5. Big Bad Wolf: Masculinity and Heroes in Modern Uyghur Literature

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Abstract: Men were the cornerstone of the Uyghur family and society and the core of the cultural and economic system in Xinjiang. Shifting power dynamics within Uygur society and the rise of Uyghur women have weakened the traditional role of Uyghur men. In the daily reality, Uyghur men are discriminated against in employment, education, housing, and political representation by the Han. This inferiority has led to the emphasis on physical masculine traits as an ethnonational symbol aiming to represent Han man as "feminine" and "weak" compared with the "masculine" Uyghur man. This chapter defines the representation of Uyghur masculinity through contemporary Uyghur literature. The literary space is an oasis of manhood in which the authors, mostly men, can, on the one hand, debate their decreasing status and, on the other, create an "imagined hegemony" in order to secure and preserve their culture.

Keywords: Xinjiang, masculinity, Uyghur, China, literature

"One cannot always be a hero, but one can always be a man."
(Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)

Every culture presents its model of masculinity, stylized according to its local history, religion, and customs. Although masculinity is an inseparable part of the patriarchy typical of some Muslim cultures in general, and a central component of Uyghur identity in particular, Uyghur masculinity has not been deeply researched.[1] Masculinity comes into play in the earliest stages

1 For research on Uyghur masculinity, see Bellér-Hann 1998; Byler, 2021; Dautcher 2009; Smith Finley 2013; Zang 2012.

Jarmila Ptáčková and Ondřej Klimeš (eds), *Cultural Security in Contemporary China and Mongolia*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2025
DOI: 10.5117/9789463722889_CH05

of a Uyghur boy's life. His "masculinity" and maleness are constantly related to by the women in his environment: mother, grandmothers, aunts, sisters. The Uyghur boy spends his childhood in games meant to determine his "masculine" status among his peers. Masculinity is reinforced through games and competitions which continue throughout the adolescent's and young man's life and are an essential aspect of the way male socializing functions in the *meshrep*,[2] a traditional male gathering that usually occurs during celebrations and includes music, dancing, and customary performances, and in the drinking binges that mark family and community events (see Dautcher 2009; Thwaites 2005).

Muslim masculinity takes various forms. Like any other identity, male identities are changed and shaped by the economy, politics, culture, and demography (see Ouzgane 2013; De Sondy 2013). At the same time, there is a religious context that underpins Muslim masculinity, which is also manifested in the Uyghur case. Uyghur masculinity draws its status from traditional values and customs which conventionally delineate the man's function as head of the family and provider of its livelihood (Byler 2021, 23) in contrast to women, who manage household tasks and care for their children and their elderly parents (Bellér-Hann 1998). The Uyghur man was traditionally perceived by Uyghur society as independent and dominant, and was supposed to be able to demonstrate strength and resilience in times of pressure and distress (Zang 2012, 21–23). As Byler has mentioned in his recent book, in contemporary Xinjiang, young Uyghur men demonstrate their masculinity not by dominating women, as was customary among the older generation, but by protecting each other from government discrimination and persecution. These changes preserve the significant role of men as resilient protectors. In Zang's (2021, 25) study on the perception of masculinity and femininity among the Uyghurs, men and women both defined the trait of self–sufficiency as most important in a man, and these findings are in line with the patriarchal hegemony of many Muslim societies. There are hierarchical norms of obedience to the older generation, but men are required to demonstrate more self-reliance than women. This is interesting not just in the context of gender but also in a political-economic context, because the Uyghur man of today is neither self-sufficient nor independent. Perhaps this reality is what accounts for Uyghur society assigning this trait prime importance in the perception of Uyghur masculinity, yet it demonstrates the disparity between the masculine image and the actual status of Uyghur men.

2 Unless otherwise stated, all terms in italics in this chapter are in Uyghur.

I propose viewing Uyghur masculinity, as it is portrayed in Uyghur literature, as an "imagined hegemony" in which Uyghur males experience superiority over Han males. The former draw their hegemony from an implied representation of Han men as "effeminate" and therefore fearful of Uyghur men.[3] In this way, the Uyghur preserve a stereotype of thuggery and violence. Uyghur masculinity is "imagined hegemony" since it is currently based primarily on external manly characteristics, such as a large physique and facial hair. In the everyday reality of Xinjiang, the status of Uyghur men is weakening under Han majority hegemony. Uyghur men feel inferior to their Han counterparts who, in addition to being the dominant group are also given preference in employment, studies, residential options, and political representation in Xinjiang (Pannell and Schmidt 2006; Bovingdon 2011; Roberts 2016).

Uyghur men's sense of inferiority has led them to preserve, and even reinforce, physical markers of masculinity to strengthen their status and eclipse Han men, at least in this respect. The external traits emphasize the potency of Uyghur masculinity relative to Han masculinity, the latter traditionally presenting a more "feminine" male model in external appearance (Baranovitch 2007, 73–74). This representation can also be interpreted as defiance in light of attempts to present minorities in China as effeminate and thus inferior, whether in works of art, literature, or popular culture. By presenting minorities as sexual, primitive, feminine, and exotic, those works accentuate that the Han are superior, modern, and dominant by comparison (see Dautcher 2000; Friederich 2007).

This chapter deals with the struggle over the Uyghur male's status as manifest in Uyghur literature during the current period of reforms, which began in 1978. The most popular genre in modern Uyghur literature, which rose in the 1980s, was realism. It dealt with the changes in the cities and villages in Xinjiang during the reform era or depicted significant historical events. At the same time, there was also a return to more traditional genres, and even avant-garde literature began to develop during this period (Friederich 2007, 103–5; Zelcer–Lavid 2018, 568–69). The new literary style was not accepted by readers, who could not identify with it, or by critics, who opposed its rawness (Sulitan 2003, 84; Chao 2005, 73).

