (New York: Routledge, 2015).

27. Translation my own. "Xinjiang's Original Hip-Hop Show Track's Flow Episode 4: Lil-Em," Youku, uploaded by DANK_Studio, https://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XNDQ2ODUxMzQ0.html?spm=a2hbt.13141534.app.5~5!2~5!2~5~5~5!2~5~5!2~5!2~5!2~5~5!47~A.



little issue, and instead saw it as a positive factor in the growth of the scene. While implicitly acknowledging the structural influence of such actors as state policies (which worked to repress the Uyghur language) and free market economy (which favored Putonghua rap, as it guaranteed a wider audience and therefore profit), Lil-Em's idiosyncratic interpretation of the impact of these forces reveals his position on rap as more than a conveyor of local Uyghur identity. Like the underground rap aficionados of 1990s Taiwan, we can sense his imagination of being part of a global—and in his case multiethnic and multilingual—hip-hop community.

THE RISE TO MAINSTREAM: VISIBILITY AND COOPTION

The Rap of China marked a watershed moment in Chinese rap, premiering to much surprise amid the increasing cultural censorship that followed Xi Jinping's rise in 2012. Chinese state control of cultural expression has a long history, with its theoretical groundwork laid in the 1940s by Mao Zedong, who equated the value of culture with propaganda. While censorship of cultural productions has historically been implemented by various institutions under the auspices of the State Council, full authority has since March 2018 been allocated to the new National Radio and Television Administration under direct supervision of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, founded in 1924—a move one step further toward the party's goal of directly managing all censorship and propaganda.[28] Official attitudes toward rap have been erratic. In 2015 the Chinese Ministry of Culture released a blacklist of 120 songs on People's Daily, citing them as promoting "obscenity, violence, and crime, and jeopardized morality."[29] Rap featured prominently on the list, including seventeen songs from the Beijing rap group In3, several from also-Beijinger Xinjiekou Crew, and many more from a host of Taiwanese rappers like Chang Csun Yuk, Stanley Huang, and notably MC Hotdog. Just two years later, however, the government directly commissioned the Chengdu-based rap group CD REV to produce two propaganda songs. Titled "This is China" and "No THAAD" (THAAD standing for Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense) the two songs strongly denounced Western media bias against China and the US military presence on the Korean peninsula, respectively.[30]

Against all odds, in July 2017 the first season of *The Rap of China* aired. Produced by the online video platform iQiyi, the show was essentially an adaptation of the South Korean rap reality show *Show Me the Money* (2012–ongoing). Working with four celebrity producers who also served as judges (curiously, Hotdog was one of them), a mix of underground and "idol" rappers (that is, those already signed to labels) would compete for a prize of one million RMB. The show achieved huge commercial success, reaching more than 200 million viewers per episode. Notably, the show rehashed the very

28. Nathanel Amar, "Navigating and Circumventing (Self) censorship in the Chinese Music Scene," *China Perspectives*, no. 2 (2020): 25–33, https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.10107.
29. "China Bans 120 Immoral Songs Online," *China Daily*, August 11, 2015, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/culture/2015-08/11/content_21560092.htm.
30. Eden Townend, "Rap for the Machine: How the CCP Co-Opted Chinese Rap," *News Lens*, June 27, 2019, https://international.thenewslens.com/article/121317.



Title card for the 5th season of Korean reality television series ***Show Me the Money*** (2012–ongoing).

debate about the appropriate language for Chinese rap that had divided underground rappers in the 2000s. One of the contest's most hyped subplots featured MC Jin, who participated under the pseudonym HipHopMan. The first Asian-American rapper to have been signed, in the early 2000s, to a major US record label, Jin was eliminated in the show's seventh round (born in Miami to parents from Hong Kong, Jin speaks fluent English and Cantonese, but not Putonghua). His elimination served as a deliberate plot device, reaffirming the victory of homegrown rappers over their (Asian-)American predecessors, while at the same time stressing to local rappers the necessity of sticking to Chinese languages to make it in China. Featuring a considerable number of rappers from Chongqing and Chengdu, all of whom rapped in their native tongues (variations of Southwestern Mandarin), the contest also helped the burgeoning rap scenes of the two major southwestern Chinese cities gain renown nationwide. GAI, an MC from Chongqing, eventually became a co-winner on the first season alongside PG One. Early in 2018 an unofficial hip-hop ban was issued, two weeks after news broke of an adultery scandal surrounding PG One. While no official statement came from the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television (the department responsible for censorship procedures and propaganda supervision), media outlets and online streaming platforms nevertheless took the precautionary measure of cancelling all on-air appearances by Chinese rappers and removing rap songs, after the Communist Youth League dug up an old song by PG One and publicly denounced its lyrics for depicting drug use and misogyny. GAI, after having initially been invited to perform at the New Year's Gala, did not make it, despite going so far as to sing "[Long] live my motherland" on a variety show organized by CCTV, China's official broadcaster. The event is a telling testimony of the unstable dynamic between the media industry and the state in shaping cultural production in China. Despite iQiyi's attempts to fabricate a narrative for homegrown Chinese rap that would harmonize with the socialist core values upheld by the party, the antiestablishment spirit of nearly two decades of underground

rap was impossible to mask, and proved too subversive for a country under what is arguably its most conservative regime since the 1990s.

The 2018 return of *The Rap of China* may have surprised many to start, but as the show went on it became clear that its return had come at the price of draconian censorship and even stricter adherence to party ideology. All tattoos on the performers had been digitally removed during post-production, and the lyrics were clearly toned down, confined to a handful of anodyne topics like romance and friendship. Most curiously, the participation of four rappers from Xinjiang—Ma Jun (from the legendary Icon Mic contest), Air, Nawukere (Lil-Em), and Duo Lei—had become the core thread of the show. With Air and Nawukere taking first and second place in the contest, Xinjiang rappers were all of a sudden on the mind of every hip-hop head in China, even as sweeping assimilation policies were being executed in their hometowns. This circumstance, however, was not at all mentioned by the rappers on screen—unsurprisingly, given the controversies surrounding the first season and the severe consequences, from career termination to jail time and possible "disappearance," that face artists of Chinese nationality who make political statements.

Particularly worth noting is the controversial result of Air's win over his fellow Uyghur rapper Nawukere. Throughout the season, Nawukere, born in Ürümchi in 1989, impressed the judges and fellow competitors for his lightning-quick and multilingual style of rap, often switching smoothly between Uyghur, Putonghua, and English. In one performance, he broke the show's speed record by churning out seventy words in eight seconds.[31] In comparison, Air, born in 1993 in Kashgar, never spoke or rapped a word of Uyghur throughout, and was mainly known for several love-themed pop-rap songs that went viral. Based on the votes of one hundred fellow rapper-contestants and four celebrity judges, Air won a landslide victory, beating Nawukere by fifty-three votes.[32] Whether scripted or spontaneous, the result symbolically reaffirmed the place of Putonghua over minority languages, and of a more assimilationist type of Uyghur culture over its counterpart in Chinese rap. Compared to Han rappers who stuck to *fangyan* like Sichuanese (which is nevertheless Mandarin), the ethnic-minority rapper must pledge his allegiance by conforming to the country's lingua franca in order to be acknowledged. While Xinjiang rappers successfully raised their profile through the well-publicized competition, this came at the cost of becoming propaganda tools for national ethnic unity.

LOOKING AHEAD: RAP FROM THE WEST SIDE

Between the Chinese state's increasing cultural censorship and the imposition of ethnic assimilation, linguistic uniformity, and homogenization, the prospects of Uyghur rap may seem bleak. However, by revisiting the brief history of rap in China, particularly in Xinjiang, I have attempted

31. A clip of the episode featuring the performance can be accessed on YouTube. "那吾克熱快嘴「8秒70字」 吳亦凡 熱狗 潘瑋柏嗨炸！｜中國新說唱" (Nawukere Rapped 70 words in 8 Seconds, Kris Wu, MC Hotdog, and Will Pan All Went Nuts! | The Rap of China), YouTube, uploaded by Star ETtoday, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyWkLaLvKeA.

32. Jake Newby, "Xinjiang-born Uyghur Rapper Wins 'The Rap of China 2018' as Kris Wu Calls Out Haters," Radii China, October 7, 2018, https://radiichina.com/xinjiang-born-uyghur-rapper-wins-the-rap-of-china-2018-as-kris-wu-calls-out-haters/.

to trace the multilingual roots of Uyghur rap and highlight how this multilingualism has informed the rappers' articulation of Uyghur identity as participation in a global affiliation united by hip-hop. This should remind us not to essentialize the role of the Uyghur language in Uyghur rap so as to equate the ongoing erasure of the language with the inevitable demise of its music community.

In her analysis of political commentaries in Uyghur pop music, Elise Anderson, who also contributes an essay to this volume, borrows political scientist James C. Scott's concept of "hidden transcripts" to read the oftentimes veiled metaphors Uyghur pop and folk musicians began to employ in their lyrics amid the Chinese state's increased repression of Uyghur discontent.[33] Following Anderson, I am interested in how, when it comes to hip-hop, Uyghur artists have managed to continue to smuggle such "hidden transcripts" into their work in distinctly bilingual or multilingual fashion, or even using solely the colonizer's language.

As one of the longest-running rap groups from Xinjiang, the Ürümchi-based Yiltiz did not begin to incorporate Putonghua into their songs until relatively recently. Their name, which means "roots" in Uyghur, is an apt representation of their firm attachment to their homeland and the spirit of the underground. Besides frequently incorporating traditional Uyghur instruments such as *dutar* and *qanan*, their songs often feature highly codified lyrics that represent a marginalized but empowered Uyghur identity. In the 2020 single "Ependi," the group reworks the legend of Nasirdin Ependi into an allegory for cross-cultural solidarity. Nasirdin Ependi is the East Turkistan spelling of Nasreddin Hodja, a scholar believed to have lived in Anatolia in the thirteenth century and a household name in the wider geographical region of the Balkans, the Middle East, and Asia (see also the introduction and Guangtian Ha's essay in this volume).[34] While his stories and anecdotes vary across culture, Yiltiz's track positions him as a trickster-hero who redistributes wealth among the exploited. The song opens with a sample of a qanan, then transitions into a Uyghur verse by MC Deadman, a line of which can be translated as: "Nasirdin's donkey, he rides his donkey all day long to find the bullies."[35] Then MC Elarman takes over to sing the bridge, this time in Putonghua, which can be translated as: "What my Ependi rides is not a donkey / Today he will earn another 10 million in gold coins / and spend it on a million suffering brothers."[36] The following chorus, again in Uyghur and this time sung by X-qan, can be translated as: "My name is Ependi, Nasirdin Ependi, I was born with such a temper."[37] In the official page of the song on the music streaming app Netease Music, the artist statement, originally in Chinese, can be translated as: "Ependi is our role model: a leader against the dark and the evil, an anti-bourgeois hero … HAHAHA." The group's identification with and framing of Ependi as an anti-capitalist leader standing with his suffering kin can be interpreted as a defiant voice from the Uyghur underground against the corrupted

33. Elise Anderson, "The Politics of Pop: The Rise and Repression of Uyghur Music in China," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, May 31, 2020, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/politics-pop-rise-repression-uyghur-music-china/.

34. Özlem Oğuzhan, "Re-Reading Nasreddin Hodja as an Opportunity for 'Intercultural Contact,'" *Bilig*, no. 82 (summer 2017): 249–67, https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/807322.

35. The original line in Uyghur is: نەسىردىننىڭ ئېشىكى ، تاپار زومىگەر توختىماي.

36. The original line in Chinese is: "我的阿凡提 / 他骑的不是驴 / 今天再赚个1000万个金币 / 然后花给100万个难兄难弟".

37. The original line in Uyghur is: مېنىڭ ئىسمىم ئەپەندىم نەسىردىن ئەپەندىم ، تۆغۇلۇشتىن بۇ مىجەزىم بەكلا غەلىتە.

state capitalism of post-socialist China. By cloaking it in widely known folklore while playing wittily with the party's official denouncement of capitalist ideology despite decades of state capitalism (as hinted by the knowing laughter in their statement), Yiltiz's subversive allegory has made it through the censors to reach millions of rap fans with internet access. Compared to Nawukere, Yiltiz's position is far more political, yet the bilingual lyrics also create a contact zone for the exploited masses to cross ethnic and cultural divides.

Though many may now be rapping in Putonghua and English, politically conscious Uyghur rappers still have the agency to articulate their unique experience while circumventing the censure of state-controlled media. AThree, for instance, is a rapper from Börtala (Bole), a northwestern city in Xinjiang, and a rising star of Uyghur rap. In his track "Let Go," released in 2020, the twenty-five-year-old pokes fun at the phonies populating the increasingly oversaturated rap scene in China. At one point, he dishes out a sarcastic line which can be translated as:

> Perhaps I haven't learned how to
> make myself famous /
> perhaps I should give up and start
> a rock band /
> or try folk, but I promise I won't deliver
> second-rate watery lyrics /
> you know why? Because there's
> a drought on the West Side.[38]

This line—nicely rhyming, in the original—gestures concretely to the lack of a sustainable hydrological infrastructure in Xinjiang. One might also read it less literally, as a veiled critique of the Chinese State's negligence of Uyghur people's precarity. Similar to Yiltiz's "Ependim," the codified nature of AThree's "Let Go" allowed it to circulate freely, and it was even performed on *Rap Star* in 2020—a new reality TV competition that featured Air as one of the judges.

In highlighting these two moments of subversion I do not mean to downplay the brutality of the Chinese state's imposition of linguistic homogenization and cultural censorship. Earlier in my writing, I reached out to several members of the Uyghur hip-hop community for interviews. While some initially responded with enthusiasm, they stopped responding after receiving my questions, written in Chinese, possibly due to self-censorship and suspicion. It was this regrettable lack of firsthand accounts that prompted me to look into what was available on the internet. Then, as I started reading and listening closely, the "hidden transcripts" began to emerge. But when I finished writing, I was shocked to find several of the videos I visited just a few months ago and cited in this essay, including the series "Track's Flow," already censored online. Amid such silencing, it is all the more urgent to listen, more intently than ever, to the Uyghur artists who, with cunning, humor, swag and a sense of endurance, tell us living stories from the West Side through rap. To me, the West Side they speak of is at once the Xinjiang located West of the Center, and an imagined cultural space that extends far beyond its geographical parameters, opening itself up to all members of the global hip-hop community. As we listen, these stories, digitally recorded and disseminated online, will transcend the boundaries of language, ethnicity, nation-state, and time, to inspire new forms of solidarity.

38. The original in Chinese is: "也许能出名的方式我没学会, 也许我该放弃说唱组个摇滚乐队; 或者唱点民谣, 但我保证歌词绝对不会水, you know why? 因为新疆缺水。" In Putonghua, 水 (pronounced as shui) means water, but it can also be used to colloquially refer to something bad or second-rate.

EXORCISMS AND SACREDNESS
پاكلىنىش بىلەن مۇقەددەسلىك

FATIMAH ABDULGHAFUR SEYYAH, TRANSLATED BY AHMATJAN OSMAN
فاتىمە ئابدۇلغافۇر سەييام
تەرجىمە قىلغۇچى: ئەخمەتجان ئوسمان

Those ones
From Makkah
I've got friends in you
They say:
Who are you, who are you?
I say:
Be gone, be gone!
They laugh and laugh
Until we both drop
on the ground

Those ones
From Madinah
I've got buddies in you
They say:
I don't believe you,
I don't believe you.
I say:
Leave, you astray,
leave immediately
I command you!
They cry and cry
Until we both drop
on the ground

مەككەدىن ئاۋۇلار
سەندىكى دوستلىرىم
كىمسەن، كىمسەن؟ دېيىشەر
يوقال، يوقال! دەيمەن
كۈلىشەرۇ كۈلىشەر
ئىككىمىز يەرگە يىقىلىپ قالغۇچە

مەدىنەدىن ئاۋۇلار
سەندىكى بۇرادەرلىرىم
ساڭا ئىشەنمەيمەن، ساڭا ئىشەنمەيمەن،
دېيىشەر
كەت، ئەي، ئازغۇن، دەرھال كەت،
ساڭا بۇيرۇق قىلماقتىمەن، دەيمەن
يىغلىشارۇ يىغلىشار
ئىككىمىز يەرگە يىقىلىپ قالغۇچە

Those ones
The black ones
The big ones
The male ones
I've got mates in you
They say:
I am with you,
    I am with you
I say:
I'll kill you, I'll kill you
With the holy water
With the holy words
With the holy land
With the truly unholy!
They stay and stay
Until we both drop
    on the ground

ئاۋۇلار
قارىلار
چوڭلار
ئەركەكلەر
سەندىكى ئۇلپەتلىرىم
مەن سەن بىلەن، مەن سەن بىلەن،
دېيىشەر
سېنى
قۇتلۇق سۇ بىلەن
قۇتلۇق سۆزلەر بىلەن
قۇتلۇق جاي بىلەن
ھەقىقىي رەزىللىك بىلەن
ئۆلتۈرىمەن، سېنى ئۆلتۈرىمەن، دەيمەن
قېلىشارۇ قېلىشار
ئىككىمىز يەرگە يېقىلىپ قالغۇچە

Those ones
Dog-faced ones
Cat-spirited ones
Snake-bodied ones
Bird-voiced ones
I've got companions in you
They say:
I love you, I love you
I say:
You filthy
You needy
You whisperer
You watcher
Get out of me, get out of me!
They leave, they leave
Until we both drop
    on the ground

Those ones
Those beautiful ones
Those ones in the pictures
Those ones the idols
Those ones the desired
I've got partners in you
They say:
Look at me, look at me
I say:
You're ugly
You're sexy
You're slavery
You're horny
Go die, go die!
They live and live
Until we both drop
    on the ground

ئاۋۇلار
ئىت يۈزلۈكلەر
مۇشۇك ئەرۋاھلىقلار
يىلان تەنلىكلەر
قۇش ئاۋازلىقلار
سەندىكى سەپداشلىرىم
سېنى سۆيىمەن، سېنى سۆيىمەن، دېيىشەر
سەن پەسكەش
سەن ھاجەتمەن
سەن ئازدۇرغاق
سەن پايلاقچى
ئىچىمدىن يوقال، ئىچىمدىن يوقال!
دەيمەن
يوقلىشارۇ يوقلىشار
ئىككىمىز يەرگە يېقىلىپ قالغۇچە

ئاۋۇلار
ئاۋۇ چىرايلىقلار
ئاۋۇ رەسىملەردىكىلەر
ئاۋۇ مەبۇدلار
ئاۋۇ كۆڭۈلدىكىدەكلەر
سەندىكى شېرىكلىرىم
ماڭا قارا، ماڭا قارا، دېيىشەر
سەن قەبىھ
سەن ھەۋەسلەندۇرگۈچى
سەن قۇل قىلغۇچى
سەن شەھۋانىي
ئۆل، ئۆل، دەيمەن
ياششارۇ ياششار
ئىككىمىز يەرگە يېقىلىپ قالغۇچە

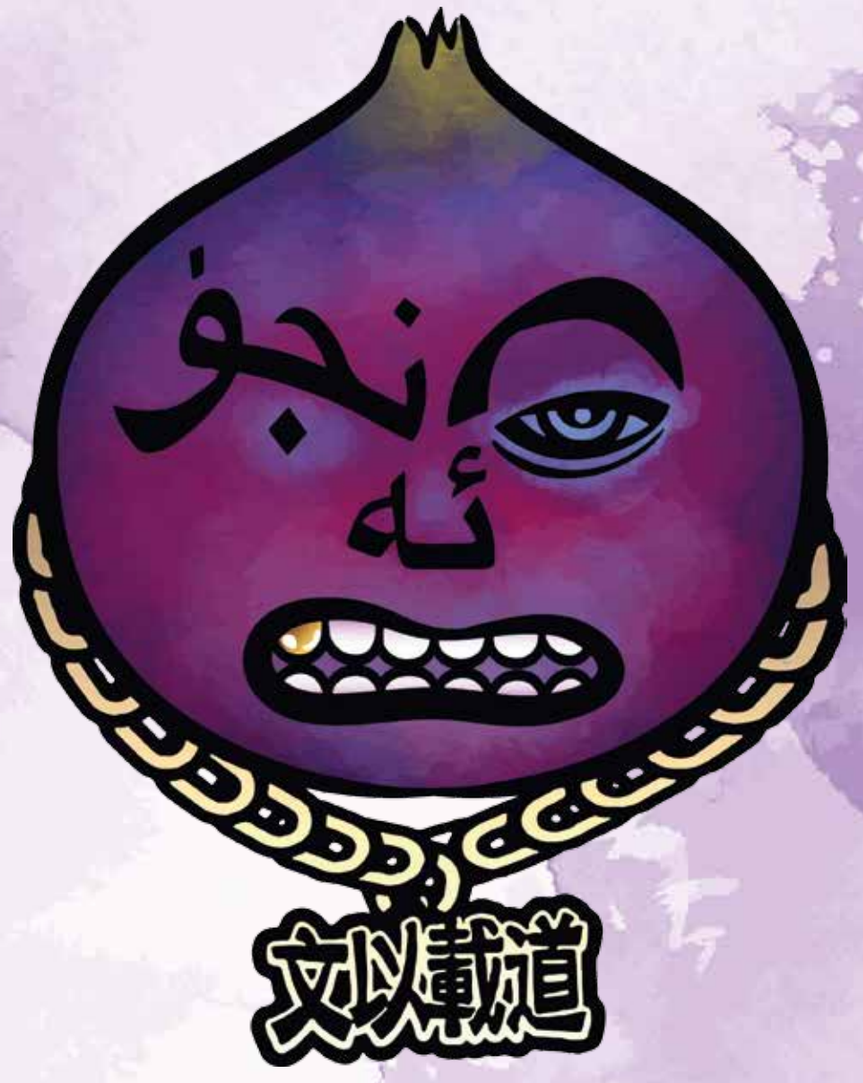
Those ones
Under the belly buttons
Above the sacred grave
I've got allies in you
They say:
Listen to me, listen to me
I say:
You bruise me, you bruise me
They kneel down
and kneel down
Until we both drop
on the ground

Those ones
Those moons
Those stars
Those pluses
Those stones
Those fires
Those trees
Those animals
I've got consorts in you
They say:
We won't leave you,
won't leave you again
I say:
Stay, stay with me
Until we all stand up
on the ground

ئاۋۇلار
كىندىك ئاستىدىكىلىرى
مۇقەددەس مازار ئۈستىدىكىلىرى
سەندىكى ئىتتىپاقداشلىرىم
ماڭا قۇلاق سال، ماڭا قۇلاق سال، دېيىشەر
مېنى زەخمىلەندۈردىڭ ، مېنى
زەخمىلەندۈردىڭ ، دەيمەن
تىزلىنىشارۇ تىزلىنىشار
ئىككىمىز يەرگە يىقىلىپ قالغۇچە

ئاۋۇلار
ئاۋۇ ئايلار
ئاۋۇ يۇلتۇزلار
ئاۋۇ مۇسبەتلەر
ئاۋۇ تاشلار
ئاۋۇ ئاتەشلەر
ئاۋۇ دەرەخلەر
ئاۋۇ ھايۋاناتلار
سەندىكى جۈپتىم
سېنى تەرك ئەتمەيمىز، سېنى ئىككىنچىلەپ
تەرك ئەتمەيمىز، دېيىشەر
قېلىڭلار، مەن بىلەن قېلىڭلار، دەيمەن
ئىككىمىز يەردىن تۇرۇپ كەتكۈچە

FIG
我绝非穷困潦倒人之餐



WITH THE POOR I'M NOT AROUND

مەجبۇرلانغان جىمجىتلىق ۋە مەجبۇرلانغان ئاۋاز:

ئۇيغۇر ئاۋاز مەنزىرىسىنىڭ ئۆچۈرۈلۈشى

ئېلىس ئاندېرسون

زورلاش ۋە زۇلۇم قىلىشنىڭ ھەرخىل شەكىللىرى بولىدۇ. رەھىمسىزلارچە سۈكۈت قىلدۇرۇلۇش ۋە مەجبۇرىي سۆزلىتىلىش خۇددى بىر تەڭگىنىڭ ئىككى تەرىپىگە ئوخشايدۇ. ئېلىس ئاندېرسون ماقالىسىدە، «مەجبۇرلانغان سۈكۈت» ۋە «مەجبۇرلانغان ئاۋاز» دېگەن ئۇقۇملار ئارقىلىق ، جۇڭگو ھۆكۈمىتىنىڭ ئۇيغۇرلارنىڭ كىملىكى ۋە مەدەنىيىتىنى يوقىتىش ئۈچۈن سىستېمىلىق ھالدا كۆچمەنلىكنى ۋە بۇنى ماس قەدەمدە ئەملىلەشتۈرگەنلىكنى كۆرسىتىپ بېرىدۇ. كوچىلاردا ۋە لاگېرلاردا ئىشلىتىلىدىغان كۈندىلىك تىلنىڭ چەكلىنىشىدىن تارتىپ ، ھۆكۈمەت قوللىغان مۇزىكىلارنى مەجبۇرىي ئورۇنلاشقىچە ئۇيغۇر ھاياتىنىڭ ھېچ بىر بۇلۇڭى بوش قويۇۋېتىلمىگەنىدى.

COMPELLED SILENCE AND SOUND:
THE ERASURE OF UYGHUR SOUNDSCAPES*

Elise Anderson

One afternoon in June 2018, I found myself browsing in an antique shop in Östengboyi (The Stream's Edge), a neighborhood running alongside the Id Kah mosque of Kashgar, the famed Uyghur city in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).[1] Behind me, I heard a voice say, "*Essalamu eleykum* (peace be upon you)," the Arabic greeting used by Muslims worldwide. "*We eleykum essalam* (and also on you)," I heard another voice answer. I turned and saw two elderly Uyghur men embracing. I then looked toward the shopkeeper; surprise was written across his face. Our eyes met, but we said nothing.

Normally, the two men's exchange would have been unremarkable. These Arabic phrases are, although sacred in origin, entirely mundane. However, these were not normal times. As early as a year before, anecdotal evidence suggested that Uyghurs had stopped using religiously inflected phrases like these as they arouse suspicions of "religious extremism."[2] By this June afternoon, I had been in the region for nearly two weeks, and this was the first and last time on this trip I heard any Uyghurs say these words. Each day of my visit contained myriad clues, such as this one, that the contours of Uyghur life had changed dramatically since I left the region in 2016. Dialogue among Uyghurs

* This is a revised and expanded version of an essay titled "Compelled Silence and Compelled Sound in the Uyghur Genocide," which first appeared in the *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* on December 15, 2020. See https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2020/12/15/compelled-silence-and-compelled-sound-in-the-uyghur-genocide/.

1. While a debate on naming conventions and terminology is beyond the scope of this essay, the topic does deserve a brief note. The "official" name of this region is the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, often "Xinjiang" for short. "Xinjiang" has been in formal use to refer to the region since 1884, when the toponym began appearing in documents of the Qing Empire (ca. 1644–1911). The region later became "autonomous" (on paper) in 1954, earning its current name. However, many indigenous inhabitants of this region understand "Xinjiang" to be a colonial term and prefer other names, including "East Turkistan" and, more frequently in the contemporary period "Uyghur Region." As a scholar and advocate, I use multiple designations for the region somewhat fluidly and interchangeably, though never uncritically.

2. Human Rights Watch, "'Eradicating Ideological Viruses': China's Campaign of Repression against Xinjiang's Muslims," September 9, 2018, https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs.

simply sounded different, and public life sounded different as a result. Linguistic and other soundscapes of the recent past now seemed a distant memory.[3]

This essay considers the roles of silence and sound in the slow-motion genocide playing out in the Uyghur homeland, where, since early 2017, Chinese authorities have been waging an ongoing assault on Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other Turkic and/or majority-Muslim ethnic groups under the guise of the "Strike Hard Campaign Against Violent Terrorism" (严厉打击暴力恐怖活动专项行动) and "People's War on Terror" (反恐人民战争). The assault is a fundamentally assimilative one, whereby the state is both erasing Uyghur culture and attempting to replace it with something else. By analyzing various sound examples, including firsthand accounts from internment camp survivors and the recent output of professional Uyghur musicians, I argue that the Chinese state is achieving cultural erasure and replacement in part through a series of pervasive sonic practices that compel both silence and sound. While some of these practices are blatantly coercive, others are more subtle and insidious, helping to sustain an environment of surveillance and fear. This chapter reveals the state-led practices of compelled silence and compelled sound in the Uyghur Region, the cultural changes that they appear to be affecting, and thus the pervasiveness and scope of China's state-led destruction of Uyghur life.

