

Symbol, Thought, Action: A Semiotic Approach to the Deterritorialization of Uyghur Resistance



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Friday 12 August 2011

A Thesis submitted to
the Board of Examiners
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
Master of Arts in Conflict Studies & Human Rights

1 Introduction

One day in April 2011, while walking around the old city of Kashgar, I noticed a row of posters, rich in representation, pasted to a wall outside a Uyghur¹ middle school. One was titled *Women Gongtong de Jiayuan* [Our Common Homeland] and read: '*Lishi youjiu de zhongguo shi suoyou zhongguo gongmin de gongtong zuguo, shi ge zu renmin shengcun fazhan de gongyou jiayuan*' [China's long history is a shared history for all the peoples of this ancestral land, living and developing together in one homeland]. The text upon a silhouette of China, highlighting the special administrative zones of Hong Kong and Macau, 'the ancestral precious island' of Taiwan and the so called ethnic autonomous regions of Xinjiang and Tibet, should be treated as an artifact in the representation of a unified China, implying 'ancestral' unity of these contentious regions. Two days later I walked past the same wall and saw that someone had ripped down the poster, leaving but a torn corner of paper. Was this a random act or demonstration of defiance? An informed analysis of this observation led me to believe it was an act of everyday resistance (Scott, 1985; 1990), against a particular representation. What was it about this representation that inspired resistance?

I argue the resisting agent was reacting to this representation as a target of perceived domination. How does the politics of representation transfer into domination? Postcolonial literature explains, the categorical representation of the colonized as lazy or backwards is capable of institutionalizing educational and employment marginalization (Memmi, 1991), and general prejudice. Representations can legitimize violence against a particular group of people, as when they are designated as 'terrorists,' somehow abrogating their human rights. This has been observed by human rights organizations in the case of Uyghurs (Amnesty, 2003, 2004), as well as other groups targeted within the 'war on terror' (Duffy, 2008; HRW 2004). Where does the force behind these representations come from?

Representations are the result of power (Frerks and Klem, 2004). We can conceptualize this as 'symbolic power' (Bourdieu, 1977, 1989, 1991), the monopoly of power held by one group to represent

¹ Uyghurs are a Turkic speaking, predominantly Muslim, ethnic group that resides primarily in the Northwest of China and in Kazakhstan. They have a distinct language, religion, and culture from the majority Han population of China. For an overview of the Uyghurs in their own words see the World Uyghur Congress website: <http://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/>. For an excellent academic history of the Uyghur people see Millward (2007), or Bovingdon (2010).

and control 'reality.' It may be exerted through myriad formations and performances. Considering it is a power that monopolizes the very discourse through which 'reality' is categorized and controlled, agents that are subjugated to a dominant representation must first engage in a symbolic struggle to renegotiate the terms of their representations. These observations lead to a number of questions.

How does the Chinese regime² exercise symbolic power over Uyghurs, and do Uyghurs perceive it as a source of domination? If there are limited opportunities for resisting symbolic domination within the regime space of the dominant representation, Uyghur migration, itself a kind of resistance (Moore, 1978), to more supportive environments such as culturally and linguistically similar Turkey provides a changed opportunity for resisting Chinese power. How do Uyghurs perceive opportunity for resistance in Istanbul? How have Uyghurs in Istanbul engaged in resistance, and is there an identifiable coherence between Chinese symbolic power and repertoire innovation in Istanbul?

I will address these questions through a rigorous semiotic analysis of Chinese symbolic power and Uyghur resistance in Istanbul. Focusing on the role of images and texts, and how the narratives of Uyghurs in Istanbul explain and challenge the perceived domination brought on by certain representations, I aim to analyze how resistance is affected by symbolic power and address the guiding question of this thesis:

How does Chinese symbolic power affect the evolution of repertoires³ of resistance among the deterritorialized Uyghur community of Istanbul?

Although the group under investigation is the Uyghurs, I argue they share certain traits with other categorically subjugated groups such as Palestinians in occupation or, more generally, Muslims in the 'War on Terror.' I make this claim because in dealing with a dominant power, such groups have in many ways been stripped of their agency. They have had a representation categorically imposed upon

² Here regime means the repeated, strong interactions among major political actors including not only the government, army, and political parties, but also labor organizations, indigenous groups, media organizations, educational institutions, and segments of business (Tilly, 2006: 19). In this sense, analyzing the regime goes beyond a simple analysis of government: coercion-wielding organization that enjoys priority over all other organizations in some connected set and over the populations attached to those organizations (Tilly, 2006: 18).

³ Repertoires are the whole body of contentious performances available to a set of actors in the process of making claims targeted at another group or individual (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007). They are generally limited, familiar, and historically created and, in most situations, circumscribe the means by which actors engage in contention (Tilly, 2006: vii). They draw on identity, social ties, and organizational forms, and change accordingly (Tilly, 2006: 42)3.

them by the more powerful group.⁴ They are demoted to the status of *homo sacer* (Agamben, 1998). Their access to various resources—both for material advancement and for challenging the representation—is controlled, their legal status is defined, and their treatment derives its justification based on these representations. I argue that focusing on symbolic power and Uyghur repertoire change in Istanbul may transfer to a deeper understanding of the politics of representation and broaden our knowledge on how and why individuals and groups react to domination.

1.1 Toward a Social-Historical Contextualization

Analysis of symbolic power and resistance should be based on more than the structure of symbols and material actions. It must begin with the social-historical conditions that logically inform the meaning of symbols, and potentially the form of resistance.

Uyghurs⁵ trace their ancestry to the land known today as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR)⁶. Xinjiang in Chinese, 新疆, means new territory or frontier. Many Uyghurs perceive this word as synonymous with colonial power.

