

**UYGUR PERFORMING ARTS IN CONTEMPORARY
CHINA**

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There are 13 nationalities currently dwelling within the boundaries of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (XUAR), China's most westerly and largest unit at provincial level. The most populous nationality is the Uygur, a Turkic people, who at the end of 1982 numbered about 5,986,800 out of Xinjiang's total population of 13,159,000. Others include the Han, at 5,287,000 people, the Kazakhs (913,900), the Hui (575,500), the Mongolians (117,200), the Kirghiz (114,200), the Xibo (27,500), and Tajiks (27,100).¹

This article focuses on the performing arts of that largest of the nationalities which gives the XUAR its name: the Uygurs. The performing arts include song and dance, in which the Uygurs particularly excel, balladry, song opera (*geju*) and musical plays (*yinyue huaju*). The period of major concern is the present, defined as the early 1980s, but it is neither possible nor desirable to ignore the past. The Uygur historical and cultural traditions are among the most powerful of any of China's minority nationalities. When I visited Xinjiang for 10 days during September and early October 1982, I was especially impressed by their strength in two ways.

One was the Uygur language. The old Uygur script was introduced about the same time as Islam and has been used more or less consistently since then. Early in 1960 the XUAR People's Council approved a new script which uses mainly Roman letters.² However, since the fall of the "gang of four," and especially since 1978, the old script has increasingly come back into use. The government felt obliged to authorize its use after the event, which it did in the autumn of 1982. Books are published in either Uygur script. There are two separate Uygur editions of the *Xinjiang Daily*, one in each script. In the streets of cities it is the old script which predominates, simply because the signs predate the new script.

1. These figures all apply to the end of 1982 and are based on Zhongguo baike nianjian bianji bu (Chinese Encyclopedic Yearbook Editorial Department) (comp.), *Zhongguo baike nianjian 1983 (Chinese Encyclopedic Yearbook 1983)* (Beijing and Shanghai: Zhongguo da baike quanshu chubanshe, 1983), p. 112. The census of midnight 30 June-1 July 1982 gave the Uygur population at 5,957,112, the great majority living in Xinjiang. *Renmin ribao (People's Daily)*, 29 October 1982, p. 4. The census figure for Xinjiang as a whole was 13,081,681. Guoji tongji ju (State Statistical Bureau) (comp.), *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 1983 (Chinese Statistical Yearbook 1983)* (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 1983), pp. 112-13. The census showed minority nationalities were 59.6% of the XUAR's population. *Ibid.* p. 31. The various nationalities are discussed, including 1978 population figures, in Ma Yin et al., *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu (China's Minority Nationalities)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1981). On the Uygurs see pp. 174-94, the Kazakhs pp. 195-208, the Hui pp. 123-38, the Mongolians pp. 68-86, the Kirghiz pp. 209-219, the Xibo pp. 220-29, and the Tajiks pp. 230-40.

2. The new script is the one used in this article to romanize Uygur names and terms except for the small number of symbols which occur in new Uygur but not in the Roman alphabet. Throughout the text any Uygur names and terms given in brackets are the Chinese pinyin equivalent. In the notes the Uygur authors and works translated into Chinese are romanized into *Hanyu pinyin*, as shown on the title page. I should like to thank Pan Zhenyu of the Central Institute for the Nationalities in Beijing who helped me greatly with the Uygur romanization.

The spoken Uygur language shows no indication of weakening. Even in Urumqi there are many people who know very little or no Chinese, and in Uygur communities outside it Uygur is by far the main, or the only, language of communication. Except in localities where Han people are in the majority, the primary schools teach in Uygur or the relevant minority nationality language. At Xinjiang University, where 60 per cent of the students are from the minority nationalities, Uygur and Chinese are used interchangeably in classes, according to convenience. The radio stations in Xinjiang broadcast in five languages, Uygur, Chinese, Kazakh, Mongolian and Kirghiz.

Article 4 of the State Constitution formally guarantees all nationalities the right to use and develop their own languages, whether written or spoken.³ An official view states that Chinese has "naturally" become a convenient tool which everybody willingly uses," but this does not mean that Chinese "ought to enjoy any privileges and even more does not imply that one can force the minority nationality peoples to study and adopt the Han language."⁴ My observations in Xinjiang would suggest that not "everybody" uses Chinese, but the condemnation of any compulsion to adopt it would appear sensible.

The other area where the strength of tradition impressed me was the continuing influence of Islam. "Freedom of religious belief" is constitutionally guaranteed. *China Daily* reported (13 October 1982, p. 5) that in "about 12,000 mosques across Xinjiang, there are 15,000 Muslim clergy, but most have reached old age," as a result of which a state-financed seminary has now been set up to train Islamic clergy. In every one of the dozen or so mosques that I visited, on an arranged or spontaneous basis, I either saw or was told that worship took place actively. The *imam* of Urumqi's large Yanghang Mosque told me that he receives a salary of 100 *yuan* per month, from the state-sponsored Islamic Association (Yisilanjiao Xiehui), in other words, substantially more than the average worker. His manner, like that of other *imams* I met, was confident and bespoke a man of authority who would not be told what to do on religious matters.

On the other hand, religious freedom does not apply to unofficial propagation, so Moslem primary and secondary schools are not permitted. A report of late 1983 claimed that China's leaders were trying to eliminate "unofficial Islam, which organizes and provides religious training for Muslims in defiance of the officially prescribed boundaries."⁵ I suspect that Islam and the Marxism of the Chinese Communist Party

3. *The Constitution of the People's Republic of China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1978), p. 10; "Constitution of the People's Republic of China," *Beijing Review*, No. 52 (27 December 1982), p. 12. The two constitutions were adopted by the National People's Congress on 5 March 1978 and 4 December 1982, respectively.

4. Liu E, He Run and Wang Guodong, *Minzu wenti gaishu (Outline of Nationalities Problems)* (Hohhot: Nei Menggu renmin chubanshe, 1981), p. 134.

5. Husain Haqqani, "Repression and revival - the dichotomy of Islam in China," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, No. 50 (15 December 1983), p. 54. See also Wang Guodong, *Minzu wenti changshi (General Knowledge on Nationalities Problems)* (Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 1982), pp. 74-83.

(CCP) have been forced to learn to live with each other and respect each other's influence, but with the CCP holding most of the trump cards.