The political policies of the region have influenced the literary climate in Xinjiang. During the 1980s it was more acceptable to engage in sensitive issues, such as Uyghur history, as long as there were no direct nationalist

3 For Han Chinese "soft" masculinity and attitudes toward minority masculinities, see Hillman and Henfrey 2006, 254–56.

manifestations. The situation changed in the mid-1990s with the Strike Hard against Violent Terrorist Activities (*yanli daji baoli kongbu huodong*) campaign the government launched in response to the unrest in the region (Dillon 2004, 84–92). This campaign and those which followed it were officially declared a struggle against terrorism and religious extremism. The Uyghurs perceived them as assimilation attempts. The tight governmental control affected the literary scene, as authors were persecuted for expressing nationalistic or religious sentiments (Zelcer-Lavid 2021, 5).

The notable change occurred in 2017, when massive oppression began in Xinjiang (see Roberts 2018; Zenz 2019). Many Uyghur intellectuals, including writers, were arrested and sent to detention camps. This situation influenced Uyghur culture and led to an inevitable decline in literary production in contemporary Xinjiang. The widespread wave of arrests endangers the status and image of Uyghur men and, to a large degree, excludes them from the public space. However, in the absence of a literary discourse on the subject, it is impossible to discuss literary expressions reflecting the current dilemmas of gender and masculinity.

Through analysis of literary works written mainly in the 1990s and early 2000s and interviews with authors, this chapter proposes a definition of how masculinity is represented in Uyghur literature.[4] Uyghur masculinity can be approached from various perspectives and is a vital part of the Uyghur cultural identity. This cultural identity is under constant threat from the ruling Han culture. The regime has an interest in changing the social dynamics associated with Islamic values, and men's high status is seen as a tangible threat to loyalty to the government. In this context, Uyghur masculinity faces several challenges. Some stem from the forced adoption of Han culture via the education system, the media, and local government. Others are the result of economic policies and modernization, which have changed various aspects of the traditional way of life, men's role in society among them. This has led to a loss of status among Uyghur men, which is considered by many Uyghur authors to endanger local cultural values and prevailing family traditions.

The various literary works selected for this chapter demonstrate how these challenges are seen through the eyes of Uyghur authors and portrayed by their protagonists within the limits of politically permissible discourse in China. These works are representative examples of various aspects related to the status of the Uyghur men in Uyghur popular literature published in

4 This chapter is partly based on fieldwork conducted in Xinjiang in autumn 2006, during which I interviewed Uyghur authors and poets for my doctoral dissertation exploring ethno-national identity in contemporary Uyghur and Tibetan literature.

recent decades. Muhemmed Baghrash's story depicts issues related to family, livelihood, and the place of religion in contemporary culture. The poem of Abdulehed Abdurishit Berqi deals with the continuity and preservation of the past. Memtimin Hoshur's story describes the prevailing view of the government that Uyghur men pose a threat to public peace. The literary discussion around male roles and status is a type of indicator vis-à-vis the state of Uyghur society in general. The diminution in men's status is an inevitable process, and it is not singular to Xinjiang, but is undoubtedly of significance due to the Han male hegemony over Uyghur males. The gender discourse thus becomes a national discourse on the place of traditional Uyghur culture under the dominant regime.

The link between masculinity and nationalism is based on control and power balances which began towards the end of the nineteenth century in the West simultaneous to the definition of both terms (Mosse 1996, 7). Both masculinity and nationalism are based on hegemony, whether that is the hegemony of a nation over its own country, the hegemony of men over women, or the hegemony of men over other men viewed as inferior (Nagel 1998, 251). In the colonialist era, native men were represented in a way that was meant to justify their suppression by white men. As such, their representation accentuated their "violent and explosive" masculinity, which was perceived as a threat to white women and was positioned as oppositional to the refined masculinity of the white man, the ruling class (Dasgupta and Gokulsing 2013, 8). The cultural representation of Uyghur males, which mostly emphasizes physical, macho characteristics, was not generated by the state (which does, however, represent their masculinity as "dangerous")[5] but by Uyghurs themselves. This is the space in which they preserve a certain kind of control, even if it is only imagined.

Another focus of this chapter is the gap between traditional patriarchal values and socialist values that promote, if only rhetorically, gender equality. One of the reasons for the significance of masculinity in Uyghur literature is that most of the popular authors are men. These authors, among them men born in the 1940s and 1950s, saw how their parents preserved the patriarchal model in their homes while having to take part in political campaigns of the Mao period which, inter alia, called for gender equality and promoted the concept that "women hold up half the sky" (see Yang and Yan 2017). This contradiction became more acute with the start of the reforms in 1978 when, while traditions and culture were being restored, far-reaching social and economic changes were simultaneously taking place which weakened the

5 For Han/Uyghur stereotypes, see Smith Finley 2013, 125–29.

status of men as the providers and heads of families. The more modernized and independent Uyghur women became, the more Uyghur men felt a need to reinforce their masculine image in order to maintain the traditional ethnic traits of Uyghur society and the status of men in that society.

Moustaches, Knives, and Wolves: Literary Representations of Masculinity

The predominant model of masculinity in Xinjiang was influenced by Turkic Muslim culture, which considers the hair of the head and body a simultaneously religious and sexual symbol (Delaney 1994, 161). In Muslim culture, women were obligated to cover their hair once they had reached sexual maturity as a sign of sexual restraint and of being under the patronage of their fathers and, later, their husbands. Men, by contrast, nurtured their hair as one of the signs that they belonged to society (Alimen 2018, 116). Many young men groom moustaches to display their vitality and virility (Bromberger 2008, 381). Adult men who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca grow a beard on their return from *hajj*, since a beard constitutes an important status symbol which not everyone is worthy of bearing. Young men with beards are therefore viewed as rebellious, heretics, and harming the status of adults (Delaney 1994, 168). Uyghur tradition is similarly replete with myths and customs related to hair. Women's hair was known to be alluring and was a symbol of sexuality and fertility, while men's hair was religious, political, and a status symbol (Bellér-Hann 2004, 26–29).