When I hear, every time, that word, Xinjiang, it reminds me that, 'Oh! You have your place named with another language. You have to change that name.' It makes me think that way. Always makes me feel, always reminds me

⁴ In such relationships the subjugated group or advocacy networks acting on their behalf may of course engage in the construction of a counter-discourse to challenge the representation. But there is no guarantee that the representation challenging counter-discourse will be effective. Furthermore, what factors of power dictate when and how a certain representation take hold is a complicated arrangement beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁵ I do not want to reduce this conflict to a simple ethnic, Uyghur-Han, relationship but in limited space it is the most expedient vocabulary for discussing the phenomenon. As Brass has pointed out, prematurely conceptualizing cycles of violence in India in terms of Hindu-Muslim clashes distorts the complexity of the phenomenon as to render analysis facile. Conflation of contention to one category whether male/female, rich/poor, in-group/out-group fails to take into consideration a multiplicity of influences and identities (Sen, 2006). Similarly I do not attempt to present some definitive sketch of 'Uyghur.' There is none. On this, it is worth quoting Christoffersen in length. "Western and Chinese discourse on 'the Uyghur' tends towards making essentializing arguments that assume there is a 'Universal Uyghur' with an unchanging essence and fixed properties, whether living in Xinjiang, the Central Asian diaspora, Afghanistan, Turkey, Germany or the United States. Uyghur identity formation, difficult to begin with, is complicated further by outside forces attempting to construct a monolithic identity that would fit their particular vision. It is their essentializing imagery that victimizes Uyghurs by forcing them to assimilate to alien visions. The vast majority of Uyghurs in Xinjiang have no voice in world affairs, instead becoming the object of the politics of representation by outside forces (2002; 3)." This is true of political and academic representations. Instead of encountering one essentializing image of Uyghurs in China and Turkey I encountered Uyghurs with diverse attitudes and behaviors, as one would expect. But there are also many commonalities, from which I have composed my analysis.

⁶ It is neither my intention to challenge nor certify the word but for consistency I will refer to the region as Xinjiang. Still, I acknowledge the significance it has for many Uyghurs as a symbol of oppression or target of claim-making.

that my homeland, home place, or home country, is occupied by another power.⁷

We hate that word. We don't even have the right to say our hometown in our own language.⁸

This word, when I was young, I didn't have any special feeling. Chinese just call our region as Xinjiang. But how do we call it? But we don't have any word. When I went to Malaysia [first left China] I learned something about our flag, our country. I know that place is not Xinjiang. Now, when I hear that word I just think 'new project,' a new chance for the Chinese to earn money.⁹

The preferred name, once Uyghurs are more free to express discursive resistance outside of China, is East Turkestan. In China, however, it is illegal to mention East Turkestan, *Dong Tujuesitan*,¹⁰ and the image of the East Turkestan flag, a crescent moon and star on a blue field, is forbidden from public and private space.¹¹ As I will demonstrate, because the term presents an implicit history of an independent Uyghur nation which challenges the official Chinese history, the regime conflates 'East Turkestan' with separatism and terrorism (Dwyer, 2005), and extends this interpretation to the use of this term outside of China. The use and interpretation of these words appears to be a constituent of domination and resistance. I argue that understanding the significance of this term and the social-historical context from which other symbols derive their meaning and force is important to analyze contemporary perceptions of domination and resulting Uyghur resistance.

In 1759, Qing troops conquered the region in what had been a long history of territorial conflict (Millward, 2007). China has at times admitted this history but used it rhetorically to state, "The lives and cultures of people from multiple ethnic groups have been so intertwined for thousands of years that no single group can claim exclusive ownership of this region (China Daily, 2009b)." Still, the declaration of *terra nullius* is generally only put forth to counter Uyghur claims to a 4000 year history of multiple independent kingdoms.¹² The predominant Chinese narrative is that Xinjiang has been an integral part of Han Chinese rule for centuries (Beijing, 2003; Shandong, 2010), however third party

⁷ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul for five years, 2 June 2011

⁸ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul for one and a half years, 4 June 2011

⁹ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul for one and a half years, Turkish citizen, 9 July 2011

¹⁰ Interview with a Uyghur professor in Beijing 29 April 2011

¹¹ In December 1999, two men were arrested and charged with 15 and 13 years in prison for hoisting the East Turkestan flag in place of the Chinese Flag at a courthouse in Xinjiang. See "China Detains Uyghurs Over Separatist Poster" *RFA*, 4 March 2007.

¹² "Brief History of East Turkestan," World Uyghur Congress website: <http://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/?cat=132> (accessed 10 July 2011)

historians have suggested it was not incorporated into the empire until 1821 (Gladney, 2004: 215).

Conflict throughout this period was protracted. In 1864, Qing administration was jolted by the Yakub Beg rebellion which resulted in the independent Khanate of Kashgaria (Gladney, 2004). However, Beg's sudden death in Korla in 1877 effectively brought an end to organized resistance; and, although Xinjiang had been treated more as a colony to this point, it was shortly thereafter officially made a province in 1884 (Millward, 2007). The collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911 sank China into chaos. In Xinjiang, uprisings and brutal crackdowns were prevalent (Gladney, 2004) as the region was split between a series of warlords and the competing geo-political interests of the Soviet Union and emerging rivalry between the *Guomindang* (Nationalist) and Communist party of China (Bovingdon, 2010; Millward 2007; Gladney, 2003, 2004).

Millward (2007) provides a vivid account of rapidly shifting power dynamics during this period. On 12 November 1933, the independent East Turkestan Republic (ETR) was established in Kashgar. Its leaders were predominantly educators and merchants who had been influential reformers in the 1910s and 20s. A year later the ETR would fall to the infamous warlord Sheng Shicai. On 12 November 1944, the second ETR was established in Ghulja. Ahmetjan Qasimi, Mehmet Emin Buğra and Isa Yusuf Alptekin were influential forces in this time, and remain as Uyghur heroes. However, hope of lasting independence went down in flames on 27 August 1949. Ahmetjan Qasimi and a coterie of Xinjiang's top Uyghurs had been invited to Beijing to discuss independence with Mao but their plane mysteriously crashed. Their deaths would be kept secret until several months after the Chinese Army had fully occupied the region. The death of so many well educated and capable leaders resulted in a leadership vacuum for Xinjiang's Uyghurs, a lesson that has not been lost to Uyghurs abroad.¹³ In her memoir, World Uyghur Congress (WUC) President Rebiya Kadeer notes, “The death of our leading delegation was too severe a setback for compatriots to overcome, and so our momentum toward independence came to a stop (Kadeer, 2009: 11).”

Despite this history of indigenous resistance, Chinese sources tend to represent the independent republics as the result of abusive foreign governments (Chen, 2009). Media sources in China go as far to relate that in the early 20th century and later, 'a small number of separatists and religious extremists in Xinjiang,' influenced by overseas extremism and imperialism, 'politicized the idea of East Turkestan' and fabricated a history which had never existed (China Daily, 2009a). While Chinese officials and

¹³ In all of my interviews this narrative of the two independent republics and the plane crash were salient features. As we will see below, it is mentioned in numerous comments in context with a number of different questions.

scholars may have referred to Xinjiang as a colony before the establishment of the People's Republic of China, “Chinese historians after 1949 would busy themselves erasing any such reference (Bovingdon, 2010; 39).” The representation of Xinjiang as an ancient and unbroken part of China became the official discourse. However, many Uyghurs contest this discourse.