The essay begins with an overview of China's genocidal campaign of repression, suggesting that the current campaign is a logical, if absurd, continuation of assimilationist policies in the Uyghur Region over the past several decades. The section that follows briefly articulates a theory of compelled silence and compelled sound, drawing from extant literature on enforced silence and sonic torture to develop a conceptual toolkit for describing the sonic means of erasure and replacement. The remainder of the text develops this theory through description and analysis of examples of compelled silence and compelled sound inside internment camps and in Uyghur society more broadly, showing how forms of sonic erasure and replacement play a significant role in China's repression of Uyghurs. The conclusion suggests some areas worthy of future research.

THE REPRESSION OF UYGHUR LIFE AND LIFEWAYS

For decades, China has embarked on repressive, assimilative campaigns targeting the indigenous peoples of what it calls the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. These state efforts have included

3. I conducted ethnographic interviews and observations referenced in this essay in May–August 2010, May–June 2011, December 2012–June 2016, and June 2018.
4. Gardner Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
5. Eric T. Schluessel, "'Bilingual' Education and Discontent in Xinjiang," *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 2 (2017): 251–77. https://www.tandfonline.com/ doi/abs/10.1080/02634930701517482.
6. What I am calling the "Ürümchi uprising" here is more commonly known by the name of the "Ürümchi riots." The events of July 5, 2009, began as a peaceful demonstration by Uyghur university students asking for justice for wrongful deaths in inner China; at some point, likely provoked by police force, the demonstration became an ethnic riot. Vigilante violence lasted for days. Chinese state media claimed that the majority of the nearly two hundred dead were Han, but for more than a decade Uyghurs have continued to insist that hundreds, if not thousands, of Uyghurs died and disappeared into state custody in the days that followed. For more on the uprising, see James Leibold, "The Xinjiang Riots: Tried Paradigms, Fresh Tensions," *China Beat*, July 14, 2009; and Uyghur Human Rights Project, "Can Anyone Hear Us?: Voices from the 2009 Unrest in Ürümchi," July 1, 2010, https://uhrp.org/ → press-releases-uaa-and-uhrp-reports/can-anyone-hear-us-voices-2009-unrest-urumchi.
7. Joanne Smith Finley, "Securitization, Insecurity, and Conflict in Contemporary Xinjiang: Has PRC Counter-terrorism Evolved into State Terror?" *Central Asian Survey* 38 (March 11, 2019): 1–26, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02634937.2019.1586348; Sean Roberts, *The War on the Uyghurs: China's Internal Campaign against a Muslim Minority* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020).
8. Rachel Harris and Aziz Isa, "Islam by Smartphone: Reading the Uyghur Islamic Revival on WeChat," *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 1 (2019): 61–80, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02634937.2018.1492904.
9. Anna Hayes, "Interwoven 'Destinies': The Significance of Xinjiang to the China Dream, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Xi Jinping Legacy," *Journal of Contemporary China* 29, no. 121 (2020): 31–45, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10670564.2019.1621528.
10. Because of the Chinese government's opacity, numbers of both detainees and camps are estimates at best. For a 2019 estimate of a "speculative upper limit" of 1.8 million detainees, see Adrian Zenz, "'Wash Brains, Cleanse Hearts': Evidence from Chinese Government Documents about the Nature and Extent of Xinjiang's Extrajudicial Internment Campaign," *Journal of Political Risk* 7, no. 11 (November 2019), https://www.jpolrisk.com/wash-brains-cleanse-hearts/. A 2020 investigation published by *Buzzfeed News* identified 315 locations used in the ongoing internment/imprisonment program: Alison Killing, Megha Rajagopalan, and Christo Buschek, "Blanked-Out Spots on China's Maps Helped Us Uncover Xinjiang's Camps," *Buzzfeed News*, August 27, 2020, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/alison_killing/satellite-images-investigation-xinjiang-detention-camps.
11. On predictive policing, see Human Rights Watch, "China's Algorithms of Repression," May 1, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/01/chinas-algorithms-repression/reverse-engineering-xinjiang-police-mass. On human surveillance as another feature of this system, see Darren Byler, "China's Government Has Ordered a Million Citizens to Occupy Uighur Homes. Here's What They Think They're Doing," *ChinaFile*, October 24, 2018, https://www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/postcard/million-citizens-occupy-uighur-homes-xinjiang.
12. Chris Buckley and Austin Ramzy, "Night Images Reveal Many New Detention Sites in China's Xinjiang Region," *New York Times*, September 24, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/24/world/asia/china-muslims-xinjiang-detention.html.
13. Emily Feng, "Uighur Children Fall Victim to China Anti-Terror Drive," *Financial Times*, July 9, 2018, https://www.ft.com/content/f0d3223a-7f4d-11e8-bc55-50daf11b720d.
14. Vicky Xiuzhong Xu, Danielle Cave, James Leibold, Kelsey Munro, and Nathan Ruser, "Uyghurs for Sale," *Australia Strategic Policy Institute*, March 1, 2020, https://www.aspi.org.au/report/uyghurs-sale. →

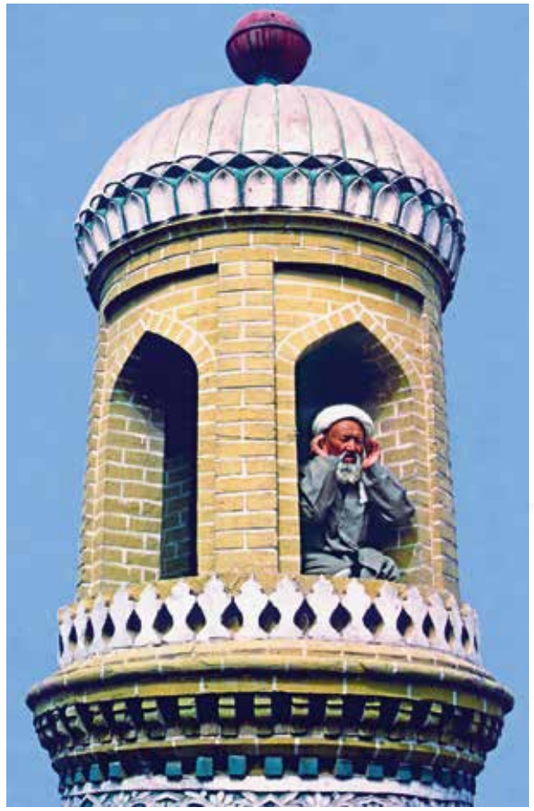
"Strike Hard" campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s[4]; a move toward "bilingual" (but really monolingual) education beginning in the early 2000s[5]; repression during and following the 2009 Ürümchi Uprising[6]; and, since 2014, a "People's War on Terror" (反恐人民战争) characterized by securitization and "stability maintenance."[7] All of these campaigns are linked by the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) anxieties over its governance in and control of the region. The Chinese government has so far been unsuccessful in assimilating groups such as the Uyghurs, who see themselves as the original inhabitants of this land and whose growing piety in recent decades became the government scapegoat for a harsh crackdown on expressions of discontent.[8] The government wants to secure the region for the purposes of political power and economic benefit, including for its ongoing Belt and Road Initiative.[9] Institutionalized Islamophobia and systemic racism against non-Han peoples bolster this system.

State repression has intensified since 2017. China has taken a multipronged approach to its assault on the Uyghurs, embarking on a massive internment campaign,[10] building up a predictive policing system and pervasive surveillance state,[11] meting out long prison sentences,[12] separating families,[13] placing individuals (both former detainees and people who have never been detained alike) in forced-labor schemes under the guise of "deradicalization" and "poverty alleviation,"[14] and forcibly sterilizing Uyghur and other women,[15] among other things. Leaked government documents show that the highest levels of CCP leadership developed and approved this program,[16] as well as that at least one local official envisioned the end game as being to "break their lineage, break their roots, break their connections, and break their origins."[17]

Scholar Rian Thum has aptly summarized the multipronged nature of this campaign, commenting to Buzzfeed News:

> The internment and assimilation program in Xinjiang has the overall logic of colonial genocides in North America, the formalized racism of apartheid, the industrial-scale internment of Germany's concentration camps, and the police-state penetration into everyday life of North Korea.[18]

As of March 2021, a growing number of governmental actors, scholars, rights advocates, and others around the world have begun to recognize the multifaceted repression as rising to the level of crimes against humanity and genocide.[19]



Muezzin calling the faithful to prayer in Kashgar.

The authorities have left no part of Uyghur life untouched in this campaign, including the sound environment. Sound is foundational to social bonds and community life, figuring into the ways that human

15. Adrian Zenz, "Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control: The CCP's Campaign to Suppress Uyghur Birthrates in Xinjiang," *Jamestown Foundation*, June 2020 (updated July 21, 2020), https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Zenz-Internment-Sterilizations-and-IUDs-UPDATED-July-21-Rev2.pdf?x30147.

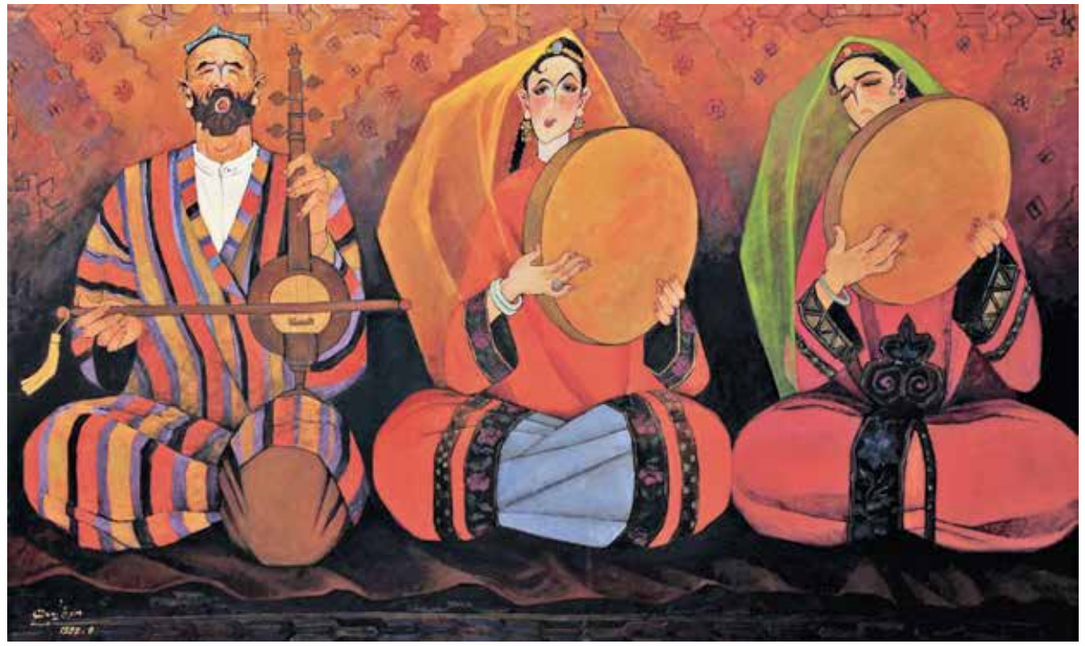
16. Austin Ramzy and Chris Buckley, "'Absolutely No Mercy': Leaked Files Expose How China Organized Mass Detentions of Muslims," *New York Times*, November 16, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/16/world/asia/china-xinjiang-documents.html.

17. Ben Dooley, "Inside China's Internment Camps: Tear Gas, Tasers and Textbooks," *Agence France-Presse*, October 25, 2018, https://www.afp.com/en/inside-chinas-internment-camps-tear-gas-tasers-and-textbooks.

18. Megha Rajagopalan, Alison Killing, and Christo Buschek, "China Secretly Built a Vast New Infrastructure to Imprison Muslims," *Buzzfeed News*, August 27, 2020, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/meghara/china-new-internment-camps-xinjiang-uighurs-muslims.

19. Global Legal Action Network, "International Criminal Responsibility for Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide Against the Uyghur Population in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region," February 8, 2021, https://www.glanlaw.org/single-post/legal-opinion-concludes-that-treatment-of-uyghurs-amounts-to-crimes-against-humanity-and-genocide; Newlines Institutes, "The Uyghur Genocide: An Examination of China's Breaches of the 1948 Genocide Convention," March 8, 2021, https://newlinesinstitute.org/genocide/the-uyghur-genocide-an-examination-of-chinas-breaches-of-the-1948-genocide-convention/. For the January 2021 US Department of State determination, see US Department of State, "Determination of the Secretary of State on Atrocities in Xinjiang," January 19, 2021, https://2017-2021.state.gov/determination-of-the-secretary-of-state-on-atrocities-in-xinjiang//index.html. For the February 2021 vote in the Canadian Parliament, see "Vote no. 56, 43rd Parliament, 2nd Session, Sitting no. 63," February 22, 2021, https://www.ourcommons.ca/members/en/votes/43/2/56. For the February 2021 non-binding motion in the Dutch Parliament, information about which appears not to be accessible on the website of the parliament of the Netherlands, see Eline Schaart, "Dutch Parliament Declares Chinese Treatment of Uighurs a 'Genocide,'" *Politico*, February 25, 2021, https://www.politico.eu/article/dutch-parliament-declares-chinese-treatment-of-uighurs-as-genocide/.

beings create and articulate senses of place and self. Something as seemingly ordinary as a call to prayer or an *essalamu eleykum* upon greeting a friend can figure centrally in everyday life. Uyghur music, defined by a cohesive set of aesthetic concerns and technical standards that differ significantly from what we would think of as "Chinese music," has long played a significant role in similar processes. The lyrics of the classical *muqam* repertoire, for example, with its roots in courtly tradition and long-standing connections to Sufi devotional practice, reflect on the relationship between humankind and Allah, the nature of authority, and what it means



Marwayit Hapiz, ***The Singers***, 1997, oil paint on canvas. 100 × 150 cm.

to live in an unjust world. The folk music tradition connects Uyghurs to a sense of place through its geographically distinct repertoires and to a sense of community through its shared transmission, while pop music of recent decades has provided Uyghur singers with coded ways to express discontent, among many other meanings and uses.[20] Since 2017, the space for at least some forms of Uyghur music performance has diminished drastically in the region, and in some notable instances performances of Han music have come to replace more traditional Uyghur forms.[21] Rachel Harris analyzes developments

20. For more on *muqam*, see Rachel Harris, *The Making of a Musical Canon in Chinese Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2008) and Nathan Light, *Intimate Heritage: Creating Uyghur Muqam Song in Xinjiang* (New York: Lit Verlag, 2008). For more on popular music, see Elise Anderson, "The Politics of Pop: The Rise and Repression of Uyghur Music," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, May 2020, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/politics-pop-rise-repression-uyghur-music-china/; and Rachel Harris, "Cassettes, Bazaars, and Saving the Nation: The Uyghur Music Industry in Xinjiang, China," in *Global Goes Local: Popular Culture in Asia*, ed. Timothy J. Craig and Richard King (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2003), 265–83.

21. Amy Anderson and Darren Byler, "'Eating Hanness': Uyghur Musical Tradition in a Time of Re-education," *China Perspectives*, no. 3 (2019): 17–26, https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.9358.

such as these through the lens of what she terms "sonic territorialization," or how the Chinese state uses sound centrally in its project of political control.[22]

THEORIZING COMPELLED SILENCE AND SOUND

After a 2018 field trip to the region, which overlapped with my own by several days, scholar Joanne Smith Finley recounted that a Uyghur told her, "Now we don't talk anymore."[23] This comment and the linguistic self-policing I described earlier, along with examples from music, are evidence of what I call compelled silence and compelled sound—sonic practices of erasure and replacement, here dictated by the forces of the state, that shape what is and is not sayable, speakable, even singable and playable. Forms of compelled silence that have befallen Uyghur life since 2017 are a direct outcome of the state-led breaking of social bonds, and they have been met with replacement. As an audience member at a talk I gave in 2018 noted, silence leaves a vacuum that can be filled with something.[24] In the Uyghur Region, the Chinese state is attempting to fill that vacuum with itself and its vision of how Uyghur life should sound.

I have deliberately chosen to use the word *compelled* to describe the phenomena of sound and silence in the Uyghur crisis, rather than *enforced*, which has longer standing in scholarly literature, or even *coerced*. While some examples of Chinese state intrusion into Uyghur soundscapes, particularly inside the camps, suggest clear examples of force, other manifestations of state intrusion are less obviously coercive, making it more difficult to show with clarity and certainty that they originate from an outside force with ill intent. *Compelled*, then, strikes me as a concept



The site of **Qirmish Ata Mazar**, in Aqsu prefecture, is famous for its healing waters and ancient trees, and has a mosque and *khaniqa* (a Sufi lodge for mystics) on the grounds. In the 1990s, it was turned into a tourist destination by a Han developer, with tickets for entry, food court, music and picnicking on the formerly sacred site. Where votive ribbons were once tied to trees by Uyghur pilgrims today hang ribbons sold at the local shop for tourists bearing the Chinese characters for a peaceful lifetime.

22. See Chapter 6 ("Song-and-dance and the Sonic Territorialization of Xinjiang.") of Rachel Harris, *Soundscapes of Uyghur Islam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021).
23. Joanne Smith Finley, "'Now We Don't Talk Anymore,'" *China File*, December 28, 2018, https://www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/viewpoint/now-we-dont-talk-anymore.
24. I am thankful to Eric de Roulet, who made this comment at a panel where I delivered a paper at the annual meeting of the Central Eurasian Studies Society on the campus of the University of Pittsburgh in October 2018.

that highlights the sometimes murky ways that the phenomenon I'm describing can take place. In colloquial American English usage, *compelled* can carry a transitive, reflexive, or active meaning: "he compelled me" shows a clear actor exercising outside control on another actor, whereas the reflexive and passive phrasings "I felt compelled" or "I was compelled to" suggest a hidden or unseen force at play. To feel *compelled* might suggest self-policing and performances of loyalty not dissimilar to those seen in China's Cultural Revolution (1968–78), speaking to ways that social and/or political conditions lead people to censor themselves and to alter their own soundscapes in subtle, yet devastating ways.

Scholarly literature on enforced silence has been useful in helping me to articulate these ideas. In a study of Gulag survivors, Jehanne M. Gheith explores how reticence manifested itself in the Soviet Gulags, including through demands the authorities placed on internees not to speak while in detention and, later, not to speak about their experiences following their release.[25] While Gheith focuses on recommending strategies and approaches to healing for survivors, her study is nonetheless useful for the way it describes moments of coerced silence in the Chinese camps, which I describe in further detail below. Similarly, studies of auditory and sonic deprivation in carceral settings, particularly in the experience of solitary confinement in prisons in the US and elsewhere, are useful in thinking about how control over the sound environment is a manifestation of power relations, and even a form of torture.[26] Countless other studies have explored the psychological and other effects of enforced silence on detainees and prisoners.[27] Imposed, or coerced, silence is a form of torture that adversely impacts those made to suffer it.

As I have already begun to show, authorities in the Uyghur Region have been using coerced sound as a complement to coerced silence, filling the sonic voids they are creating with other forms of sound-making. To make this point, scholarship on enforced sound, as well as on the role of music in torture, offers some useful ways of thinking about how an actor can manipulate the sound environment as a form of control. As Suzanne Cusick shows, the US government has rendered music a weapon and a form of torture on numerous occasions over at least the past two-plus decades, if not longer, including by blasting songs in interrogation settings from Panama to the Persian Gulf.[28] Similarly, the Nazis forced Jewish internees at many of its camps to listen to and/or sing music on multiple occasions, rendering it as a form of control for the powerful to exert.[29] Many people take for granted that music is a form of sense-making and memory formation, that it can help us to recall specific places and times in life. To a former internee, however, the sound of music that played the soundtrack to their detention, one possible manifestation of compelled sound, is surely a nightmare.

25. Jehanne M. Gheith, "'I Never Talked': Enforced Silence, Non-Narrative Memory, and the Gulag," *Mortality* 12, no. 2 (2007): 159–75.
26. Konca Saher and Murat Cetin, "The Sounds of Crime and Punishment: A Review of Different Prison Types in Regard to Their Binary Soundscapes," *ISOR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 21, no. 11 (2016): 57–69.
27. Craig Haney, "The Psychological Effects of Solitary Confinement: Systematic Critique," *Crime and Justice* 47, (2018): 365–416.
28. Suzanne G. Cusick, "Music as Torture / Music as Weapon," in *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. Michael Bull and Les Back (New York: Routledge, 2015): 379–91.
29. Katarzyna Naliwajek-Mazurek, "Music and Torture in Nazi Sites of Persecution and Genocide in Occupied Poland, 1939–1945," *World of Music* 2, no. 1 (2013): 31–50.

SONIC ERASURE AND REPLACEMENT IN THE UYGHUR REGION

Compelled silence in the Uyghur genocide has played out in perhaps the most obvious ways in internment and other detention settings. Survivors who have spoken publicly about their experiences in the camps have described long periods of silence in detention, periods when internees were explicitly disallowed from talking outside of class, talking in a specific language such as Uyghur, or talking at all.

In a Uyghur-language interview with an anchor from the *Pidaiylar Biz* (We The Volunteers) television show on the Turkey-based Istiqlal TV, survivor Gulbahar Jelilova, an ethnic Uyghur and Kazakh citizen who was held in three different detention facilities between March 2017 and September 2018, recounted that the mere act of speaking was a punishable offense:

> Talking was not possible. There were cameras everywhere, and they would punish us if they saw us talking to each other. When they punished us, they had these dark rooms. No one could even lie down in those dark rooms. They were one meter by one meter.[30]

Ms. Gulbahar has given testimony to a number of outlets.[31] Elsewhere, she has noted that she and the other women in her cell would be punished with "bad food" for the "offense" of speaking Uyghur. Her testimony suggests that authorities and camp guards went to great lengths to deny detainees the ability to speak. In internment settings, this kind of compelled silence appears to be administered with force, entering the territory of enforced or coerced silence.

Qelbinur Sidik, a public-school educator from Ürümchi who was forced to teach in two different internment camps in the city for a total of nine months in 2018, recounted the following in an extended interview with Radio Free Asia's Uyghur Service:

> When I went into the classroom, the students were quiet. There were no tables. They were sitting in small chairs. … Because they'd all just been brought in, the men still had beards [that were later cut off]. I noticed that many of them looked like religious people, religious leaders. I said "assalamu alaykum" to them, and they all sat there quietly and said nothing. I realized I'd said something wrong. "Let's get started," I said, and began teaching.[32]

She went on to suggest that camp officials disallowed the speaking of the Uyghur language:

30. Istiqlal TV, "Ölüm lagérigha alaqidar dehshetler" [Terrors of the Death Camps], *Pidaiylar Ekrani* channel, November 8, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VlLgyCn-gS0. Translation mine.

31. With some rare exceptions, Uyghurs use patronyms, meaning an individual's last name is simply their father's first name rather than a family name passed across generations. When using titles with one another, Uyghurs attach the title to the person's first name: for example, Ms. Gulbahar rather than Ms. Jelilova, or Dr. Rahile rather than Dr. Dawut. For this reason, I find it more appropriate to refer to Uyghurs with a title and their first name than by the English-language (and other) convention of defaulting to the last name on subsequent mention.

32. "'I Wish I Could Wipe My Heart and Mind Clean': Uyghur Former Camp Instructor," *Radio Free Asia*, October 5, 2020, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/instructor-10052020130813.html.





Han Gunji Stephens, *unfurling narratives*, 2020, fine-liner and marker on card paper, 15 × 10 cm. This image illustrates the silence and deliberate obfuscation that diaspora Uyghurs face when trying to find out what has happened to their relatives in China.

> They were very tough [on people]. … Once class started, [students] didn't have permission to ask questions, and they were absolutely not allowed to speak in Uyghur. All the books and materials we used had to stay in the classroom, and it wasn't possible for us to bring phones inside. So horrific, such threats.

Ms. Qelbinur stops short of enumerating the ways the authorities compelled silence in the camps, but given the numerous other testimonies that describe surveillance and physical torture, it is not difficult to imagine the means of enforcement.

The camps have been sites of enforced sound as well as of enforced silence; the state has sought to fill the voids it is creating in detention with sonic practices of allegiance to itself. Another common element of survivors' stories is being forced to memorize and recite or sing "red" (that is, pro-CCP) songs, including "Without the Party There Would Be No New China" (没有共产党就没有新中国), among others. Testimonies and interviews given by Omer Bekali, an ethnic Uyghur and Kazakhstan citizen who was one of the earliest survivors to flee China and testify about his experiences in detention, have spoken in part to the roles of compelled silence and sound in Xinjiang internment. Based on an interview with Mr. Omer, Gerry Shih, then with the Associated Press, wrote:

> Internees would wake up together before dawn, sing the Chinese national anthem, and raise the Chinese flag at 7:30 a.m. They gathered back inside large classrooms to learn "red songs" like "Without the Communist Party, There Is No New China," and study Chinese language and history. They were told that the indigenous sheep-herding Central Asian people of Xinjiang were backward and yoked by slavery before they were "liberated" by the Communist Party in the 1950s.[33]

Testimonies by Ms. Gulbahar and by Mihrigul Tursun, who was the first survivor to reach the United States, also speak to forced singing, a form of compelled sound, as a feature of their experiences inside the camps. Ms. Mihrigul's testimony reads:

> Before we ate breakfast, which was water with very little rice, we had to sing songs hailing the Communist Chinese Party and repeat these lines in Chinese: "Long live Xi Jinping" and "Leniency for those who repent and punishment for those who resist." We had seven days to memorize the rules of the concentration camp and fourteen days to memorize all the lines in a book that hails the Communist ideology. Those women whose voices were weak or cannot sing the songs in Chinese or remember the specific rules of the camp were denied food or beaten up.[34]

At least one scholar has described the singing of red songs in some other parts of China as a voluntary, public event, the provenance of retirees who meet for communal choral activities in public parks.[35] In internment settings in the Uyghur Region, however, the singing of red songs in the Chinese language is a clearly compelled act, one that fills the void left as the lineage and roots of the detained are broken, as the state creates a vacuum of silence that it is shaping and filling with itself.

33. Gerry Shih, "China's Mass Indoctrination Camps Evoke Cultural Revolution," *Associated Press*, May 17, 2018, https://apnews.com/article/6e151296fb194f85ba69a8babd972e4b.
34. Mihrigul Tursun, "Testimony of Mihrigul Tursun for Hearing: The Communist Party's Crackdown on Religion in China," US Congressional-Executive Commission on China, Washington, DC, November 28, 2018, https://www.cecc.gov/sites/chinacommission.house.gov/files/documents/REVISED_Mihrigul%20Tursun%20Testimony%20for%20CECC%20Hearing%2011-28-18_0.pdf.
35. Junxi Qian, "From Performance to Politics? Constructing Public and Counterpublic in the Singing of Red Songs," *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, January 9, 2014, https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549413515256.
36. Elise Anderson, "The Politics of Pop: The Rise and Repression of Uyghur Music in China," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, May 31, 2020, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/ politics-poprise-repressionuyghur-music-china/.

CULTURAL ERASURE AND REPLACEMENT IN THE WORLD OF UYGHUR MUSIC

Understandably, the internment camps where Uyghurs and others are held have garnered the widest attention in international press and other coverage of the crisis. But we should never lose sight of the fact that the campaign to assimilate the Uyghurs extends far beyond those camps, encompassing the totality of Uyghur life. As a result, compelled silence and sound have also played out far beyond the camps, including in the world of Uyghur music, from 2017 to the present.

As I have argued elsewhere, Uyghur music has long been an excellent gauge of political attitudes, an expressive realm that has served for decades as a civil society-like space, both despite and because of China's repressive policies.[36]

From the earliest days of the People's Republic, the authorities encouraged music-making and artistic activity, in part because they fed into foundational ideas about what constituted ethnic groups. In turn, ethnic groups such as the Uyghurs, who came to receive formal designation and status in the PRC, became the subject of stereotypical depictions as lovers of song and dance, encapsulated by the expression 能歌善舞, "able to sing and good at dance."[37] The tokenization of Uyghur art for political purposes has a long history.