Another area where accommodation has been forced on the Moslems is in their attitude towards the arts. In pre-Republican times "culture was monopolized by the *imams*," who banned printing, "opposed and restricted" musical activity, and "caused the spread and popularization of culture extreme difficulties, so that the people were universally placed in the situation of being without culture."⁶

The authors of this black view go on to state that the people of that time simply ignored the views of the *imams* on song and dance. A group of worshippers whom I met casually at a mosque in Urumqi laughed at the suggestion of any Islamic opposition to the arts. On the other hand, the *imam* of the Yanghang Mosque gave a slightly different perspective. He said that as a Moslem leader he did not really approve of artistic performances. He himself never sang, danced or went to the cinema, and he believed his attitudes and behaviour were prevalent among the Moslem leadership. However, he made no attempt to prevent or discourage the Islamic masses from indulging in the pleasures which the performing arts provide.

So on the question of whether the arts as such are good or bad, Marxism is closer than Islam to the Uygur tradition. Yet the CCP Government has faced great difficulty in devising a policy which recognizes past values but encourages the development of a new art.

During the Cultural Revolution decade (1966–76) the Han attempted totally to suppress traditional themes and some nationality art-forms, along with Islam. All that this accomplished was to inflame the Uygurs against the Han and make them long for their own traditions.

On the other hand, a far higher priority on good race relations, including cultural matters, has now become formal policy. The 12th CCP Congress declared in September 1982 that the Party "upholds and promotes relations of equality, unity and mutual assistance among all nationalities in the country," and aids the areas inhabited by the minority nationalities in cultural development.⁷ Minister of Culture Zhu Muzhi later called for special attention to develop and promote the arts of the minorities and warned against "harming the original style and special features."⁸

Policy does not necessarily reflect reality. In mid 1982 a writer in Xinjiang's main daily, while calling for "the correct handling of nationality relations in the socialist period," noted the persistence of "problems"

6. Xinjiang shehui kexue yuan Minzu yanjiu suo (Xinjiang Social Sciences Academy Nationalities Research Institute) (comp.), *Xinjiang jianshi (Simple History of Xinjiang)* (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 1980), Vol. I, p. 218.

7. "Constitution of the Communist Party of China" (adopted 6 September 1982), *The Twelfth National Congress of the CPC (September 1982)* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1982), p. 95.

8. Zhu Muzhi, "Guanyu kaizhan minzu wenhua gongzuo de wenti, zai Quanguo minzu wenhua gongzuo huiyi shang de jianghua (zhaiyao)" ("On problems of developing the nationalities' cultural work – summary of speech at the All-China Nationalities Cultural Work Conference"), *Minzu tuanjie (Nationalities' Unity)*, No. 10 (15 October 1983), p. 32.

but still claimed that they "are not the mainstream, but a side stream."⁹ That formula is a typical one and probably underestimates the depth of the antagonisms. But these are currently not nearly as serious as during the Cultural Revolution decade.¹⁰

Cultural policy as it affected Xinjiang specifically was discussed at the XUAR Third Congress of Literature and Art Workers (*Wenxue yishu gongzuozhe disanci daibiao dahui*), held in Urumqi from 18 to 28 September 1980, the XUAR's first such Congress since 1959, before the devastation caused by the Cultural Revolution to race relations and to the arts. The chairman of the XUAR People's Government and secretary of its CCP Committee Ismayil Emet (Simayi Aimaiti), a Uygur, made a congratulatory speech, and the honorary chairman of the relevant XUAR associations, the Han, Liu Xiaowu, gave a long report. Liu called on all artists to "excel in carrying forward and reforming the literature and arts heritage of every nationality." But his main point was that Xinjiang is too bound to tradition and its artists must strike out in an imaginative new socialist direction.

What we must develop now is socialist literature and arts and this is not the same as a sort of brand new literature and arts in any old time. It not only needs a brand new life content, but also a brand new artistic form corresponding to this life content. . . . So as far as literature and arts creation in the Autonomous Region is concerned, the main thing it still lacks is the spirit of courage to reform.¹¹

The theme also came through at a festival of dramas (song operas, plays and others) held in Urumqi in mid 1982. "Items reflecting modern themes occupied a very great place in this festival," said Xinjiang's main daily newspaper.¹² The official requirement was to give primacy to modern themes, placing traditional in a secondary position. A Uygur troupe leader I interviewed in Turpan (Tulufan) told me he regarded a proportion of two to one in favour of modern themes as satisfactory and typical at least of state-run professional companies.

The question of "courage to reform" on the basis of the nationalities' traditions was only one item, albeit an important one, among numerous policy strands laid down at the Third Congress of Literature and Art Workers. However, the great majority singularly failed to distinguish Xinjiang from other parts of China, especially minority nationality areas. They accorded with nationwide policies in calling for the continuation of arts serving the workers, peasants and soldiers, and the implementation of

9. Zhao Wenchao, in *Xinjiang ribao (Xinjiang Daily)*, 4 June 1982, p. 3.

10. The Constitution of December 1982 incorporated several new provisions designed to give members of the minority nationalities more leadership positions in the nationality areas. I have considered this question further in "China's policies towards its minority nationalities," *The Journal of International Studies*, No. 11 (July 1983), pp. 7–18.

11. "Tuanjieqilai, tongxin tongde, nuli fanrong zizhi qu duo minzu shehuizhuyi wenyi" ("Unite and with one heart and mind strive for a prosperous multi-nationality socialist literature and art for the Autonomous Region"), *Xinjiang wenxue (Xinjiang Literature)*, No. 11 (November 1980), p. 14. See similar points made by Ismayil Emet in "Zai zizhi qu disanci wendai huishang de zhuci" ("Congratulatory speech at the Third Literary Congress of the Autonomous Region"), *Xinjiang wenxue*, No. 11 (November 1980), p. 5.

12. *Xinjiang ribao*, 19 July 1982, p. 4.

the "Hundred Flowers" policy of freedom and variety in the arts. They advocated the CCP's policy on nationalities of giving full play to the special forms and styles of each minority people's works. Ismayil Emet urged "close co-operation and mutual help" among the literature and art workers of the various nationalities and "the elimination of obstacles among nationalities left over from history,"¹³ referring primarily to the harmful effects the Cultural Revolution had wrought on race relations. One cure, as Liu Xiaowu commented, was "to strengthen exchanges in literature and the arts among the various nationalities,"¹⁴ by which he meant not simply a vehicle for Han influence on weaker cultures but genuine interchanges in which influences operate in numerous directions.¹⁵ And the last policy to mention here was the need to continue to collect, rearrange, translate and research works representing the artistic heritage of the nationalities.

Song and Dance, Drama

The example raised for the Uygurs was the *Twelve Mukams*, an ancient set of musical pieces lasting some 20 hours if played consecutively. They are still performed, though rarely *in toto*. A *mukam* is a song-and-dance form which includes long narrative song-poems. The *Twelve Mukams* form the basis of much that is distinctive in the Uygur performing arts, including many specific songs, dances and musical pieces.