With the revival of Uyghur culture following the destructive outcome of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) and the relative liberalization of the 1980s, a return to traditional customs began to take place.[6] Growing a beard was identified with Islam. The PRC authorities considered this a marker of religious loyalty which threatened loyalty to China. For this reason, people in positions of public service or education were prohibited from having a beard (Leibold and Grose 2016, 95). As part of the current cultural and religious oppression in Xinjiang, in 2015 the government announced religious restrictions that included, among other things, a ban on "abnormal beard" growth.[7] A long beard was seen as a sign of religious extremism,

6 One such tradition is the pilgrimage to Mecca, which has become more popular since the late 1990s (Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China 2000, 257).

7 Women were also subject to restrictions regarding dress and fashion as part of "Project Beauty," launched in 2011. The project aimed to change the look of traditional Uyghur woman to

and already in 2013–14 was a cause for "re-education" in certain areas in southern Xinjiang (Zenz 2019, 105).

Since growing a beard placed severe limitations on employment options, nurturing a moustache became an even more important symbol of masculinity, eventually becoming the most popular external symbol of masculinity among the Uyghur (Bellér-Hann 2002, 69). The moustache signifies cultural affiliation while also distinguishing Uyghur men from Han men. The story *Burut Majirasi* (The Moustache Dispute) by Memtimin Hoshur (1944–) is instructive vis-à-vis the importance of the moustache as a symbol of masculinity while simultaneously exposing the "imagined hegemony" of Uyghur masculinity.

This story from the 1990s is written in the first person with Hoshur's characteristic blend of humor and cynicism. The author was born in Ghulja and completed his studies at the Department of Literature and Language at Xinjiang University in 1967. In the 1970s, he served as a clerk in the government of the Ili region. From 1979 to 1995, he was involved in the world of creative writing and edited the literary journal, *Ili Deryasi* (The Ili River). After becoming known as an author, he served as the chair of the Xinjiang Writers Association from 1995 to 2006 and as a member of the China Writers Association. He is one of the most renowned Uyghur authors in China, and his stories have been translated into Chinese, publicized in important journals, and earned prestigious literary awards. It is important to note, however, that Uyghur authors are not overly popular in China, and most are unfamiliar to Han readers.

As in other stories by Hoshur, right at the outset the narrator encounters the story's protagonist, who gives him a manuscript that details the events of his life. The anonymous protagonist asks that the narrator publish the story in his name. This allows Hoshur to write in the first person without the narrative being tied to him. It is a style which provides relative freedom due to the author's senior status and familiarity in Uyghur society. The technique adds to the narrative's authenticity, which in retrospect reflects the life of a regular person, someone with whom the reader can easily identify.

At the center of the plot conveyed by the anonymous storyteller is a knife battle whose nature becomes clearer as the narrative progresses. The speaker, who is the plot's hero, hears about the incident from the local police officer, who asks the protagonist to make a list of everyone with a moustache. This is because a large-bodied man with a handlebar moustache committed murder in broad daylight in the city market. The speaker is so pressured by

that of a "modern woman." All veiling styles have been banned since 2015, and there is constant pressure on Uyghur women to adopt Chinese fashion norms (see Grose 2020).

this instruction that he quickly shaves off his own moustache, and demands that his firstborn, Ahmetjan, who has a resplendent moustache, do likewise, out of fear that they will be accused of a crime that not only they did not commit but eventually has never occurred:

> I fingered my moustache, short, sparse; it could hardly really be called a moustache. I calmed down and returned to my yard. My son sat beneath the awning polishing his shoes. When I saw him, I could hardly prevent myself from seething with rage: how had I not noticed that he had grown a moustache, thick and large?
> "Ahmetjan, look at me!"
> "What?" he glanced, distracted.
> Allah in heaven! Beneath my son's nose a small collar wiggled, a thick black moustache. If he didn't shave it, within four days it would reach his ears.
> "Today you're going to get rid of that!"
> "What did you say?"
> "I said, 'That's your moustache.'"
> "Why does my moustache bother you, father? Don't you have a moustache too? Not all men these days …"
> "Better you should shut up! Listen, both of us are going right away to the barber to shave our moustaches."
> Actually, I don't care, but for my son to shave his moustache is like chopping off his head. This time I am implementing all my authority as a father. I never even allowed him, when he begged, to take a photo as a keepsake. I pushed him into the barber to shave that "collar" beneath his nose. (Maimaitiming Wushou'er 2001, 170–71)[8]

As the father suspected, the barber squealed on everyone who chose to shave their moustaches that day, and the father was summoned to an investigation in the new mayor's offices. Upset by the investigation, that night he shouts in his sleep, signaling a nightmare. His wife is disturbed and wakes him, and he relates the following dream:

> I dreamt that we were both seated on the *supa*.[9] You were preparing the wool. I asked what you were making, and you said you were unravelling

8 The story was translated from Chinese. An excerpt from the story was translated from Uyghur by Darren Byler and Mutellip Enwer (2014, 1697–1771). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

9 A raised plank which in China is called *kang* and serves as a bed. In traditional Uyghur homes this plank is an inseparable part of the *dalan*, the family living area (see Dautcher 2009).

> old clothes in order to make new ones for the children. I thought for a moment and said, happily, "Can you unravel me and reknit me?" Don't laugh, now; that's exactly what I said. And you said, "I can unravel you, but when I reknit you, there'll be remnants and you'll be smaller." "It's better if I'm smaller, so I beg of you, unravel me, and reknit me, before the light of day rises." After you promised, you undressed me, placed me on the *kang*, and began to unravel the soles of my feet. I felt a tingling in the area you worked on, but no pain. I lay comfortably and when you reached my neck, the thread became a tie. You didn't hear me scream and continued to pull on the thread. I felt myself choking, I waved my arms every which way. I opened my eyes, aggravated, and realized it was a nightmare and you were standing facing the *kang*. (Maimaitiming Wushou'er 2001, 173)

In Uyghur tradition, dreams about hair carry symbolic significance. A dream about cutting the hair of the head foretells good fortune and anticipated wealth. By contrast, a dream about cutting the beard is a bad sign portending loss of social status (Bellér-Hann 2004, 29). In his dream, the hero is not shorn; rather, his entire body is unraveled into threads which are meant to be reshaped into a new man. The dream describes the difficulty that the speaker feels when he must rid himself of the markers of his masculinity: his moustache and physical size, which are comparable to those of the murder suspect. Before shaving his moustache, the hero tells the policeman that he grew a moustache only because he felt ashamed of his oldest son growing one while he himself had not. After shaving his moustache, he began to sense its importance, and blamed himself for being so hasty because he felt persecuted for having a moustache and a large body.