Because of the close relationship between politics and the arts, then, professional music-making in the region has long been subject to the whims of the state. In particular, I have noted a pattern in which periods of political volatility have been marked by decreases in public artistic performance. This was the case following the July 2009 unrest in Ürümchi. The following summer, I interviewed members of a professional ensemble in the city who told me they had not performed for roughly one year. I did not fully understand why at the time, and my interviewees were cagey when I asked them follow-up questions to try to understand. Four years later, during my long-term fieldwork in Ürümchi, I came to understand. Following a brief revival in 2012 and 2013, when concerts, plays, and other live stage shows took place at least twice per month, that world grew quieter once again following the beginning of the People's War on Terror in 2014.

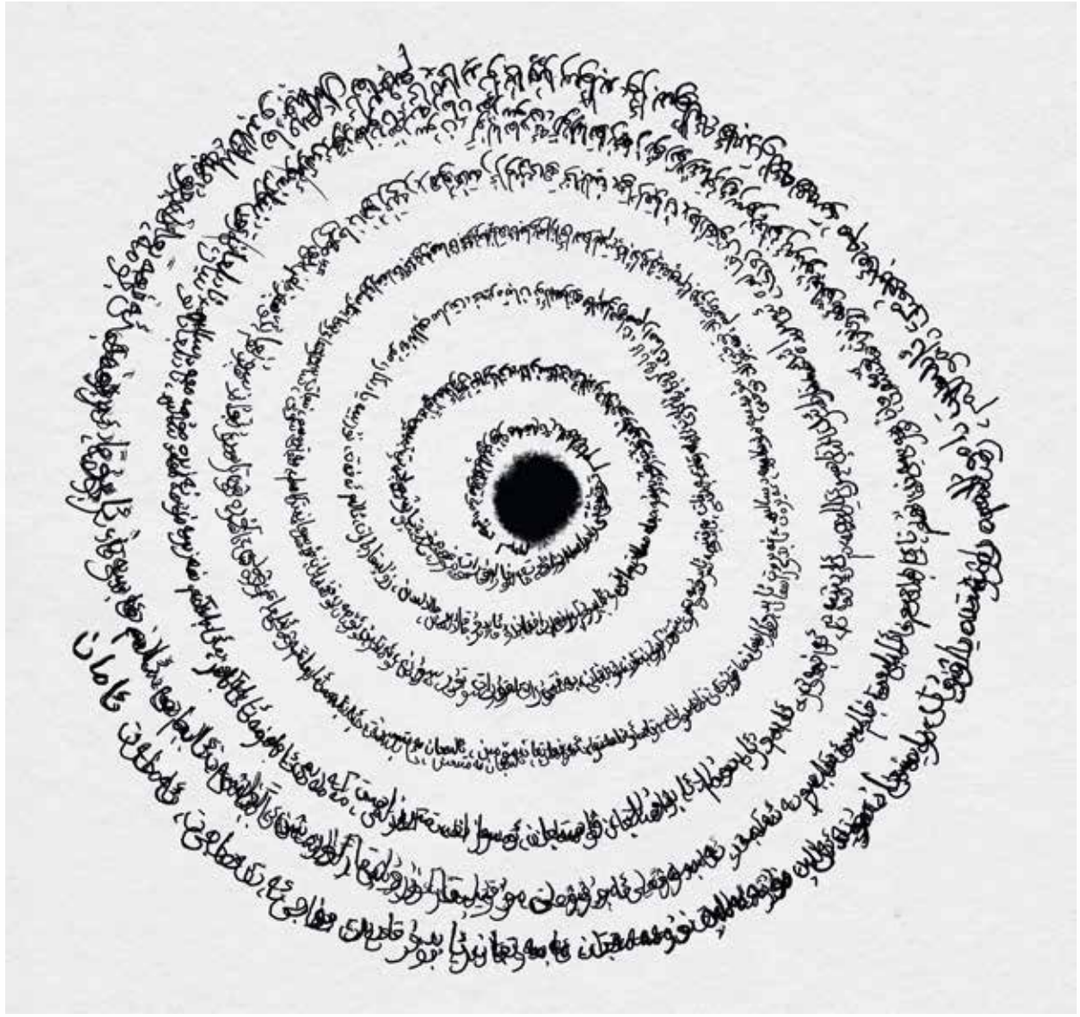
By 2018, I spoke with a source in Ürümchi who noted that none of the major ensembles there had, to their knowledge, performed in public in at least a year despite still being required by their bosses to show up for work. Similarly, a source I spoke with in Kashgar that same summer noted that their only performances were those for which they were "sent down" to counties, townships, and villages. These shows were almost undoubtedly ideological in nature, containing red songs and skits with explicitly pro-CCP, nationalist themes. As of 2020, some shows appeared to be taking place, though their regularity and openness to public audiences was difficult to gauge from afar. Even a professional musical world can grow paradoxically quiet, compelled into silence by the state.

Over the past several years, some of the most beloved and visible Uyghur singers and musicians have released songs that mark dramatic stylistic and thematic departures from their larger bodies of work, suggesting that authorities may have coerced them to some degree. In mid-2017, just months after the mass internment campaign began, a singer beloved for his classical and pop styling released a Uyghur-language song dedicated to Xi Jinping. The song marks a significant stylistic departure from not only his performance style, but also the aesthetic sensibilities central to Uyghur music, which is defined by monophony and long, ornamented melodic lines. The song opens with an introduction on the *tembur*, the most virtuosic of the Uyghur lutes, but the instrument is merely a framing device that disappears as the singer begins his melodic line, which lacks the *puraq* ("scent") that defines melodies in Uyghur song. The lyrics are pure propaganda: the singer praises Xi Jinping for putting light into the hearts of the people.

A year later, in summer 2018, the long-hailed King of Uyghur Pop released a Chinese-language song entitled "美丽新疆," or "Beautiful Xinjiang." The song is remarkable for two reasons: the lyrics are in Mandarin, which the singer rarely sang in previously, and the singer refers to the Uyghur Region not as the *weten* ("homeland"), a lightly coded word preferred by singers, poets, and others for decades, but explicitly as the colonial "Xinjiang." By August 2020, the same singer surprised members of the Uyghur diaspora when a video of him singing another patriotic song in Chinese and English was circulated following a live-streamed concert. The lyrics in the newer song liken the relationship between the singer and China to one of child and parent, and the melody is completely devoid of the musical characteristics that make Uyghur music Uyghur. The state has not managed to completely erase Uyghur music, but it has already begun replacing some aspects of it with politicized sonic sensibilities.

Since 2017, studios and stages where Uyghur music once thrived have grown quiet. When sound has returned to them, it has been of a fundamentally different character than in even the recent past, missing the styles, themes, and aesthetics of local musical practices. It is impossible to know the exact circumstances in which

37. Helen Rees refers to this stereotype as the "motif of the music-making minority." See Helen Rees, *Echoes of History: Naxi Music in Modern China* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000).



A whirlpool formed from the names of Uyghur writers, intellectuals, and artists in China's internment camps and prisons, made by the Uyghur art collective Sulu.Artco.

Uyghur artists are writing, producing, and performing patriotic, pro-CCP songs. Given that a number of Uyghur performers have been detained,[38] and given that they almost never produced or sang such songs in the recent past, it seems reasonable to surmise that at least some of them feel compelled to sing as a way of demonstrating loyalty to authorities who are constantly redrawing the political lines the performers must toe. These examples from Uyghur music provide insight into the ways that compelled sound can be passively and reflexively practiced, encouraging us to think about how the technologies of surveillance and reeducation, and more pointedly the environment of fear they engender, appear to have led prominent artists and public figures to self-police, self-censor, and show fealty to the state through song.



Mukaddas Mijit performing in The Silk Road Concert "Following the Traces of Marco polo." Many Uyghurs in the diaspora are actively fighting to keep culture alive, choosing to combine traditional forms with their own contemporary interpretations.

CONCLUSION

Sound is both a weapon of the weak and a tool that the powerful can—and do—co-opt and abuse. In the case of the Uyghur Region, where Chinese authorities have created an environment of fear in their ongoing quest to destroy Uyghur culture, altered and unexpected sounds give clues to the depths of state intrusion into everyday life. In compelling both sound and silence, the state is manipulating soundscapes and lifeworlds. Listening for compelled silence and compelled sound can help us understand the tragic human dimensions of this mass atrocity: namely, the way the Chinese state exerts control over fundamental forms of Uyghur expression, over the most intimate and mundane aspects of daily life.

Future research on compelled silence and compelled sound will do well to explore how these practices contravene fundamental and commonly shared human rights, showing how the erasure and replacement of sound environments can serve as evidence for atrocity determinations. Although the right to freely make sound is not defined in international human-rights frameworks, it is nonetheless central to freedom of expression and dignified human life. As such, the world has an obligation to respond to its erasure.

The extent to which Uyghur music, and Uyghur culture more broadly, will survive this attack is difficult to predict. Continuing to listen, including to the voices of brave Uyghur activists around the world, will give the international community more indications of why they have a moral obligation to support the conditions necessary for the survival of Uyghur lives and lifeways, and of how to hold perpetrators to account.

38. Many of these musicians are rumored to have been released, though their precise whereabouts at time of publication are difficult to ascertain. Performers who have appeared to disappear into state detention at one point or another since 2017 include Abdurehim Heyit, Ablikim Kalkun, Sanubar Tursun, Ablajan Awut Ayup, and Zahirshah Ablimit, among others.

AN EAR ON THE WALL تامنىڭ قۇلىقى

ABDUSHÜKÜR MUHEMMET, TRANSLATED BY MUNAWWAR ABDULLA
ئابدۇشكۈر مۇھەممەت تەرجىمە قىلغۇچى: مۇنەۋۋەر ئابدۇللا

As soon as we arrived
Our parents convinced us
the walls had ears
It was only later that we
realised everything
else did, too.

The story was, as the elders
said, mouths pressed
to ears,
The youths we had
grown up playing with
Had vanished one night
as if abducted by jinn
They had been standing
under a wall with ears.

Until the day we arrived
in Sweden
We lived a thousand years
per day surrounded
by them.

There were no eared
walls here
In fact, the people
had none either
You may try to
tell them something
On the streets and squares
with loudspeakers
Yet no one listens

They did not believe that
walls could have ears,
That there were ears
around us.

بىز تۇغۇلغاندىلا
ئاتا-ئانىمىز ئىشەندۈرگەن ئىدى
بىزنى تامنىڭ قۇلىقى بارلىقىغا،
كېيىنچە بىلدۇق بىز ھەممە
نەرسىنىڭ قۇلىقىنىڭ بارلىقىنى.
چوڭلارنىڭ ئېغزىنى قۇلاققا
يېقىپ تۇرۇپ ھېكايە قىلىشچە،
بىز كىچىكىمىزدە بىرگە ئويناپ
چوڭ بولغان ياشلار،
بىر كېچىدە غايىپ بولغانمىش
خۇددى جىن ئېلىپ قاچقاندەك،
چۈنكى ئۇلار تۇرۇپ قالغانمىش
قۇلىقى بار تامنىڭ تۈۋىدە.
تاكى بىز شۋېتسىيەگە كەلگۈچە
ياشىدۇق قۇلاقلار ئارىسىدا بىر
كۈننى مىڭ يىلدەك.
شۋېتسىيەدە تامنىڭ قۇلىقى يوق،
ھەتتا ئادەملەرنىڭمۇ يوق ئىدى قۇلىقى.
بىر نەرسىنى بىلدۈرمەك بولۇپ ئادەملەرگە
جار سالساڭ ياكىراتقۇ بىلەن كوچىلاردا،
مەيدانلاردا
ئاڭلىمايىتتى ھېچكىم سېنىڭ
نېمە دەۋاتقانلىقىڭنى.
ئىشەنمەيىتتى ئۇلار تامنىڭ قۇلىقى
بولىدىغانلىقىغا،
ئەتراپىدا قۇلاقلارنىڭ بارلىقىغا.

But in the homes
of Swedish Uyghurs
Every wall is covered
with them
Carrying ears inside
themselves, they had
smuggled them in
From where they
came from

Where they were from
If a person laughed
they looked angry
If a person smiled
they looked sarcastic
They believed the tea
they drank and the food
they ate had ears.
They were too anxious
to dream, to think
Because they had ears
on themselves, too
They could not live
without them
They did not believe
the Swedish walls
had none

Unable to imagine
an earless life,
Scared to death of standing
below an earless wall

They lived. Eventually,
Part of them became
an ear on the wall.

Stockholm, 27.4.2017

لېكىن شۋېتسىيەدە ئۇيغۇرنىڭ ئۆيىدە
تامنىڭ ھەممىسى قۇلاق ئىدى.
ئۇلار بۇ قۇلاقلارنى ئېلىپ
كەلگەندى ئىچىگە سولاپ
كەلگەن يېرىدىن.
ئۇلارنىڭ كەلگەن يېرىدە
بىر ئادەم قاقاقلاپ كۈلسە غەزەپ
قىلىۋاتقاندەك بىلىنەتتى،
كۈلۈمسىرىسە مەسخىرە
قىلىۋاتقاندەك كۆرۈنەتتى.
ئۇلار ئىچىۋاتقان چېيى، يەۋاتقان
تامىقىنىڭمۇ قۇلقى بارلىقىغا ئىشىنەتتى.
ئۇلار چۈش كۆرۈشتىنمۇ، بىر نەرسىلەرنى
خىيال قىلىشتىنمۇ ئەنسىرەيتتى،
چۈنكى ئۇلار ئۆزلىرىنىڭمۇ قۇلقى
بارلىقىنى بىلەتتى،
ئۇلار قۇلاقسىز ياشاشقا
ئەسلا كۆنەلمەيتتى.
ئۇلار شۋېتسىيەدە تامنىڭ قۇلقى
يوقلىقىغا ئىشەنمەيتتى.
ئۇلار قۇلاقسىز ھاياتنى
تەسەۋۋۇر قىلالمايتتى،
قۇلقى يوق تامنىڭ يېنىدا تۇرۇپ
قېلىشتىن ئۆلگۈدەك قورقاتتى.
ئاخىرى ، ئۇلار شۇنداق ياشاپ
بىر قىسمى تامنىڭ قۇلقىغا
ئايلىنىپ كەتتى.

2017-يىل 27-ئاپرىل، ستوكھولم



يۇقىرىدىن كەلگەن قورقۇنچ ، تۆۋەندىن كەلگەن كومېدىيە

دەررىن بايلېر

ئابدۇكېرىم ئابلىزدەك داڭلىق شەخسلەر تەرىپىدىن ئورۇنلانغان ئۇيغۇر ئېتنوتلىرى، مۇرەككەپ مەنا ۋە بەس-مۇنازىرە ئىپادىلىنىدىغان ئۇيغۇر رەپلىرىگە ئوخشاشلا كۆپ تىللىق ۋە كۆپ قۇتۇپلۇقنى نامايەن قىلىدىغان بىر ساھەدۇر. مەزكۇر ماقالىدە، دەررىن بايلىر ئۇيغۇر كومېدىيەسىنىڭ تارىخى مۇساپىسىنى سىزىپ چىقىش بىلەن بىرگە، ئۇنىڭ رۇس، خەنزۇ ۋە كەڭ ئىسلام ئەنئەنىسىنى ئاساس قىلغان دۇنياۋي ئىجادچانلىقىغا يېقىندىن نەزەر تاشلىغان. سەھنە ئويۇنلىرىدىن تارتىپ ئىنتېرنېت يۇمۇرلىرى ۋە دوۋيىن ۋىدىئولىرىغىچە، بايلىر ئۇيغۇر كومېدىيەسىنىڭ جوڭگۇ ھۆكۈمىتىنىڭ باستۇرۇشىغا قارىتا كۆپ خىللىقى ۋە زېرەكلىكىنى كۆرسىتىپ بەرگەن.

HORROR FROM ABOVE, SATIRE FROM BELOW

Darren Byler

Until the mid-2010s it was difficult to understate the importance of the comedy of Abdukerim Abliz in Uyghur popular culture. Abliz was one of the first public figures to utilize newly arrived DVD and streaming video technology to bring staged performances of sketch comedy to the general Uyghur public. A tall, distinguished-looking man from Kashgar famous for his carefully groomed mustache, he embodied a Uyghur masculine ideal while at the same time parodying it. Yet for all Abliz's quick-witted use of language, metaphor, and jawline, his comedy also reveals something serious about Uyghur society. While staying within the parameters of Chinese state policy, he mirrored the way his Uyghur audiences acted, talked, and thought about common sense issues and the place of Uyghur society in the Chinese state. Yet, this official, state-sanctioned comedy is not the only form of comedy that has shaped popular culture. The social media apps WeChat, and more recently Douyin (as TikTok is known in China), which circulated Abliz's sketch comedies, have also allowed individual Uyghurs to publish their own satirical commentaries regarding state actions and elite Uyghur society. These semi-anonymous, often ephemeral, forms of satire paired popular texts and songs with imagery of police brutality and disappeared family members, producing dark comedy that condemned state violence and Uyghur colonization.



Yi Xiaocuo, ***WeChat Monster***, 2019. An illustration of the way WeChat is being used by Chinese authorities and the technology company to track the online speech and social relations of Uyghurs and other minorities.

Satire is a genre of comedic expression that utilizes exaggeration of speech and action, parody of popular forms and texts, allusions of euphemism, and understatement to convey political or moral messages.[1] Over the course of the 2010s,

1. Satire is not reducible to parody since many forms of parody do not carry a political or moral message. Instead, parody—transforming an existing text or form for comic effect—should be thought of as a potential technique (along with other forms of comedy) for satire.

Chinese state-directed comedy, which posited a satirical critique of Uyghur social life, was met by Uyghur self-published satirical critique of state policies and police actions until, near the end of the decade, the state authorities radically contracted space for comedic Uyghur language speech itself. Embodied satire of normative Uyghur behavior on stage and parody of Uyghur popular texts and modes of expression allowed Uyghurs to allude to forms of belonging. It allowed them to express a self-definition of who and what they should be and what their relationship with the state should look like. It opened up a space at the edge of carefully policed conversations to poke fun at hollow policy pronouncements. It also enabled people to mourn in public, packing rhymes that everyone knew with parodic absurdity. Satire does all of these things. But when it becomes the target of digital surveillance and an intense political struggle, even these subtle forms of autonomy, of thinking outside the lines, is narrowed. This blurs the distinction between images that may produce knowing smiles and those of deep sadness—the absurd drifting into the grotesque, the comic into the horrific.

ON *ITOT*, OR UYGHUR SKETCH-COMEDY

In a 2010 essay titled "A Brief History of Itot," Uyghur writer Hoshur Qariy traces the genealogy of a Uyghur form of sketch-comedy or *itot* from its French origins in the 1860s to its arrival on the Russian scene in the 1920s, its derivation in Soviet Uzbekistan, and eventually its arrival in Northwest China. According to Qariy, the Uyghur word *itot* is derived from the Russian translation of the French word *feuilleton*.[2] In nineteenth-century France, the feuilleton was a social commentary section in magazines and newspapers. Qariy argues that this journalistic form was adopted by the Russians around the same time and eventually transformed into a dramatic art form in Soviet Russia. Yet, according to Qariy, this normative, state-centered history of Uyghur drama does not really provide "satisfactory information" about the origins of the itot—since it draws together both state-sanctioned theatrical performance and aspects of native ritual performances known as meshrep (see Rachel Harris in this volume). These festive, often gendered, performances asked participants to enact forms of parody of themselves and others, and carried with them forms of moral instruction.[3]

Going on, Qariy writes that famous books of ancient Uyghur history and philosophy by renowned Uyghur scholars like Imin Tursun and Abdushükür Muhemmed Imin discuss comedy as an "episode" within a larger dramatic performance, but the standalone mini-drama or sketch comedy form of contemporary Uyghur performers has no singular indigenous antecedent. In its current form, Uyghur official comedy also shares at least an institutional resemblance to mainstream Chinese comedy *xiangsheng* ("cross-talk") and *xiaopin* ("sketch comedy"). Although these have their origins in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), as they

2. Hoshur Qariy, "Itot atalghusining qisqa tarikhi [A brief history of the term itot]," *Xinjiang Art Journal*, January 10, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20131203142023/http://bbs.alkuyi.com/thread-5729-1-1.html.
3. Sawut Pawan, Rahile Dawut, and Saadet Kurban, "Uyghur Meshrep Culture and Its Social Function," *Fourth World Journal* 15, no. 2 (winter 2017): 81–90; Rachel Harris, "'A Weekly Mäshräp to Tackle Extremism': Music-Making in Uyghur Communities and Intangible Cultural Heritage in China," *Ethnomusicology* 64, no. 1 (winter 2020): 23–55.

came into the service of Socialist Realism in Maoist China they became a tool to teach the general public moral lessons and proper Mandarin pronunciation.[4] *Xiangsheng*, and comedy more generally, puts social norms and values on display and shows the hilarity that ensues when norms and values are violated.

In a general sense, official Uyghur comedy performance functions in similar ways. While comedy has been important in Uyghur social life for centuries, the *itot Kéchiliki* ("night of comedy") that rose to the fore in recent decades through the personas of famous comedians such as Adil Mijit—Abliz's comedic predecessor, who was detained for unknown reasons in 2017—is a relatively new form of state-sanctioned entertainment and social satire.[5] Official contemporary comedy as performed by Mijit and Abliz is commissioned, or otherwise contracted, and approved by the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region's Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party. It should thus be seen as a kind of *zhu xuanlü* ("main melody") performance that serves state policy. In contemporary China, main melody performances, particularly in the case of "model operas" and blockbuster films, are designed and supported directly by state funders as a way of teaching audiences official versions of national history and citizenship. In some cases, Uyghur itots were adapted directly from mainstream Chinese language comedies performed by comedians such as Zhao Benshan, one of the most famous state-sponsored comedians in all of China.

Yet, despite the direction of the state, the improvisational and interpretive aspects of comedy writing and performance on this stage can, at times, also become an agentive space of self-representation. As with the silences in the Uyghur landscape observed by Elise Anderson in this volume, the ellipses of understatement and gaps of allusion can be filled in by viewers, and the ironic self-mocking tone of satirical performance can reveal fundamental aspects of lived reality. For instance, though Abliz's ostensible task might be to demonstrate the harms of alcoholism and the promise of economic development, through his comedy he shows negotiation of alcoholism and employment hierarchies *through* performances of Uyghur masculinity and folk wisdom. That is to say, he is using Uyghur knowledge systems, even exaggerated Uyghur patriarchal norms, to push his audience to laugh at and reconsider the increased alcohol dependency that resulted from growing underemployment among Uyghurs. Ultimately, he is demonstrating the way Uyghurs can enact an autonomous Uyghur life in response to broader Chinese social and political change.

At times Uyghur comedy goes beyond this more normative form of "self-making" by highlighting the absurdities of naturalized cultural and political norms. When it does this it opens up discursive space to expose power structures, staging them for a broad community, and thus shaping and critiquing norms and modes of identification. At times they enact a feeling of what Mikhail Bakhtin refers to as the carnivalesque, a momentary inversion of power structures within a society, when those in charge are mocked.[6] This is particularly the case in unofficial comedy,

4. Perry Link, *An Anatomy of Chinese: Rhythm, Metaphor, Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).
5. For a clip of Adil Mijit's comedy, a translation, and brief analysis, see Darren Byler, "Hip-Hop vs. Uyghur Folk Music," *Art of Life in Chinese Central Asia*, December 13, 2013, http://livingotherwise.com/2013/12/13/uyghur-hip-hop-vs-uyghur-folk-music/.
6. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

which ranges from overt satire to more subtle parody, something I will consider below in relation to self-published memes.

More often though, particularly in the tightly controlled political atmosphere of Uyghur society, comedy simply becomes a discursive space of contradiction and ambiguity. For instance, many official itots simultaneously reinforce a type of native Uyghur cultural citizenship and knowledge systems tied to fluency in Uyghur language and idealized gender norms, while at the same time promoting state policy objectives, which emphasize reliance on the Chinese market and the replacement of Uyghur language with Chinese.

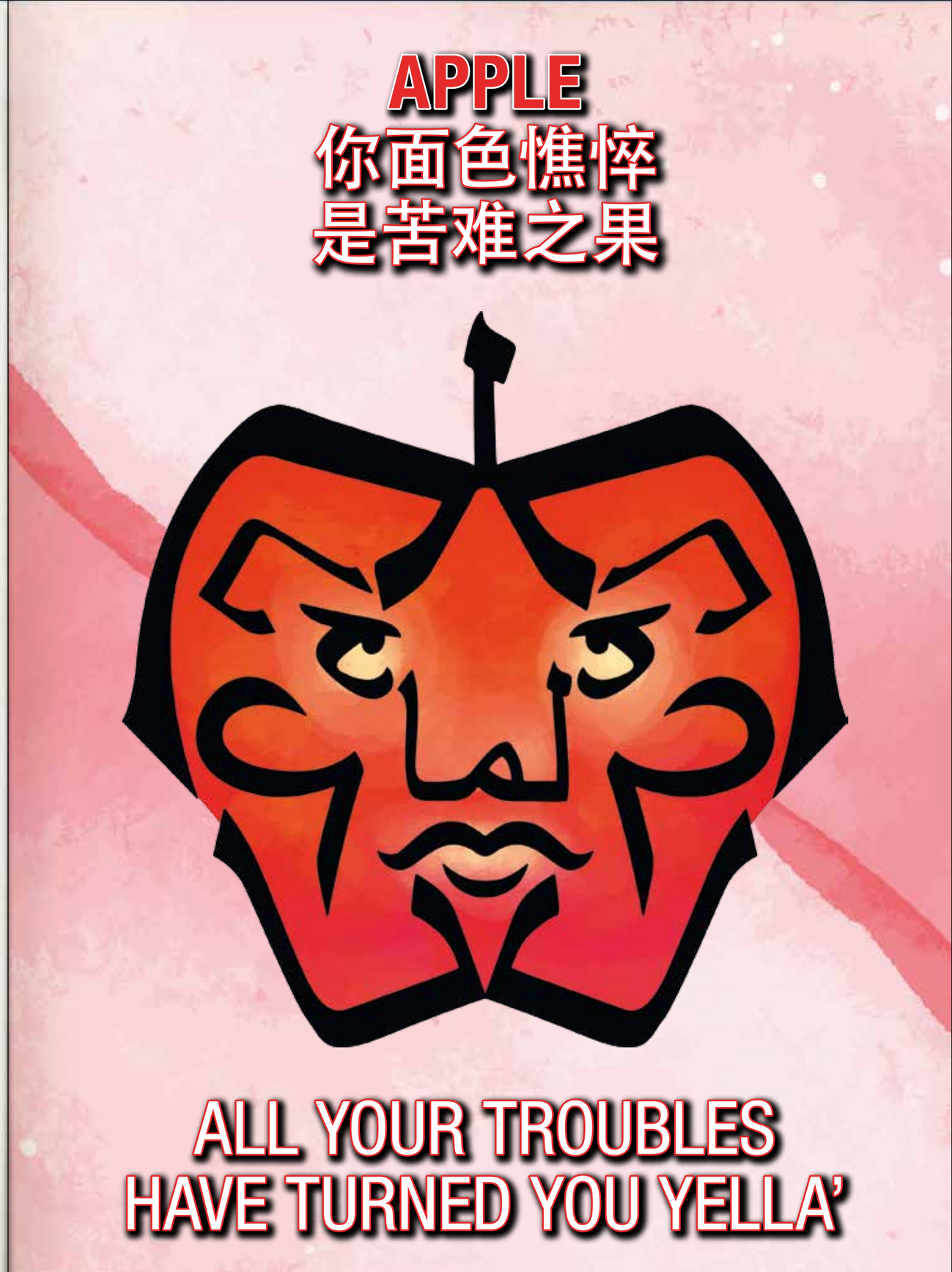
STATE-SANCTIONED SATIRE



Selling jade is a common business practice among Uyghurs. Photograph taken in the Uyghur region by Slavs and Tatars during their research trip there in 2013.