Narrative song-poems, folk songs and dances, including those from the *Twelve Mukams*, exist among the masses and can be performed individually and informally at the family (or a similar) level. Yet no professional performance of songs takes place without including dances. Many items are both forms at once, the performers singing as they dance, or the instrumentalists accompanying not only by playing but by singing as well. Thus, it is in one sense very difficult validly to split the two forms. Some initial comments covering both song and dance would be appropriate.

An evening's entertainment by a professional song and dance troupe (predominantly or entirely Uygur) is likely to consist of several dances, some songs for a male or female singer, and solo tunes for a traditional instrument, such as the stringed *ravap* (*rewapu* or *rewafu*). In addition, a small number of *xiangsheng* are given, that is, witty cross-talk popular among the Han Chinese and adopted by other nationalities.

The orchestra accompanying the musical items sits behind the soloists, although if there are many dancers in one item and the performance takes place in a theatre, the players might transfer to a pit. The members of the orchestra are usually male and wear plain clothes, including the traditional Uygur cap. The dancers are either male or female, predominantly

13. Ismayil Emet, "Zai zizhi qu," p. 5.

14. "Tuanjieqilai, tongxin tongde," *Xinjiang wenxue*, p. 16.

15. A policy article by the Uygur Chairman of the XUAR Federation of Literature and Arts Circles (Wenxue Yishu Jie Lianhehui), Yasin Hudaberdi (Yasheng Hudabaierdi) stressed literature and art works which contributed to unity among the nationalities and "educated the people, especially using the communist spirit to educate the younger generation." See "Wenyi gongzuo zhe de shengsheng zhize" ("The sacred duties of literature and arts workers"), *Xinjiang wenxue*, No. 3 (1 March 1982), p. 65.

the latter, and their costumes are extremely elaborate. The women wear dresses in bright or starkly contrasting colours over long coloured trousers; hair is usually very long and arranged into several thin plaits. In a theatre, scenery might be projected onto the rear of the stage for the dance or combined song-dance items. In form these performances are in most respects very similar to what is found elsewhere in China, although the content is distinctive to the relevant nationality, primarily Uygur.

No programme is issued but a young girl announces each item, first in Uygur, then in Chinese. The language used for the songs or *xiangsheng* is that appropriate to the particular area. In two performances I witnessed in Turpan, where most people are Uygurs, all songs and *xiangsheng* used Uygur, except the small number of foreign songs. Over two other evenings' entertainment I attended in Urumqi, songs were sung in Uygur, Kazakh or the language of the relevant nationality, one *xiangsheng* was in Uygur and one in Chinese; and one Uygur song-dance used Chinese. In short, the language used for the Uygur performing arts is overwhelmingly Uygur, with a small admixture of Chinese.

In pre-Liberation folk songs people "praised their lovable hometown, and expressed young, simple and steadfast love between men and women." They also complained about the bitterness of their life. After Liberation a new dimension was added in the form of pieces in praise of the socialist system, China and its leaders, and "the unity of the nationalities," that is, a new kind of directly and explicitly political folksong.¹⁶

At the same time, a generation of professional musicians has arisen, the members of which have composed a new corpus of songs by rearranging the folk musical heritage. This means that the form is still Uygur, while the content has become socialist. The songs will still include non-political themes such as love, but those in some way or another in direct praise of the socialist system dominate the newly-created songs.

The extent has differed from period to period. All openly-performed songs were political in the Cultural Revolution decade,¹⁷ whereas to judge from published collections and performances I have attended in the early 1980s, topics such as love of home or of members of the opposite sex have become possible in recent years.¹⁸ Love and courtship have reappeared as a literary and musical genre, resulting in the publication of several

16. Zhou Ji, "Qianyan" ("Foreword"), in *Xinjiang shaoshu minzu gequ xuan, Weiwuer zu gequ zhuanjie* (Selection of Xinjiang Minority Nationality Songs, Uygur Nationality Song Collection) (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 1980), pp. IV-V.

17. For example, see the Uygur items in Zhongyang minzu xueyuan bianji zu (Editorial Group of the Central Institute for the Nationalities), *Shaoshu minzu gequ xuan* (Selection of Minority Nationality Songs) (Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chubanshe), published in November 1978, i.e. on the eve of the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP which opened the lid on criticism of the Cultural Revolution. There are nine of them, a folksong in praise of Chairman Mao and eight other songs, all of them political. See pp. 59-81.

18. For instance, see *Xinjiang shaoshu minzu gequ xuan, Weiwuer zu gequ zhuanjie*, which contains 62 songs, 17 of them billed as folksongs. The content breakdown is as follows: praise of the CCP or socialism, 13; labour, 11; praise of leaders, 10; love of Xinjiang or particular places in it, 9; love and courtship, 7; love of China, 6; others, 6.

volumes of love songs or poems.¹⁹ However, the domination of the explicitly socialist songs over the non-political applies to all periods since 1949. Audience reaction suggests to me that most people prefer the non-political items, but this is only an impression.

The following piece is selected as illustration partly on the basis of this suspicion. It is a Uygur folksong, called "High white poplars," popular in Hami. Each stanza is sung to the same tune, the rhythm of which is a deeply felt four crotchets to the bar. The mode is the ordinary major scale.

High white poplars stand in a row,
Beautiful floating clouds hover in the sky,
A tomb is overgrown with lilac,
Alone it rests on the river bank,
A tomb is overgrown with lilac,
Within sleeps a beautiful girl.

High white poplars stand in a row,
Beautiful floating clouds hover in the sky,
The beautiful girl kisses lilac,
She has spoken intimate words to me,
The beautiful girl kisses lilac,
She has sung intimate words softly to me.

High white poplars stand in a row,
Beautiful clouds hover in the sky,
The solitary tomb is overgrown with lilac,
My beard has reached my chest,
Beautiful floating clouds and high white poplars,
For ever I shall tightly cherish the withered lilac.²⁰

This sombre and delicate song, with its repetitions of words and phrases, shows beautifully the Uygurs' sense of tragedy, which is also evident in their long narrative love poems. It forms an ideal contrast to the image of song and dance as a form of merry-making, of humour.

I now turn to the other main arm of song and dance, namely dance. Writing not long after Liberation, one student of Uygur dance summarized its contents by drawing attention to four main categories. These were dances: (1) describing the love between men and women; (2) expressing resistance to oppression; (3) which praise the CCP, its leaders and the socialist system; and (4) which express labour.²¹

These topics are very close indeed to those of the folksongs. The first and last are particularly suited to dance, which takes its origin from representing everyday life on an artistic plane. The essential movements of

19. An example of a book of love songs specifically from the minority nationalities is Tian Liantao, Yuan Bingchang and Li Huizong (eds.), *Zhongguo Shaoshu Minzu aiqing gequ ji* (Collection of Love Songs of China's Minority Nationalities) (Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chubanshe, 1981). It contains words and scores in numerical notation of 114 songs from 47 nationalities, including 7 from the Uygurs (pp. 17-25) who are among the best represented.