Shichor (2003, 2009) provides a rich history of Uyghur diffusion. In 1949, Alptekin and Buğra led the first major wave of a Uyghur exodus from Xinjiang to neighboring Kashmir. By 1952, owing to Alptekin's efforts, pressure from the US and the UNHCR Turkey accepted around 2,000 Uyghur refugees for resettlement in Kayseri. This marked the second phase of Uyghur migration. A decade later a sizable community had also started to form in Istanbul.¹⁴ The third phase can be divided into two separate waves. The first began in the late 1970s, with greater flight from China, mainly to Central Asian countries and Turkey. The second wave was composed of Uyghurs migrating from host countries such as Turkey to a third host country in Western Europe or North America (Shichor, 2003: 285). The Diaspora is relatively small. The majority of Uyghurs still live in Xinjiang where Han migration is perceived by many Uyghurs as an attempt at assimilation.

Domestically, due less to migration of Uyghurs out of Xinjiang than to steady Han migration into Xinjiang, from 1949 until the present the demographics of Xinjiang have dramatically shifted. The majority of Uyghurs I spoke with in Istanbul brought this up in conversation as one of the gravest threats to their cultural survival. The Han population in the region increased at an average rate of 8.1 percent yearly, from 5 percent in 1947 to around 40 per cent in 2000 (Millward, 2007: 307). Information for 2010 from the National Bureau of Statistics in China reports the percentage of Han as 40.1 percent and conflates the remaining 59.9 percent to an amalgamation of the other ethnic groups.¹⁵ This census representation, I argue, is done in part to stifle ethnic based mobilization and to legitimize official histories of Chinese presence in the region.

In Korla a Uyghur teacher asked me if I knew how many Uyghurs lived in Xinjiang. I repeated

¹⁴ Although precise population figures are probably influenced by prejudice, while several Uyghur sources in Istanbul related that the Uyghur population in Turkey was around 300,000, third party sources tend to place the Uyghur population in Turkey at around 100,000 (Shichor, 2003). However, it is difficult considering Uyghurs are ethnically Turkic. Higher figures take into account many among the last hundred or more years of migration, where culturally one might argue that they should be classified as Central Asian Turks rather than Uyghurs. I encountered a number of cases where members of the Uyghur community would classify Turks as Uyghurs simply because of ancestral links, while the individuals themselves identified themselves as Turkish, and generally don't speak Uyghur. Such distinctions present a number of questions related to cultural identity that are beyond this thesis.

¹⁵ Xinjiang Statistical Information Net website [Chinese]: http://www.xjtj.gov.cn/stats_info/tjgb/11561756109932.html (accessed 25 June 2011).

the generally accepted figure: around 9 million. He replied, there are actually double but that, “the government will never say there is more than 10 million Uyghurs. Because when a nation has more than 10 million,” he choked with emotion, “they have to get their own country.”¹⁶ This is illustrative of the perceptions of repressive intentions behind various forms of representation, including the census. Representing or misrepresenting population figures is a way to dominate a given group but it can also be transformed into a counter-discourse if the population claims greater numbers than official figures. Uyghur sources report from 15¹⁷ to 20 million¹⁸ Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

As with contemporary census data, the history of this conflict has been represented in opposing narratives by Chinese, Uyghur, and third party historians. This is understandable considering actors in political conflicts often appeal to history to legitimize their cases (Bovingdon, 2010: 23). At times, it becomes difficult to disentangle the opposing representations. It does appear, however, that some accounts (Bovingdon, 2010; Gladney, 2003; 2004; Millward, 2007; Shichor, 2003; 2009) are more resonant with Uyghur narratives. This is important to separate from narratives obedient to Chinese hegemony (Israeli, 2010; Mao, 2010; Chen, 2009). Understood from an analysis of the literature and discussion with Uyghurs, official Chinese accounts can be seen as representational repression. Putting representations in historical context, as a constituent of identities and organizations, is not only helpful for examining the meaning and force of symbolic power it also helps to understand the significance of Turkey and how potential forms of resistance in Istanbul evolve from historical narratives (Tilly, 2006; Zald, 1996; Gamson and Meyer, 1992).

1.2 Analytic Framework: Contentious Politics and Semiotics

The central puzzle of this thesis raises questions of how groups perceive repression and how they react. It asks us to situate symbolic power within an understanding of domination and resistance. Does symbolic power operate in a similar way to material or coercive power, or do they empower each other? Does the literature on structural domination offer sufficient analytic strength to analyze the relationship between symbolic power and resistance, or if there are gaps can we reconcile them with the application of other theoretical approaches?

¹⁶ Fieldnotes, Korla, 4 April 2011

¹⁷ Uyghur American Association website: <http://www.uyghuramerican.org/categories/About-Uyghurs/> (accessed 13 July 2011).

¹⁸ Uyghurweb website: http://www.uyghurweb.net/En/t_uyghur.html (accessed 13 July 2011).

McAdam et. al offer a rich tool set to understand and analyze the relationship between power and contention in the form of *Contentious Politics*: the episodic, often public, and collective interaction of actors making claims on someone else's interests, claims that would affect those interests if realized and involve governments as a claimant, target, or third party. It is divided into two broad subcategories. *Contained contention* is where the parties are previously established, generally speaking, political actors relying on established techniques. *Transgressive contention* involves the interaction of at least some newly identified actors and/or the implementation of innovative techniques, such as new vocabularies or sources of support (McAdam et. Al, 2001:48).

We can accurately describe established Uyghur organizations in Istanbul who engage in political lobbying or public acts such as protests, as contained actors. Contained contention is more common in democratic regimes, such as Turkey, where institutions have been created precisely to structure and contain conflict (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007: 61). In nondemocratic regimes like China contained contention is rare because the regime is less tolerant of dissent. However, one may wonder if the regime is capable of affecting the form of contention outside of its borders. If Uyghur students perceive a risk in participating in contained contention in Istanbul their resistance may take on more transgressive forms, adopting innovative techniques. How can we systematically analyze the factors that lead to changes in contentious actions?