The title of one of Abliz's major comedy galas in 2012, "In Each Month the Moon Shines for Fifteen Days and Is Dim for Fifteen Days," is a common aphorism in Uyghur, which roughly approximates the English saying, "what goes around, comes around." The two-person sketch begins with the character played by Abliz returning to Ürümchi after seven years in Beijing. After a circuitous discussion, Abliz admits to a long-lost colleague from Hotan that he has lost the fortune he made from selling jade in the early 2000s. He says he has heard that his friend has invested his jade money in a company and that this company is known for its benevolence. It is here that Abliz's character begins to break down. He tells his old friend, "I came here so you could *béshimni silaysiz* ('stroke my head')." In Uyghur this phrase implies a comprehensive form of comfort, a taking care of the material needs necessary for life. It is something someone says as they are dying to their relatives and close friends: "Please stroke the heads of my family." But Abliz's colleague misunderstands this request and instead literally strokes Abliz's head. Abliz then says, "You're messing with me. I came here so that you might *méni élip kétisiz* ('take me')," —a line that implies that Abliz wants his friend to take him as his wife. The audience roars.

By this time the audience in the Ürümchi concert hall appears rapt by the scene unfolding before them. Abliz then delivers the first moral lesson of the evening, saying in a serious tone, "Before I passed millions of yuan through my hands, now I merely chase after hundreds of yuan. If you abuse money—money will abuse you." As the crowd solemnly applauds, he continues the lesson: "In the business of corn and wheat you can always grow more, but in the business of stone, stones just get fewer and fewer. The best thing is for me





to start a business like you; the best thing is to increase your own quality (Uy:sapa; Ch: suzhi). If you have millions of yuan but don't have knowledge and quality you are like a donkey."

Abliz's partner does not let him off so easily. Parroting the Chinese mainstream clichés of economic success and accruing cultural capital or *suzhi* through self-investment is not enough to merit his sympathy. Instead he points out the deeper moral failings of Abliz's character, how he failed to live up to the Uyghur ideal of virtuous masculine responsibility. "Oh wow, now you have become a philosopher. Before you were spending money like paper, *shirt, shirt, shirt* …."—the repetition of this last word forms a Uyghur onomatopoeia for the sound brand new money makes as it is peeled off in one's hand. Abliz's character again diverts the blame, saying it was Satan that led him astray. Again his friend points out that it was not Satan but "those young *naynaq* (flirtatious) girls which misled you."

Faced with this gendered, heteronormative accusation, Abliz's character finally begins to admit to his failings as a man, a Muslim, and a Uyghur: "That nightclub ruined my life. I made money with coated stones and wasted money on coatless women." To which his friend responds, "Because those women were foreign, that's why they look like gold. They were dancing around you—that's why you just gave them money. If you had given the money to poor men without jobs in your hometown for food and coal, you would have earned good *sawap* (deeds)." Abliz then admits to his inter-ethnic womanizing—a critique of violating ethno-purity and moral failings within the patriarchal ideals of Uyghur society.

In Uyghur traditions, ideal marriages are those that join Uyghur families from similar class backgrounds and nearby geographic locations. As Uyghur society has been enveloped by the Chinese market economy, and more and more young Uyghurs have moved to urban locations, this social norm has been destabilized. The itot comments on the rise of migration and romance, but by specifying that Abliz's character had been flirting with *foreign* women it also highlights the threat to the purity of Uyghur ethnicity that market integration brings with it. While it could be that these foreigners were from another Muslim ethnic group such as Kazakh or Hui, the "coatless" lack of propriety that these women demonstrated could indicate that they were non-Muslim women. Because of the destabilization of Uyghur marriage traditions and the symbolic and material violence of the Chinese colonial project, non-Muslim romantic relations have also become deeply stigmatized in Uyghur society. Yet, as I have noted recently, since 2017 the Chinese state authorities have begun to promote marriages between Han men and Uyghur women—something that appears to directly contradict the "anti-foreign" morality theme of the state-sponsored itot.[7]

What is also important to note is how Abliz signals that proper ways of knowing can be associated with Uyghur ways of thinking. The line "I made money with coated stones and wasted money on coatless women" refers to the most sought-after jade: white stones must have a golden coat—something described in Chinese as a *yangzhibaiyu* with a *sajinpi* ("sheep-fat white jade" with a "sprayed golden skin"). In the itot, though, Abliz's way of speaking is taken directly from the regular conversation of Uyghur jade traders. Anyone familiar with the Uyghur jade scene has heard

7. Darren Byler, "Uyghur Love in a Time of Interethnic Marriage," *SupChina*, August 7, 2019, https://supchina.com/2019/08/07/uyghur-love-in-a-time-of-interethnic-marriage/.



Badiucao (巴丢草), ***Xinjiang Auschwitz***, 2019. This Chinese political cartoonist uses his pen name to protect his identity.

people say *tashning chapini barmu*? *Süzük mu*? ("Does it have a jacket? Is it clear?"). In Uyghur this is described as a "clear" white color jade wearing a golden "jacket." By talking about jade the way he does, and not drawing from the Chinese etymology, Abliz shows that Uyghur knowledge systems have adapted to the contemporary Chinese world and economic market, and that something as iconic as *yangzhibaiyu* can be talked about in different ways. He is demonstrating a kind of participation in mainstream Chinese society and, by extension, the imperatives of state policy, through a Uyghur linguistic register. This in turn demonstrates a mode of Uyghur agency within a state-sponsored capitalist economy. Economic productivity in a Chinese market is possible within a Uyghur world, something that the current reeducation campaign actively undermines by diminishing the use of Uyghur language.

COMEDY AS CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP

The most general theme Abliz addresses in the itot is the way the rise of consumer culture and lucrative jade business has impacted the moral lives of Uyghurs from Hotan. As a Uyghur man who lived through the economic growth and social change in Hotan and has since relocated to North America told me in an interview, the jade industry in Hotan really began in the early 2000s. "In the 1990s it still wasn't industrialized," he said. "People just used shovels and *ketmen* (hoes) to dig for jade by hand." There were no giant earth-moving machines. Two decades ago that began to change. People, particularly Han settlers, invested in industrial grade equipment

and it became a lucrative business. He continued, "Some people who couldn't get jobs out of college started in the jade business and got super rich. Rich people now just get richer." Yet those who have been doing it long-term, and did not achieve spectacular wealth, are now often pushed to the side by recent Han industrial miners and buyers. He noted that there have also been reports of state-sponsored seizures of land and stones. Efforts to regulate access to jade sites have led to officials and Han settlers with heavy pockets and protests from Uyghurs who were elbowed aside. In fact, in the years since Abliz staged this itot, many of those who complained about this state-supported theft have ended up in the reeducation camps.

Cultural citizenship refers to the slippage between "self-making and being made" in the social contract with the state.[8] As anthropologist Renato Rosaldo puts it, "Cultural citizenship refers to the right to be different (in terms of race, ethnicity, or native language) with respect to the norms of the dominant national community, without compromising one's right to belong, in the sense of participating in the nation-state."[9] Aihwa Ong further clarifies this conceptualization by showing that cultural negotiation of "ambivalent and contested relations with the state" is how subjectivity is enacted.[10]

Uyghurs are legally Chinese citizens of Uyghur nationality, but what does that mean in everyday life? How does one perform ethnicity, not as an interpreter for outsiders, but for other people in one's own social position while not violating the sovereign demands of the state? These are the questions that Abliz embodies and enacts as he takes the stage. When he takes on the persona and the moral economy that accompanies the process of getting rich quick, Abliz is simultaneously drawing limits around Uyghur norms, promoting Uyghur ways of thinking and acting, and enacting Chinese state policy objectives. By making people laugh at themselves, he is forcing them to evaluate themselves in an act of "self-making" while simultaneously submitting to "being made." It is this ambivalence that gives Abliz's comedy so much force.

A theme in Abliz's comedy is a direct call for the contemporaneity of Uyghur knowledge systems. Or, to put it another way, his comedy demands that Uyghur language modes of thinking be treated as equal to the task of life in the global economy and modern Chinese state. His implication then that Uyghur language should not be eliminated as the life force of Uyghur society stands in diametrical opposition to state policy that has criminalized the use of Uyghur language in much of the Uyghur education system. For instance, in another itot called *chüshenmidim* ("I Don't Understand"), Abliz mocks urban Uyghurs educated in Chinese who forget how to refer to particular objects in the Uyghur language. Yet he is also calling on Uyghur audiences to embrace a market-oriented ethos. He is making them think through the way infrastructure and Han settlement have forced Uyghurs to move from land-based farming traditions. By clearly valuing economic integration and criticizing the Uyghur moral failing that might come from newfound wealth, he is both parroting the state campaign to "open up the West" and claiming a right to Uyghur cultural

8. Aihwa Ong, Virginia R. Dominguez, Jonathan Friedman, Nina Glick Schiller, et al., "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States," *Current Anthropology* 37, no. 5 (December 1996): 738, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2744412.
9. Renato Rosaldo, "Cultural Citizenship in San Jose, California," *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 17, no. 2 (November 1994): 57, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24497930.
10. Ong, 738.

difference. In doing so he is making a policy objective that centers on Xinjiang's natural resource extraction and industrial farming palatable for an audience that might otherwise see it only as a form of dispossession and legalized theft.[11] That is, he is helping Uyghurs see a way forward within a Chinese development system.

At the same time, implied within this framework is a logic that fails to critique the colonial system. As a result, those who fail to thrive in the Chinese economy, or are targeted through police brutality, have no one to blame but themselves and their own moral failings. In other comedy programs he demonstrates similar themes, portraying critiques of masculine alcoholism and underemployment as the result of a lack of Uyghur self-discipline and entrepreneurship. He is participating in tropes of ethnic minority "laziness" and "backwardness" that have come to define Chinese mainstream understanding of ethnic minorities such as Uyghurs and Tibetans—a logic that resonates with the exploitive mechanisms of contemporary capitalism more generally.[12]

LAUGHTER FROM BELOW

Unofficial forms of Uyghur comedy take a broader view of the sources of social failure. On April 13, 2014, Abdulbasit Ablimit, a seventeen-year-old young man from a small town near Aqsu, was shot twice. It appears as though he ran a red light on his electric motor scooter and, rather than stop and pay a fine, he fled. According to his friends, three kilometers later he was shot. The official state narrative, posted a few days after the incident, says he attacked the police with stones, tried to grab their guns, and so on.[13] Abdulbasit died within hours. His body was given to his family for burial. But he was not buried. Instead his body was carried, wrapped in a white shroud with a procession of hundreds of his friends and family on a march toward the town center. They demanded that the officers who had killed Abdulbasit be arrested. As you can hear in a video clip that sent shockwaves throughout Uyghur society,[14] they chanted "God is Great"—one of the few Arabic phrases that everyone knows and understands.

Realizing their mistake in returning the body of the "martyr" to his family, security officials seized Abdulbasit's body again and arrested many of the grieving protesters and those who spoke about what they had observed. It's interesting to note that ten days after the incident, officials in a neighboring county announced greater rewards, up to 50,000 yuan, for tips on those who contacted foreign media in addition to the usual information on separatism and terrorism. They reported that Abdulbasit was a "terrorist," then decided against it.[15] They didn't mention

11. Adam Hunervan, "Spirit Breaking: Capitalism and Terror in Northwest China," *Chuang*, no. 2 (2019), http://chuangcn.org/journal/two/spirit-breaking/.
12. Emily T. Yeh, "Tropes of Indolence and the Cultural Politics of Development in Lhasa, Tibet," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 97, no. 3 (2007): 593–612, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.2007.00565.x.
13. Jingjing Huang, "Uyghur Biker Shot for Attack after Grabbing at Gun: Police," *Global Times*, April 17, 2014, https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/855272.shtml#.U1hpkvldWSo.
14. "Uyghur Funeral Procession for 17-year-old Gunned Down by Police," *BeijingCream*, April 24, 2014, https://youtu.be/BsoMgNaUQWg.
15. Pinghui Zhuang, "Uygurs Protest Over Teenager's Fatal Shooting in Aksu City, Xinjiang," *South China Morning Post*, April 16, 2014, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1483285/uygurs-protest-over-teenagers-fatal-shooting-aksu-city-xinjiang.

that his family was poor, that his father had died when he was a year old, and that he might not have had the money to pay the 200 yuan fine the police were known to demand from people driving without proper paperwork. Like all reports of violence in Xinjiang, the details are fuzzy. For instance, what happened to Abdulbasit's two friends who were riding on the back of the scooter is unclear.

For the story I want to tell here, those details are less important. What *is* important is the way people across Uyghur society responded to the incident. Uyghurs wrote hundreds of messages on Weixin (as WeChat is known in China), Weibo, and Uyghur-language message boards. As mentions of Aqsu and Kelpin county were deleted from social media, Uyghurs used a variation of the shell game common on the Chinese internet of alluding to censured topics through new turns of phrase and neologisms. In this context Uyghurs turned the famous songs, poems, and memes of state-sanctioned popular culture in new directions as a way of sharing their grief and outrage with what Uyghur life had become. In direct reference to these carriers of meaning, they twisted their tears into dark laughter pointed not at individual moral failings, but at what they saw as the systemic failure of Chinese institutions to protect Uyghur lives.

As is often the case when Uyghurs grieve, they began by transforming the poetry of the celebrated poet of China's Cultural Revolution period in the 1960s and 1970s, Abdurehim Ötkür. Transmuting his most famous poem, "Trace," an anonymous poet wrote:

16. Darren Byler, "Xinjiang Education Reform and the Eradication of Uyghur-Language Books," *SupChina*, October 2, 2019, https://supchina.com/2019/10/02/xinjiang-education-reform-and-the-eradication-of-uyghur-language-books/.

TRACE

We were young when we rode out
on the hard journey,
Now it seems those grandchildren of
ours are riding motorcycles,
Tell our grandchildren to ride slowly
and carefully,
Don't leave another grave
at the stop light.

They took on the most famous book in the Uyghur pantheon, *Alphabet*, a kindergarten text that every young Uyghur previously memorized in elementary schools where Uyghur language was the medium of instruction. Prior to recent Uyghur reeducation campaigns, most Uyghurs were primarily taught in the Uyghur language as part of the limited forms of ethnic minority autonomy permitted by state policies prior to 2017.[16] An anonymous author transformed a section of the book immediately after a student learns all the letters of the Uyghur alphabet, a section huge swathes of Uyghur society know and love:

GHUNCHEM'S COMPLETION OF THE ALPHABET

Ghunchem came home from school and
spoke with her father happily:
"Daddy, Daddy I finished learning
the traffic rules."
"Ok, then tell me what happens
when someone
runs a red light."
Ghunchem says
"Police will shoot them."
Daddy kissed her forehead with
satisfaction and said,
"You are worthy my daughter,
you learned well.
Please go to Kelpin in Aqsu and
become a police officer."



Xinjiang Education Department, ***Alphabet***, 1993. The kindergarten textbook is likely the most widely shared text among Uyghurs. Its role in society is similar to the history of the Dick and Jane basic readers in the introduction of English to children.

They also took on a famous song by the mainstream, state-sponsored Uyghur pop star Abdulla, "After You Are Forty," in which he explains to young people that they will understand the feelings of their parents when they are forty.[17] In a satire of this description of shifts in life stages, an anonymous lyricist revised the song to reflect the everyday vulnerability of life as the object of targeted state surveillance:

AFTER YOU ARE FORTY

The pains of Kelpin,
The taste of two bullets,
The preciousness of this life,
You'll understand after you go through the red light.

Another lyricist reconsidered yet another famous love song, by Uyghur pop star Hezirti Ali, called "With Me," in which an underemployed rural-urban migrant asks his lover to stay with him through the responsibilities and shame of unfulfilled life projects.[18] But now, instead of asking his lover to bear the burden of poverty and filial duty, the songwriter asks his partner to ride a motorcycle with him through a red light:

WITH ME

Will you spend the rest of
your life with me?
Will you wait at the red light with me?
If I go through the red light because
I'm in a rush,
And the police shoot me,
will you go with me?

Finally, reprising the language of dreams, an important element of Uyghur oral traditions, a writer described the incident as a nightmare in which the arsenal of the nation was aimed at him or her, a rider on an old motorcycle without brakes. The weapons of the nation, like its rules and regulations, are set up in opposition to this Uyghur Chinese citizen:

I HAD A DREAM

In my dream it seems like I was riding an old motorcycle quite fast. After a while I reached the county center and there was a red light. Because the brake on my motorcycle didn't work well, I went over the line by the span of my hand (*ghérich*). I stopped there and looked around. The whole area surrounding the traffic light was filled with weapons such as tanks, canons, armed vehicles, katyusha rockets, fighter jets, helicopters, guided missiles, even space ships. My heart almost leaped into my throat. I couldn't go backwards even if I wanted to. Then I woke up. Oh thank God. Since then, I've been scared of dreaming, especially dreams of going through red lights.

17. For a video of Abdulla performing this song, a lyric translation, and brief analysis, see Darren Byler, "Abdulla, King of Uyghur Pop: His Themes," *Art of Life in Chinese Central Asia*, July 22, 2013, https://livingotherwise.com/2013/07/22/abdulla-king-of-uyghur-pop-his-themes/.

18. For a music video featuring this song, a lyric translation, and brief analysis see Darren Byler, "Aspiration, Masculinity and the City," *Art of Life in Chinese Central Asia*, July 1, 2013, https://livingotherwise.com/2013/07/01/aspiration-masculinity-and-the-city/.

Anonymously authored Uyghur satire woven through pop culture sensibilities is an elliptical way to discuss a shared experience of life under a colonial regime. The "security" offered by armed police is creating a way of life that Uyghurs do not recognize as their own. Instead, as is common in the lives of minoritized people across the world, the police are shown to protect the interests of the majority, and those that are already succeeding in the market. These sentiments show us how trauma can be a source of collective identity and how humor and poetry circulated through the assumed anonymity of a digital mediascape is a means of coping with this trauma. In a wave of memes, Uyghurs found a way to express collective outrage through satirical parody.

Since 2017, the public space for both state-supported and underground comedy has been radically restricted by new digital surveillance systems and extrajudicial detentions. Since that time, Abliz has stopped producing itots. Official Uyghur cultural production has largely ground to a halt as a number of Abliz's collaborators have disappeared in the drastically expanded reeducation camp system.[19]

As new Uyghur digital forensics tools were operationalized by Xinjiang Public Security Bureaus in 2017, thousands of Uyghurs were detained due to online activity that was deemed "extremist"

19. Elise Anderson, "The Politics of Pop: The Rise and Repression of Uyghur Music in China," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, May 31, 2020, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/politics-pop-rise-repression-uyghur-music-china/.

MESHREP مەشرەپ

RACHEL HARRIS رەيچىل ھارىس

A space for eating, drinking, dance, and conflict mediation, *meshrep* gatherings are a central part of Uyghur culture. Before the crackdown in Xinjiang they could be found across the Uyghur Region, and in transnational Uyghur communities in Central Asia and elsewhere. The term *meshrep* embraces all sorts of communal occasions that lie outside the realm of mainstream lifecycle and religious celebrations, from male socializing to religious assemblies. Descriptions of meshrep can be found in the accounts of European and Russian travelers and researchers from the late nineteenth century onward. Historically and today, meshrep take various forms depending on the locality and the specific context. Uyghurs are proud of their meshrep. They say that meshrep teach the rules of communal behavior to young men, and serve as a way to perform



Still from documentation of Almaty Meshrep "**The Court (dawa dastur)**" from the Uyghur Meshrep Project.

or "separatist."[20] This has effectively made it impossible for Uyghurs to publish the types of satire they did in the past. The few forms of protest memes that continue to be published and shared are typically expressions of sadness and nostalgia rather than subtle ridicule. For instance, in 2019 Uyghurs briefly shared a popular Douyin meme of young people wiping tears from their faces or beating their chests in front of a background of missing relatives. In 2020, another meme set to the Italian protest song "Bella Ciao" of Uyghurs being loaded into buses bound for forced labor in faraway factories briefly went viral.[21]

CONCLUSION

Occasional glimmers of Uyghur ironic dissent still appear, but now it is mostly in Chinese and is authored by people who assume a certain level of protection. And the humor that comes from a certain distance from symbolic violence now provides less of a veil. For instance, on January 4, 2021, Uyghur rock star Esqer the Gray Wolf posted the following Chinese message on Weibo:

> This new year, I hope there will no longer be any more illegal discrimination toward my people when it comes to renting a place or staying in a hotel in Inner China, or when they arrive in another city by plane or drive through checkpoints! But it continues, public security sees us like an enemy. The most difficult thing at this point is not knowing whether I can change the nationality of my children. Teacher Xi told us that we are like pomegranate seeds that can't be separated. Don't we use the same ID card?

Esqer, famous for his keytar playing and outlandish hair, has lived in Beijing for over two decades. As the son of government officials who grew up speaking Chinese outside Xinjiang, he has not been subject to the same sort of scrutiny as Abliz. Now, in a surviving vestige of Uyghur comedy from below, he is reduced to making jokes about Xi Jinping speeches, mocking false metaphors of Uyghur-Han intimacy in the midst of institutionalized Islamophobia and ethno-racialization, and changing the ethnicity of his children.

Both official and underground Uyghur comedy can be seen as modes of satire that resemble discourse permitted by the state. Abliz appears to inhabit state policy positions to the point that it appears as though he is offering sincere support for them. The anonymous authors of memes likewise mimic the rhythms and poetics of state-authorized pop stars, though clearly in order to ridicule state policies and institutions. Protected pop stars use the language of state campaigns to more directly mock state discourse, officials, and institutions.

In their analysis of similar comic phenomena in late-socialist Russia and the contemporary United States, Dominic Boyer and Alexei Yurchak argue the

20. Scilla Alecci, "How China Targets Uighurs 'One by One' for Using a Mobile App," *International Consortium of Investigative Journalists*, November 24, 2019, https://www.icij.org/investigations/china-cables/how-china-targets-uighurs-one-by-one-for-using-a-mobile-app/.
21. Isobel Cockerell, "How TikTok Opened a Window into China's Police State," *Coda*, September 25, 2019, https://www.codastory.com/authoritarian-tech/tiktok-uyghur-china/; Isobel Cockerell, "Revealed: New Videos Expose China's Forced Migration of Uyghurs During the Pandemic," *Coda*, July 9, 2020, https://www.codastory.com/authoritarian-tech/china-uyghur-migration/.

and transmit Uyghur expressive culture and communally shared knowledge.

Ildiko Bellér-Hann describes meshrep as "the institutionalized enactment of community itself; through the transmission of rules between generations, young people were taught how to be social, how to submit to the rules of the community."[1] Meshrep gatherings thus are a vehicle for making and sustaining community, and they promote community identity and solidarity. This goes some way toward explaining why both the Soviet and Chinese governments have—historically and today—been so keen to appropriate or suppress this tradition.[2]

The name of these gatherings is closely related to the Arabic term *mashrab*, which means "place for drinking," and by extension came to mean a wellspring, particularly for Sufi inspiration. The contemporary usage of meshrep as a term for gatherings and festivities may have derived from, and is certainly linked to, Sufi gatherings, which are closely intertwined with local religious traditions.[3] The name meshrep is also shared by a seventeenth-century mystic poet Bābā Rahīm Mashrab (also known as Shah Mashrab, or Shah Meshrep in the Uyghur pronunciation), a central figure in oral and literary traditions across Central Asia.[4] Mashrab was a mystic poet and a trickster, a *qalandar* who flouted conventional morality in favor of a mystical understanding of God that transcends superficial obedience to doctrinal rules and external performances of piety. The story of his life is contained in Dīvāna-i Mashrab, a set of stories and poems that circulated widely in written and oral forms across the lands he traveled: the Ferghana Valley in contemporary Uzbekistan and Altishahr, and the "Six Cities" that ring the Taklimakan desert in today's southern Xinjiang. The sensibility of these stories is closely allied with that of "The Contest of the Fruits."

In 2010, meshrep gatherings were inscribed by China on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage in urgent need of safeguarding. China's submission to UNESCO effectively cleansed meshrep of their religious meanings, but did emphasize the community-building capacity of meshrep, an emphasis that aligned well with UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage agenda. However, the subsequent treatment of meshrep in China spectacularly failed to align with the UNESCO mission. Approaches to safeguarding meshrep in Xinjiang initially involved the top-down approaches to heritage already well documented in China: staged recreations and tourist performances led by local government organs, alongside ever tightening restrictions on grassroots associations. Since 2016, China's radical policies of surveillance and mass internment, coercive forms of "reeducation" and cultural erasure in Xinjiang have rendered particularly hollow its commitment to UNESCO's heritage agenda. While grassroots association for Uyghurs is inconceivable under the current regime of surveillance and incarceration, staged performances of meshrep continue to welcome tourists and to whitewash government policies.

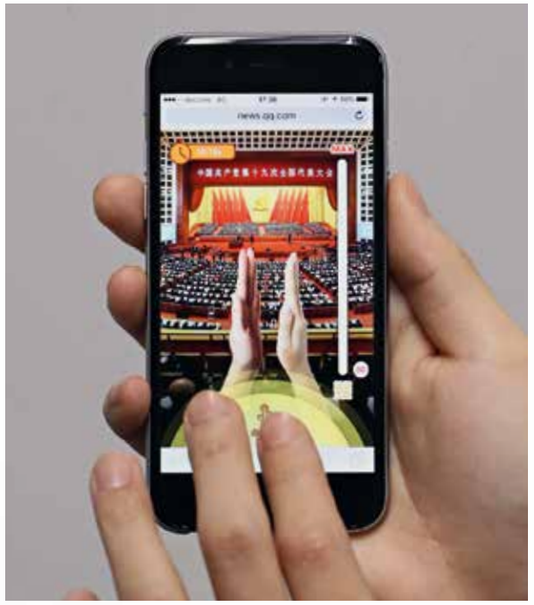
Against this troubled backdrop in the Uyghur homeland, Uyghur communities across the border in Kazakhstan have initiated their own grassroots approach to revitalizing meshrep. The Uyghurs of the Ili Valley, which traverses northwest Xinjiang and southeast Kazakhstan, nurtured a distinctive form of meshrep: regular all-male gatherings with a stable membership known as the *ottuz oghul* (thirty sons). I attended one such gathering in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in August 2019. Below is an excerpt from my field notes describing the event:[5]

1. Ildikó Bellér-Hann, *Community Matters in Xinjiang 1880-1949: Towards a Historical Anthropology of the Uyghur* (Boston: Brill, 2008).
2. Rachel Harris and Ablet Kamalov, "Nation, Religion, and Social Heat: Heritaging Uyghur Māshrāp in Kazakhstan," *Central Asian Survey* 40, no. 1 (2021): 9–33, https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2020.1835825.
3. Nathan Light, *Intimate Heritage: Creating Uyghur Muqam Song in Xinjiang* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2008).
4. Alexandre Papas, *Mystiques et Vagabonds en Islam. Portraits de trois soufis qalandar* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2010).
5. An edited film of the gathering, made by Mukaddas Mijit, is available on our project website: http://www.meshrep.uk/.

institutional and ideological conditions of "hypernormalization" accompanied authoritarian statecraft in Russia and monopolized media institutions in the United States prior to the rise of "fake news" and social media siloing. Drawing on Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, they argue that polarized ideological environments produce such a "precise mimicry of the object of one's irony that it is often impossible to tell whether this is a form of sincere support or subtle ridicule, or both."[22] This subtlety opens spaces of self-making as they mock the being made of their environment. For Uyghurs, new media, which was still quite tightly controlled by central authorities even before the reeducation campaign, offered them a space to experiment with semi-anonymous overt mockery, and, at times, more subtle ridicule.

Now, as social media has been tightly restrained, it is likely that future Uyghur underground comic expression will even more tightly mimic state discourse. The space between self-making and being made that constitute the play of cultural citizenship is contracting. For instance, in 2017 and 2018 middle-aged Uyghur men at *olturush* (self-organized drinking parties) began to circulate videos turning traditional folk songs into praise of Xi Jinping and the Communist Party. They sang with what appeared to be sincerity, but the flowery language of Sufi poetic imagery mixed with the stolid image of Party Secretary Xi produced bitter grins on the faces of many Uyghurs. Other videos—of Uyghur mothers urging their children to kiss a poster of the great leaders of the Communist Party and of an unveiled, elderly Uyghur woman, missing teeth and with a stricken look on her face singing "Without the Communist Party There Would Be No New China" with a heavy Uyghur accent—produced expressions of horror in the same listeners. They saw a grandmother who was singing for her life. The intense controls of the reeducation campaign likely produce moments of satirical parody, but because the space between symbolic violence and self-expression is so narrow, it is now difficult to interpret. Increasingly, comic memes have been replaced by memes of sadistic horror and tragedy.