His masculine characteristics become, in the dream, a tie that chokes him, threatening his very life. The fact that it is his wife who is unravelling the threads for the purpose of knitting a new, small-bodied man contributes to the dream's symbolism. The narrator feels threatened by the mayor, who represents the government, and by his wife, who represents changes in Uyghur society. The narrator feels he is losing his masculine identity and, as later becomes apparent, his Uyghur identity as well, but his cries are not heard.

In the mayor's office, the nature of the market incident is clarified. Several youngsters attacked a man who, in reaction, drew his knife. After they got control of that knife, he drew another, which they also took from him. He drew a third, larger blade. The vegetable seller from the adjacent stall began screaming and everyone fled. No one was hurt, and no murder was committed. In a bag discovered near the scene of the event, fourteen large

knives and several sharpening tools were found, which roused the mayor's concern and fury:

> The mayor slammed his fist down on the table, shoved his chair back as he stood, and said to me, "Know what? People who grow moustaches always have a knife on them. Just when we wanted to list all the men with moustaches you go and shave yours! It's not such a simple matter. Do you think that what happened in the street on Sunday is just regular bedlam? No! [...] These days several knife wielders are out there trying once more to do something stupid. Who can be sure that they aren't doing bad things?" (Maimaitiming Wushou'er 2001, 175)

The mayor presents stereotypical mustachioed Uyghur males as "troublemakers." This stereotype derives from the Han image of the Uyghurs as criminals, thieves, and drug dealers (Kaltman 2007, 75). The image of young Uyghur adults with evident facial hair, hatted, their shirts open halfway down their chests and long knives in sheaths hung in the back of their belts, would also have aroused the indignation of the Uyghur by reinforcing the prevalent stereotype in China vis-à-vis "uncultured" minorities (Bellér-Hann 2002, 69). For many Uyghurs, however, this image of danger is a source of ethnic pride.

The image manifests in the Chinese paraphrasing of the Uyghur word *bala*, meaning "boy." Han call young Uyghurs *balangzi*, which contains the Chinese word *lang*, meaning "wolf." Dautcher has explained that this is a demeaning epithet which paints Uyghur youth as wild animals waiting for their innocent prey. Han parents use the concept *balangzi* to scare their children into obedience (2009, 64).[10] The term is not linked specifically to the Uyghur people but to a type of wolfman which will punish children who do not behave properly, yet it promotes the embedding of the stereotype of Uyghurs as dangerous people.

Uyghur masculinity is empowered by the image of the dangerous Uyghur male. The national symbol of the wolf additionally contributes to reinforcing the male image. In various legends, the grey wolf is considered the savior of ancient Uyghurs; in some legends, it is even the Uyghur people's ancient father (Wei and Luckert 1998, 70–71). In Hoshur's story, this masculinity threatens the mayor, who demonstrates how it is rooted in the Uyghur people's history

10 The term *balangzi* can be written in several ways in Chinese. Dautcher notes this version in his study of the use of the word "wolf" 巴狼子 (2009, 64). My Uyghur informants emphasized that it can also be written 巴郎子 or even 巴浪子 and the meaning remains identical (see also Giulia Cabras' chapter in this volume).

when he describes how Alexander the Great (Iskandar), passing through the region with his army, encountered a band of Uyghur knifemen who "without intending to, could let a knife fly and hit you right between the eyes, and your guts would spill out" (Maimaitiming Wushou'er 2001, 175). The mayor goes on to note that the gang joined Chinggis Khan on his travels westward, thereby alluding to the importance of Uyghur involvement in the creation of the Mongolian Empire (see Millward 2007, 64). His suspicions and criticism of the mustachioed knife wielders strengthen the image of Uyghur males for the reader. These historic references glorify Uyghur warriors and explain why they are perceived as a threat by the government.

In "The Moustache Dispute," Hoshur establishes the reader's impression of Uyghur masculinity only to shatter that image and disclose Uyghur men's weakness. The story's protagonist withdraws into his home for two months, fearing the regime. Eventually plucking up some courage, he decides to go out. In the street, he is shocked to encounter the mayor sporting a moustache in full view. The mayor updates the protagonist on the real nature of the knife battle:

> "Oh, we were so stupid then. We scared a great many people—you were also one of them!?! That stutterer hit us hard."
> "What stutterer are you talking about?"
> "Didn't you hear? The man with the large moustache who held the knives, in the street. Well, it turns out he worked in the butcher's shop. That day, the electronic sharpener broke down, so he collected all the butchers' knives and went to sharpen them. Three pickpockets surrounded him on the bus and stole his money. The stutterer discovered that his wallet had been stolen, got off the bus, chased after them and caught one. Because he couldn't explain clearly to passers-by what was happening, he held onto the fellow and didn't let him go. The pickpockets hit him and wanted to flee. The stutterer drew a knife, he was so nervous … and that's all there is to the story." (Maimaitiming Wushou'er 2001, 177–78)

The man who the mayor thought was the murderer is actually revealed to have been the victim and, despite his threatening external appearance, to have had no connection with the Uyghur male image and the knife handlers of long ago who could easily overpower Alexander the Great. Thus, the author exposes the disparity between the heroes of the past and the current Uyghur male.

The image of a stuttering Uyghur man can be interpreted as a metaphor for the state of the Uyghur in China. The stuttering Uyghur man could not

explain the injustice done to him and was forced to protect himself from the pickpockets, but as soon as he did, he became a murder suspect. Like the stutterer, the Uyghurs are prevented from voicing the injustices they feel are done to them by the regime and the Han. They are often perceived as "troublemakers" and "dangerous" despite the fact that according to them, they are fighting for their basic rights (Clarke 2010). Neither the narrator's image nor that of the "murderer" is a model of masculinity. To top it all off, the mayor is revealed to be a "fake male."