Complex social phenomena are made more understandable by separating them into mechanisms and processes. Mechanisms are events that can change the relationship among groups of elements and generally behave the same way each time. Processes are the amalgamation of multiple mechanisms and often produce a greater effect. In the social-historical context above Uyghur migration is part of the process of *new coordination*. It is a combination of the mechanisms, *brokerage*: the production of new connection between previously unconnected or weakly connected sites; and *diffusion*: the spread of a contentious performance, issue, or interpretive frame from one site to another (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007: 215). *Certification*, the attempt to gain support of powerful international actors such as the Turkish government, is arguably a mechanism influencing Uyghur repertoires in Istanbul. A final mechanism that will help us address the central question of this thesis is *repression*.

If repression is a mechanism that affects contention how can we conceptualize repression within the context of Uyghurs and the politics of representation? We can equate repression with violence-as a process, understood as a triumvirate of physical, structural, and symbolic violence. The former is easily understood as police brutality or torture. Structural violence (Galtung, 1996) pinpoints certain systemic

forms of violence such as poverty or ethnocentrism that have been institutionalized by a certain structure of power. Symbolic violence, originally put forth by Pierre Bourdieu, accounts for a fundamental source of violence primarily related to language and its imposition of a specific universe of meaning (Zizek, 2008). I argue that symbolic power is the source of all three forms of violence.

The Chinese regime has predominantly represented Uyghurs as the backward rural minority in contrast to the developed majority Han. This ethnic representation is, in fact, generally a canvas stretched over all of China's 55 ethnic minority groups and is a crucial discourse within the reproduction of China's national mythology (Gladney, 1994, 2004), one that I would argue is full of Han chauvinism. Such representations are certainly capable of institutionalizing structural violence.

Bhatia (2005) and Russell (2005) have argued that the political logic behind much of a regime's naming of 'terrorists' within its borders can be seen as an attempt to gain the legitimization of 'any means necessary' for combating terrorism within the global 'war on terror.' While China has engaged with the 'war on terror' discourse in its representation of Uyghur unrest after 9/11, it was virtually absent from public representations before 2001 (Dwyer, 2005). China has re-articulated the previous representation of domestic separatist to match the discourse on international terrorism. One could argue that by representing members of the Uyghur community in this light China seeks to legitimize its physical violence against such individuals. Do Uyghurs perceive these representations as a source of repression? If these representations are perceived as part of the structure of domination can they become a target of claim-making?

In the language of contentious politics, representations are a matter of *framing*. Frames simplify and condense aspects of the world in ways that are “intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists (Benford and Snow, 2000: 614).” However, within the literature on contentious politics, framing has mainly been examined as a process of *collective action frames*¹⁹ by those resisting domination and less as a process of repression by the dominant. It fails to recognize that framing does more than simplify and condense aspects of social phenomena; it is capable of constructing social phenomena. While Tilly states that the naming of a phenomenon does not guarantee that it exists (2006: 46), this appears to be the case in China where Uyghurs and the state, “have been vying in precisely this domain, seeking to define and shape social

¹⁹ Social Movement Scholars conceptualize collective action frames as active phenomena that implies agency. Collective action frames can be both diagnostic and prognostic; they define problems and suggest action. Furthermore, they are generally the outcome of consensual shared meaning among movement actors (Gamson and Meyer, 1992; Zald, 1996; Tarrow, 1998; Benford and Snow, 2000).

reality to serve political ends (Bovingdon, 2010: 86).” That is to say, “how the Uyghurs are defined depends on who is defining them (Christoffersen, 2002: 3).” Does contentious politics address these observations?

Tilly distinguishes between two kinds of coherence. He explains, “*Causal* coherence refers to the systematic cause-and-effect properties of a phenomenon. *Symbolic* coherence singles out the extent to which participants or observers of a phenomenon attribute to it unity and significance (Tilly, 2006: 48).” Are Uyghur repertoires in Istanbul significantly affected by their perceptions of Chinese symbolic power or, as Tilly might propose, are structural factors more important? Tilly acknowledges that some contentious performances are symbolically coherent, but places the majority of his emphasis on causal coherence; understandably, in most cases it is more observable. While causal coherence explains how the murder of two Uyghurs in a factory in Shaoguan, Guangdong province contributed to triggering the violence in Urumqi in 2009²⁰ (UNPO, 2009), it is not sufficient for analyzing how Uyghurs and the state have engaged in the discursive realm to shape reality, as noted by Bovingdon. We can analyze symbolic coherence through the lens of symbolic power.

Symbolic power legitimizes a group or individual's ability to give name and meaning to a phenomenon and consequently construct and control the social world (Bourdieu, 1991). It is the power to define (Frerks and Klem, 2004; Brass, 1996) that, as Butler (1997) notes, provides power not only with its dominant force that presses on the subject from above, and exploits in a Marxist sense but also forms the subject. Systematically approaching symbolic power will facilitate our analysis of the symbolic coherence of representations and how it affects Uyghur resistance.

In order to deconstruct Chinese representations of Uyghurs and analyze Uyghur narratives of the representation and perceptions of domination we must engage with the nature of symbols themselves. Semiotics is concerned with signs and symbols and their use or interpretation. It requires a careful examination of multiple relationships within the social space. Because it provides a superior approach to analyzing symbolic coherence, semiotics is an analytic tool for addressing where contentious politics falls short.

While semiotics helps us identify Chinese symbolic power how does it lend to an understanding of resistance? The literature explains, just recognizing symbolic power is insufficient to resist it

²⁰ On 5 July 2009 large scale inter-ethnic violent clashes erupted. Although an analysis or proper discussion of these events is beyond the scope of this thesis, the events were powerful episodes in the lives of all of my Uyghur informants. For excellent coverage and analysis of the riots and their aftermath see: UNPO, 2009; and HRW, 2009.

(Bourdieu, 1991). It requires an analytical repertoire of revealing the intentions of the representation or unmasking it (Barthes, 1972: 127) and the active repertoire of resignification (Butler, 1997), where the subjugated agent attempts to alter either the form or meaning of its representation. However, as Butler notes, symbolic power is not a force exterior to the agent. It is a constituent of everyday Uyghur life. How, then, do Uyghurs script their resistance when faced with such an overwhelming power asymmetry enacted in everyday life?