22. Dominic Boyer and Alexei Yurchak, "American Stiob: or, What Late Socialist Aesthetics of Parody Reveal about Contemporary Political Culture in the West," *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 2 (May 2010): 179–221, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2010.01056.x.



A man plays a game called **Excellent Speech: Clap for Xi Jinping**. The WeChat game allows smartphone users to retroactively applaud Xi's more than three-hour opening speech at the National Congress of the Communist Party.



Still from documentation of Almaty Meshrep "**Education** (telim terbiye)" from the Uyghur Meshrep Project.

The gathering begins with food: a meaty noodle soup. After the food the assembled men move to the garden and sit around a dasturkhan *(cloth) laid on the grass to enjoy joking and music. After the music, and a short break, it's time for the court. This is an important part of the meshrep, where members are accused, judged, and punished for minor misdemeanors. Today, one of the members is accused of leaving the meshrep early last time. He left, claiming he had to meet an old friend, and promised to bring his friend back with him, but didn't return. The meshrep members discuss the issue, and they begin to crack jokes. Their jokes are rich in innuendo and frequently filthy. Each punchline is met with an outburst of braying laughter, and swiftly followed by a counterattack. The exchanges require fast thinking, and excellent linguistic skills.*

Eventually, the man is judged guilty, and is punished by the traditional pantomime of "eating dumplings," which serves as a form of comic humiliation. He sits in the middle of the cloth; one man holds his arms tightly behind him, while the host forces him to mime eating dumplings, eating watermelon, and swimming. It is brilliantly executed, the members laugh heartily, and the accused takes the punishment in good humor. The meshrep goes on with other punishments and lessons, but also with more eating and music and dancing. Finally it is time for the formal handover from today's host to the host of the next gathering. They make short speeches, a tray of apples is passed from one to the other, and an apple is handed to each member. The host hands the wooden rod, with which he has presided over the gathering, to the future host to keep safe until the next meshrep. It is a gesture of trust, and a guarantee.

The revival in Kazakhstan, including the Almaty meshrep described above, responds to the heritage-ing of meshrep in Xinjiang, but here it has taken a very different form. Meshrep in Kazakhstan are neither staged song-and-dance spectacles nor dry discussion forums; they are exciting, culturally rich, performative occasions involving "hot" forms of male sociality including singing, dancing and joking.[6] These occasions provide important spaces within which debates about identity, aesthetics, emotion, and ethical action are played out. In an increasingly bleak landscape of oppression, the continuation of meshrep in Kazakhstan offers a certain hope and means to maintain the Uyghur language and the culture it guards.

6. For further discussion of Uyghur men's joking, see Jay Dautcher, *Down a Narrow Road: Identity and Masculinity in a Uyghur Community in Xinjiang China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

PEACH
别在污土中胡言



STOP LYING IN THE DIRT!

سىزنىڭ سالىتىڭىز سىزدىن ئەقىللىق

گۈاڭتىيەن خا

بىز كۈلۈشنىڭ بىر دورا ئىكەنلىكىنى دائىم ئاڭلاپ تۇرىمىز. ئۇمىدسىزلەنگەن ياكى ئۇمىدلەنگەن چاغدا ، كومېدىيە ئىنسانلارنىڭ ھاياتىدىكى بىمەنىلىكلەرنى كۆرسىتىپ بېرىدىغان قورال بولالايدۇ. بۇ ماقالىدە ، گۈاڭتىيەن خا كومېدىيەنىڭ پەلسەپىۋى مەنىسىگە قارىتا كەڭ دائىرىدە ئىزدىنىش ئېلىپ بارىدۇ ، شۇنداقلا ئۇنى كۆپ تىللىق بولۇش ئىقتىدارى ۋە قارشىلىق كۆرسىتىش روھىنىڭ ئىپادىلىنىشىگە باغلاپ چۈشەندۈرىدۇ. كومىدىيەنىڭ ئىنسانىيلىقنىڭ مۇھىم ئامىللىرىدىن بىرى ئىكەنلىكى ھەققىدىكى مەسىلىرىدە، ئۇ پەلسەپە بىلەن كىلاسسىك ئىسلام ئەسەرلىرىنى بىرلەشتۈرۈپ ، كۈلكىنىڭ تىل ۋە رايوندىن ھالقىغان ھالدا پەيدا بولىدىغانلىقىنى يورۇتۇپ بېرىدۇ.

YOUR SALAD IS SMARTER THAN YOU

Guangtian Ha

It is somewhat of an instance of delightful serendipity that in modern Arabic the common word for humor is *fukāha* (fruit), presumably for the lush and juicy joy it proffers the cerebral palate.[1] While in both Uyghur and Persian the word for fruit is *mīve*, the warm embrace of the two terms in their English translation provides the precarious, even fleeting space wherein this essay finds its intervention.

This essay explores what it means to translate and to move across disparate languages, and links this meditation to a contemplation on humor and comedy. There is something intrinsically funny about being human, and "The Contest of the Fruits," with its distinctly multilingual character that defies the policing of national and linguistic boundaries, offers a unique opportunity to transcend the straitjacket of area studies. Only in the English word *fruit* do fukāha and mīve find their momentary rapport. However, I grew up speaking none of these three languages (English, Arabic, Persian); I was accidentally born in the humble abode of Chinese. In more than one sense this essay itself is a practice in translation, much like the project that generated this volume. Perhaps the foolhardy drive to be translingual is rather comical in itself? For what is funnier than a human trying to be as human as he can—if language is that which defines our essential humanity? What if existential gaps and unscalable abysses are what define who we are, and comedy is that exemplary mode of literature that exposes this savory truth?

AN ALLEGORY OF READING

In the preface to an exquisite book of bilingual poetry—in Arabic and Uyghur—by Ahmatjan Osman, translator Jeffrey Yang confessed forthrightly that he knew neither language:

1. Shahe S. Kazarian, "Humor in the Collectivist Arab Middle East: The Case of Lebanon," *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 24, no. 3 (2011): 332, https://doi.org/10.1515/humr.2011.020.

> [O]ver the next four years [after the initial contact] Osman would send me a kind of skeleton key in English of his original Uyghur and Arabic poems, which I would further distort (not knowing either language) and send back to him along with a list of detailed questions, which he would reply to, and back and forth we've slowly proceeded despite my ignorance.[2]

One wonders if it was actually ignorance, or a wise and lovely folly (even a charming recklessness), that had kept the project alive and warmed the tender heart of a brilliant poet in exile. The tortuous procedure also brought triumph and exhilaration: "[o]n more than a few occasions … Osman has quelled my emails of despair with replies of ebullience and surprise upon seeing an overdraft (to borrow Basil Bunting's word for translation)"; yet caution dictates humility, "[l]et sympathetic readers judge." What is needed is probably more than sympathy: rather the demand is of a literary imagination that dwells in a translingual space of poetic diaspora where vowels and consonants, images and dreams, commit randy adultery in defiance of "chaste" marriages that obsess most immigration laws in the world.

If the poet is to be considered the king of words, is the translator—a good one at least—a sort of courtly fool? An Arabic story of the popular figure Juḥā—another legendary sagacious fool—adds to this duo a third term:

> The king Tīmūr had a donkey which was a gift from some of his admirers. Being extraordinarily vain he wished to distinguish his donkey from all the rest of the donkeys in the world because it was Tīmūr's donkey and there is simply no escaping it that it must be a superb ass. So he announced to the city that he was seeking a man who could teach his donkey to read. Of course, being Tīmūr he never disappointed: he said whoever accepted the challenge yet was unable to do so would have his head chopped off by a sword.
>
> Lo and behold: here came Juḥā who was to accomplish this mighty feat. He led the donkey home, and brought it a big book of many pages. He opened the book and scattered on each page some barley and clover. Whenever the donkey was peckish, Juḥā would bring him the book with the pages laid wide open, and the silly ass would eat from them. This lasted for a whole month until finally it was firmly established in the mind of the donkey that food could be found between the pages of an open book. When a book was brought to it, it would lick its pages with its tongue and would eat from them.

2. Jeffrey Yang, "Translator's Preface," in *Uyghurland: The Farthest Exile* by Ahmatjan Osman, trans. Jeffrey Yang and Ahmatjan Osman (Los Angeles: Phoneme Media, 2015), VIII.

تۆگىنى
ئۇسسۇلغا
قويارسا، بىر
تاختا پەلەسنى
بۇزار.



If you cause
a camel
to dance,
it will spoil
a sunflower
field.



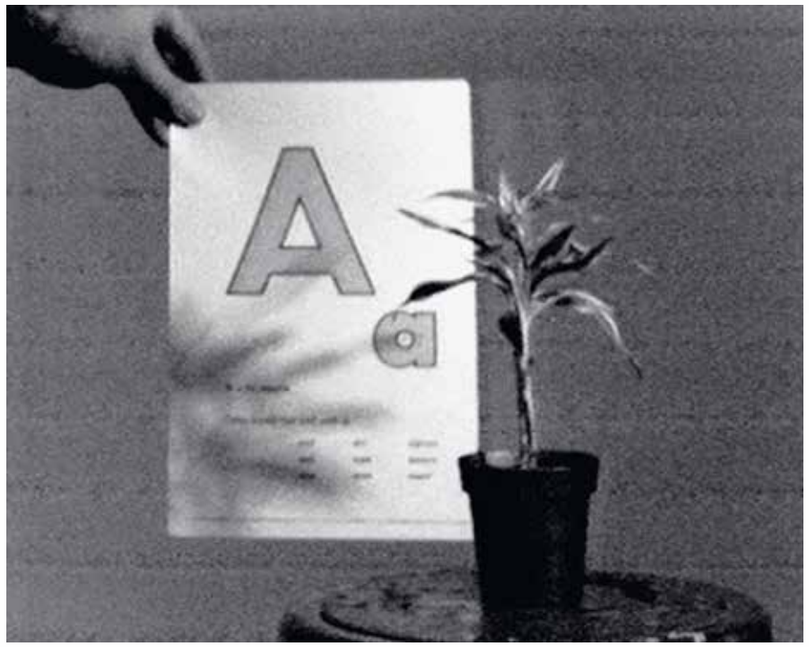
Pilar Albarracín, ***Asnería***, 2010, installation with books, magazines and stuffed donkey, variable dimensions. © 2021 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

> Then came the day for Juḥā's final report. Tīmūr gathered all the people together on the central square and here came Juḥā with the donkey; it had been starved for days before this moment. He put down a book in front of it—but this time there was neither barley nor clover among the pages. Yet seeing the book laid open the ass jumped at it and licked its pages. "Hee-haw, hee-haw" he went, in a frenzied search for food. Everyone felt content and applauded the wise ass, praising it profusely for its miraculous ability to read.[3]

How does this story add to the duo of the poet and the translator, working across a linguistic gap that is as much historical and political as it is linguistic? If the translator is the courtly fool to the poet as the king of words, are we as readers the foolish ass or the onlookers cheering on as the ass "reads"? The joke is no doubt an earthly flight in the face of oppressive sovereign authority, for Tīmūr, being the figurehead of the Turco-Mongol conquest of Islamic lands, was surely not cast in a favorable light in Arabic lore.

3. This version of the story is adapted from "*al-ḥimār al-qari*' (the donkey reader)," in Ḥikāyāt Juḥa wa-l-ḥimār, arr. Mansur Ali ʿIrābī, 18. The book is from a series of popular children's stories arranged by the same author, available at https://books-library.online/free-298988393-download. Different variations of the same tale, with minor alterations, are widely known in the Muslim world.

Fooling the powers that be, whether in mostly benign empires or under oppressive colonial rule, has always been an essential tactic, if not a necessary form of coping for the downtrodden. Mikhail Bakhtin, writing in exile, was equally drawn to the subversive potential of carnivalesque satire. At times it looks almost as though the wisdom of politics, if not a general wit of existence, were to be found among the apparently enfeebled fools seemingly powerless in the face of a crushing dictatorial force. And satire is that odd art of, as it were, *mo laohu de pigu* ("caressing the rear end of a tiger"): the thrill of revolt is the tastiest when closest to the target, and the very luminance of power impels ambiguous and innovative forms of expression (hence the Uyghur expression, "It is dark near the lamp"). Darren Byler's essay in this volume captures precisely this paradigmatic irony.



John Baldessari, ***Teaching a Plant the Alphabet***, 1972, single-channel video, black and white, sound, 18:40 minutes.

An anthology of poetry that acknowledges and dwells upon gaps of language and history, and which—no doubt thanks to Osman's cosmopolitan poetic repertoire—includes quite a few poems that wreck a conventional mind, should likely make us pause: in laughing at the simple folks who eulogized the reading ass, are we not mocking ourselves? And in ridiculing a translator that knows not the language he is translating from, are we overly confident that we actually know the language that we claim is our mother tongue? Or is it more likely the wandering tongue of a starving ass in search of food that is no longer there?

YOUR SALAD IS SMARTER THAN YOU



Tomb of **Al-Jawzī** in Baghdad, Iraq. Restored after citizens protested its destruction and replacement with a parking lot.

There is something inherently *funny* about moving across languages: here the word funny means amusing, causing laughter, or comical, as well as odd, peculiar, and unexpected. Linking the predictable and the unexpected, the ordinary and the extraordinary, seems to be the quintessential realm of the comic. Incongruity and its playful irresolution are the lifelines of wit.[4] This is as much true of Islamic humorous traditions as it is of Western ones. "Sillier than purslane" (*aḥmaq min rijla* or *aḥmaq min baqla*) would be somewhat of an odd Arabic proverb to those unfamiliar with the context: purslane is considered silly "because it grows both in waterways and in the camel's path" (*li-annahā tanbutu fī sabīli-l-mā'c wa ṭarīqi-l-ibil*); it is foolish because it fails to distinguish between the wet and the dry. Likewise, a fool is a fool "because he does not distinguish his speech from his flippancy" (*li-annahu lā yumayyizu kalāmahu min ruʿūnatihi*).[5] Related in the same twelfth-century text on foolery—al-Jawzī's *Book of Idiots and Imbeciles*—from which the proverb about the donkey was drawn are also proverbs that use animals as analogies:

> "More foolish than a wolf" because she leaves her own cub and suckles the cub of a hyena. … "Stupider than a pigeon" because she builds no warm nest and sometimes even drops

4. Without belaboring this point, let us mention one famous formulation of the incongruity theory in the history of Western philosophy. In his *Critique of Judgment*, Immanuel Kant defines the source of laughter as "an affection arising from a strained expectation being suddenly reduced to nothing." See Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1952), Part I, 199.

5. Al-Jawzī, *Akhbār al-Ḥamqā wa al-Mughaffalīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Banānī, 1990), 23.



Ingredients necessary to make pickled purslane: fresh purslane, apple cider vinegar, salt, sugar, garlic and lemon. Recipe created by Eat Grim, a fruit and vegetable delivery service in Denmark.

> her egg and breaks it, or lays her egg on the top of a pole and lets it drop. … "Sillier than an ostrich" because when she passes an egg that is not hers, she would hatch it while ignoring her own egg. …[6]

Folly in these proverbs thus involves a peculiar misrecognition of kinship, if not its repudiation altogether. In the text, folly is ridiculed and denounced, and its denunciation acts as a coercive corrective aimed at maintaining social norms. To be stupid is to take anonymous strangers as kin and leave one's own offspring unattended. It is a failure, again, to draw a distinction between the close and the distant, the related and the unrelated; it is a preference extended especially to strangers—strangers that have yet to be born, no less. In some cases, the preference sounds akin to a self-sacrifice: "'Stupider than a plover' because when it sees people, it drops in their path so they can seize it."[7] In all these proverbs, there is a sense of inevitability; it looks as if these creatures could not restrain the impulse to become what they are not—if kinship can be considered an extension of ego.[8]

The same can be said of purslane, the leafy green that only recently became a culinary craze of the herbivorous petty bourgeois and white middle class.[9] Yet can we not invert the sanctimonious mockery embedded in these proverbs and uncover in them a glorious audacity? There is something remarkable in the purslane's failure to distinguish habitats of opposing ecologies: in the foolery of apathy is hidden an indestructible will to live in the face of inescapable destruction. It is also a flirtatious fluidity trading sure death for momentary immortality. An explanation of the proverb al-Jawzī provides says that "purslane is stupid because it grows where torrents flow." In other words, it finds life

6. Ibid., 42. Note that all the animals here ridiculed are gendered female. This essay will have no space to address the essential relationship between gender, sexuality, and humor. Suffice it to say in this footnote that early Muslim humor, especially in the Arabophone Islamic world, adopted much from pre-Islamic times, and Arabic Muslim humor was closely bound up with poetry and other categories of belles lettres. Both in early Islamic Medīna and later in Baghdad during the high Abbasid period, jokes and witticism were often associated with men with ambiguous gender identities or sexual orientations. See Everett K. Rowson, "The Effeminates of Early Medina," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111(4), 1991: 671–693.
7. Ibid., 42.

8. Incidentally, the study of joking in anthropology began in kinship studies, especially the study of kinship in Africa. There the question is who can joke with whom and to what extent joking is a rite and can be considered an indicator of social conjunction and disjunction. If a foolish ostrich knows no kinship and such ignorance constitutes the source of a funny absurdity, then to distinguish themselves from such silly creatures the humankind needs to know how laughter and joking can be translated into socially regulated forms so we appear less absurd (to ourselves!). For the early studies of joking relationships in Africa, see Denise Paulme, "Parenté à Plaisanteries et Alliance par le Sang en Afrique Occidentale," *Africa* 12, no. 4 (1939): 433–44, https://doi.org/10.2307/1155951; F. J. Pedler, "Joking Relationships in East Africa," *Africa* 13, no. 2 (1940): 170–73; and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, "On Joking Relationships," *Africa* 13, no. 3 (1940): 195–210, https://doi.org/10.2307/1156093. Latter-day studies on joking and peace-building in Africa are legion; to what extent they may reflect a colonial legacy that still marks—and mars—anthropology as a disciplinary endeavour is a question yet to be asked.
9. See, for instance, David Beaulieu, "Purslane: Focus on Its Culinary Uses, Not Weed Control," *Spruce*, January 5, 2021, https://www.thespruce.com/edible-purslane-profile-2131203.
10. Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).
11. Henri Bergson, "Laughter," in *Comedy*, ed. Wylie Sypher (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), 84.

where life is soon to be extinguished. If some anthropologists have suggested that mushrooms are good to think with as creatures that provide a prospect of life after or even during the slow unfolding of capitalist catastrophes,[10] then purslane seems to have taken it to a different level. For what is persistence if one grows only once the disaster is over? Who would have imagined that the salad you just gobbled might have been smarter than you—smarter and more resilient, smacking of a foolish, absurd heroism evocative of Don Quixote.

LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE

Let us examine this indestructible will to live more closely. Those interested in humor and comedy have likely heard of Henri Bergson's famous explication: that laughter results when we see "something mechanical encrusted on the living"—thus a variation on the incongruity theory of the comic.[11] A classic portrayal of the bookish academic would suffice as an example: they are so absorbed in work that, without looking, they mistake the inkwell for a teacup (a goblet would have been less pathetic?) and drink from the former and dip the quill in the latter. Such absentmindedness is a staple for much mockery and constitutes the prime example of "something mechanical encrusted on the living." For Bergson, laughter functions as a social corrective (this is rather a killjoy claim, no doubt, and is akin to the unstated stance of the Arabic proverbs we find in al-Jawzī):

> What life and society require of each of us is a constantly alert attention that discerns the outlines of the present situation, together with a certain elasticity of mind and body to enable us to adapt ourselves in consequence. Tension and elasticity are two forces, mutually complementary, which life brings into play. If these two forces are lacking in the body to any considerable extent, we have sickness and infirmity and accidents of every kind. If they are lacking in the mind, we find every degree of mental deficiency, every variety of insanity. Finally, if they are lacking in the character, we have cases of the gravest inadaptability to social life, which are the sources of misery and, at times, the causes of crime. … But society asks for something more; it is not satisfied with simply living, it insists on living well. What it now has to dread is that each one of us, content with paying attention to what affects the essentials of life, will, so far as the rest is concerned, give way to the easy automatism of acquired habits. … Society will therefore be suspicious of all *inelasticity* of character, of mind, and even

of body, because it is the possible sign of a slumbering activity as well as of an activity with separatist tendencies.[12]

A well-dressed, mild-mannered French gentleman slipping on a banana peel and going bananas afterward is an example of how both body and mind lose control of their trained composure. According to Bergson's theory, our laughter in this case is directed at the gentleman's absentmindedness, his lack of alertness to his environs, and thus the fact of his temporarily becoming a machine in his behavior. We laugh to bring him back to a society that requires unremitting attention and alarm. Another reading, one that is considerably more generous and humane (and so naively lovely it must be right), is that we laugh out of an implicitly shared sense of relief: that we are all imperfect and we feel redeemed when others appear just as clumsy.

Yet do we not discern at the heart of this Bergsonian insistence on "living" an existential compulsion: society "asks for something more," is not "satisfied" with "simply living," and "dreads" the easy automatism of acquired habits. At first glance, Bergson stands in opposition to our proverbial purslane; for him, life must remain perpetually vigilant, and failure to distinguish torrential waterways from desert camel paths would be a cardinal sin that conveniently invites well-deserved death. However, in attributing to society an almost neurotic mindfulness that knows no rest, has our prime twentieth-century philosopher of life himself been "encrusted" by something "mechanical"? Where then do we draw the fine line between human and machine, life and death, innovation and repetition? The indestructible will to live is somehow also an invincible drive to die; the urge not to become a machine paradoxically converts one into a life-seeking machine. Humor thus poses what Jacques Derrida might call an "aporia": an ineffable paradox that forces "life" to confront its own apodictic absurdity.[13]

Does this mean that there is something intrinsically comical about being human—that at the heart of humanity is a ludicrous comedy? Bergson to some extent agrees, and drawing on the popular comedies of Molière he considers comedy as possessing a special power in portraying human values and characters in their conceptual purity:

> A drama, even when portraying passions or vices that bear a name, so completely incorporates them in the person that their names are forgotten, their general characteristics effaced, and we no longer think of them at all, but rather of the person in whom they are assimilated; hence, the title of a drama can seldom be anything else than a proper noun [such as *Hamlet*]. On the other hand, many comedies have a common noun as their title: *l'Avare*, *le Joueur*, etc. … The reason is that, however intimately vice, when comic, is associated with persons, it nonetheless retains its simple, independent existence, it remains the central character, present though invisible, to which the characters in flesh and blood on the stage are attached.[14]

شاپاقتا تېيىلىپ،
ئۇرۇقتا زوك
ئولتۇرۇپتۇ.



The one who slides on melon-peelings will squat down on (its) seeds.

12. Ibid., 72–73.
13. This is an argument akin to the one set forth by Alenka Zupančič in her Lacanian book *The Odd One In: On Comedy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018). Like many books of the same Lacanian school, Zupančič's remains so very consistent in its theoretical exposition and insistence on the use of Lacanian psychoanalysis that the work can be read as a satirical impression of the school. Reading it through the prism of Deleuze's "How Do We Recognize Structuralism," and treating both as satirical texts as well as texts of high theory, would be an interesting exercise. See Gilles Deleuze, "How Do We Recognize Structuralism," in *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953–1974*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Mike Taormina (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 170–92.



Watercolor painting produced in Istanbul around 1790. From an album showing Turkish costumes. **Soytarı**, a clown or buffoon. Collected by The British Museum.

While some first-rate physical comedy—think Mr. Bean or the earlier Monsieur Hulot—may complicate Bergson's claim about comedy never named after a key character, he makes it sound as

14. Bergson, 70.

though comedy were philosophy by other means—and by means considerably wittier, sharper, and funnier. It is almost as if he were saying that for philosophy to become itself, for serious thought to approach the core of its conceptual work and grasp almost by intuition what has so far been comprehended only by intellect, grim-faced theory must give way to sophisticated mirth.

There is no philosophy without laughter, no thought without glee. If humanity is defined as the being that contemplates its own existence, a being that is "there" that casts its own existence into



Francis Goya, ***Capricho no. 39: Hasta su abuelo*** (And so was his grandfather), 1799, aquatint print on laid paper, 21 cm × 15 cm. Collected by The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

ئاتىسى
ئاتالمىغان
قوڭغۇزنى،
بالىسى ئېتىپتۇ
توڭگۇزنى.



The father
could not
shoot a beetle,
but the son
shot a boar.

question (Dasein), then are we not intrinsically comic characters, to the extent that we cannot stop being funny, and the really funny thing is we fail to see how absurdly funny we have been all along? Are we defined by a fundamental impairment that prevents us from laughing at ourselves—an existential schism between our comical being and wearisome intellect, a gap that separates who we genuinely are from who we *think* we are? Writing wittily against Bergson by way of Wyndham Lewis, who reversed Bergson's argument, Simon Critchley has the following to say about this all too human dilemma:

> So, if a man behaves like a cabbage, then that is funny, but if a cabbage behaves like a man, then that is also funny. It is incontestable. Person-become-thing and thing-become-person are both funny and therefore both Bergson and Lewis would appear justified in their theories of laughter. …
>
> [Yet] [i]t is not so much a person behaving like a thing or vice versa that is the root of the comic, but rather—surprise surprise—a person acting like a person. That is, there is something essentially ridiculous about a human being behaving like a human being; there is something laughable about me

LISTENING AND SAMĀʿ ئاڭلاش ۋە ساما

GUANGTIAN HA گۇاڭتىيەن خا

In conventional Muslim lore, once a child is born, the father is to play God. He is to recite the *adhān*, the Muslim call to prayer, and once completed hold his breath and blow it into the ears of the newborn—in the same manner as when God blew the *rūḥ* (soul) into the empty husk of a body to create humankind.

The Arabic word *adhān* shares the same triliteral root with *udhun* (ear), and *adhina* ("he listened"). Form 4 of the same verb, *ādhana*, is where we find the active meaning "to announce" or "to make someone listen," thus "to call (to prayer)." Yet such morphological conversion disappears in translation and as such masks an essential inversion: instead of laying stress on the act of audition, it draws attention to the moment of vocalization. Does such inversion bespeak a symptomatic displacement, whereby collective audition (often passive and ridden with conflicts and contingencies) gives way to individualized vocalization (clean, melodic, and deceptively simple)?

Listening can be potentially subversive. In his cogently argued book *A Voice and Nothing More*, Slovene philosopher Mladen Dolar relates a joke that may be the nightmare of every dedicated *mu'adhdhin* (he who performs the call to prayer):

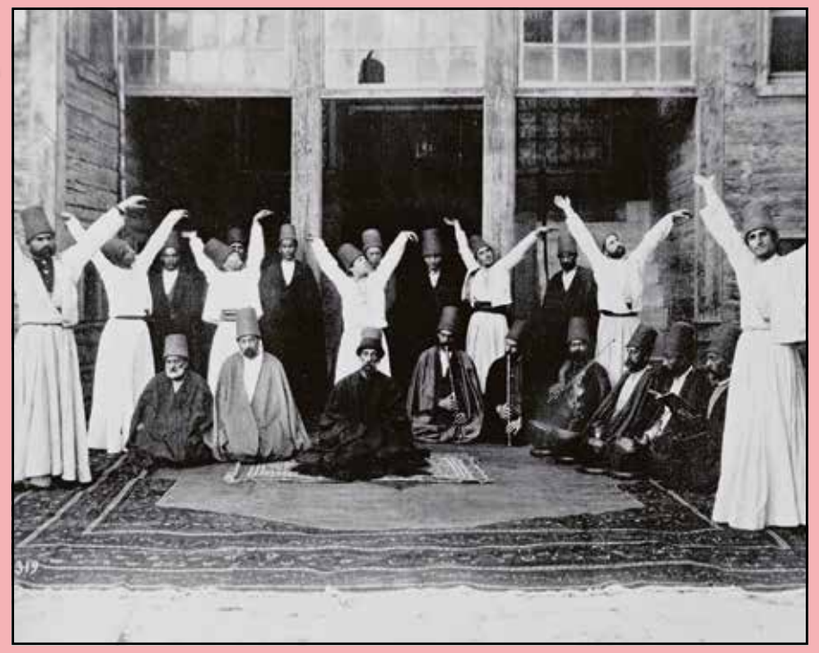
In the middle of a battle there is a company of Italian soldiers in the trenches. An Italian commander issues the command, "Soldiers, attack!" He cries out in a loud and clear voice to make himself heard in the midst of the tumult, but nothing happens, nobody moves. So the commander gets angry and shouts louder, "Soldiers, attack!" Still nobody moves. And since in jokes things have to happen three times for something to stir, he yells

behaving like a little professor of philosophy and you behaving like earnest readers of a book on humour. It is finally absurd, is it not? We might just as well be cabbages.[15]

Cabbage or purslane, professor or fool, the line begins to blur as we approach the heart of the human comedy. But we also need to ask, before circling back to the person of the translator and closing this chaotic contemplation on humor, what can we say about those who break the truth to us and even make a profession out of it? Who are the specialized comedians and professional fools, and what sort of a garden would give pride of place to our cabbages and purslanes—not to mention our foul-mouthed succulent delicacies in "The Contest of the Fruits"?