The mayor explains that he grew a moustache because he was criticized for persecuting moustache wearers. Like other Uyghur leaders, up until then the mayor avoided growing a moustache as a way of demonstrating his loyalty to the regime. After coming across the mayor, the narrator sees the policeman, who explains that the mayor, unable to grow a moustache, took a false one from the culture department and glued it on, hoping thereby to counter the criticism levelled at him. The narrator ends the story by expressing great wonder at all this. The significance of the events in the marketplace increases when the mayor is revealed as unable to grow a moustache. The reader is left wondering if the mayor went after men with moustaches out of envy and a sense of inferiority over not being a real man like them.

External and internal criticism are both expressed in this story, which is made possible by the author's particular writing style. Hoshur's skill enables him to level criticism at the social, economic, political, and cultural reality in a way that can be interpreted as merely humorous rather than political. According to Arzugül, a Uyghur literary reviewer, Memtimin Hoshur's humor reflects Uyghur culture. Thus, she signals that anyone not fully conversant with this culture in general, and Ili's local culture in particular, may not understand the satire, the absurdity, the wit in these stories (Aiziguli 2000, 48).

Hoshur's humor, however, is presented to the Chinese reader in a non-threatening light. It is reasonable to assume that once translated into Chinese, the story might lose some of its original style (as is customary in the process of any translation). The political criticism, however, is clear and integrated into the story's cynical style. At the outset, the anonymous author expresses his surprise and puzzlement at the instruction to register all moustache wearers. The story presents this instruction as bizarre and intended to persecute the Uyghur people, just like the prohibition against beards. Little did he know that this satire would become a reality and that growing a long beard would be banned entirely in Xinjiang from 2015.

The moustache becomes, for the Uyghur people and the regime, a political tool. The moustache serves as a form of political defiance which threatens

not only Han masculinity but also the public agenda.[11] Registering moustache wearers weakens the moustache's importance as an ethnic symbol since the act of growing a moustache is thereby placed under the regime's supervision. The decision to grow a moustache is wrested from the Uyghur male and integrated into the hegemony, which clarifies how Uyghur masculinity, seemingly presented as dangerous, is no more than "imagined hegemony."

Memtimin Hoshur cynically links the legendary band of warriors who attacked Alexander the Great's army, fighting alongside Chinggis Khan, to modern, stuttering men with thick moustaches and blunt knives meant for slaughtering sheep rather than courageous fighting. The author's criticism becomes even sharper when it is directed towards the mayor, whose senior political role is understood as being no more than that of a collaborator. Thus, even if the mayor does not belong to the Han hegemony, he has aligned himself with it, at least externally. This perception becomes clearer at the story's close, when it becomes apparent that the mayor is unable to grow a moustache and is therefore not a "man" of equivalent stature to mustachioed Uyghur men.

Between Tradition and Modernity: Masculinity and Family Values

Uyghur men are represented in literature not only by physical traits but also by values such as patriarchy and morality. A Uyghur man should act as a family man, a religious adherent, and culturally loyal, as opposed to the implied typical Han man. Often, this expectation is the pivot of a dispute concerning the place of tradition in current material reality. The rapid economic changes in Xinjiang have triggered constant conflict among Uyghur men, who have to balance their place in the family against the need to establish their status in society.

Uyghur literature written since the 1980s describes Uyghur society's difficulty in adapting to modernization in the current period of reforms. This is one of the central topics of work by Muhemmed Baghrash (1952–2013).[12] As a youngster, the Qarasheher-born Baghrash worked as an actor and dancer in a local theatre, and a truck driver on the Xinjiang–Tibet line. He reached Ürümchi in 1981 and began writing stories while simultaneously working at the local newspaper (Baghrash, personal communication, October 7,

11 On the historical link between the moustache and Turkic politics, see Delaney 1994, 168.

12 Muhemmed Baghrash is the pseudonym of the author Muhemmed Osman.

2006). Initially employing the social realist style popular during Mao's rule, Baghrash's early stories realistically describe Uyghur society, focusing primarily on farmers and laborers. These stories won him awards, were translated into Chinese, and were published in leading Chinese literary journals.

Baghrash's story *Kamalidin*[13] describes modernization's penetration into the Uyghur village in the 1980s and the consequences of economic policy for the morals and values of traditional society. The plot occurs in a village situated on a riverbank. Despite being underdeveloped, without flowing water and electricity, the village is described as appealingly pastoral. Residents care for each other, and everyone is happy with the little they have. One day, Adi, an entrepreneur born in the village many years ago, returns to open a restaurant there. Now in his mid-forties, his departure during the communist period was a result of his recruitment to help other men build a dam. At the outset of the economic reforms, he returns together with his foreign wife, who is not conversant with local customs. She uses heavy make-up and flirts with other men.

The restaurant quickly becomes the village's central meeting spot. Adi purposely shocks the village elders with various stories and actions, hoping they will not return to the restaurant, where they had been hanging around all day without ordering anything. Nevertheless, the village elders return and young folk love to listen to his tales too. One of them, a frequent visitor, is the protagonist, Kamalidin, the younger son of a highly respected villager. Kamalidin is described as a serious, obedient young man who respects the old customs and is greatly esteemed in the village. He is drawn to Adi's bold anecdotes about life in the metropolis:

> In Ürümchi's craze of smoking and drinking, men and women spend time together at parties, dancing and embracing. If you're willing to spend some forty to fifty yuan, you can spend the night with an educated whore [...] If you've got money, no one can call you a hillbilly. If you've got money, you can meet the prettiest, most modern girls. (Bagelaxi 2006, 40)

Some time later, Kamalidin begins to re-evaluate his own life. The small gloomy room he shares with his wife, his children, and his parents feels like a prison. He has trouble leaving the restaurant and heading back home. He begins to aspire to become wealthy:

13 The story was translated into Chinese and published in the *Nationalities Literature* journal (Chinese: *Minzu wenxue*) in 2006. It is based on the novella *Kelkün* [The Flood], written in the 1990s.