Scott (1985, 1990) situates our discussion of resistance within an established vocabulary. He explains, it is against everyday domination that springs the repertoire of everyday resistance. Within everyday resistance there are both hidden and public transcripts, each informed by the perception of domination held by the resisting agent. However, the parameters of resistance are set by the institutions of repression (Scott, 1985: 299). This echoes Foucauldian notions of power: where there is power there is resistance. However, “this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power (Foucault, 1990; 95).” How does symbolic power set the parameters of Uyghur resistance?

Our case of the poster being torn down can be seen as an example of a public transcript of everyday resistance. It represents the desecration of a perceived status symbol of the dominant (Scott, 1990: 198). The utterance of 'East Turkestan' in private conversations in China is an example of the hidden transcript, a negation of the official narrative. However, one day while I sitting in a training center in Korla, chatting with the Uyghur instructors, it occurred to me that not all acts of resistance fit easily into one or the other classification. As I was being introduced to the students, my attention was directed to a tote bag dangling from the shoulder of a young boy. Drawn on the outside of the blue bag was the forbidden image of the East Turkestan flag. Hanging from the handle was a small pewter M16 keychain.²¹ Based on the risk of such actions, I would say the student would prefer for this to remain an act of hidden resistance but if it was spotted by the police it would be forced into the public and prosecuted accordingly. In this sense, I would argue that such everyday resistance may be situated at the boundary between hidden and public action. Furthermore, the motivation behind hidden or public transcripts, as with the general evolution of contention, rests on perceptions of opportunity conducive to one or the other.

Analyzing the regime within which contention is occurring or against which transnational contention is directed is important because it reveals the threats and opportunities for resistance.

²¹ Field notes, Korla, 4 April 2011

However, within a given regime space opportunities may vary by policy or group (O'Brien and Li 2006: 25). A group with more prestige understandably has more opportunity to engage in claim-making. Furthermore, perceptions of opportunity may be shaped by experience. It became apparent that perceptions of opportunity in Istanbul differed between Uyghur students with significant ties to their homeland and Uyghur businessmen or community leaders who had either born abroad or had been living out of Xinjiang for several decades.

Variance in perceptions of opportunity is often influenced by rapid political change or incremental structural factors (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007; Tarrow, 1998). Deterritorialization arguably results in changes in opportunities and repertoires. However, Uyghur perceptions of opportunity in Turkey can be constrained by perceptions of Chinese coercion. By carefully analyzing structural and non-structural conditions we can analyze Uyghur perceptions of opportunity to isolate important factors for repertoire innovation.

Political Opportunity Structure (POS) analysis in Turkey will help us understand Uyghur perceptions of opportunity. POS asks us to identify, (1) the multiplicity of independent centers of power within the regime, (2) the openness of the regime to new actors, (3) the instability of current political alignments, (4) the availability of influential allies or supporters, (5) the extent to which the regime represses or facilitates collective claim-making, and (6) decisive changes between (1) and (5) (Tilly, 2006: 44). I would argue that political and economic globalization and technological advances have extended a given regime's ability for repression beyond the confines of its borders. For this reason China may be capable of constraining the degree of political opportunity for Uyghur students to engage in contention in Istanbul. To grasp repertoire innovation we must examine more than political opportunity structures.

For this, McAdam points toward the cultural component of opportunity: (1) the dramatization of a glaring contradiction between a highly salient cultural value and conventional social practices; (2) suddenly imposed grievances; (3) dramatizations of a system's vulnerability or illegitimacy; and (4) the availability of an innovative 'master frame' within which subsequent challengers can map their own grievances and demands (1996: 25). Do repertoires vary between perceptions of political and cultural opportunity, and does the perception of a greater degree of one make up for the perceived lack of the other? I argue that political and cultural opportunity explanations are insufficient to analyze Uyghur perceptions of opportunity as they influence repertoire innovation in Istanbul. Uyghur student

narratives further revealed symbolic opportunity²² as a component in their perceptions of opportunity. Does the data require a distinct symbolic opportunity structure to augment existing opportunity structure analysis?

1.3 Methodology

I conducted five months of field research divided between two months in China between March and April and three months in Istanbul between May and July of 2011. My field work in China was also partially informed by 22 months of living and working in Beijing from 2008 to 2010.

Despite efforts of objectivity, I believe the social scientist is still a participating subject in the phenomenon he or she is observing.²³ However, I believe that if treated carefully this may serve as an asset in at least relating to the subjects of research rather than constructing abstract boundaries of objectivity or allowing the structures of power to set an 'objective' meaning (Graeber, 2004).

Because of my own ideological prejudices, instead of an 'objective' hierarchical method, I preferred to carry out interviews based on Ritchie and Lewis' postmodern or feminist perspective. In this perspective the distinction between researcher and subject becomes less stark: the interview is seen as a collaboration between them as they share in the process of negotiating coverage, language and understanding. Reciprocity is emphasized. The researcher feels free to step outside the formal role of the neutral asker of questions, expressing their own feelings and giving information about themselves (2003; 140). Such flexibility seems beneficial for researching sensitive phenomena.

In addition to my field research in China and Turkey I spoke with academics and international Uyghur leaders, in person in Brussels or via Skype. In Hong Kong and Beijing I spoke with NGO workers and journalists. I acknowledge that such sources do not produce analyzable data, as they are observers of the phenomenon. However, their experience and knowledge was useful for content mapping questions.

Scholars (Bovingdon, 2010; Shichor, 2005) have pointed out the difficulties of conducting research in Xinjiang, and the necessary departure from standard structured interviews (Bovingdon, 2010). I was forced to take a number of conditions into account during field research. I relied on semi-

²² Although there is no mention of symbolic opportunity in the literature, in terms of informing an analysis of perceptions of opportunity and threat, here I refer to symbolic opportunity as perceptions based on symbolic coherence.

²³ For an elaboration of the participatory nature of social research and Uyghur perceptions of me as a researcher see Appendix I.

structured interviews, unstructured conversations, and observations. Semi-structured interviews were based on a rudimentary topic guide. Where they were unstructured I had to make a decision based on sensitivity or location about what issues would be discussed and how they would be presented. However, I was able to engage with similar concepts and questions and found that responses were generally reproduced across various samples. My data collection was based on the need to remain flexible to the conditions of sensitive social research in a high-capacity authoritarian regime.²⁴

I was also informed by Chinese media, in both English and Chinese. The goal was to piece together the official Chinese discourse. In this sense, that China is an authoritarian regime with a tightly controlled media was a benefit. While I could not reach officials, information reported in Chinese media can essentially be treated as officially endorsed. Finally, I decided to treat all data collected in China as one step in a multi-stage process, where the information would be later tested and used in detailed interviews in Istanbul.