Anthropologists are famous for their killjoy interpretations; in this they rival Sigmund Freud in his otherwise monumental *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (though, to be fair, the man had his own distinct brand of nerdy humor). "If there is no joke in the social structure, no other joke can appear," thus alleged Mary Douglas. And quickly she added, "[My] hypothesis is that a joke is seen and allowed when it offers a symbolic pattern of a social pattern occurring at the same time. … [A]ll jokes are expressive of the social situation in which they occur."[16] Thus an

15. Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (London: Routledge, 2002), 58–59.
16. Mary Douglas, "Jokes," in *Implicit Meanings: Selected Essays in Anthropology*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1999), 109.



Whirling dervishes in Galata Mawlawi House, 1870. Istanbul, Ottoman Empire.

even louder: "Soldiers, attack!" At which point there is a response, a tiny voice rising from the trenches, saying appreciatively "Che bella voce!" *"What a beautiful voice!"*[1]

While YouTube and other online streaming services have enabled millions of Muslims to gratify their ears with mellifluous *adhān* recorded from Saudi Arabia to Egypt, the spiritual danger of being captivated by the medium at the expense of the message is ever more alarming for

1. Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 3.

ئادەم ئۆلمەس،
كۆزى تويماس.



Man's eyes are insatiable until death.

initiate undergoing a rite of passage can defy the conventional order and make rowdy fun of the elders, but once he's crossed the threshold and the structure is restored, such defiance will no longer be tolerated. Yet in all societies, past and present (though to different degrees), there are those who straddle the orderly and the disorderly, and who are neither quite "here" in the society nor completely "there" in the beyond:

> Perhaps the joker should be classed as a kind of minor mystic. Though only a mundane and borderline type, he is one of those people who pass beyond the bounds of reason and society and give glimpses of a truth which escapes through the mesh of structured concepts. Naturally he is only a humble, poor brother of the true mystic, for his insights are given by accident. They do not combine to form a whole new vision of life, but remain disorganised as a result of the technique which produces them. … Needless to say, he is always a subordinate deity in a complex pantheon. The joker as god promises a wealth of new, unforeseeable kinds of interpretation. He exploits the symbol of creativity which is contained in a joke, for a joke implies that anything is possible.[17]

17. Ibid., 114.

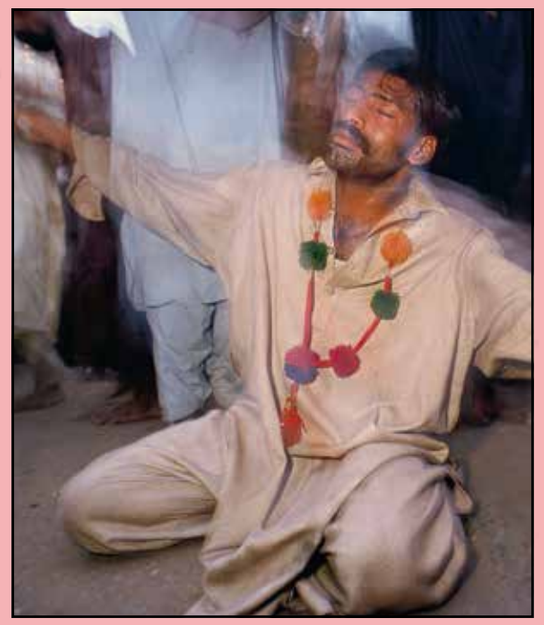
the piously minded. Yet ironically, as an essential component of Islamic recitation, *adhān* is also among the most varied in its musical improvisation.

Listening as both boon and bane reaches its self-contradicting apotheosis among the Sufis. Here we are in muddier waters, for the matter is not simply the legitimacy of the sound one listens to, but more importantly, how and in what context one listens, and the chain of implications set off by the act of audition. The great Abbasid Sufi Abu Ḥāmid Al-Ghazali raises no objection to the Sufi practice of *samāʿ*, which means "listening" and covers



Muhammad Sadiq Zand, ***A Portrait of an Amorous Couple***, 1787. Isfahan, Persia.

a wide range of activities that often involve string instruments, a profusion of percussion, and a medieval Muslim precursor of retro-disco. However, in his monumental *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences) he offers numerous constraining conditions: listening is forbidden to youth, for whom lust is not yet under control and music provokes yearning and desire; it is also forbidden if the poetry set to music is composed by women, or when the occasion is attended by beardless young boys acting as servants (much like in ancient Greece). The same



Man surrendering to Sufi music in the Indus Valley, Sindh, Pakistan.

proscription is applied to musical instruments normally played on joyous occasions where alcoholic drinks are served, for this may render the *samāʿ* indistinct from those occasions and indirectly condone or at least remind those present of the censured euphoria caused by the sweet wine.[2]

One of the most remarkable things about Islam—and likely about people of all faiths—is the huge gap that often separates the holy injunctions announced in the book from the magnificent mess of human life. Wine drinking has been one place where this gap manifests;[3] another is the historical existence, until the 1800s, of popular forms of male homosexuality or homoeroticism in Muslim societies ranging from the Hejaz to Istanbul.[4] The cautious legal permission given to *samāʿ* bears out the same story.

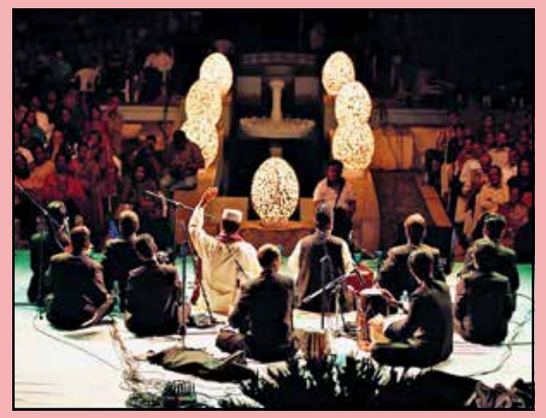
2. Duncan B. MacDonald, "Emotional Religion in Islām as Affected by Music and Singing," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, (April 1901): 235–44, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25208293.
3. See Shahad Ahmed, *What Is Islam?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 57–71.

It is probably in the person of this minor mystic whose access to truth is necessarily unsystematic, incoherent, accidental, and ever-shifting that we ought to find a fragile transcendence that offers a slim hope of salvation. To this category, too, we shall attribute our urbane Juḥā and his later reincarnation in Molla Nasreddin (or Effendi)—clever fools whose sagacious tales are the warp and weft of mundane wisdom across Eurasia, from Iran to Croatia to China; and Shah Mashrab, otherwise known as Bābā Raḥīm Mashrab, a *dīvāne* ("crackpot") Sufi of the seventeenth century who proved essential for popular Sufism in Central Asia.[18] Our cornucopia of a text, "The Contest of the Fruits," while presenting no clear figure of a wise fool, spares no poetic juice in concocting a party of succulent buffoons. In the introduction we describe this Uyghur munāẓara as a distant resonance of the Platonic symposium. Here the analogy comes full circle, for if the symposium is where the foolish wits debate over love, the conference of the fruits is where the witty fools—are they, too, "minor mystics"?—hash out what it means to live together, holding no grudges and pulling no punches.

Are translators also "minor mystics"? Do we become such ourselves by coming to an awareness of the unhomeliness of the mother tongue, and by feeling an uncanny intimacy with a foreign language—or two, or three, or four—that may or may not be interested in adopting an alien child? If it is true that there is nothing funnier than a human trying to be human, or on the contrary, a human acting as though they could stop being human, all the while knowing next to nothing about what humanity is, in seeking security in a cuddly mother tongue—and naming it as such—are we not all pretending that we had not been orphaned all along, as if we had found a home in a language we thought we had been born into? Really, we might just as well have been the donkey eating from a spiced book.

18. For Shah Mashrab, see Nathan Light, *Intimate Heritage: Creating Uyghur Muqam Song in Xinjiang* (Berlin: Lit, 2008), 109–11. For the Uyghur meshrep communal traditions built around Shah Mashrab and other essential figures of mystical Islam, see also Rachel Harris, *Soundscapes of Uyghur Islam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020); and Mu Qian, "From Sufism to Communism: Incarnations of the Uyghur Song 'Imam Hüsäynim,'" *Central Asian Survey* 40, no. 1 (2021): 76–96, https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2020.1813088. Stories of Shah Mashrab are known to have circulated across the Ferghana Valley and the Uyghur Region. Some of these stories were collectively known as *Dīvāne-ye Mashrab*. →

In modern times, sagas of the miraculous Bābā Raḥīm Mashrab are occasionally published for public consumption (such as *Qissai Mashrab*, published in 1992 in Tashkent). In some popular legends, Shah Mashrab was also portrayed as an essential figure in the conceived conversion of some eminent Mongol Junggar Lamaists to Islam in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See Thierry Zarcone, "Between Legend and History: About the 'Conversion' to Islam of Two Prominent Lamaists in the Seventeenth-Eighteenth Centuries," in *Islam and Tibet: Interaction Along the Musk Routes*, eds. Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett, and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim (London: Routledge, 2011), 281–94.



Performance by **Fareed Ayaz**, **Abu Muhammad Qawwal and Brothers** in Pakistan.

Once at a concert featuring Fareed Ayaz—one of the living masters of South Asian Qawwali music—I saw him chewing betel leaves nonstop while sitting on the edge of the stage as the host introduced him to a roomful of impeccably dressed Pakistani socialites—and me. He was visibly inebriated, swaying to and fro and presumably muttering praise of the Lord under his breath. As our sights incidentally crossed, he stared straight into my eyes. *Ta de yanjing dai gou* ("His eyes have got hooks"), so goes a Chinese proverb.

Taking this as an invitation for benediction, I nudged my way to the front after the concert and had a friend snap a photo of the two of us. But the holy man addressed her and not me, "Is he your friend, my child?" "Yes," she said. "Then be safe, my child, be safe." Did he manage to see in me what I had failed to see all along? A drunk clairvoyant might have been the only sober creature in an otherwise wasted human world.

4. For male homoeroticism in the post-classical Arab-Islamic world, see Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). It must be noted that the author deliberately chooses not to use the term "homosexuality" to describe the homoerotic practices among Muslim men. The caution has to do with the specific historical genealogies of the word—and the concept—in modern Western history per Michel Foucault's argument in his groundbreaking *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1.



HIJRAN هىجران

MUNAWWAR ABDULLA مۇنەۋۋەر ئابدۇللا

The moon creates a monsoon
in me
Sand crashes into a mountain
One sad wave away from farewell
I sniff dust, create water.

The first time I left was
thirty-some years ago
Before I had even been a thought

As they began to dig
the deserts for water
As they mined the mountains
for gold
Only the moon saw me leave
Named me Hijran, and kept
A piece of my heart

I left more pieces
at each goodbye
Those who held one
could burn it
In an emergency
So I could return to them

I left again at fifteen,
Seventeen, twenty,
twenty-three, twenty-five,
Leaving little fires behind

The moon burned and burned
I promised to be the water yet
Said my name was Hijran,
and left

The moon sent smoke
“Define Hijran”
“Isn’t it just my name?”

Farewells and see-you-soons
And a dull ache in winter
Healed scars, the places
I had broken off

Farewell is a state of being
That runs away from itself
Unable to return to any small fire
Or understand
Hijran
Might I be dust or water …
Why couldn’t I use
the moon for flight?

«بىز تومۇزغىلارنىڭ سايرىشىغا تاقابىل تۇرالمايمىز»

شائىر تاھىر ھامۇت ئىزگىل بىلەن سۆھبەت

مۇساپىر
تەرجىمە قىلغۇچىلار: سەھەر ۋە مۇساپىر

بۇ مول مەزمۇنلۇق زىيارەت خاتىرىسىدە ، داڭلىق ئۇيغۇر شائىرى تاھىر ھامۇت ئىزگىل «مېۋىلەر مۇنازىرىسى» دېگەن ئەسەرنى ئۇيغۇر كىلاسسىك ئېغىز ئەدەبىياتى نۇقتىسىدىن تەھلىل قىلدۇ ۋە بۇ ئەسەرنىڭ ھازىرقى زامان ئۇيغۇر زىيالىلىرى تەرىپىدىن ئېلىپ بېرىلغان ئاقارتىش ھەرىكىتىنىڭ بىر قىسمى ئىكەنلىكىنى يورۇتۇپ بېرىدۇ. نۇرغۇنلىغان ھازىرقى زامان ئۇيغۇر سەنئەتكارلىرى ۋە شائىرلىرىغا ئوخشاشلا ، ئىزگىل بۇ كۆپ خىل ۋە دۇنياۋىي ھەرىكەتكە ۋەكىللىك قىلىدۇ. ئۇ ئۆز شېئىرىيىتىنىڭ كۆپ تىللىق ئىكەنلىكىنى، خەنزۇچە «گۈڭگا شېئىر» دىن تارتىپ غەرب پەلسەپىسىگىچە بولغان خاسلىققا ئىگە مەنبەلەرنى قوبۇل قىلىغانلىقىنى كۆرسىتىپ بېرىدۇ. ئىزگىل ئۇيغۇر كىلاسسىك ئەدەبىياتىدىن ھازىرقى زامان سەنئىتىگىچە ، جەدىتچىلىك ھەرىكىتىدىن ئۇيغۇرلارنىڭ ھازىرقى ئەھۋالىغىچە تەھلىل يۈرگۈزۈپ ، ئۇيغۇر مەدەنىيىتى دۇچ كېلىۋاتقان ئېغىر ۋەزىيەتكە بولغان قايغۇ ۋە ئۈمىدىنى ئىپادىلەيدۇ.

"WE CAN'T DEFY THE SINGING OF THE CICADAS":

A CONVERSATION WITH POET TAHIR HAMUT IZGIL

INTERVIEW BY MUSĀPIR

Translated by Seher & Musāpir

Musāpir
This interdisciplinary research project, *The Contest of the Fruits*, is inspired by classical Uyghur satire, based on the manuscript version that was translated and printed by Gunnar Jarring in 1929 in Kashgar. As you know, there have been several different versions of "The Contest of the Fruits" among Uyghurs, including twentieth-century classics such as those written by Abduqadir Damollam and Exmet Shah Qaraqash, as well as many related oral traditions.[1] Uyghur folk artists have performed the poem in various venues with different melodies. Can you speak to the role this well-known poetic narrative has played in Uyghur life?

Tahir Hamut Izgil
Regardless of the different variations, or versions, "The Contest of the Fruits" belongs to Uyghur folk literature. We might also call it a *dastan*, a Uyghur epic narrative, because of the length and dialogic nature of this poem. Although some writers have appropriated and incorporated the theme into their creative work, I believe it has mainly been preserved and disseminated orally by storytellers and folk artists. There is another well-known satire, also in the genre of *munāẓara*, called "The Battle on the Dastarkhan,"[2]

1. Abduqadir Damollam (1899–1983) was a prominent educator and a leading Uyghur Jadidist, Jadidism being a Muslim reformist movement in the Russian Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Uyghur Region. Jadidism (from the Arabic جديد *jadīd* or "new") advocated a radical reform of educational methodologies and tools, away from the rote learning of traditional *maktabs* or Muslim schools. Jadidism was largely co-opted or defanged by the arrival of Bolshevism in Soviet Central Asia. For more on this legacy, see Adeeb Khalid's *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1999). Its particular Uyghur iteration has only recently gained attention, namely by David Brophy in his book *Uyghur Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016). In addition to publishing a series of textbooks on Arabic, Islam, and Turkish orthography, Damollam set up the first New Method school in Kashgar in 1912.

2. Dastarkhan is a Perso-Turkic word that means tablecloth. This literal meaning is often expanded to refer to the entire setting of the ceremonial meal that includes both its culinary dimension and broader spatial, cultural, and religious arrangements.

which has been widely performed at Dolan Meshrep gatherings.[3] While "The Contest of the Fruits" portrays a debate among fruits, "The Battle on the Dasturkhan" features a debate among different food dishes. In both munāẓara,[4] each type of fruit or food symbolizes and represents a particular personality, or a certain phenomenon in nature, and the contest, discussion, or battle concludes with the understanding that no one is superior to others in this world and that each and every individual has their own unique role. These munāẓara highlight the importance of maintaining social balance and how equity and diversity is a vital condition for people to live in peace and happiness. Essential social values, such as advocating for good morals and deeds, and criticizing evil and bias, are fundamental themes, and they play an important role among the public's morals. Therefore, these works are of great significance within our Uyghur epistemology, especially in the lives of the common people, who have retained their values and passed them on from generation to generation.

M
No wonder Abduqadir Damollam used this munāẓara in his textbook for Jadidist schools at the beginning of the twentieth century, reworking and arranging it as understandable, simple, and concise poetry.[5]

THI
I believe so. During the new-style education period of Abduqadir Damollam, such popular and interesting poetic works played a vital role in enlightening the nation and awakening the people. Before him, Uyghurs were living in a dark period, in which the long-standing colonization by the Qing Dynasty had implemented policies that deprived us of education and aimed to keep the community in a closed mindset so as to limit the influence of new ideas. Uyghur elites like Abduqadir Damollam used popular literary works like "The Contest of the Fruits" to educate and lead the community to question the inequality and discriminations against their society, highlighting the importance of equity and harmony.

M
In the manuscript that Gunnar Jarring collected, in which Slavs and Tatars originally found "The Contest of the Fruits," we can see several different words that originally came from Arabic, Persian, or Chinese. How would you describe the influence of other languages on Uyghur poetry?

THI
I think that every language in the world contains some words from other languages. Since Uyghurs largely converted to Islam in the ninth to fifteenth centuries, both written and oral literature appropriated some Arabic and Persian words. In later times, for example, from the early twentieth century onward, some Chinese words—very few though—were introduced into Uyghur. Uyghur people have been living in a larger Islamic culture, which is shaped by many Muslim communities' cultural practices.

3. The Dolan Meshrep, a type of meshrep gathering (see Rachel Harris in this volume), is distinct in refusing to separate the more secular community gatherings from the sacred dimension of a *muqam* performance. The Dolan Meshrep includes musical performances with more colloquial and less standardized texts than the renowned Uyghur Twelve Muqam. Amy Anderson and Darren Byler, "'Eating Hanness': Uyghur Musical Tradition in a Time of Re-education," *China Perspectives, Special Issue: Sinophone Musical Worlds*, no. 3 (2019): 17–26, https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.9358.

4. In this interview we use munāẓara as both a singular and a plural noun. Its proper plural form in Arabic is munāẓarāt.

5. For Jadidism among the Uyghurs, see David Brophy's essay in this volume.

Turkish, Persian, and Arab cultures share a common religious foundation. They were and still are interacting and influencing each other. Historically, the Uyghur homeland was a very important node on the Silk Road. Different religions, languages, and cultures passed through our land. So I think it is quite normal for this poem to contain Persian, Arabic, and even Chinese words. No language or culture can exist without the influence of neighboring nations. I think a culture can only move forward by interacting with and impacting neighboring cultures.

M
As you said, Uyghurs have lived at the heart of the famous Silk Road. It was a fertile land for a melting pot that had close communication with neighboring nations politically, economically, and culturally. For example, when speaking of classical literature, we often proudly mention Mir Ali Shir Nava'i (1441–1501), who wrote poetry not only in Chaghatay,[6] but also in Persian in the fifteenth century. Today, we see elites like you and Perhat Tursun writing poetry in Chinese. Could you please tell us your thoughts on this?

THI
I think that, in the past, many classical poets knew Arabic and Persian very well. There were lots of discussions about the beauty of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. For example, Ali Shir Nava'i dedicated the book *Muḥākamāt al-Lughatayn* to this very topic.[7] Besides that, there were several other writers who also wrote in Persian. However, after the seventeenth century, there were fewer and fewer writers who created literature in languages other than Uyghur.

In 1994, Perhat Tursun and I planned to publish a collection of our poems in Chinese in Beijing. We had translated a number of our poems from Uyghur into Chinese, and had written some of them directly in Chinese. For various reasons, that collection was never published. However, since then, I have continued to translate almost every poem I write in Uyghur to Chinese, and I even sometimes first write in Chinese and then work on the Uyghur translation. In Western culture, it is not uncommon to create literature in a language that is not one's mother tongue.[8] Yet, for people like us, who have been living under political control and closed off from the outside world for many years, it is very difficult. Interestingly, even though transportation is easier today than during the Nava'i era, communication and mobilization were freer then, when there were no passport restrictions. In the past several hundred years, Uyghurs have lived in a very isolated state and opportunities to learn and create in other languages have been very limited.

Since the 1980s, with the Chinese "open door" policy, Uyghur elites have gradually had greater opportunities to engage with other languages.

6. Chaghatay is a Turkic language that was once widely spoken and the literary language of Central Asia.

7. Mir Alisher Nava'i (1441–1501) is a poet, mystic, and champion of the Chaghatay language. His titanic efforts to usher in a literary Turkic on par with the prevailing use of Persian at the time makes him comparable to a Pushkin of Central Asia. Mir Alisher Nava'i, *Muḥākamāt al-Lughatayn*, trans. Robert Devereux (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966). In this book, Nava'i writes "It is unfortunately true that the greater superiority, profundity and breadth of Turkish as compared to Persian as a medium for poetry has not been realized by everyone .... In the early days of my youth I began to perceive a few jewels from the inkwell of my mouth. These jewels had not yet become a string of verse, but jewels from the sea of consciousness which were worthy of being placed on a string of verse began to reach shore, thanks to the nature of the diver."

8. Fatimah Abdulghafur Seyyah and Munawwar Abdulla, whose poems have been included in this volume, write in both English and Uyghur. They exemplify a growing trend among diaspora Uyghur poets to write in Western languages, especially in English.

Some, like Ahmatjan Osman, studied in Arab countries and write in Arabic. Perhat Tursun and I both studied in Beijing and are able to write in Chinese. I know some Uyghur writers and poets who are writing today in Chinese, Turkish, English, and other languages. I was born in Kashgar and learned Chinese when I went to college in Beijing at the age of seventeen. I first learned the Chinese language by reciting "Misty Poetry," a highly debated genre in the Chinese literary world at that time.[9] Soon after I became more fluent in Chinese, I learned about world literature and Western philosophy through Chinese-language materials. For Westerners, this may be a very normal thing, but in the 1980s, Western literature in China was still criticized as "the poison of the bourgeoisie." For a fragile nation like that of the Uyghurs, which was so closed off and lived under political and ideological persecution, it was such an exciting opportunity to study different philosophies and literature of the West and to thus get access to the outside world.

Since I really wanted to share what I was learning with other Uyghur youth, I wrote and published my first book, titled *Approaches to Modern Western Literature*, at my own expense. At the time, I didn't have enough money to publish a book, so I borrowed some from my friends. Sales of the book were not ideal, which I had guessed would be the case, and my wife and I had to pay off the debt for years. However, I was happy with my decision. I could see the book open up many young people's minds, and some tell me that they are still using the book today.

M

Your poetry is thought-provoking and brings up deep emotions. Could you read us one of your poems? I am particularly interested in the poems that you have translated to multiple languages.

THI

Sure. For example, I wrote "The Distance" in Chinese in the 1990s, then translated it to Uyghur. Joshua Freeman translated it to English, together with quite a few other works that were later published in my debut collection, *The Distance and Other Poems*, which showcases my poems from 1987 to 2016, published in Beijing.

THE DISTANCE*

We can't defy the singing of
the cicadas
Behind the convex glass
the hospital building, the distance;
nurses' distorted faces
watch our cartoonish party.

Downing cold water and liquor
we open the window and, half-naked,
speak sneeringly of
life, nation, girls.
Cicada song keeps bursting in
and wrecking crucial parts of
our discussion.

They think up some excuse to ditch me
and leave me here alone.
The romantic tableau
of empty bottles
makes me feel
I'm in a Turkish bath.

I lock the door:
Time to go to work!

I feel like doing somersaults.
I feel like killing myself.
June 1994, Beijing

9. "Misty Poetry" was a genre of poetry in the 1970s and 1980s that was influenced by modernist Western poetry and delivered a social and political critique of Chinese society. Its abstract nature made it unpopular with the Chinese Communist Party, which favored social realist imagery in visual art and poetry. Some scholars contest the term "Misty Poetry" as being too wide to encompass a broad scene consisting of various avant-garde and experimental poets. See Michelle Yeh, "The 'Cult of Poetry' in Contemporary China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 1 (February 1996): 51–80, https://doi.org/10.2307/2943636.

* This translation was first published in *Asymptote* in January 2017.

ئۇلار بىر باھانىلەرنى تېپىپ
مېنى يالغۇز تاشلاپ چىقىپ كېتىدۇ.
قۇرۇق بوتۇلكىلاردىن ھاسىل بولغان
تۇرمۇشنىڭ بۇنداق رومانتىك مەنزىرىسى

مېنى خۇددى ھور مۇنچىسى ئىچىدە
تۇرغاندەك
ھېس قىلدۇرىدۇ.
مەن ئىشىكنى قۇلۇپلايمەن:
ئىشقا بېرىشىم كېرەك!

مېنىڭ موللاق ئاتقۇم كېلىدۇ.
مېنىڭ ئۆزۈمنى ئۆلتۈرىۋالغۇم كېلىدۇ.
1994-يىل ئىيۇن، بېيجىڭ

ئارىلىق

بىز تومۇزغىلارنىڭ سايرىشىغا تاقابىل
تۇرالمايمىز
كۆپۈنكى ئەينەكتىكى ئارقىسىدا
دوختۇرخانىنىڭ بىناسى، ئارىلىق؛
سېستىرالارنىڭ شەكلى ئۆزگەرگەن
چىرايى
بىزنىڭ ھەجۇيى رەسىمدەك
ئولتۇرىشىمىزنى كۆزىتىدۇ.

بىز سوغۇق سۇ بىلەن ھاراق ئىچكەچ
دېرىزىنى ئېچىۋېتىپ، يېرىم يالىڭاچ،
ھالدا
تۇرمۇش، مىللەت ۋە قىزلار توغرىسىدا
زەھەرخەندىلەرچە پاراڭلىشىمىز.
تومۇزغىلارنىڭ ئاۋازى پات پات ئۆيگە
باستۇرۇپ كىرىپ
پارىڭىمىزنىڭ ئەڭ مۇھىم يەرلىرىنى
بۇزۇۋېتىدۇ.

10. A meddah is a person who propagates Islamic values through singing and storytelling. Some have no stable address, nor a phone, and in some ways they are like wandering dervish. They usually perform religious stories in the bazaars. "Uyghur *dastans*—epic oral narratives—are long, eventful works that use prose narrative and poetic descriptions to richly depict social life. *Dastan* demands specialist performers (*dastanchi*) who are musically and instrumentally adept. *Dastanchi* usually recite in places where people gather together, namely on the bazaar days in villages, at *meshrep* gatherings and *mazar* festivals, or in front of mosques around the time of Friday prayers." Mutellip Iqbal for the Musical Geographies of Central Asia conference in 2012 at the Institute of Musical Research, School of Advanced Study, University of London. https://www.akdn.org/our-agencies/aga-khan-trust-culture/akmp/musical-geographies-central-asia.

M

To my knowledge, epic and poetic dastans and other folk narratives have been performed by Uyghur *meddahs* and *dastanchis*[10] at bazaars, *mazars* and meshrep gatherings, mostly accompanied by traditional music. You mentioned that you have seen folk artists performing these kinds of poetic dastans in the Kashgar and Hotan area until very recently. How do you see the poetic features of "The Contest of the Fruits" represented in Uyghur folk art?