> But not for a corrupt life; rather, in order to live. Money can get you everything. People without money aren't considered people. Money is the omnipotent god. If it can give us a little grace, the whole village would have everything: TVs, movies, electricity, cars, new homes, new boots. (Bagelaxi 2006, 41)

The village's opportunity arrives in the form of a city entrepreneur who expresses a wish to buy it. The entrepreneur is described as corrupt and rich, and Kamalidin is happy he's a farmer rather than a city dweller. The message is that farmers have purer morals, authenticity, and integrity than city folk. But the tale quickly takes an unexpected turn. Although the entrepreneur has been pursuing Adi's wife, Adi invites him to a drinking session during which he closes a deal. Thereafter, Adi invites all the village's residents to work for him, offering them a chance to earn money by producing mats from the reeds growing on the river bank.

Adi's proposal is viewed with mixed feelings by the villagers. Kamalidin is torn between his wish to earn money and his wish to obey his father, who is suspicious of Adi's economic initiative. If he chooses to work for Adi, it will be against the wishes of his father, who is afraid of the government's reaction to this questionable private initiative. It may lead to a rift in his family. The dilemma Kamalidin finds himself in is analogous to that of all Uyghur men: he can uphold traditional values or pursue the promise of a better life at the price of adopting modern values.

> At worst, my wife and I will live separately. What? How will we live separately? My parents are still alive. To live separately and betray them? Even an animal wouldn't do such a thing. It's a sin [...] If father only knew, he'd die of fury [...] No, I'll do it, nonetheless. A real man must take the chance. Why behave like a woman? I want to earn money, money! (Bagelaxi 2006, 49)

Kamalidin fears that if he opposes his father's views, it will lead to a split in the family. The traditional custom of living with the husband's parents remained common into the 1990s among the rural population of Xinjiang (as in other rural areas of China). Breaking the custom is considered a stain on the family's honor and leads to social ostracism. As the plot develops, Kamalidin is not required to choose between his parents and the chance to improve his financial state since the regime permits the villagers to harvest the reeds. The father, therefore, no longer objects to the new deal.

The farmers are surprised by the regime's decision to allow reed reaping. On the one hand, the need to receive permission rouses their ire, but on the other, they fear acting without permission. The celebration of the village's pastoral atmosphere gives way to a critical description of the villagers. The author sensitively relates how their passivity led to their weak economic status. In fact, the entrepreneurs, described as greedy and lacking morals, are the ones who dare to take on the regime and demand their rights. Furthermore, Baghrash shows how the regime actually encourages farmers to take the initiative and improve their situation. The government allows farmers to harvest the reeds, if only in the places it has designated—a move which preserves its monopoly on the land. The farmers, shedding tears of gratitude, enthusiastically sign on for loans with low interest rates provided by the local bank for the purpose of funding the purchase of a donkey and wagon to cart the reeds away from the river bank.

The whole village comes to life. Kamalidin describes the village as an infant that has been sleeping for centuries and is suddenly waking. In other words, the farmers' difficult lives and sense of despair over their financial struggles and tough physical work is not the fault of the current regime, according to Kamalidin's description, but a reality which has prevailed for several centuries. The image of the village as an infant also testifies to its immaturity; it is far from reaching adulthood. It would seem that the historiography offered by Baghrash in this story is similar to the official narrative provided by the communist party, which claims that the Uyghur were released from feudalism, poverty, and ignorance, but with one primary difference: Baghrash emphasizes that the key factor that released the Uyghur farmers was money and not communism or nationalism.

According to the story, modernization is welcomed by the village with open arms and leads to materialism and greed, which are responsible for the ruin of traditional values and culture:

> Now no one has time to hang around, to chatter and play cards in the restaurant. Everyone's urging everyone else on [...] Money accelerates their actions. Is that greed? Dear Allah, we used to have so much time in the past, and we did nothing. In the period of communes, the work team leader knocked on every family's door, ruining his throat calling people out to work. And they didn't work hard, the way they do today. (Bagelaxi 2006, 52)

Money awakens the villagers, leading them to take their destiny into their own hands. Kamalidin is no longer interested in selling Adi his mats in

return for the pitiful sum he pays the farmers. Instead, Kamalidin approaches the fishermen and arranges for them to transport and sell his mats. Very quickly, most of the villagers sell their mats to Kamalidin, who pays them several pennies more than Adi does. Other farmers decide to distribute their mats independently, and the village begins to split among dealers. Now the village has electricity, TVs, movies every Friday, and a thriving restaurant. The villagers renovate their homes. Alcohol also settles in like a local son, and many villagers are quickly addicted.

Alcohol leads to fights among drunken young men and fishermen, and the fights sometimes end in stabbings. Several young men are arrested and incarcerated for years. Gambling also becomes popular. City folk coming to do business with the villagers teach them to gamble, and the drunk villagers begin losing their money. One night, after leaving in the middle of a game of dice, Kamalidin fumes over the money Adi is making. Kamalidin tosses a cigarette butt onto a pile of reeds in anger, thinking it would be preferable to be rid of the reeds which have brought so much trouble, and the reeds go up in flames, costing the farmer they belong to several hundred yuan. The story describes how the farmer's mother and wife mourn as though having lost a son, whereas the farmer himself is too drunk to comprehend the significance of these events.

Further on in the narrative, Kamalidin is invited to a game of dice. Intoxicated for the first time in his life, he loses all his money. Having lost everything, he seeks a loan from one of the city entrepreneurs to allow him to continue gambling. In return for one thousand yuan, he is required to bring his young wife's braids to the lender. The entrepreneur had hoped to remove Kamalidin from the game with this outrageous request, but suddenly Kamalidin turns up, braids in hand, together with his father's shorn beard. Since hair is a religious and gender symbol in Uyghur culture, cutting his wife's and his father's hair and presenting it publicly is an insult to his wife's modesty and his father's trust. The severe insult is further reinforced by the fact that their hair was cut in order to gamble. The horrified farmers attack Kamalidin for his greed and humiliation of his family:

> Kamalidin is not a man. Kamalidin is not Uyghur. Kamalidin is not a human! He is not a man. He is a beast, and not human! (Bagelaxi 2006, 75)

The narrative comes to an end with the sound of his children's cries. Kamalidin ends up bereft of honor and status. He loses his family, friends, possessions, and respect. The villagers view his breach of traditional values as inflicting harm on the Uyghur identity and air their grievances in the

form of accusations against him, in which he is described as not being a Uyghur man.