To generate my sample frames I relied on the snowball and flow population methods. I wanted to understand how Uyghurs in Xinjiang expressed their grievances and perceptions of symbolic power. Snowballing originated from pre-existing contacts. In following up snowballing I allowed myself to travel to meet contacts. I drew my sample from Korla, Kashgar, and Urumqi. Realizing that power can operate in different ways from one place to another, the diversity of locations was beneficial for observing these distinctions. Furthermore, because I had traveled around Xinjiang I believe I was able to gain more trust and respect from those I would speak with in Istanbul. I believe this was beneficial.

Flow population sampling allowed me to construct a diverse sample frame but was more influenced by security. My sample was drawn from Kashgar: the environs of Id Kah mosque and the old city. I focused on areas that had a high density of material manifestations of symbolic power, such as posters or banners. Also, because vendors sell old money around Id Kah mosque it was helpful to discuss symbolic power and currency. This sampling method allowed me to generate a fairly heterogeneous frame. Rather than focus on individual similarities I hoped to identify central themes represented across a diversity of subgroups. This sample drew from less educated youth, young entrepreneurs, established businessmen, and the elderly. I conducted countless interviews, some in a

²⁴ I was warned by several international Uyghur leaders and foreign scholars not to communicate with them while I was in Xinjiang as skype and email are frequently monitored. At a bus station in Korla I was detained, searched, and questioned. A number of Uyghur informants in Kashgar repeatedly warned me about my questions and noted undercover police and 'black cars.' Several times a conversation would end abruptly as the topic became more sensitive. However, because I was aware of these conditions I was able to maneuver within them relatively unconstrained.

small group, and some for no more than a minute. Flow population interviews were conducted in Chinese.²⁵ I was cautious to take detailed notes of my observations so that I could later test them against the established literature and incorporate them in interviews to analyze their significance.

Even though I brought a tape recorder with me to China I made the decision not to employ it in Xinjiang as it represented a potentially destabilizing influence. Following Bovingdon's (2010) methodology I was able to reconcile these difficulties. I kept a small pad and would jot down quick notes after conversation and later compile detailed field notes. Admittedly, by the time I set to the task of recording my informants' statements what I was recording was more general summaries. While this presents difficulties for producing minute detail it is well suited for identifying general concepts.

I relied on a semiotic methodology to adjust for certain structural limitations. It is at times difficult to get people fearful of repression to speak about their grievances; however, gauging responses to images allowed for observations to adjust for reticence. I focused primarily on public signs and Chinese currency. I also selected a number of images that, incidentally, are blacklisted in China. These included black and white photos of the 1933 failed ETR independence fighters and related pictures. I also relied heavily on these visual elements while interviewing in Istanbul.

In Istanbul I relied on semi-structured interviews. They were based on a detailed topic guide. The design came from a careful analysis of existing literature and was informed from field research in Xinjiang. It was broken into topics informed by the central questions of my thesis and subtopics that responded to differences between my samples. Interview coherence was maintained through uniform topical engagement and treatment of set images and texts. I didn't want to merely discuss symbolic power abstractly. I wanted to examine actual representations and engage them with my informants.

Concurrent with the conducting of interviews, I continued my analysis of literature. In this sense, as my pool of interview data grew I was able to ground it in theory and, conversely, continuously weigh the theory against empirical results. Treating the research process as organic I was able to generate data more systematically as my empirical and theoretical frame developed.

In generating my sample frames I relied primarily on snowballing. However, I arrived at my preliminary sample frame through two Uyghur organizations. I divided my sample into three subgroups.

The first group was composed of Uyghur students who still have Chinese citizenship.

²⁵ Here I must note the moral dilemma of inquiring of subjugated individuals about the nature of their perceived subjugation using the language of domination.

Informants in this group had been in Istanbul for a period of three years or less. All of them had come to Istanbul as masters students. The reasoning for this first group was that Uyghurs who plan to return to China are more likely to refrain from overt contention, potentially revealing more innovative resistance. Furthermore, because they had not lived outside of Xinjiang for an extended period of time, their memories and perceptions of symbolic power in China were likely more robust than those who had lived abroad for longer. I wanted to understand how they perceived symbolic power in China. How were their lives in China influenced by symbolic power? I wanted to understand their initial changes of perceptions through deterritorialization. Did their actions abroad appear to be affected by symbolic power? I interviewed eleven Uyghur students who retain Chinese citizenship.

The second group comprised of Uyghur students and recent graduates who had become Turkish citizens. Generally, informants in this second group had lived outside of Xinjiang for more than five years. While length of time was one important factor in the complexion of this group the other was a matter of relationship to their homeland. If opportunity to engage in certain kinds of contention is shaped by constraints from the Chinese government, does renouncing Chinese citizenship change perceptions of opportunity? That they themselves were free from the regime, in many respects, their perception of representations within the regime may have been altered. Did the length of time away from Xinjiang or the change of citizenship affect the way they perceived symbolic power or engaged in resistance? In total I interviewed eight Uyghurs with Turkish citizenship.

Finally, the third subgroup was drawn from Uyghur community leaders, those engaged in traditional politics such as lobbying as well as those who command a degree of respect among the community. This was determined both by how they represented themselves and by how they were introduced to me by others. Informants in this group had generally lived in Istanbul for more than ten years. Several of them had been born outside of Xinjiang. What was most intriguing about this group was whether those who had been away from Xinjiang for ten or twenty years or had never lived there shared a perception of symbolic power with those who had arguably been directly affected by it. In this way I could generalize whether the politics of representing Uyghurs extended the physical boundary of China in terms of perceived domination. Informants in this group were helpful in understanding structural changes, and gaining an insight into broader strategic directions. Because members of this group compose the core of contained actors it allowed for a contrast toward an understanding of repertoire change. I interviewed seven community leaders.

Interviews were mainly conducted in English. A few were done through a Uyghur translator.

One or two were conducted oscillating between English and Chinese. Several were conducted in a small group. In addition to these three main groups I also spoke with two Uyghur businessmen and a professor. In total I conducted twenty eight semi-structured interviews. I contributed to these interviews with observations and conversations at community events.