THI

I think the origin of any poem relates to the beats and musical culture of the nation that bore it. In traditional Uyghur poetic literature, rhymes, syllables, and meter are considered the most important elements of poetry. One of the central characteristics of Uyghur folk couplets is the rhythmic delivery of the lyrics. It is much easier to remember poems like "The Contest of the Fruits" and "Battle on the Dasturkhan." I believe it is in human nature to sense and enjoy the rhythm and the beats in music. In Uyghur folk literature, couplets and poems have been orally preserved and disseminated from generation to

generation. For instance, many young Uyghurs can recite well-known poems like "Oyhan (Awakening)"[11] by Abdukhaliq Uyghur, "Answer to the Years"[12] by Lutpulla Mutellip, "Trace"[13] by Abduréhim Ötkür, "It's Hard to Be a Farmer" by Rozi Sayit, and couplets by Sadir Palwan and Nozugum. They can even remember some long historical *dastans* such as Séyit Nochi. This is not only because people value the fact that these poetic works express the aspiration for freedom, the appreciation of humanity, and the fight against oppression, but also because the language of these poems is beautiful and concise, and thus easy to understand and remember.

M
You have mentioned reciting Uyghur and Chinese poems, both in your time in Kashgar and in your time in Beijing. I also loved memorizing my favorite poems and reciting them at gatherings. When I was a child, elders would even give us awards to encourage us. Today, I still see the continuation of this culture, and I award my friends' talented children when they recite beautiful poetry for us. How do you see this tradition of reciting poetry affecting the identity of Uyghur children, especially in the Uyghur diaspora?

THI
It is part of our tradition to memorize and recite Uyghur poetry. Even Uyghur proverbs, riddles, word games, fables, and folktales have a very strong sense of poetry. They are well suited to children's psychology and beneficial to cultivating a healthy mind. In the last few decades in the Uyghur Region, it was common for children to prepare, memorize, and recite a special poem on stage at *Sünnet* ceremonies (male circumcision at the age of seven). With these poems, children thank their parents

11. AWAKENING by Abdukhaliq Uyghur

Awaken, oh pitiful Uyghur, you've slept far too long,
You have nothing left now; your soul too will be gone.
Leaving yourself unguarded from this demise,
Your life, oh, your life is jeopardised.

Stand! I say, raise your head! Wake up from this slumber!
Spill the blood of your foe, set their heads asunder!
Without studying your surroundings,
without opening your eyes,
Another day will never arrive; in regret you will die.

Even now your body resembles a corpse,
Is this why death is not a cause for remorse?
I call for you and there, immobile you lie,
Never awakened, is that how you wanted to die?

Open your eyes and take a look around you,
Contemplate carefully upon what you will do.
Unable to hold onto one precious opportunity,
Your prospects fall to great, great difficulty.

Dearest Uyghur, my heart goes out to you,
My comrade, my brother, my family.
It is from love that I attempt to wake you,
Why is it that you cannot seem to hear me?

I know you will come to regret this one day,
Then you will understand what it is I say.
"Alas," you will utter, but much too late,
And so, you will heed the words of Uyghur.

Turpan, 1921. Translated by Munawwar Abdulla

ئويغان
ئابدۇخالىق ئۇيغۇر

ئەي پېقىر ئۇيغۇر ، ئويغان،
ئۇيقۇڭ يېتەر،
سەندە مال يوق،
ئەمدى كەتسە جان كېتەر.
بۇ ئۇلۇمدىن ئۆزۈڭنى قۇتقۇزمساڭ،
ئاھ ، سېنىڭ ھالىڭ خەتەر،
ھالىڭ خەتەر.

قوپ! دېدىم ، بېشىڭ كۆتۈر!
ئۇيقۇڭنى ئاچ!
رەقىبىڭ باشىنى كەس ،قانىنى چاچ!
كۆز ئېچىپ ئەتراپقا ئوبدان باقمىساڭ،
ئۆلسەن ئارماندا بىر كۈن نائىلاج.

ھېلىمۇ جانسىزغا ئوخشايدۇ تېنىڭ،
شۇڭا يوقمۇ ئانچە ئۆلۈمدىن غېمىڭ ؟
قىچقارسام قىمىرلىمايلا ياتسەن،
ئويغانماي ئۆلمەكچىمۇ سەن شۇ
پېتىڭ ؟!

كۆزۈڭنى يوغان ئېچىپ ئەتراپقا باق،
ئۆز ئىقبالىڭ ھەققىدە ئويلا ئۆزاق.
كەتسە قولدىن بۇ غەنىيمەت پۇرسىتى،
كىلەچەك ئىشىڭ چاتاق،
ئىشىڭ چاتاق.

ئېچىنار كۆڭلۈم ساڭا ئەي ئۇيغۇرۇم،
سەپدىشىم ، قېرىنداشىم ، بىرتۇغقىنىم.
كۆيۈنۈپ ھالىڭغا ، ئويغاتسام سېنى،
ئاڭلىمايسەن زادى، نېمە بولغىنىڭ ؟

كېلىدۇ بىر كۈن پۇشايمان قىلىسەن،
تەكتىگە گەپنىڭ شۇچاغدا يېتىسەن.
«خەپ» دېسەڭ ئۆ چاغدا
ئۆلگۈرمەي قالار،
شۇندا ئۇيغۇر سۆزنىگە تەن بېرىسەن.



A group of older men watch as a young boy is being circumcised. This photograph is from the ethnographical part of *Turkestan Album*, a comprehensive visual survey of Central Asia undertaken after imperial Russia assumed control of the region in the 1860s.

12. ANSWER TO THE YEARS by Lutpulla Mutellip

Time is impatient, it lingers not,
The years are time's greatest steed.
No fallen water nor broken dawn repeats,
The galloping years are life's greatest thief.

It will steal and run without a backwards glance,
Chasing one another, racing each other.
In the garden of youth, leaves fall, with no chance,
For the wings of nightingales to make a single flutter.

Youth is a person's era of grace,
Yet its existence is ever so brief.
Through each tear of a calendar page,
The flower of youth loses another leaf.

The winds of years fan by, burying all traces,
The leafless trees become wretched, wasted.
The years are generous, it does not come empty-handed,
Bringing wrinkles for girls and beards for men.
But it is not right to curse the years,
It's fine, let it be on its way.
People also do not let time get away,
Human hands are what turned deserts to oases.

Time is freehanded, with many opportunities,
Great things like mountains rise up with time.
Take a look at the baby, last night so small,
Yesterday he crawls, oh, and today he strides!

The years and stalwart youths they chase,
Rest assured the struggle will find their grandchildren.
For those martyred in search of happiness tonight,
Flowers in memoriam will cover their graves. →

and the guests who came to celebrate this important day of their lives, and share their wishes to grow up and do good for their people. Teaching and reciting poems to children is also becoming more common in Uyghur language schools in the diaspora. The rhymes and rhythm of poetry, the simple and beautiful Uyghur language combined in them, are really easy for children to understand and learn. In my opinion, first of all, reciting those poems is good for the health of their memory. Secondly, children can learn how to think and imagine in their mother tongue, and through that they can learn cultural expressions and symbols. Thirdly, language is the essence of a nation's culture. Children's poems play a vital role in preserving and continuing our mother tongue and cultivating a sense of Uyghur identity.

My first daughter was born in the early 2000s. We sent her to preschool when she was two years old. On the very first day, she memorized a very interesting couplet, and gave us a recitation with body movements, which made us so happy. This means that children of a very young age can learn their

mother tongue quickly. Every language has its unique form of expression. Translations can express the basic meaning of one language in another, but it is not possible to fully convey feelings, moods, and how they are embedded in that language. A number of my poems have been translated into other languages and we often talk about this with translators. A professional and diligent translator feels this point very deeply. Moreover, the poetic language is deliberately chosen and refined and beautiful. So it is very important for children to read and memorize poems, especially now in the Uyghur Region, where the Uyghur language is basically banned and completely excluded from the education system. We have lost the basic right of systematic teaching in our mother tongue. It is unclear how long this policy will last, but I hope it is not forever. In exile we live in different host countries. Our children are growing up and are influenced by the language and culture of their respective countries. If the Uyghur diaspora does not work hard to teach children their mother tongue and Uyghur identity at home, assimilation to the host culture will happen faster than they think. Of course, I strongly believe that everyone should learn the language and culture of the country they live in. But our situation is very different. If the Uyghur language and culture are not banned and criminalized in our homeland, perhaps the sense of crisis among the Uyghur diaspora would not be as strong.

M
You have written a number of poems, in both traditional and modernist styles. They all express the beauty and sensitivity of the Uyghur language. I know you also made well-received movies, documentaries, and television series when you were in the Uyghur

If the years gift us with beards, so be it,
I will also bellow in time's embrace.
My work, my poetry has stamped themselves
On the necks of the years who try to escape.

I will not grow old in the fierce face of struggle,
My poetry is a star that will shine before me.
Death will falter below, in struggle's sloping mountains,
In my mind I know that resilience is victory.

I will cling to the hands that have honed their rifles in battle,
I will stick to the course with the flag charging forth.
I will never fatigue in the wilderness of struggle,
With each win we will stride onto the wide paths of triumph.

Years, do not laugh so boisterously,
Death is better than standing ashamed before you.
Do not go out of your way to age me,
I will put my son forward for the final battle.

Even if the ocean of years swells and heaves,
Our ships will take on your greedy waves.
Even if you try to frighten with the passing years,
We will answer: our creations will make the years age.

Aqsu, January 1944. Translated by Munawwar Abdulla

ئۆزىنىڭ يولى.
ئادەملەرمۇ ۋاقتىنى قولدىن
بەرمەيدۇ،
چۆللەرنى بوستان قىلغان ئادەملەر
قولى.

يىللارنىڭ قوينى كەڭ،
پۈرستى نۇرغۇن،
تاغدەك ئىشلار يىللار بىلەن ئۆزە
تۇردۇ.
قاراب باق ئاخشامقى بوۋاق
كىچىككىنە تۇرسۇن،
تۇنۇگۈن ئۆمىلەپ، ھە ... بۈگۈن
مېڭىپ يۈردۇ.

كۆرەشچان بالىلار قوغلىشىپ
يىللار،
كۆرەش نەۋرىلىرىنى چوقۇم تاپىدۇ.
ئاخشام بەخت ئۈچۈن قۇربان
بولغانلار،
قەبرىسىنى يادلاپ گۈللەر ياپىدۇ.

مەيلى ساقال سوۋۇغا قىلسا
قىلسۇن يىللار،
مەنمۇ تاۋلىنىمەن يىللار قويىندا.
ئىجادىم شېئىرىمنىڭ ئىز تامغىسى
بار،
ئالدىمدىن قېچىپ ئۆتكەن ھەر
يىل بويىندا.

قەبرىماسمەن كۆرەشنىڭ كەسكىن
چېغىدا،
شېئىرىم يۈلتۈز بولۇپ يانار
ئالدىمدا

ئۆلۈم پەستە قىلىش كۆرەشنىڭ
داۋانلىق تېغىدا،
چىدام غەيرەتنىڭ يەڭگىنى
ھەرجاغ يادىمدا.

ئېسىلارمەن مىلتىق ئېتىپ
تاۋلانغان قولغا،
يېپىشارمەن بايراق بىلەن ئالغا
ئاتلىغان يولغا.
كۆرەش باياۋاندا ھارماسمەن
ئەسلا،
كۆرەش بىلەن كىلىپ چىقمىز
كەڭ غالىب يولغا.

يىللار مەيدەڭنى تۆتۈپ قاقاقلاپ
كۈلمە،
ئالدىڭدا قىزىرىشتىن ئارتۇق
كۆرىمەن ئۆلۈمنى.
قېرىتمەن دەپ ئارتۇق كۆڭۈل
بۆلمە،
ئاخىرقى جەڭگە ئاتاپ قۇيارمەن
ئوغلۇمنى.

يىللار دېڭىزى دولقۇنلۇق
بولساڭمۇ،
ئۇيغۇنلىرىڭنى ياردۇ بىزنىك
كاراپ.
يىلنىڭ ئۆتۈشى بىلەن قورقىتىپ
باقساڭمۇ،
ئۇجاد يىللارنى قېرىتىدۇ دەپ
بېرىمىز جاۋاب.

يىللارغا جاۋاپ
لۇتپۇللا مۇتەللىپ

ۋاقىت ئالدىراڭغۇ ساقلاپ
تۇرمايدۇ،
يىللار شۇ ۋاقىتنىڭ ئەڭ چوڭ
يورغىسى.
ئاققان سۇلار، ئاتقان تاڭلار
قايتىلانمايدۇ،
يورغا يىللار ئۇمۇرنىڭ يامان
ئوغرىسى.

ئوغرىلاپ قاچىدۇ ئارقىغا يانماي،
بىر-بىرىنى قوغلىشىپ،
يورغىلىشىپ.
ياشلىق بېغىدا بۇلبۇللار قانات
قاقماي،
يوپۇرماقلار قۇيۇلدۇ پورلىشىپ.

ياشلىق ئادەمنىڭ زىلۋا بىر
جېغى،
تولمۇ قىسقا ئۇنىڭ ئۆمرى بىراق،
يىرتىلسا كالىندارنىڭ بىر ۋارىقى،
ياشلىق گۈلدىن تۆكۈلدۇ بىر
يۇپۇرماق.

يىللار شامىلى يەلپۈندۇ، ئىزلار
كۆمۈلدۇ،
يوپۇرماقسىز دەرەخ بىچارە
بولدۇ قاخشال.
يىللار سېخى قۇرۇق كەلمەيدۇ
ئەكىلىپ بېرىدۇ،
قىزلارغا قورۇق، ئەرلەرگە ساقال.

بىراق يىللارنى تىللاش توغرا
كەلمەيدۇ،
مەيلى ئۇتىۋەرسۇن،

13. TRACE by Abduréhim Ötkür

We were young when we made the long journey on horseback
And now it is our grandchildren who have mounted the way
So few we were on our difficult journey, so young,
A trace left in the desert, we emerged a great caravan
The trace still remains in the desert, in the mountain passes,
Those Arslan-hearted ones, lions forgotten in the plains
In the deserts, without epitaphs without graves
In the field where the tamarisk turns red,
don't say left without graves,

For our graves wrap themselves in blooms,
flower at dawn in the spring
The trace lingered, the halting place lingered,
they all linger far away
A storm rises, the dunes shift, winds pass,
our trace will be as it was unburied
Endless caravan on the open road, horses tire and thirst,
But this trace will surely be found one day, by our children,
Our grandchildren, no matter the time nor distant place

Translated by Dolkun Kamberi & Jeffrey Yang

ئىز
ئابدۇرېھىم ئۇتكۇر

ياش ئىدۇق ئۇزۇن سەپەرگە
ئاتلىنىپ چىققاندا بىز،
ئەمدى ئاتقا مىنگۈدەك بوپ
قالدى ئەنە نەۋرىمىز.

ئاز ئىدۇق مۇشكۇل سەپەرگە
ئاتلىنىپ ماڭغاندا بىز،
ئەمدى چوڭ كارۋان ئاتالدۇق
قالدۇرۇپ چۆللەردە ئىز.

قالدى ئىز چۆللەر ئارا ، گاھى
داۋانلاردا يەنە،
قالدى نى-نى ئارسلانلار دەشتى-
چۆلدە قەبرىسىز.

قەبرىسىز قالدى دېمەك يۇلغۇن
قىزارغان دالىدا،
گۈل چېچەككە پۈركىنۈر تاڭلا-
باھاردا قەبرىمىز.

قالدى ئىز ، قالدى مەنزىل، قالدى
ئۇزاقتا ھەممىسى،
چىقسا بوران، كۆچسە
قۇملار، ھەم كۆمۈلمەس ئىزىمىز.

توختىماس كارۋان يولىدىن گەرچە
ئاتلار بەك ئۇرۇق،
تاپقۇسى بۇ ئىزنى بىر كۈن،
نەۋرىمىز-يا ئەۋرىمىز.

homeland. Even the TV commercials you made represent the beauty of Uyghur culture and gave youth a sense of pride. However, it is disheartening that today there are almost no opportunities to create new art forms that combine tradition with innovation, that integrate national pride and identity into literary and artistic creation. What do you feel is the role of elites and elders among the Uyghur diaspora who are, like you, trying to preserve, protect, and continue Uyghur culture in exile?

THI
This is a serious and heartbreaking situation. Uyghur culture and the Uyghur language should have been preserved and continued in our homeland, and we diasporas should have just benefited from the pop culture that came out from our homeland. For example, when I was forced to leave the country in 2017, I still wished that our relationship with the motherland would not be cut off and wished that our children could visit home often even if we could not. Now it is unclear when we will be able to go back or whether we will ever be able to. Indigenous people have their own land. This very land preserves the customs, culture, and everything the community has liked and enjoyed. Many things are invisible, but felt by the community. If our language in our homeland had been spoken regularly in schools and in literature, music, film, television, theater, and other art forms, we probably would not feel this much pressure and obligation in exile. However, the culture, language, faith, and even physical existence of Uyghurs are now being severely violated in our own homeland. This is a serious and unprecedented situation that no one knows how to deal with. Thus, I think that the role of every cultural worker in the diaspora, including those in literature and language, is extraordinarily significant. At the same

time, while we realize these responsibilities, we know that what we can do is limited, and this breaks my heart.

M
It is heartbreaking. Hundreds of prominent Uyghur intellectuals and artists who have been doing research and creating art for many years have been forcibly disappeared or incarcerated. I wish more people like you among the diaspora would make an effort to create art, publish literature, and disseminate what we brought from home, so that Uyghur youth can see that their culture is continuing and flourishing. However, when I see young Indigenous and marginalized people who have lost pride in their culture, or have even become ashamed of it under generations of oppression, I deeply worry for our future generation.

THI
Almost all Uyghur intellectuals in the diaspora have this sense of crisis and a sense of threat. We all do what we can. Some have started to publish Uyghur books. Some have come together to digitalize and disseminate scholarly papers, articles, and books that were published back home long ago. Open-source Uyghur archives have been built online and house thousands of scanned books and manuscripts. Quarterly journals dedicated to children are now published online. Uyghur immigrant parents are working harder than ever to educate their kids in their mother tongue, including me as a father of three. I think that almost everyone is doing their best. But the power of the Uyghurs is very weak and resources are limited. Sometimes there are things we want to do but just cannot do given our circumstances.

M
Thank you so much Tahir Aka.[14] What do you want to say to the Uyghur youth in the diaspora and to those who want to understand Uyghur culture and literature through this project, *The Contest of the Fruits*?

THI
This artwork and research project is very timely and has come out very well. I have participated in two parts of this project, one public poetry reading (on September 24, 2020) and this interview. I am very pleased with the researchers and artists who came together and have worked hard on this project. When foreign researchers are interested in certain phenomena and poetic works of Uyghur classical literature or culture, I feel as if our very existence is being demonstrated, and that our ancestors' knowledge is finally valued and receiving the attention it deserves. I only hope that more projects like this can be developed and represent our voice. Uyghur culture, like all other cultures in the world, has its unique characteristics and place within the culture of humanity. Uyghur culture, as a culture that evolved at the heart of the Silk Road, contains many beautiful elements of many other cultures. This is a tradition our ancestors have created, cultivated, valued, enjoyed, and loved for thousands of years. So, in my view, Uyghur culture has a right to exist, a right to continue in the world of cultural treasury. Unfortunately, this culture is at the edge of extinction now and the political reality of my people is beyond imaginable. This is a tragedy that every human being around the world needs to take seriously.

14. Aka is a respectful form of addressing an elder in Uyghur.

MY SHARE OF THE NIGHT
تۈندىن نېسىۋەم

AHMATJAN OSMAN,
TRANSLATED FROM ARABIC BY
JEFFREY YANG AND AHMATJAN OSMAN

ئەخمەتجان ئوسمان
ئەرەبچىدىن تەرجىمە قىلغۇچىلار:
جەففرەي ياڭ ۋە ئەخمەتجان ئوسمان

Ephemeral as a falling star,
evanescent as twilight
and this old, old world
is like mellow tobacco …
I rip off a corner of the sky
and roll it up
I, the most familiar
the most strange
more concerned with tobacco
than death

I walk along the streets of
my imagination
poems falling from
my autumn mouth
with flecks of tobacco
The starlight picks them up
with slender fingers
the whole of my life
the whole of my death
my share of the night

عابرًا كما النيزك، زائلاً كالشفق ...
وهذا العالم العتيق العتيق
كما لو أانه تبغ معتق
أاشق زاوية السماء
وأالفّه بها
أانا ا أ لاليف الغريب
المأاخوذ بتبغه أاكثر من الموت

أاسير في شوارع أاتخيلها
حيث القصائد تتساقط من فمي الخريف يّ
مع نثار التبغ
تلتقطها النجوم بأاياديها النحيلة
ذات حصة لي من الليل
هي حياتي كلها
هي موتي كله



THE CONTEST OF THE FRUITS LYRICS
مۇشارەئنىي جەڭى مېۋە

LYRICS FROM SLAVS AND TATARS' ANIMATION *THE CONTEST OF THE FRUITS*. THIS IS A MODERNIZED RAP ADAPTED BY RAPPER **NASHTARR** AND SCHOLAR **ERIC SCHLUESSEL** FROM GUNNAR JARRING'S 1936 TRANSCRIPTION OF THE UYGHUR MUNĀẒARA.

نەشتەر ۋە ئەرىك شلۇسسەل

THE FRUITS ...	مېۋىجان ...
WHICH FRUIT AM I ...	مېۋىلەر مەن قايسى ...
LISTEN UP ...	ئاڭلاپ بېقىڭلار ...
ALL THE FRUITS WERE	مېۋە-مەيداندا
THROWING DOWN	ئۇرۇشۇپ
STANDING ON	كەڭ مەيداندا
THE BATTLEGROUND	تۇرۇشۇپ
THEN THERE CAME	چىقتى شۇ
A GREAT COLLISION	زامان غوۋغا
AS THEY SHOWED	ئەيلىدى بىر-بىرىنى
EACH OTHER DERISION	رەسۋا
THE MULBERRY SAID,	ئۇجمە ئېيتتى كى،



I'm the best!	ئەۋزەلمەن!
Why am I better	نېمە ئۈچۈن
than the rest?	ھەممىدىن ئەۋزەلمەن ؟
Earlier than you all,	مەن پىشارمەن ھەممە
I rise!	مېۋىدىن بۇرۇن-ئا!
They smear my juice	يالىڭاچ كۆزگە قىلىدۇ مېنى
on their naked eyes[1]	ھەممىسى سۈرمە
Like Sulayman,	شلانىم كەڭىردۇر،
I throw a generous feast	سۇلايماندەك
All creatures eat there	جانۋارلار يەيدۇ،
at my feet	مېھماندەك.
No other fruit	مېۋىلەر مەنچىلىك
gives as much as me	كەڭرى ئەمەس؛
No other fruit	باشقا مېۋىلەر
can touch me	ماڭا يەتمەس.
They climb up my branches,	شېخىم ئۈزرە چىقىپ،
going to town	ھەممە خوبان
When they shake me,	ئىرغىتۇرلار،
jewels fall down	تۆكىلىدۇ مارجان.
My leaves are great	ياپرىقىم پەزىلىتىنى
in certain terms	قىلاي زاھىر
Job (Ayyub)	بەردى قۇرتقا
endured the worms[2]	ئەيۇبى سابىر
That is how	ئاڭا بۇ
he found salvation	نىجات بولدى
That is how	كۆپ زىننەت
he found adornation	ھايات بولدى

1. Mulberry leaves and juice are used to make *sürmä*, literally "the smearing thing," which women use to darken their eyebrows.
2. This is a reference to the use of mulberry leaves to feed silkworms. Like Ayyub/Job, the mulberry here suggests that he endures pain to receive the grace of God.

SO THE MULBERRY	قىلدى ئۆزىنى،
GAVE HIS BEST	تەرىپلەر
THINKING THAT HE WAS BETTER	ئۆزىدىن باشقا
THAN THE REST	مېۋىلەرنى ياد
HE SET HIMSELF APART	ئۆزىدىن ئۆزگىلەرنى
FROM THE CAST	سۈندۈردى
AND ABOVE EVERYBODY	بىرىسنى تۆپىسىگە
HE RODE FAST	مىندۈردى
SO THE MULBERRY	ئۇجمە ئۆزىنى
MADE HIS STATEMENT	ئۆزى قىلىپ ئېلان
CASTING THE OTHERS	قىلىدۇ قالغانلارنى
INTO ABATEMENT	ئۆزىدىن كام
AT THAT HOUR,	ئۇجمە سۆزلىدى
THE MULBERRY RHYMED	مۇشۇ سائەت
THEN THERE CAME	ئۆرۈكلەرگە
THE APRICOT'S TIME	كەلدى نۆۋەت
THE APRICOT SAID	ئۆرۈك ئېيتتى

Oh, mulberry, skinny!	ئەي ، ناۋاق ئۇجمە!
Don't you boast so much,	ھەددىدىن زىيادە
you ninny	لاپ ئۇرما
Sometimes you look like	بەزىك ئوخشايسەن
a blackberry	قارىقاتقا
Lonely kings eat you,	سېنى يەيدۇ غېرىپ
As do the poor	شاھ ۋە گادای
But when you fall to the ground,	چۈشكىنىك بولىدۇ
you're donkey food	ئېشەككە غىزا
The birds will gobble up	تۇگەيدۇ سېنى
all your grains	كى يەپ قۇشلار
And the starving eat you	ئامال يوق سېنى
when no choice remains	يەر ناچلار
Before anyone else,	ھەممىدىن ئىلگىرى
your leaves droop and fade	بولىسەن غازاك
All of a sudden,	بىر زامان سەندە
you've got no shade	يوقتۇر ئامان
Ask around,	سوريسا
everyone knows I'm loved and loyal	مەندۇرمەن ناشق سادىق
That's the reason why	ئۇ سەۋەبتىن
my face is yellow	يۈزۈم سېرىق
They eat me when spring comes,	باھاردا يەيدۇ مېنى
noble and common	خاس ۋە ناۋام
So let me now	بۇ سۆزۈمنى
conclude my rhymin'	ئەمدى قىلاي تامام
I'm adored	ئالەم ئىچىدە
around the world	بولدۇم ئەزىز
'Cause when they open me up,	مېنى چاقسا
they reap great rewards[3]	ئىچىمدە كۆپتۇر مېغىز
When an apricot's	ھەر زامانى
still green	غورا ئۆرۈك
It makes all	بولىدۇ غوربغا
the ladies' hearts scream	جۈۋانلار يۈرەك
The ripe ones are	چوگلىرىم
a guilty pleasure!	ئاسىيدۇر جانانە
A gift for the throat	ھەلقى كۆرمەس
by any measure	كى ئىنانە
Among the people,	خەلق ئىچىدە
my face is sparkling	يۈزۈم چىرايلىق



3. Méghiz is literally "pit" or "fruit," but "opening up the pit" (the phrase used here) also means "reaping the benefits."