20. *Ibid.* p. 23.

21. Di Geng, "Weiwuer zu de wudao" ("Uygur nationality dance"), *Xin guan cha* (New Observer), Vol. III, No. 9 (1 December 1951), p. 31.

Uygur dance, which are actually not very numerous, are based on the normal regular actions of ordinary people.

Two examples will illustrate this point. For a man to stretch his left hand naturally in front of him and his right hand upwards is said to express riding a donkey. A woman arches both arms above her head, the fingers of each pointing towards those of the other, the palms open and facing upwards; this is a common gesture in Uygur dance and is said to derive from beckoning.²²

Uygur dance is open to participation by any number of people. There are established items for solo dancers, duos or trios. There are also some for many performers or even in which large crowds may take part.

Apart from traditional folk dances, modern dance, which reflects the present is also developing. The most distinguished Uygur choreographer of the post-Liberation period is Haji Rahman (Aji Raheman), who died of a heart attack on 4 June 1982 at the age of 50.²³ He systematized the essential movements of Uygur dance in such a way that the XUAR was able to draw up a list of standard movements according to topic: love, labour, happiness and so on.

As well as contributing to the arrangement of traditional dances Haji Rahman also designed many new dances, including some which build upon the *Twelve Mukams* to fuse them with the contemporary dance movements. When a troupe came from Xinjiang to Beijing to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, his compositions were well represented, including the recent "Child-care worker" based on a popular folk cradle song of southern Xinjiang. The choreographer used the movements of folk dances but the item is designed to reflect the present and "praise the new life." Thus, "one very quick dance passage which expresses the play of the child-care worker and the children" uses material revised from an old courtship dance.²⁴ Haji Rahman's male solo "My *Ravap*" was the most successful of the Uygur items presented at the First Nationwide Dance Competition held in Dalian, Liaoning province, in September 1980.²⁵ His "Jade flower" is a female solo item which "uses a young girl to symbolize the dazzling and brilliant jade of Hotan (Hetian) in Xinjiang."²⁶

From 24 October to 1 November 1980 the Ministry of Culture and Nationalities Affairs Commission held a Nationwide Festival of Minority Nationalities Performing Arts in Beijing, at which the Uygurs chose to focus mainly on modern themes. One of their items, "Flower rug dance," was supposed "to express the mettle of the workers," while "The joys of

22. *Ibid.*

23. See two obituaries on Haji Rahman in *Wudao* (Dance), No. 4 (30 August 1982), pp. 44-46.

24. Shashu, "Yishou dongren de yaolan qu" ("A moving cradle song"), *Wudao*, No. 5 (30 September 1979), p. 22.

25. See *Zhongguo wenyi nianjian she* (Almanac of Chinese Literature and Art Society) (comp.), *1981 nianban Zhongguo wenyi nianjian* (1981 Almanac of Chinese Literature and Art) (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1982), pp. 620-21.

26. Liang Huimin, "Tianshan gewu ying xinchun" ("The song and dance of Tianshan welcome a new spring"), *Wudao*, No. 2 (30 April 1982), p. 30.

distribution" was designed as propaganda for the new economic policies in the countryside following the Third Plenum of the CCP's 11th Central Committee in December 1978.²⁷

The expression of "the ideological feelings of a girl in real life" is intentional in the newly choreographed "My orchard." A solo female dance, it has also "with great courage absorbed western dance vocabulary and kneaded it into Uygur dance."²⁸

The phraseology of this comment suggests that the fit of the two cultures is none too comfortable, and my observation is that, in general, western influence on Uygur dance is rather slight. The expression of "ideological feelings" through a phenomenon so normal, both in the past and present, as an orchard suggests a rather mild connection between art and politics. This is in direct contrast to the Cultural Revolution period when the ideology needed to be clearly and directly spelled out, not only sometimes but always. Contemporary Uygur dance thus combines the modern and the classical idioms, but with a continuing and rather heavy stress on the latter.

Drama, which combines a story, with music, song or dialogue and the stage, has never fully become part of Uygur culture. It is most striking that the spoken play without music has remained almost non-existent. Some professional Uygur artists told me that they simply do not like the spoken play because it lacks that ingredient so essential to the Uygur people, music. Drama means song opera, that is, the westernized form which the Chinese term *geju*, or "musical play," which contains, in addition to dialogue, a considerable portion of song, dance and musical interlude.

Although the song opera or musical play has become an established genre, there remains the suspicion that it is really more foreign than Uygur. There are, of course, grades of foreignness. In Urumqi two Beijing Opera troupes and a play company are among those which perform, in Chinese and almost entirely for Chinese audiences, Chinese items principally on Chinese themes.²⁹ The song opera and musical play are not in the category of totally foreign. The writers use the Uygur language and in general stories from the Uygur tradition.

The irony is that the first song opera of the Uygurs dates from 1936, that is a full nine years before the premiere, in April 1945, of the earliest full-scale Han Chinese *geju*, *The White-haired Girl (Baimao nü)*. The Uygur opera, over two hours in length, was entitled *Erip and Senem (Ailifu - Sainaimu)* and was based on a famous love story which has been enshrined among other places in the *Twelve Mukams* and a long classical narrative poem. It has been by far the most popular of all dramas in Xinjiang since Liberation and continues to be performed frequently in the

27. See Zhang Ke, "Kongqian shengda de kongque hui" ("Unprecedentedly splendid peacock meeting"), *Wudao*, No. 5 (30 December 1980), p. 3.

28. Liang Huimin, "Tianshan gewu ying xinchun," p. 30.

29. The Xinjiang Play Troupe (Xinjiang Huaju Tuan), Xinjiang Beijing Opera Troupe (Xinjiang Jingju Tuan) and Urumqi Beijing Opera Troupe (Wulumuqishi Jingju Tuan) are listed, together with some detail about them, in *1981 nianban Zhongguo wenyi nianjian*, pp. 1174, 1177. In September 1982, I visited the Play Troupe, the members of which are 90% Han.