While the culture of fear noted in China is less dramatic in Istanbul, it was still a condition I had to take into consideration. I took my informants wishes for security seriously. While most were willing to be recorded, some apprehensively, and on condition of anonymity, others refused. Such limitations must be taken seriously but are also a kind of data to understand an individual's psychological state. If the interview was recorded I was free to be more reflexive; however, when I had to transcribe the interview by hand I naturally lost a degree of involvement. Regardless, I was able to generate detailed accounts of my interviews in Istanbul.

Data analysis is based on the coding and memoing of transcripts from all of my interviews in Istanbul. Analysis was based on the grounded theory, semiotic and narrative analysis models.

1.4 Roadmap

Chapter 2 presents a coherent picture of symbolic power and how Uyghurs are represented by the Chinese regime. It builds on semiotic analysis to 1) deconstruct these representations; 2) address how they have evolved; and 3) how they are understood as domination. I argue that a further constituent of symbolic power is the foreclosure of potential to resist symbolic power within the repressive regime space of the dominant representation, which logically feeds into a discussion of deterritorialization. Chapter 3 seeks to address how Uyghurs perceive opportunity and threat in Istanbul. I argue that while Uyghurs perceive a distinct threat in certain kinds of contention they also perceive opportunity for other kinds of contention. I will address perceptions of opportunity along three lines and analyze them for what appears to be the greatest component in shaping repertoire innovation. Chapter 4 approaches resistance in Istanbul from the perspective of our analysis of symbolic power and perceptions of opportunity and threat. While structural opportunities have resulted in claim salience, I argue that perceptions of threat and shortcomings in established organizations have ushered in a new frontier in Uyghur claim making. This section will approach the innovation of repertoires and position our analysis of resistance at the nexus of contentious politics and semiotics. I will end with a synthesis that demonstrates how symbolic power has affected both the substance of repertoires and the target of

claim-making.

2 Deconstructing 'Uyghur'

This chapter will outline symbolic power. Because, focusing on representations clarifies crucial processes to the emergence and reproduction of distinct identities and the conflicts that ensue as agents interact with these representations (Bovingdon, 2010: 7), my goal is to provide a coherent set of analytical vocabulary for understanding how Uyghurs are situated within the politics of representation. The first section will begin with a descriptive vignette of symbolic power before moving on to define semiotics as an analytic tool.

I argue that the Chinese regime has worked to enforce a dual representation of Uyghurs. Section two will address the representation of Uyghurs as singing, dancing minorities. Section three will approach the representation of Uyghurs as separatists and terrorists. Where do these representations come from? How have they taken hold and how have Uyghurs been persecuted under them?

2.1 Symbolic Power

'Symbolic power is that invisible power;' it must be discovered where it is 'least visible'²⁶

In 1955 China's central bank issued a second series of *Renminbi* [People's Currency] at a new exchange value to shore up the mounting inflation of the 1948 series.²⁷ Each note spelled out the denomination in the Chinese, Uyghur, Tibetan, Mongolian, and Zhuang writing system. This polyglot feature remains on modern currency as an important inscription in the construction of China's multi-ethnic national representation, “a point that is critical to China's representation of itself to itself, and to the international sphere (Gladney, 1994: 96).” The Chinese Renminbi would go through three more changes before settling on its current design.²⁸ The most noteworthy, for our purposes, is the pictorial alteration between the fourth and fifth series.

The 1980s fourth series was printed in 1, 2, 5, 10, 50, and 100 Yuan denominations. Each bill featured two of China's official ethnic minority groups side by side with images of famous landscapes on the reverse. The fourth series 2 Yuan bill featured a Uyghur and Yi girl.

With the introduction of the fifth series in 1999 the depiction of nationalities on the currency was abandoned and a 20 Yuan bill was introduced. The place of ethnic minorities was replaced by the visage of Mao Zedong. This can be analyzed as an act against minorities, by removing them symbolically from the public sphere of the market. One could also argue that print-money, as with print-language, served as a systematic instilling of nationalist ideology (Anderson, 1983: 163). What is more interesting is that the 2 Yuan bill, depicting the Uyghur (and Yi), was not simply replaced with the nationalizing image of Mao but removed from circulation. To which one Uyghur in Kashgar expressed, “The minorities are all lost. Lost!”²⁹

On the semiotics of printed currency one may begin by asking what is the cultural, political, and social implication of currency? Wennerlind has noted, currency 'does not exist in a vacuum;' it is part of

²⁶ Bourdieu, 1991: 163-4

²⁷ “Renminbi-RMB,” *China Daily* website: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2006-09/29/content_699307.htm (accessed 11 April 2011)

²⁸ “*Wutao renminbi lishi* [Five series Renminbi History]” *Xinhua* website [Chinese]: http://news.xinhuanet.com/collection/2006-09/13/content_5085533.htm (accessed 13 April 2011); “*Zhongguo Renminbi de Lishi* [A History of Chinese Renminbi]” *Baidu* website [Chinese]: <http://zhidao.baidu.com/question/55224254.html> (accessed 13 April 2011)

²⁹ Field notes, Kashgar, 8 April 2011

an elaborate relationship between 'dynamic social structural conditions within which people act and interact (2001: 557).' On the resonance of this interaction, Juniper argues, "both words and coins are 'minted' by public authority, and both can lose their value due to 'over-circulation (2006:1)." I agree that monetary value is conferred from authority and may lose value through 'over-circulation' but does symbolic value really lose its force through 'over-circulation?' We must engage Uyghur perceptions of the symbolic value inscribed in this currency.

When speaking with Uyghurs on the streets of Kashgar about this change I uncovered a subtle awareness of the semiotics of power. I found that offering my thoughts for their response evaded the reticence of sensitive conversation under repression. Several Uyghurs agreed that the images on currency are a powerful way for regimes to tell stories and that this story was not good for them. Accepting that such conversation is dangerous, gestures can speak quite loudly. Many just shook their heads in concern as we spoke. One man, after asking him about his interpretation of the change, simply clasped his hands together in a pantomime of pressure and control.³⁰ Where does this interpretation come from?