At the start of the story, Kamalidin represented Uyghur traditions. His name means "perfection of religion" (Kamal al–Din), and as this name indicates, he was a model of the ethical Muslim man. His encounter with Adi changed him, and he began longing for money and status. This longing led him to doubt traditional Uyghur values, and the possibility of becoming rich caused him to demean his religion and his family.

Baghrash sympathizes with the farmers, and frequently writes about their lives. In an interview, he once noted that "In order to understand the Uyghur's real issues, you must travel to southern Xinjiang and meet them. In those regions, there are numerous problems, but people are afraid to speak up."[14] Why, then, does Baghrash, who is so familiar with farmers' lives from his frequent travels to rural regions where he collects material for his work, choose to present them so negatively? It would appear that he wants to exaggerate the corrupting influences of modernization. In an interview, he related this idea to the story by saying that "the farmers profited somewhat but lost a great deal more; part of that loss is their ethnic culture."[15] In demonstrating the scope of the loss, Baghrash describes the farmers as innocents who fall into the trap of materialism.

When I discussed the story's significance with a Uyghur poet, he reinforced the message Baghrash conveys by saying that "There are many stupid Uyghur. They're only interested in money, and we call them spies."[16] Uyghur who choose to abandon their culture are perceived, then, as traitors to their heritage, and are in fact identified with Han culture. The Uyghur male is required to be a responsible provider, a concerned husband, and a loving father (Zang 2012, 31) but no less so, as the story emphasizes, a protector of the values identified with Uyghur tradition.

The Historical Hero: Masculinity as a National Symbol

Historical heroes are national symbols who facilitate the coherence of Uyghur society by virtue of the myths, legends, tales, and other cultural manifestations which develop around them. This legacy of heroes is a male legacy and constitutes a source of national pride. Not wanting to rouse the

14 Interview, Ürümchi, October 2006.
15 Interview, Ürümchi, October 2006.
16 Interview, Ürümchi, October 2006.

regime's suspicion, many Uyghur choose to address historical and national issues through folklore (Friederich 2007, 95). This tendency is manifested in current Uyghur song and literature as a longing for the heroes of the past, and comparisons between them and Uyghur men's current situation. The state of the modern Uyghur man is described in these terms by the author and poet Abdulehed Abdurishit Berqi (1972–) in his poem "Uyghur":

Uyghur
Oghuzhan is coming?
Not yet!
He is an ordinary Uyghur man
That couldn't have bought a house
That has been wandering in the city
For his life.
He is not riding a horse
With golden horses' horns
But he is wearing jeans
Not iron armour.
He is not holding a sword
But a brochure
About curing impotence.
No! No!
In the road a Uyghur man is coming
He is a blood drop of Oghuzhan.
He is rolling into the future
Got dust all over the body
So humbly. (Berqi 1999)[17]

Berqi was detained in 2017 after returning to Xinjiang from a two-year postdoc studying modern Uyghur literature in Israel (Gerin 2022). His poems and novels were not officially banned as of 2021, yet it is unclear if this situation will persist in light of the government's growing restrictions on books in Xinjiang (Kuo 2019). Berqi composed this poem in Ürümchi in 1999. Having grown up in a village in Hotan (Hetian) Prefecture and arrived in Ürümchi in the 1990s, he witnessed the many changes the city underwent in the years following his arrival.[18] Once fully assimilated into metropolitan

17 The poem was translated by Berqi and published on a Uyghur website which is currently unavailable.

18 Interview, Ürümchi, October 2006.

life, Berqi became the epitome of the Uyghur urban intellectual. Most of his poems and stories deal with love and issues of concern to young city people:

> This poem is about the future of Uyghur people and city life. 20 percent of Uyghurs now live in cities. Metropolitan culture is not unfamiliar to the Uyghur: two thousand years ago, the Uyghur built cities and enjoyed an urban culture. Currently, we are forced to be strangers to urban life [...] the common urban culture is Chinese, since most of Xinjiang's urban residents are Chinese rather than Uyghurs. Uyghur culture has difficulty in surviving in the city. Uyghur men must cope with increasing issues, the main one being how to survive.

In this poem, Berqi challenges the image of Uyghur masculinity, which is based on the model of male fighters. He acknowledges the impact of American cinema on his development as a youngster, particularly action films starring Sylvester Stallone and Jean-Claude van Damme,[19] actors renowned for their strongly macho combat roles in which they defeat their enemies against all odds. The American macho male image was a source of inspiration for Berqi, as it was for many other young Uyghurs. American film stars were the most convincing and readily available option for Uyghurs seeking an alternative to popular Han culture: "Up until some years ago an American film was shown each day, and later, once every ten days. Until September [2006] they showed American and Japanese animated movies but stopped because they claim it leads to Americanization. Instead, they show movies from China and Singapore" (Berqi, personal communication, October 5, 2006). Despite attempts by the regime to block Western cultural influences, the American macho model achieved great popularity in the 1990s and 2000s due to the internet and the flourishing market for illegal DVD and VCD copies of American films.[20] American machismo echoed the traditional model of Uyghur masculinity but offered a modern, Western alternative that fascinated Uyghur youth.

Berqi links the state of Uyghur males to nationalism. Uyghur men's struggle for status is a struggle to preserve Uyghur culture and traditions. Berqi represents modern urban culture, and in his view, the tough situation faced by Uyghur men in the urban environment does not derive

19 Interview, Ürümchi, October 2006.

20 In addition to American movies, Turkic films are also popular among the Uyghurs of Ürümchi, who prefer to avoid watching Chinese TV or listening to Han music (Kaltman 2007, 54–57).

from clashes between tradition and modernization but from the clash between Han and Uyghur cultures. Han culture dominates urban life, leaving no room for Uyghur culture from a social, economic, or ethical perspective.