1980s.³⁰ Its music is derived partly from the *Twelve Mukams* and preserves Uygur rhythms, tonality, melody and general texture brilliantly.³¹

Other song operas composed in the 1930s were also based on the famous traditional love stories. At the time there was, in addition, incipient interest in plays. In some cities of Xinjiang, such as Urumqi and Kaxgar (Kashi), clubs promoting theatre and experimental play troupes were set up.³² Left-wing influence was very strong and tolerated by Sheng Shicai, who ruled Xinjiang from 1933 to 1944 and declared his very pro-Soviet "Six Great Principles" in April 1934.³³

After Liberation, the greatest strength of theatrical forms continued to rest in song operas, especially those based on famous long narrative poems. There have been other inspirations as well. They include newly written novels, film scripts, dramas and revolutionary stories. Even the model Beijing operas of Jiang Qing temporarily provided a source. For instance *Hongdeng ji (The Story of the Red Lantern)* was adapted into a Uygur song opera, which was performed at a nationwide literature and arts festival in 1975 and even made into a film.³⁴

The performers of this item were members of the Xinjiang Song Opera Troupe, set up in October 1973 on the basis of groups dating back to soon after Liberation. It is by far the most important of the XUAR's companies devoted mainly to song opera or musical plays.

The instruments which accompany these Uygur works are partly European in origin. They include the violin and cello, piano, flute, trumpet and trombone. The Han *pipa* is often used. The orchestra of *Erip and Senem* includes the oboe among the usual European instruments and in addition the main ones of the Uygur ensembles. The voices of the singers are characteristically Uygur. The addition of European instruments has in no sense robbed the music of its Uygur feel.

The song opera and musical play have grown stronger since the Third Plenum of December 1978. On the other hand, one commentator, Li Qiang, has expressed disappointment at the predominance of traditional stories and singular lack of operas dealing with the present or the history

30. For example, the Xinjiang Song Opera Troupe (Xinjiang Geju Tuan) gave 67 performances of a version of the opera in 1981. See *Zhongguo xiju nianjian bianji bu* (Chinese Theatre Yearbook Editorial Department) (comp.), *Zhongguo xiju nianjian 1982* (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1983), p. 525.

31. Excerpts from this song opera are recorded on numbers DB-20102/20103 of *Zhongguo changpian (Chinese Records)*, with accompanying libretti in Chinese and Uygur (old script). See also a review by Li Qin in "Minzu geju de yike mingzhu" ("A jewel among national song operas"), in *Zhongguo xiju nianjian bianji bu* (comp.), *Zhongguo xiju nianjian 1981 (Chinese Theatre Yearbook 1981)* (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1981), pp. 78-79. The reviewer was principally impressed by the fusion of music, poetry, song, dance and drama which made the item genuinely neither Han nor western, but Uygur.

32. See *Zhongguo kexue yuan Minzu yanjiu suo* (Nationalities Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Sciences) and Xinjiang Shaoshu minzu shehui lishi diaocha zu (Xinjiang Minority Nationalities' Societies and Histories Investigation Group) (comp.), *Wei wuer zu jianshi jianzhi hebian (chugao)* [*Concise History and Account of the Uygur Nationality (Draft)*] (Beijing: Zhongguo kexue yuan Minzu yanjiu suo, 1963), p. 220.

33. In October 1942 Sheng Shicai broke with the Soviet Union, and demanded the withdrawal of all Russians, including military advisers.

34. *Zhongguo wenyi nianjian*, p. 1174.

of the Revolution. He is dissatisfied also at the continuing emphasis on the musical side at the expense of the theatrical. This means that there is not enough contradiction or clash in Uygur song opera, and too little attention to the development of the characters. One could perhaps charge that these criteria are more western or Han than Uygur, but they do again identify the persistence of tradition as a major and, to the authorities, unwelcome force in Uygur society.

Li Qiang's overall evaluation appears to follow from his earlier comments.

By comparison with the world's classical operas and the whole country's superior song operas, the level of Xinjiang's song opera art is still very low. The quantity of the items performed is quite large, but the quality is still not high.³⁵

This is not damning, and seems to hold out hope that improvements may come eventually. But neither is it a particularly flattering assessment.

The Performing Arts in Society, Artists and Their Training

Despite the novelty and apparently faltering progress of theatrical forms, song and dance have been an integral part of the lives of the Uygurs since the most ancient times. Accounts after Liberation also describe the Uygurs as keen on music, song and dance. They are often called a people who "can sing and is good at dancing" (*neng ge shan wu*),³⁶ but that is a stock phrase applicable to virtually all China's minority nationalities. The balladiers are as popular as ever. "On days of happy celebration, such as New Year, people often hold large-scale entertainment on river embankments or in squares."³⁷

The "new year" is the Corban Festival, the first of each year according to the Islamic calendar, and it is by far the most important Uygur traditional festival. The practice of collective song and dance in which everyone takes part is called *mexrep* (lit. "gathering") in Uygur. Those of large scale take place on the evening before major festivals, but smaller ones at weddings. They cost the participants no money and their aim is simply to rejoice and make merry. One very important difference between now and the past is that women take part equally with men.

I happened to be in Xinjiang for the Corban Festival in 1982. That year it fell on 29 September, just two days before China's National Day on 1 October, which happens also to be the anniversary of the XUAR's establishment (1955). The coincidence of these events stimulated bigger celebrations than usual and provoked questions about the relationship between the year's main festivals, one religious the other two secular, one traditional the other two contemporary.

During the Corban Festival I attended three occasions of relevance to this article. The first, held in Urumqi on 28 September 1982, was a large-scale function sponsored by the XUAR's CCP Committee, People's

35. "Xinjiang geju xunli" ("A tour of Xinjiang's song operas"), *Xinjiang yishu*, No. 2 (15 March 1982), pp. 55-56.

36. *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), 18 October 1982, p. 3.

37. Di Geng, "Weiwuer zu de wudao," p. 30.

Congress Standing Committee, People's Government and Nationalities Affairs Commission. As such it was entirely secular but specifically held in honour of all three festivals. All the main political and military power-holders were present, including Chairman Ismayil Emet and CCP Central Committee member and XUAR First CCP Secretary Wang Enmao, who as the then first Party secretary had come under such strong attack at the time of the Cultural Revolution. Others among the "more than 800 people"³⁸ present included members of the sponsoring organizations, foreigners and Overseas Chinese.

Apart from several rather short speeches the entire function comprised performances of short pieces of minority nationality and Han art, mainly the former. Although there was a stage in the hall, the audience sat on four sides of a square space in the middle, the high dignitaries on one side, the lesser ones opposite them, and the foreigners and Overseas Chinese on the other two, much less populous sides. In front of all seats were large arrays of fruit, sweets, cakes and *sangza* (*sanzi*), the Moslem delicacy special to Corban. The function began at 6.00 p.m. and ended at 8.30 p.m.

What struck me most strongly about this celebration was the subordination of things Han to minority nationality, especially Uygur. The speeches gave the impression that what really mattered was Corban, not National Day or the XUAR's birth. The Uygur items received far more applause and/or laughter than the Han, including from the Han members of the audience. One newspaper comment was that Corban had "also become an occasion for the display of friendship among the region's [Xinjiang's] various nationalities,"³⁹ and that was clearly the intention of the sponsors.