I am everybody's darling	شۇ سەۋەبتىن ھەممىسى ناشىق
I am the baddest fruit	بۇ جاھاندا مەن
in the whole world	ھەممىدىن يامان
All the men are	ماڭا شاكىر
crazy for this girl!	مۇڭا پىق مەنىۋن
They crack me open	تولىدۇر چاقسا
and find a heart like this	ئىچىمدە مېغىز
Is there any other girl	بارمۇ ئالەمدە
in the world like this?	ئۇشبۇ ياڭزىلىق قىز
Now it's time	قىلاي ئەمدى
to shut my face	سۆزۈمنى تامام
So no one will	قىلمىسۇن ئەيىپ
get on my case	چوك كىچىك ناۋام

THE APPLE HEARD	ئۆرۈكنىك
THE APRICOT'S JABBER	ھىكايىسىنى ئىشىتىپ
AND RAN UP TO HER	يۈگۈرۈپ كەلدى
PITTER-PATTER	ئالما يېتىشىپ
THE APPLE WAS	ئالما ئۆرۈشۈپ
HOLDING A GRUDGE	ئۆرۈك بىلەن
AND DECIDED TO GIVE THE APRICOT	ماجىرا سالدى
AN ANGRY LITTLE NUDGE	كۆرسىتىپ بەدەن



Hey, wretched fella!	ئەي ئۆزۈك مېھنەت!
All your troubles	سارغىيىپسەن
have turned you yella'[4]	چېكىپ زەخمەت
They think there's fruit inside,	مېغىزى بار دەپ
so they try to eat you	چېقىپ باقسا
Pull out a knife,	پۇچەك چىقىدۇ
and they try to cut you	يېرىپ باقسا
They leave you to dry	ناچچىق دەپ
because you're tart	يېمەيدۇ قۇرت
Forget you in a few days,	سېنى نەچچە
they leave you out	كۈندىلا ئۇنۇت
When you're dried out,	قۇرۇپ بولسەن
it gets odder	گۈلى
Widows drink you	تۇل خوتۇنىنىك
as apricot water	چۆلى
Me, I am beloved	مەندۇرمەن مەھبۇب
Is there anything	بارمۇ ئەسلىدە
like me?	مەندەك
I am the comeliest	باغ ئارا شاھى
in the garden	خۇبان
My face is red	يۈزلىرىم قىزىل
and shining	يەنە تابان
With apples like us,	ئالما تۇرسا
people never get enough	ھەممىسى تويماس
Their teeth fall out,	چىش قامىغۇچە
but still it's not enough	يېمىسە تويماس
Is there anything in the world	ئالەمدە مەن
as tasty as I am?	كەبى خوشبۇي
In the garden,	چىمەن ئىچىدە
no one is as cute as I am	بولۇرمەن خۇشخۇي
This is the world's	ئارزۇلۇقتۇر بۇ
desire	جاھان
Pick me for your dame	بىر-بىرىگە ئەر
or sire	ۋە جۈۋان

4. "Yellow" usually has negative connotations in Uyghur, indicating sorrow and barrenness.

NOW IT WAS
THE PEACH'S TIME
SO THE APPLE
STOPPED HIS RHYME

شاپتۇلغا
نۆۋەت كەتتى
ئالما سۆزنى
تامام ئەتتى



Hey, apple of worms!
Stop lying
in the dirt!
How dare you
speak to us?
Look at yourself,
how can you face us?
When they eat you,
they catch a chill
Their belly aches,
they don't feel well
Who wants an apple
when they've got me?
When I'm not around,
eating apples is out of necessity!
I am a treat!
Tasty, delicate,
juicy, sweet
Whoever lifts my fruit
to their lips
Will be filled
with this kiss
Even when
they are sated
They see me and they eat me,
it's fated

ئەي، قۇرۇق ئالما!
سەن يەردە
چالما
نە يۈزۈك بىزگە
سۆزلەيسەن
ئالمىنى ئۆزۈڭگە
كۆزلەيسەن
سېنى يېسە،
سوغىقى ئاشار
ئاغرىپ بولۇر
بىمار
مەن تۇرۇپ ئالمىنى
يېگەن كىمۇ
مەن بولمىغاندا
يەيدۇ زۇرۇر
شاپتۇل مەندۇرمەن زىبا
تاتلىق ھەم
شىرىن رەنا
ھەر كىم
ئاغزىغا ئالسا
قانار ئۇسسىغان
بولسا
بولسىمۇ ھەر
كىمنىڭ قارنى توق
كۆرسە مېنى يېمەي
ئامال يوق

THE WALNUT HEARD
WHAT SHE SAID
AND HE STEPPED UP
WITH HIS FACE RED!
THE WALNUT CAME ANGRY
AND HE GAVE THE PEACH
WHAT SHE WAS ASKING FOR

بۇ سۆزنى ياڭاق
ئاڭلىدى
قەھرى بىرلە ئارىغا
كەلدى
ئاچچىغلاپ شۇ زامان
چۈشتى ئىككىسى
بىر مەيدان



Hey, fuzzy face!
Shut up,
enough, peace!
All you
peachy people
There's no one
so disgraceful!
You beast,
you're covered in hair
You're a monster
everywhere
When you eat peaches
five or more
Your mouth
is sore!
I am cherished!

ئەي، يۈزى تۈكلۈك!
سۆزلىمە
بولدى، خەپشۈك!
ئۇلۇسى
شاپتۇل ئالەمدە
سەن كەبى
يوق شەرمەندە
تۈك
ئۇنۇپتۇر يۈزۈڭگە
سەن ھايۋان
جاھاندا
ھەر كىم يېسە
بەش شاپتۇل
ئاغزى ئۇنىڭكى
بەك ئاغرۇر!
مەندۇرمەن دىلدار!

They grab me
and play
Is there anything
as delicious as me?
The fruit in me
is very tasty
If anyone gets cuts
or bruises
They spread me on
for healing uses

مېنى تۇتۇپ
ئويناپ
بارمۇ ئالەمدە مەن
كەبى تاتلىق
مېغىزى ئىچىمدە
جىق تاتلىق
ھەر كىشىنىڭ
ياردىسىغا ئەلەم
چاپار ئېزىپ
مەن مەلھەم

THESE WALNUT'S WORDS,
HEARD THE POMEGRANATE
AND ALL AT ONCE
SHE COULDN'T STAND IT
SHE CAME UP,
COULDN'T LET IT PASS
AND STEPPED UP
TO THE FIGHT SO FAST

ياڭاقنىڭ سۆزىنى
ئىشتتى ئانار
ئىچىگە تۇتاشتى
شۇ دەم نار
كەپتۇ ھۇشىغا
ئۇ شۇ سائەت
ماجىرا ئەيلىدى
ئۇ تېز سۈرئەت



They skin you
and strip you
They're laughing
as they ditch you
I am
the heart's desire!
Everyone who sees me
is a sigh-er
In this orchard,
I'm the boss
'Cause my face is red
and gloss!
But I'll say
no more
Now I've done
my chore

يالىڭاچلاپ
تېرەڭنى سويۇپ
ئالدۇ كۈلكە
سېلىپ قۇرۇتۇپ
مەندۇرمەن
دىلخاھ
كۆرگەن كىشى
ئۆردۇ ئاھ
باغ ئارا شاھى
خوبان
يۈزۈم قىزىل
بىرىسى تابان
سۆزلىرىمنى
كەم قىلدىم
ۋەسىمنى
ئوتكۈزدۇم

THE JUJUBE HEARD
HER TELLING
AND THEY RAN UP
YELLING

ئاڭلىدى بۇ
ھىكايىنى چىلان
يۈگۈرۈپ كەلدى
بولۇپ نالان

Oh, pomegranate,
bless!
Maybe you should
talk less
Your face is
blushing
You did too much
gushing
They break you
into pieces
You're
a frail fool
I'm
a rare jewel
A healing tool!

ئەي ئانار
تەلۈە
سۆزۈڭنى مۇنچە
ئوتكۈزمە
قىزىرىپتۇ
يۈزۈڭ
ھەددىدىن ئاشتى
سۆزۈڭ
قىلىدۇ سېنى
پارە-پارە
سەن يۈرۈيسەن
ئاۋارە
مەندۇرمەن
نايىپ
ئاغرىق داۋاسىغا ئاسباب



THE JUJUBE BLEW
THEIR HORN
NOW IT WAS
THE QUINCE'S TURN
THE QUINCE CAME RUNNING
AT A VERY QUICK PACE
AND SHE GOT UP
IN THE JUJUBE'S FACE

چىلان ئۆزىنى
تەرىپ ئېتىپ
نۆۋەت ئەمدى
بېھىغا يېتىپ
بېھى كەلدى
يۈگۈرۈپ
چىلاننىڭ يۈزىگە
تۆكۈرۈپ



Hey, you,
shameless!
Where you get off
talkin' to us?
By what right
do you join our disputes?
And consider yourself
an equal to us fruits?
I am the soul
of the orchard!
The queen of beauties
in the field
I am
the smartest fruit
And superior
to boot
Now I've done
my short set
Don't you all
get upset

ئەي،
شەرمەندە!
بىزگە سۆزلىگەندە
سەن نەدە؟
نېمەڭ بىلەن
سۆزلەيسەن؟
مېۋىلەرنى ئۆزۈڭگە
تەڭ قىلسەن
مەندۇرمەن
جانۇ باغ!
باغ ئاراسىدا
شاھى خۇبان
مەندۇرمەن
باغدا ئالەم
ھەممىنىڭ تۆۋىدە
ئەۋزەل ھەم
ۋەسپەمنى
قىلدىم كەم
بولمىغاي
ھەققى زەم

A PEAR HEARD
THE CLASH
AND CAME TO JOIN
THE BASH

ئىشتىپ نەشپۈت
مۇجادىلىنى
كەلدى نەچچىسى
مەداللىنى



For me this is
a happy occasion!
Anyone else feel
this warm sensation?
Whoever has
a lick of reason
Eats me
in every season
Among the fruits,
I'm a candy lolly
The Water of Life,
some might call me!
Like candy,
but prettier
They write about me
in India
There
the King is my fan!
That's a road
for no other man

مېنىڭ ئۈچۈن
شادىمان نۆۋەت
ئۆزگىدە بارمۇ
مەندىكى راھەت
بولسا كىمدە
تېمىز ۋە دانىش
يىسە بولۇر
مېنى ياز ۋە قىش
مېۋىلەر ئارا
قەنت-ناۋات
بەلكى دەيمەن
ئابى ھايات
قەنت نوقۇنتىن
ئوبدان
نەقىل قىلۇر
ھىندۇستان
ھىند
شاھىغا ماقۇل
ئۆزگىگە يوقتۇر
بارغىلى يول

THE PEAR BROUGHT HIS PATTER
TO AN END
THE CHERRY PLUM
WAS STANDING ON HAND
THIS STORY
THAT SHE HEARD
MADE HER COME
AND SHARE HER WORD

سۆزىنى قىلدى
نەشپۈت ئاخىر
جىنەستە تۇرۇپ
ئىدى ھازىر
بۇ ھېكايە شۇ
زامان ئىشتىپ
ماجىرا ئەيلىدى
جىنەستە كېلىپ



I am
the orchard's paradise!
I am a fruit
of a different hue
Each of me is pearl
or jewel
All are blown away
when they see me!
Hey, fools! Among the fruits,
I shine like candy!

چىمەن ئىچىدە
بېھىشتىمەن
مېۋىلەر ئىچىدە
رەڭدۇرمەن
مەن گۆھەر
مارجان
مېنى كۆرسە
قالىدۇ ھەجران
ھەي نادان! مېۋىلەر ئارا مەسىل
قەنتتۇرمەن تابان

SO SAID
THE CHERRY PLUM
PUMPING ITSELF UP
WHEN THE MELON[5]
HEARD IT ALL
HE GOT READY
FOR A BRAWL

ئۇشبۇ يەردە
جىنەستە سۆزلىدى
ئۆزىنىڭ تەرىپىنى ئۇرلەتتى
قوغۇنغا بۇ ئىشتىن
خەۋەر يېتىپ
چىقتى ماجىرا
ئىشتىپ



Hey, you,
cherry plum!
Of the fruits,
you're the bum
If someone eats
one of yours
They go grey
and don't want more
Who's as giving
as I am to all?
My banquet's big,
in a rich man's hall
Now let me show you
what I've got as well
You all talked,
now let me tell

ئەي،
سېنى جىنەستە
مېۋىلەر ئاراسىدا
سەن پەستە
يىسە سېنى
بىرغىنە تاق
سۇر بۇلۇپ پات
بولغۇسى ياق
مەن كەبى
كەڭرى قايدا
شىلانىم كەڭرۇ
ئۆيلىرى بايدا
مەن ھەم ئۆزۈمنى
ئايان ئەيلەي
ھەممىڭز دېدىڭز
بايان ئەيلەي

5. Specifically, this is a sweet melon like a cantaloupe, the special variety from Qumul known as "Hami melon." For visual reference: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hami_melon.

If you're thoughtful
and discerning
I'm the fruit for which
you're yearning
When they know,
they testify
My story's
globally recognized
If you plant melons
in the earth
For seven years,
that's a hajj's worth!

ئىنساپ قىلساڭ
تېمىز
جۈملە مېۋىلەر
ئىچرە مەندۇر ئەزىز
بىلىپ بولسە،
شېھىت
رىۋايەت ئەشھەر
قىلىندى سېيىت
مېۋىلەر ئارا
خاربۇز يېمىش
يەتتە يىل تېرىسە
ھەج دېمىش

NOW THE GRAPE
WAS ON THE GO
TO DEAL THE REST
A BLOW

يېتىپ كەلدى
ئۈزۈم ھەم
ئۆزگىلىرگە
ئەيلەپ زەم



Hey, hillbilly!
You make
faces filthy
Look at me
honestly
Where else
can I be found?
Praise of me
abounds
Poets write in Persian
of me
So many vines
they raise
Who could want
higher praise?

ئەي ، سەن قالاق!
سېنى يېسە
يۇزى شالتاق
ئىنساپ بىلەن
كۆرسەڭ مېنى
مەن كەبى
مېۋىلەر قېنى؟
مەن ئۈچۈن
شېئىرلار ئېيتىپ
پارىسىي نۇتكىلەر
قايتىپ
مۇنچە تېرىپ
ماڭا قىلمىش
نە ھەد چوڭ
سۆز قىلمىش

THE FIG HEARD
THEIR NAGGING
AND CAME TO DO
HIS BRAGGING

ماجىرالارنى ئەنجۈر
كەلدى ئاڭلاپ
ئاچچىقى بىلەن ئۆز
ئۆزىنى داڭلاپ



Okay,
I'm the fruit king!
Round as
the moon's ring!
With the poor
I'm not around
With kings
my fate is found
I'm powerful
and muscular
My fruity flesh
corpuscular
I rule over
all the fruits
Brought from India
Treated as a gift
in China

تامام، مەن مېۋىلەر شاھى
شاھى!
سۈرتىمدۈر
ئاسماندىكى ماھى!
تېپىلماسمەن
گادايلارغا
قىسمىتىم شاھ
بايلارغا
قۇۋۋىتىم بارچىدىن
كۈچلۈك
پوستۇم ئىچىدە
مېغىزىم گۆشلۈك
شاھىدۇرمەن
ئۆزگىلەرگە
كەلتۈرەر ھىندىستاندىن
تۆھپە ئېلىپ بارغىلى
كېلۈرلەر چىنىستاندىن

"那吾克熱快嘴「8秒70字」 吳 亦凡 熱狗 潘瑋柏嗨炸！｜中國 新說唱" (Nawukere Rapped 70 words in 8 Seconds, Kris Wu, MC Hotdog, and Will Pan All Went Nuts! | The Rap of China). YouTube, uploaded by Star ETtoday, https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=fyWkLaLvKeA.

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Fatimah Abdulghafur Seyyah
is an Uyghur poet who writes in Uyghur and English. Born and raised in Kashgar, in Chinese-occupied East Turkestan, Seyyah grew up immersed in the rich Uyghur poetic culture and started writing when she was eight. Her perception of poetry changed when she was twelve upon reading a short Uyghur poem called "The Impossible Prey" by Ahmatjan Osman. There she felt the presence of an unknown and never to be known entity that speaks through poetry. Seyyah did not publish until her first, and last, Uyghur poetry collection, *The Mystery Land*, was printed in 2018. In 2020, she burned this collection after being introduced to Osman's script "Poetry, What Is, How Is." At that moment, she began writing in English. She lives in Sydney, Australia.

Munawwar Abdulla
is a lab manager and research technician in an evolutionary neuroscience lab at Harvard University. She holds a BSc from the Australian National University and an MSc from UNSW Sydney. When she is not working with dog and fox brains, she is knee-deep in projects surrounding Uyghur activism and community building. Abdulla co-founded the Tarim Network, runs the Uyghur Collective, and collaborates on projects with Uyghur rights organizations around the world. She also has a keen interest in poetry and literary translation. Her writings have been published in *Subbed In*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *The Diplomat*, *Overachiever Magazine*, and *Rabbit Poetry Journal*, and elsewhere.

Elise Anderson
is a human rights advocate, scholar, translator, and performer based in Washington, DC. There she works as the senior program officer for research and advocacy at the Uyghur Human Rights Project, a research-based advocacy organization fighting for the rights of Uyghurs and other oppressed Turkic and Muslim peoples in East Turkestan. She holds dual PhD degrees in Central Eurasian studies and ethnomusicology from Indiana University-Bloomington, granted in 2019 after conducting years of primary field and archival research on *muqam*, classical Uyghur music. In 2020, she testified before the International Human Rights Committee of the Canadian House of Commons and gave commentary on the Uyghur genocide to a number of major media outlets. Her writing has appeared in a number of scholarly and public-facing publications, including *Asian Music*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, and *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*.

CAIR-Philadelphia
is a civil rights and advocacy organization focused on delivering key legal services and protection for Pennsylvania and Delaware Muslims; advocating for better inclusion and equity for Muslims in public life; engaging in youth empowerment; advancing a nuanced understanding of Islam and Muslim communities; and promoting innovative interfaith and cross-cultural collaboration. Established in 2006 in response to the post-9/11 era civil rights violations facing Philadelphia area Muslim-Americans, CAIR-Philadelphia serves the area's internally diverse Muslim communities. Its programs include "know your rights" presentations, courses on American Muslim history, advocacy for inclusion in school districts, media engagement, and increasing voter registration and turnout in partnership with allies from like-minded nonprofits.

David Brophy
is a senior lecturer at the University of Sydney, where he teaches Chinese and Soviet history. His work explores the social and political history of Xinjiang in the Qing and Republican periods, and engages with the region's connections to the wider Islamic and Soviet worlds. His first book was *Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier* (Harvard University Press, 2016). He is also the translator of *In Remembrance of the Saints* (Columbia University Press, 2021), an eighteenth-century Sufi work in the Chaghatay language. Alongside his academic endeavors he is a commentator on contemporary Australia-China relations, his most recent contribution being *China Panic: Australia's Alternative to Paranoia and Pandering* (Black Inc, 2021).

Darren Byler
is an anthropologist. He is the assistant professor of international studies at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver and a postdoctoral research fellow in the China Made project at the Center for Asian Studies, University of Colorado-Boulder. He is the author of *Terror Capitalism: Uyghur Dispossession and Masculinity in a Chinese City* (Duke University Press, 2021) and *In the Camps: China's High-Tech Penal Colony* (Columbia Global Reports, 2021). His research is focused on infrastructure development and global China in the context of Xinjiang and Malaysia.

Guangtian Ha
is a professor of religion at Haverford College. His book *The Sound of Salvation: Voice, Gender, and the Sufi Mediascape in China* was published by Columbia University Press (2021). He works on Islam in Asia and beyond, and is involved in two new research projects: one on the transnational making of Asian Islam through the slave trade and the circulation of women, and the other on comedy among African American and other black Muslims in North America and elsewhere.

Tahir Hamut Izgil
one of the foremost Uyghur-language poets, grew up in Kashgar, an ancient city in the southwest part of the Uyghur homeland. After college in Beijing, he returned to the Uyghur Region and, in the late 1990s and 2000s, emerged as a prominent film director, perhaps best known for the pathbreaking drama *The Moon Is a Witness* (Ay guwah). His poetry has appeared in English translation in the *New York Review of Books*, *Asymptote*, *Gulf Coast*, *Berkeley Poetry Review*, and elsewhere. In 2017, as the Chinese state began the mass internment of Uyghur intellectuals, Izgil fled with his family to the United States. He now works as a producer at Radio Free Asia while continuing his writing.

Rachel Harris
is a professor of ethnomusicology in the School of Arts at SOAS University of London. She is author of *The Making of a Musical Canon in Chinese Central Asia* (Routledge, 2008) and *Singing the Village* (Oxford University Press, 2004), and has coedited several books, including *Theory and Practice in the Music of the Islamic World*

(Routledge, 2018) and *Ethnographies of Islam in China* (University of Hawaii, 2020). Her most recent book is *Soundscapes of Uyghur Islam* (Indiana University Press, 2020). Harris led the Leverhulme Research Project *Sounding Islam in China* (soundislamchina.org) from 2014 to 2017, and is the principal investigator for the *Uyghur Meshrep Project* (meshrep.uk).

The John B. Hurford '60 Center for the Arts and Humanities provides a home for inclusive and interdisciplinary programming by promoting collaborative engagement with the intellectual and artistic ambitions of Haverford College and broader communities. An integral part of the Center, the Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery is the principal venue for Haverford's exhibitions program. Envisioning galleries as active workshops for the exploration of visual culture, the program partners with faculty, students, staff, visiting curators, and artists to design exhibitions that connect curricular interests and scholarship with contemporary artistic practice.

Maidina Kadeer
is a student of English literature in Montreal and former editor of *Soliloquies Anthology* at Concordia University. Originally from Ghulja, Kadeer writes about the relationship between movement and memory. Her poetry and short stories are often inspired by her experiences as a child refugee, and the literary history of the Uyghur people. For Kadeer, Central Asian life and culture survive through stories and testimonies shared with authentic vulnerability.

Köresh Kösen
was born in Ürümchi. He studied music at the Academy of Performing Arts and, after graduation, toured extensively with his ensemble, becoming widely known for his performances and lyrics. Because of the content of his songs, he was forced to flee to Turkey in 1996. Undaunted, he produced four more albums and performed them in Central Asia, leading to his arrest in Kyrgyzstan under diplomatic pressure from China. With the help of the United Nations, he became a political refugee in Sweden. There, he worked as a music scholar at the Culture Department of the Eskilstuna Municipality and was appointed as a salaried national composer by the Swedish government. He performed at music festivals around Europe, and released his last album in 2004. Kösen died in 2006, and is remembered as a powerful activist, poet, lyricist, and musician.

Alvin Li
is a curator, writer, and contributing editor of *frieze* magazine, based in Shanghai. Li is, with Hera Chan, Adjunct Curator, Greater China, supported by the Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation, at Tate, London. He has curated exhibitions at the UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing; Para Site, Hong Kong; chi K11 Art Museum, Shanghai; and Antenna Space, Shanghai, among others. Li's writing on contemporary art has appeared in international publications such as *frieze*, *Artforum*, *e-flux*, *Mousse*, *Art Agenda*, and *ArtReview Asia*, as well as in catalogues published by the New Museum, New York, among others. As a fiction writer he has been featured in *Spike Art Quarterly* and held readings at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego and CURRENT:LA Public Art Triennial. Li is the co-founder of CINEMQ, a Shanghai-based queer film and publishing collective that organizes screenings of East Asian queer independent productions.

Mukaddas Mijit
is an ethnomusicologist, filmmaker, and performer. Born and raised in the Uyghur homeland, she moved to Paris in 2003. She has taught visual anthropology and anthropology of performance in several universities while working on film projects about Uyghur culture and arts. Since 2019, Mijit has been involved in a research program titled "Towards an Alternative Model of Heritage as Sustainable Development: Meshrep in Kazakhstan (SOAS)" and numerous creative projects in Paris and New York. She has made four substantial documentaries and a series of short films on Uyghur culture and is working on her first fiction film.

Abdushükür Muhemmet
is a writer and poet from Kuchar who has lived in Sweden since 2003. Qumtur studied to be a teacher of Uyghur literature, poetry, and history, and by the 1990s had become a well-known poet among Uyghurs. He was subjected to severe control and harassment for his role in promoting the Uyghur language and culture, and was forced into exile. He has published six books, among them *Strange Face* and *Wandering Thoughts*, a collection of articles titled *My Mother's Memories*, and a biography titled *Struggle Never Dies*. He is currently a member of the Swedish Writers' Union and the Secretary General for the World Uyghur Writers' Union, which he founded alongside other writers of the Uyghur diaspora.

Seher
is a Ph.D student and a junior researcher in Central Europe. Her research regards social and cultural ethnography of Uyghurs. She spent three years collecting data about Uyghur material culture, the social life of rural Uyghurs and the rural markets in southern Xinjiang. As a native Uyghur female scholar, she is also interested in the role of women in Uyghur community.

Musāpir
is the pseudonym of a Uyghur diaspora scholar. They grew up in Xinjiang and were educated in the Uyghur language, and thus have a deep personal bond and knowledge of Uyghur literature, music, and traditions. They have translated multiple sources in Uyghur-language literature and research on Uyghur tradition. They hope to develop new strategies and educational resources to preserve and communicate language, traditional knowledge, and epistemology.

Nashtarr (aka Young Nash)
is a Uyghur rapper. His first mixtape, *Motivation*, came out in 2019 and was followed by *Yanchuqla Tom* in 2020. Nashtarr raps in Uyghur and English, collaborating with other Uyghur diaspora rappers and local American MCs. In addition to his rap career, he designs and produces his own Original Uyghur clothing and merchandise line. He modernized and performed "The Contest of the Fruits" poem, transforming it into a contemporary rap.

Eric Schluessel
is an assistant professor of modern Chinese history at George Washington University and the author of *Land of Strangers: The Civilizing Project in Qing Central Asia* (Columbia University Press, 2020) and *An Introduction to Chaghatay* (Maize Books, 2018). He holds a PhD in history and East Asian languages from Harvard University.

Slavs and Tatars
is an internationally renowned art collective devoted to an area east of the former Berlin Wall and west of the Great Wall of China known as Eurasia. Their work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Salt, Istanbul; Vienna Secession; Kunsthalle Zurich; Albertinum, Dresden; and Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Warsaw, among others. The collective's practice is based on three activities: exhibitions, publications, and lecture-performances. In addition to their translation of the legendary Azerbaijani satirical periodical *Molla Nasreddin* (I. B. Tauris, 2017), Slavs and Tatars have published more than ten books to date, including *Wripped Scripped* (Hatje Cantz, 2018) on the politics of alphabets and transliteration and *Crack Up – Crack Down* (Mousse, 2019) on satire and the graphic arts.

Twelve Gates Arts (12G)
is Philadelphia's hub for the emerging art landscape, mapping the culture of Asian migration, inclusive of the systems that influence it: race, gender, creed, empire, and economy. A nod to the archetypal fortified walls that surround medieval cities worldwide, the organization's name underlies its exhibitions and events, which celebrate the mélange of cultural identity that foments as peoples move and settle. Through quarterly visual exhibitions and community events, 12G showcases contemporary artists and curators in the diasporas who are overlooked in traditional art spaces and engages local community in the work of challenging and transcending geographic and cultural boundaries.

The current volume is published on the occasion of the exhibition *The Contest of the Fruits* at Haverford College's Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery. Part of a constellation of collaborations between Slavs and Tatars and Haverford College's Hurford Center for Arts and Humanities; Twelve Gates Arts, Philadelphia; and the Philadelphia Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the project explores humor, surveillance, and alphabets, among other aspects of Uyghur culture, with contributions by scholars, artists, critics, poets, and musicians.

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Guangtian Ha and Slavs and Tatars
Editorial and Project Manager
Pia Chakraverti-Wuerthwein
Design and Typesetting
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Design Assistants
Ollie George, Andrea Galano Toro
English Copy Editing and Proofreading
Gretchen Dykstra, Ken Koltun-Fromm, Seher, Katharina Stadler, James Weissinger
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Tahir Hamut Izgil, Musāpir, Seher
Additional Assistance
Jixin Jia
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Munawwar Abdulla, Fatimah Abdulghafur Seyyah, Elise Anderson, David Brophy, Darren Byler, Guangtian Ha, Tahir Hamut Izgil, Rachel Harris, Maidina Kadeer, Köresh Kösen, Alvin Li, Mukaddas Mijit, Abdushükür Muhemmet, Musāpir, Lutpulla Mutellip, Ahmatjan Osman, Abdurehim Otkur, Slavs and Tatars, Abdukhaliq Uyghur
Translations
Iskandar Ding, Musāpir, Seher, Eric Schluessel
Lithographer
Tadeusz Mirosz

FILM

Animation
LOGAN
Translation of "Contest of the Fruits" Poem into Modernized Uyghur and English
Eric Schluessel
Adaptation of Rap and Vocals
Nashtarr
Translation of Rap into Chinese
Iskandar Ding
Sound Production and Mixing
Lutto Lento

EXHIBITION

Associate Director, Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery, VCAM and Campus Exhibitions
Matthew Seamus Callinan
Koshland Director, Hurford Center for Arts and Humanities
Ken Koltun-Fromm
Associate Director, VCAM Operations Manager
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Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery Assistants
Matt Donahue, Fiona Flynn, Athena Intanate, Alyssa Kerper, Becca Matson, Graham Mauro, Maggie Parham

EDITION

Calligraphy
Amine Boulkroun
Linocut
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