The man in Berqi's poem is very different from the accompanying image of the mythical Uyghur hero. *Oghuz Khan*, hero of the *Oghuzname* mythology, is a model of masculinity and courage, considered the forefather of the Uyghur and Turkic peoples. Although the epic describing Oghuz Khan's deeds can be traced back to the thirteenth century, no written version of his story remains from this time. Folklore researchers were forced to translate the epic into the modern Uyghur language, and it was only published in 1980 (Wei and Luckert 1998, 90). During this period the myth around Oghuz Khan established itself more strongly, and many authors began expansive studies of Uyghur history. Some of them, including Turghun Almas (1924–2001), tried to prove that Oghuz Khan was identical to a historical figure, one of the region's kings (Wei and Luckert 1998, 90).[21]

For modern-day Uyghurs, Oghuz Khan represents their own origins, distinct from those of the Chinese; it also represents their affiliation with the Turkic peoples. Nevertheless, Uyghur historians attempt to prove Oghuz Khan's Uyghur identity, rather than his identity as the forefather of all Turkic peoples. Berqi notes that from his point of view, Oghuz Khan is "a symbol of Uyghur nationalism."[22] This is an important statement since other historical heroes have been more strongly identified as representing Uyghur nationalism, such as Abduxaliq Uyghur.[23] Perhaps because he is central to a myth, the latter became a national symbol, based on a mythical warrior and conqueror with whom the Uyghur can identify without being viewed by the government as nationalistic.

The mythical figure of Oghuz Khan is the ideal of the brave, unrestrained warrior, identified with the wolf.[24] According to the legend of his birth:

21 Turghun Almas suggests that the image of Oghuz Khan is based on the Hun king of 209–174 BCE. Other researchers identify Oghuz Khan as Satuk Bughra Khan, the famous ruler of the tenth-century Karakhan dynasty, or one of this dynasty's earlier rulers. The name "Oghuz" relates to tribes from the eighth to the twelfth century who lived in Mongolia and from whom the Turkic tribes (including the Uyghur) splintered off (Wei and Luckert 1998, 90).

22 Interview, Ürümchi, January 2009.

23 On Abduxaliq Uyghur as a national symbol, see Klimeš 2015, 98–108; Zelcer-Lavid 2018, 568–69.

24 The legend does not specifically relate to the grey wolf. However, the common wolf is the grey wolf *Canis lupus*, thus the legend likely indicates this creature. On the role of the wolf in these legends, see Golden 1992, 117–20.

> [...] the baby boy had sucked his mother's breast only once before he began asking for meat and meal, and with that he began to speak. Within forty days he was completely grown, able to walk and play. His feet were like a bull's, his waist was like a wolf's, his shoulders were like a black marten's, and his chest was like that of a bear. His entire body was covered with thick hair. He often herded horses, rode them, and went hunting. (Wei and Luckert 1998, 63)

Oghuz Khan skipped the stages of infanthood and childhood. Right after birth, he entered the stage of mature masculinity, which is described as being analogous to the state of various wild animals, reinforcing his status as mythological rather than merely human. Other legends about his life reveal his wisdom and skills as a military leader, a conqueror, a father, and a loving husband (see Wei and Luckert 1998). This figure directly contrasts with the modern Uyghur man of Berqi's poem. Although viewed as Oghuz Khan's progeny, the modern Uyghur male walks about the city like a homeless individual. He cannot pay for a roof over his head due to his deficient finances. He wears Western clothes that contrast with the armor and sword which signify traditional warrior garb, and the brochures he hands out discuss impotence. This man represents urban males who have lost not only their home and homeland but their masculinity as well. Thus, today's Uyghur can only relate to Oghuz Khan and other historical and mythical figures as sources of inspiration.

Conclusion

This chapter attempts to define the struggles and dilemmas of Uyghur men in the modern literary domain. In literature, there is often no separation between the private and the public, thus the fate of an individual can serve as an allegory for the fate of an entire society and culture (Jameson 2013, 56). Literature, therefore, establishes a collective identity which, in the process of its formation, is of importance not only to the literary work but also to the discourse accompanying it. Literature not only reflects the state of Uyghur men but also indicates that their struggle to preserve their status is a collective struggle to preserve Uyghur identity and culture. The literary depiction of this struggle is a cultural means of reflecting collective insecurity in Uyghur society. One definition of cultural security is as follows: "A culturally safe and secure environment is one where our people feel safe and draw strength in their identity, culture and community" (Australian

Human Rights Commission 2012, 122). A "culturally safe environment" cannot exist when the government officially representing that culture is perceived as oppositional to the local culture, as is true for Uyghur culture in China. The portrayal of masculinity in Uyghur literature not only contrasts utterly with the ruling Han culture but also, to a great degree, contradicts the changes occurring within Uyghur culture itself.

Demographic changes in Xinjiang's large cities and lifestyle changes due to accelerated economic development have aroused suspicion among the Uyghurs over the adoption of Han culture and corresponding repression of Uyghur culture. The Uyghur man is frequently forced to maneuver between the two cultures, battling to preserve his traditional values while adjusting to a changing society. The stories penned by Muhemmed Baghrash and Memtimin Hoshur reflect the drop in status among Uyghur men and indicate that current Uyghur masculinity is an image alone, a situation I have chosen to term "imagined hegemony." In fact, as this chapter shows, it is the outcome of the need to rise above the Han male—at least in the literary field. This is an intermediate stage in the process of creating the new Uyghur male, who continues to seek out the heroes of the past. It might be too soon to assess whether this process has come to a halt with the mass incarcerations since 2017 or whether the current tragedy will actually strengthen the reliance on historical heroes.

These historical heroes empower Uyghur society and contribute to a sense of national cohesion. Uyghur history tells of a golden age in which the Uyghur people controlled their own homeland, an age at the very core of Uyghur identity. The Uyghur people choose to perpetuate their rich past and reinforce their roots through the historical and mythical narratives represented by Oghuz Khan and others. These literary works reference heroes of the past from myths and folklore, around which Uyghur men and the whole nation can unite. Yet, as Berqi's poem indicates, they offer no relief to the contemporary Uyghur men struggling to preserve their status in Xinjiang.

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