The following evening, Corban itself, I went to a song-and-dance show in Turpan. In honour of the Festival the performance was free and took place in the town's largest available site, an open-air sports stadium beside the square. The audience was about 1,500 strong, and sat again on four sides of the performers, although the side directly behind them was the only one not crowded. This was a real mass occasion, with many children dressed in red and similar colours. The items were all Uygur in form, apart from two *xiangsheng*, both spoken in Uygur. With few exceptions, the programme was local both in the texture and style of the music and dance as well as in the content, which praised and concerned the Turpan area. Somewhat over half the programme dealt with the present, rather than the past.

The performance began at 9.30 p.m., which is a standard time for theatre shows to start in Xinjiang. The reason why it is so late is that Xinjiang formally observes Beijing time, but by the position of the sun the time should be about two hours earlier. Many Uygurs simply ignore Beijing time. They refer to the time as if there were two hours difference from what the public clocks are showing. In one mosque I visited the clock was set two hours behind Beijing time.

The mention of Islam takes us to the manner in which worshippers are

38. The estimate of *China Daily*, 1 October 1982, p. 3.

39. *Ibid.*

summoned to the mosque at sunrise on the Corban Festival. The third occasion I attended at Corban was just before 8.00 a.m. (Beijing time and hence dawn) outside a small but newly built mosque in Urumqi. For over half an hour as about 150 male worshippers gathered, a *suona* player, standing on the roof of the house next to the mosque, piped Uygur traditional tunes, accompanied by three seated drummers.⁴⁰

The *suona* ensemble is common in Xinjiang at weddings and similar celebrations, the tunes played varied according to the occasion and minority nationality concerned. In connection with Islam one hears it only on the Corban Festival; the afternoon before when it serves the function of announcing the festival to the people; and sometimes at the end of the Ramadan fasting season. It is not part of the regular process of calling worshippers to the mosque on Fridays or other times. The *suona* players and drummers are amateurs, and not members of the mosque staff. The *imam* of the Yanghang Mosque told me that the local Nationalities Affairs Commission had organized the ensemble.

The other social area which traditionally showed the role of song and dance most clearly was weddings, and the same is so today. When at 10.00 a.m. the bridegroom goes to fetch his bride from her house, he and his companions move partly by dancing, to the sound of Uygur musical instruments and song. On the way back to the bridegroom's house, "a group of mischievous young fellows suddenly block the road with a big rope," requiring the bride and bridegroom to perform a song and dance, after which they are given presents before they can proceed. As the guests make merry, partly by singing and dancing, the bride and bridegroom swear lifelong fidelity by drinking together a salt water substance called *tuz su* (*tuzi suyi*, lit. salt water). The bridegroom then taps off the bride's veil with a chopstick, revealing her face. The song and dance reach a climax and the bridal couple are drawn into the ring; just as in the past the pair are expected to display their artistic prowess in song and dance. The festivities continue until nightfall. The accompanying instruments include a variety of stringed and wind Uygur instruments and nowadays quite likely the violin; one absolute certainty is the hand-drum.⁴¹

Despite the great similarities between past and present, there are major respects in which the social framework of music, song and dance performance has undergone radical change. The most obvious and important is its professionalization and the consequent tighter and more highly organized training of the performers. At the same time, the social status of artists has risen enormously.

Before Liberation the great majority of artists were amateurs in the sense that they earned very little or nothing from performing and undertook other work for money if they could. There were also "folk

40. A scene very similar to that described here is depicted in Ma Naihui, et al., *Chūgoku shōsū minzoku no kabu to gakkō* (*The Songs and Dances and Musical Instruments of China's Minority Nationalities*) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe; Tokyo: Minomi, 1981), p. 181.

41. This account is based on Congyongquan, "Fengqing lu, Aximu Reyihan de hunli" ("Record of love: the wedding of Asim and Reihan"), *Minzu huabao* (*Nationalities Pictorial*), No. 12 (December 1981), pp. 28–29. The article is accompanied by many coloured pictures, most showing the important role of song and dance.

artists" (*minjian yiren*) who were only semi-professional even though they might spend a great deal of their waking time playing their musical instruments. Their social status was very low, as it was in all other parts of what is now termed China.

Women were not allowed to become folk artists. Folk dancers and instrumentalists were all male, including those who danced female roles. Training of the next generation of performers was obviously widespread and thorough, since so many people could dance and sing, but there was hardly any formal organization to manage it.

After Liberation, formal state-run troupes were established, beginning with the Literature and Art (Xinjiang Wengong Tuan) in 1950.⁴² Since then the number of professional troupes has developed to over 90 in Xinjiang, most of them performing the art-forms of the Autonomous Region's minority nationalities. The first group of Uygur full-time scale dancers was trained in the Soviet Union during the time when that country influenced the Xinjiang of Sheng Shicai, and women now dominate the dancing profession.

Late in September and early in October 1982 I visited three troupes with special expertise in Uygur arts: the Xinjiang Song Opera Troupe and Song and Dance Troupe (Gewu Tuan) in Urumqi and the Turpan Regional Song and Dance Troupe (Tulufan Diqu Gewu Tuan). The first two are descended from the initial Literature and Art Work Team, the last was set up in 1961.

As with all state professional troupes in China, members of these three receive a formal salary worked out according to a 16-grade scale, which in January 1980 ranged from a high of just over 330 *yuan* to a low of just over 40 *yuan* per month.⁴³ In fact only the most famous artists are at or near the top of the range. The Turpan troupe salaries varied from 115 *yuan* down to 55, with an average of about 65 *yuan*. Members of all three troupes receive the same state benefits as cadres throughout China, which include free health care for the worker and a half rate for his dependants, and 56 days paid maternity leave for women. However, since dancing requires special physical fitness and most dancers are women, the leave may be extended. Actually, the great majority of women dancers give up their job when they marry.

In all three troupes men predominate. Among the Uygurs almost all musicians are male, although inroads are being made by women.

The "leadership" of the Turpan troupe consists of the six top people, the troupe leader (*tuangzhang*), who deals with "thought" work, his deputy (*fu tuangzhang*), in charge of the professional side, and the two senior members of each of the music and dance teams. There is a Party branch, with four members of the Chinese Communist Party, 7.5 per cent of the troupe's total staff.

The procedure followed for deciding what to perform was explained to

42. See *Zhongguo wenyi nianjian*, p. 1174. The troupe was originally attached to the People's Liberation army.

43. For these figures see my *The Performing Arts in Contemporary China* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 185.

me by a Han spoken play troupe in Urumqi, and is almost certainly followed everywhere. The masses and troupe members put forward suggestions, which often include works composed within the company itself. The leadership then vets and decides upon the initial suggestions. The Urumqi play troupe told me of a further stage, namely approval by the local Bureau of Culture (Wenhua Ju), the highest government body at municipal level in charge of art matters.

The Xinjiang Song and Dance Troupe spends about two-thirds of its time performing in the countryside or mines, only one-third in Urumqi. Extensive travel is necessary to reach the masses in Xinjiang, given the vast distances involved.

All this material demonstrates the very close parallels to conditions in other parts of China, and suggests very strong Han influence in Uyghur troupes concerning organization and welfare. One feature is of special interest in minority nationality areas: ethnic composition. The following table gives a breakdown by nationality in the three troupes as precisely as my sources allow:

| | <i>Xinjiang Song and Dance</i> | <i>Xinjiang Song Opera</i> | <i>Turpan Song and Dance</i> |
|--------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Uygurs | 151 | 130 | 43 |
| Han | 75 | 45 | 8 |
| Kazakh | c. 14 | 3 | 0 |
| Uzbek | c. 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Hui | c. 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Others | c. 8 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 252 | 180 | 53 |

The Han are usually the administrators or office-workers, rather than the artists.

One can look at the troupe members' provenance another way by asking how they were trained. The answer is that a small number were folk artists trained before Liberation; and the higher the level of the company the more likely is it that the members received their training outside Xinjiang, mainly Beijing or Shanghai. However, facilities have recently improved in Xinjiang itself so that the number of local recruits is rising and the autonomous region is becoming more independent of outside assistance.

The presence of the folk artists is explained by the fact that the great majority of these semi-professionals entered formal troupes after Liberation. Those who did not are among the artists who play the *suona* or beat the drum at weddings or festival time.

The master-disciple relationship survives in some cases within the troupes themselves, and a musician I met in Turpan called Ufur (Wufuer) told me he teaches his own son to play the dulcimer. But it is no longer as important today in training new performers. There are now amateur

troupes, organized by local culture stations (*wenhua zhan*), and workers' or rural clubs in some of the units of urban and rural Xinjiang. Ufur had himself begun his musical career as an amateur, and the ranks of the professionals include others like him.

But the most important factor in the new Xinjiang training system is the emergence of the art school. There are currently five large ones in Xinjiang at regional or *zhou* (prefectural) level. I interviewed the leaders of that in Urumqi, the Xinjiang School of Arts (Yishu Xuexiao), in late September 1982.

It is a secondary-level institution, set up in 1958,⁴⁴ and comes under the leadership of the autonomous region's Department of Culture (Wenhua Ting), the highest provincial-level government body in charge of culture, directly under the central Ministry of Culture (Wenhua Bu). The school encompasses four areas of speciality: fine arts, music, dance and the spoken play.

The course lasts four years. All students learn general political and education subjects, such as Marxism-Leninism, politics, history and culture. Their special field occupies about 70 per cent of their course time, the general topics about 30 per cent. Classes take place mainly in the Uyghur language, because it is understandable to the students of all minority nationalities, but Chinese is also used extensively.

For the purposes of the present article the music and dance sections are the most important. Training focuses almost entirely on the arts of the minority nationalities, especially the Uygurs. The instruments taught are mainly the traditional ones of the nationalities, except the Han, and there is some instruction in western instruments. These two sections of the school aim at producing people who will join Xinjiang's minority nationality art troupes, hence the lack of instruction in Han musical instruments. As of September 1982 there were 122 students in the Xinjiang School of Arts. Of these some 73 were Uyghur, 37 Han and the remaining dozen or so spread among the Kazakhs, Tajiks, Kirghiz, Xibo, Mongolian and Uzbek nationalities. There is a concentration of Han in the spoken play section, for as mentioned above this is not an art form favoured by the Uygurs.

There is an extremely high teacher-student ratio, with some 110 instructors, of whom 70 are Uygurs and 34 are Han. Many of the Han come from other places, such as Beijing or Shanghai. Initially, there was a flood of Han teachers, but more recently almost all are trained in Xinjiang including a few graduates of this school, and most are from the minority nationalities.

The trend is clearly in the direction of encouraging the Uygurs to dominate and determine virtually all the form and style and part of the content of their own arts. The ethnic composition of the troupes, and especially the school where many future troupe members are trained, appear to suggest this interpretation, especially since the teachers are more and more members of minority nationalities. On the other hand, the

44. See brief notes on the school and its history in *Zhongguo wenyi nianjian*, p. 1175.

presence of leaders in charge of "thought" work and the inclusion of Marxism-Leninism in the curriculum are among factors pointing clearly to the conclusion that the framework remains the ideology of the CCP. How troupe members or students react to this is unclear, since Islam is still strong and one Han official of the Nationalities Affairs Commission told me that about 90 per cent of Uygur members of art troupes were Moslems. I strongly suspect that the situation in the arts companies reflects that in society as a whole, where Chinese Communism and Islam have been forced to recognize and accept each other's influence.

One factor favouring Chinese Communism in the Xinjiang Arts School is the high level of social services. Students' livelihood includes free accommodation, food, health care, and tuition, as well as a subsidy for clothes, determined according to the family circumstances of the individual. Students live in dormitories, four or five to a room.

Teachers at the school also receive free health care and the other social services proper to state cadres. Their average salary is 100 *yuan* per month, moving from a maximum of 200 for the most experienced and senior to a minimum of some 80 *yuan*.

The school reflects the continuing male domination of the arts, though it is much less pronounced than it used to be. Male students outnumber female in a proportion of about 3:2, and teachers about 2:1. Only in the dance field are there more women instructing (22) than men (6). The ratios for the students favour males less sharply than some I was given in theatre schools in other parts of China in January 1980.⁴⁵

Selection of students indicates very fierce competition. Those who wish to attend sit a public examination. The school sends a work group to interview those who do well, which examines their style and habits, talks to their family, and observes their physique and health.

Successful applicants must undertake another examination after a three-month trial period to ensure that they will reach the required standard in terms of their cultural level, physique and health. Between 1 and 2 per cent of original applicants, and about one in six of those who enter the school, pass this examination. Almost all those able to pass this examination graduate from the course.

At the end of their formal training they may express a wish on what job they would like. In the meantime, the various troupes inform the Department or local relevant Bureau of Culture of their requirements. It is the Central Ministry of Culture which approves final allocations, which may or may not follow the graduate's initial wish.

The foregoing discussion on training throws some light on power relations between the Han and other nationalities in the Xinjiang arts. The keen competition to become an artist, the good social services, and the salaries, which on average are on a par, for performers, with those of workers, and for the school's instructors with those of other teachers, all suggest that musicians and dancers enjoy a reasonably high social status. There is still a long way to go, and at the Third Congress of Literature and

45. See Mackerras, *The Performing Arts*, pp. 179-80.

Art Workers in September 1980, Liu Xiaowu said of Xinjiang's "literature and art workers and editorial staff as a whole" that "we should raise their social status, honour their labour and improve their material treatment."⁴⁶ Yet their status and conditions are considerably higher than in the past and are still improving.

Conclusion

The rising social status of performers is one factor pointing to a series of central questions involving contemporary Uygur performing arts. What has been the general effect of life within the borders of the People's Republic of China on the Uygur arts? Do the arts function as a vehicle for Han domination over the Uygurs and are they being deliberately sinicized to that end? Or conversely, do the Uygurs see the arts as being able to preserve and strengthen their own national identity, and if so how do the Han view this?

The fact that Xinjiang is not independent, nor part of the Soviet Union, but an autonomous region with the People's Republic of China has brought about three main results. One is that Han control over Xinjiang has strengthened, simply because the central Chinese government is stronger now than at most other periods in recent history, and the Han population has grown in size relative to the other nationalities through immigration. Secondly, socialist influence has spread simply because of the CCP's Marxist philosophy. Thirdly, there has been an attempt to direct Uygur attentions and sympathies away from the Soviet Union and other outside countries. This is important, although probably less so for the Uygurs than the Kazakhs or other minority nationalities more numerous on the Soviet side of the border. Cultural affinities inevitably play a role in a sensitive border area, because of the government's fear that they will lead some of the people under its control to pay loyalty according to cultural ties, not political boundaries.

Han influence has long been felt in the arts of the Uygurs, but it became stronger after Liberation because of the larger number of Han teachers in the arts and because of the stronger presence of Han theatre and other performing arts in Xinjiang. The information presented earlier suggests that the direct influence of Han teachers is again declining, but only after they have had their general framework and methodology accepted.

The issue of socialism is clearly related to that of Han influence because the particular brand of communism which currently prevails in Xinjiang comes directly from China, not the Soviet Union. Yet it is a distinct issue because the Uygurs could quite easily accept socialism, but reject the Han.

In fact, the specific ways in which socialist influence has been felt in the Uygur performing arts are clearly part and parcel of the Han impact. Xinjiang is subject to the changes in arts policy emanating from Beijing. It was affected by Jiang Qing's total politicization of the arts, as seen in the content of folk songs and dances during the Cultural Revolution. It is

46. "Tuanjieqilai, tongxin tongde," *Xinjiang wenxue*, p. 17.

enjoying the milder political climate of the 1980s, and the revival of tradition is a feature of Han China as well as of the Uygur arts.

Another change which shows Han and socialist influence as identical to each other is the rise in social status of performers, the better social services for the profession and the organization of artists into formal troupes. Contemporary Chinese Communism looks askance at the freely wandering artist. It seeks to control him both for his own good, because it does not wish him to suffer humiliation or want, but also for its own benefit in that it sees an influence on the people which it would like used in the direction of socialism. The point carries all the more weight among a people to whom singing and dancing mean as much as they do to the Uygurs. Any regime which treats artists well can begin to win over not only the performers but also the people who enjoy their art.

The greater organization of the art schools and troupes has professionalized the Uygur arts to an enormous extent. Of course, the amateurs are still strong. The people still hold *mexreps*, especially at festival time, and dance and sing *en masse*, the amateur *suona* players still pipe from the rooftops to drum accompaniment. But the overall balance has clearly shifted decisively towards the professionals. They will not only provide a larger proportion of performances than ever before, but will also affect the standard of the amateur which will need to be more polished than in the past. The process inevitably affects the texture of the performing arts and is most certainly the result of Han socialism.

The forms of the performing arts have grown in number. A full-scale song opera was performed among the Uygurs nine years before the first such Han effort. But it has been Han socialism that has encouraged the new form for most of the first half century of its existence. Without the professional troupes to perform song operas, they could never have grown among the Uygurs.

Do all these developments amount to Han suppression of Uygur culture? Are they a political ploy to ensure Han domination of the Uygurs? Perhaps the evidence may have supported such a conclusion in the decade of the Cultural Revolution but does not do so in the 1980s. The Han at present appear to be leaving artistic matters to Uygurs in the troupes and art schools, although the presence of "ideological" directors shows they will permit no departure from the current CCP line in political affairs. Despite strong Han and socialist influence in the professionalization of the Uygur arts, the content remains essentially Uygur. The language used is Uygur. Even the strong male dominance of the orchestras survives with little change.

There is little doubt that the Uygurs guard their national identity very jealously and resist any onslaughts upon it. There is still a school of thought which denies that Xinjiang is an inalienable part of China and demands the right of secession.⁴⁷ Most Uygurs probably do not object to certain types of Han influence, but this does not mean that the unity of

47. See, for instance, a letter dated 10 December 1981 addressed to Zhao Ziyang in *Tibetan Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 1 (January 1984), pp. 14-18. It lists 31 demands on the Chinese Government, the first being the right of secession of East Turkistan from China.

which official documents speak is a reality. The Uygurs will fight fiercely against any attempt to dilute their culture, especially their performing arts. They may dwell in China, but their culture is more Turkish than Han. The revival of Islam is one manifestation of this feeling. The Uygurs are emphasizing certain differences from the Han.

Another manifestation is the return to certain forms of traditional culture. I instance the mushrooming of periodicals containing Xinjiang minority nationality literature, the revival of traditional customs and dances and interest in the *Twelve Mukams*. Basically the Han people are prepared to go along with these feelings of Uygur national identity, in fact there is no alternative, but boundaries exist which may not be crossed.

However, the speeches I have quoted suggest that the authorities believe the emphasis on tradition is a little too strong. There appears to be no difference in written documents between Han and Uygur officials on this issue, but that is not surprising since Han control is still certainly strong enough that no Uygur could rise to real power who espoused local nationalism. Thus, neither a Uygur nor a Han power-holder would tolerate any suspicion of secessionist sentiments in the performing arts, though it is likely, despite their public statements, that Uygur cultural leaders are actually more sympathetic to traditions reinforcing the national identity of the Uygurs than their Han counterparts.

I have argued elsewhere that the process of modernization will damage the traditional performing arts in China⁴⁸ – and believe the same applies to at least some of the minority nationalities, for instance the Mongolians. The Uygur tradition is stronger, modernization less far advanced than among the Mongolians. The Uygurs want modernization, which brings a higher standard of living, but they will not in the foreseeable future sacrifice cultural or national identity for it. The dichotomy is not yet a real one, but it will be ironical if the cultural tradition ends up as an obstacle to modernization.

48. Mackerras, *The Performing Arts*, pp. 211-14.