I argue that texts, images and speech denote meaning in relation to other symbols within a given physical or discursive social space. In capitalist regimes, "money can only signal meaning and experience in relation to other symbols, such as private properties and markets (Winnerlind, 2001: 564)." Outside of a Marxist analysis of money as a symbol of the construction of value and exploitation of labor, the graphics printed upon currency can be analyzed as part of the process in constructing a specific discourse. In a repressive regime, full of other culturally ascribed symbols of domination, printed money can signal a relation to other interactions of domination, as evidenced in the responses of several Uyghurs in Kashgar. While it may not be a universal interpretation, the comments of one restaurant owner in Kashgar provide an analyzable window into semiotics. After we had spoken for a while about perceptions of domination he handed me my change, stating, "Here, have some paper with Mao on it."³¹

This exclamation may have been an act of defiance in response to similarly perceived domination, as noted above, or it could have been a mild joke. Regardless of the motivation for his comment, I believe the significance of this utterance provides a rich context for understanding symbolic power. By referring to the currency as an image, rather than the conferred monetary value

³⁰ Field notes, Kashgar, 9 April 2011

³¹ Field notes, Kashgar, 10 April 2011

placed upon it by the regime, this comment elicits Saussure's observations on language and offers a transition into semiotic analysis.

The contribution of Saussure's analysis of language extends beyond linguistics, providing a foundation for the study of symbols in other social sciences. His systematic conceptualization of language consisted of breaking down that system into signs, each made up of two parts. Saussure identified the audible utterance as the signifier and the concept implied by the signifier as the signified. Finally, for Saussure, a sign is the union between these two parts (Ives, 2004). For Barthes, "what we grasp is not at all one term after the other, but the correlation which unites them (1972: 111)." What is most important for critical analysis is not the signifier: the utterance or inscription, or the signified: the concept or intention, but the correlation: the sign or signification. To explain how this process works outside of linguistics Barthes provides a romantic illustration.

Barthes offers the example of a bouquet of roses. He explains, the roses are used to signify passion. Does that mean we have just a signifier, the roses, and a signified, passion? No. The bouquet can be deconstructed back into flowers and passion. The significance of this gesture is conferred by the relationship between the two parts. In this sense, he explains, passion is understood as a formless concept while the roses are a meaningless form (1972: 111). Perhaps Shakespeare spoke too hastily. The meaning is transferred via the sign, the signification. The signification imbedded in currency can be interpreted as the correlation of the subjugation of minorities, as the signified, under the domination of the party, manifest in the image of Mao, as the signifier. It seems that, contrary to Juniper, this signification is not dulled by 'over-circulation.'

Barthes' (1972) analysis is more complex than in linguistic systems. The signifier actually has two aspects. The first is the connotative meaning, or rather, the social-historical context attributed to its second aspect: the denotative form (1972: 121). If Uyghur narratives of domination attribute the form of Mao to the social-historical grievances under the Party then the signification of the currency takes on a deeper meaning. We can continue our analysis to include the removal of the 2 Yuan bill. In a rather metaphysical sense, the removal from circulation of the 2 Yuan bill is the signifier. If correlated to the discussion above concerning Han migration and the threat to Uyghur culture, as the signified, then we can argue that the signification of the removal is tantamount to signifying Uyghur removal from social space or at least contributing to their marginalization. Still, it is incorrect to say that there exists a natural relation between the signifier and the signified (Ives, 2004: 18), which I will later demonstrate as a constituent of resistance to signification.

Extending the inorganic correlation between signifier and signified, Barthes notes, the signification is, therefore, essentially arbitrary (1972: 124). That is, nothing naturally compels the signifier of the removal of minorities from the currency to mean the signified concept of Han domination. Rather, in a poststructuralist turn, Barthes notes, symbols play on the analogy of form and meaning with other symbols in the social space. Symbolic power is that very power that seeks to dominate these symbolic interactions in social space and thereby assert domination over it. How does symbolic power assert this force?

It is a matter of monopolizing cultural and symbolic capital, says Bourdieu (1977, 1991). Cultural capital is understood as the partial or total monopoly of a society's symbolic resources in religion, education, science, and art, by monopolizing the mechanisms for appropriating these resources, such as reading and writing: language (1977: 187), as we will see at the end of this chapter.

Symbolic capital is the accumulated prestige or honor of a given group (1991: 14) and the recognition they receive from another group (1991: 72). If the regime works to inculcate a signification of Uyghurs as undeveloped or dangerous, they logically lose a significant degree of symbolic capital. We can see how the regime's efforts to monopolize cultural and symbolic capital provides them with the ability to impose a certain negative signification, which limits the ability of Uyghurs to challenge these representations within the oppressive environment, due to their lack of cultural and symbolic capital. Before moving on to examine representations in detail it is worth noting that, even with a monopoly over cultural and symbolic capital, the instilling of a particular signification is not automatic. It also requires the coercive power of the regime.

On one hand it requires the systematic production and reproduction of a certain universe of meaning. The regime must engage in continuous signification. In China, this is carried out through various constructions: TV and print media representations, official curriculum, political addresses and through elaborate pictorial displays to inculcate a certain signification of Uyghurs. The regime also wields coercive power to enforce the signification. However, after a time the signification may take on within itself the principle of its own continuation, as when it becomes ubiquitous in social space, freeing agents of the regime from 'the endless work of creating or restoring social relations (Bourdieu, 1977: 189).' The signification becomes 'official reality,' and enforceable through a monopoly of coercive power.

In this section I defined symbolic power in China. I identified the rich analytic vocabulary of semiotics for deconstructing symbols based on signified, signifier, and signification. I also explained

cultural and symbolic capital as crucial for understanding how a regime wields symbolic power.

In the following sections I will argue that the Chinese regime has exerted its monopoly of symbolic power, enforced by coercion, to construct and enforce a dual representation of Uyghurs. One is part of an elaborate history of national representations. One Uyghur student in Istanbul expressed, “I think the root of all the problems is *Dahan Zhuyi* [Han Chauvinism]. The Han nation is more advanced; they neglect any other nation's rights and culture. They think the Chinese culture is superior.”³² This sentiment of *Danhan Zhuyi* was repeated in a number of conversations. This appears to be behind the representation of Uyghurs as the singing dancing subaltern. The second is a more nuanced and certainly more violent one. The representation of Uyghur as separatist and terrorist is more challenging to deconstruct but I believe it conforms to the same analytical model of the first. The following sections will answer a number of questions. How have these significations come into existence? How are they reproduced in social space? How can they be conceptualized as domination?

2.2 The Uyghur as Singing, Dancing Subject

In this section I will identify three places where symbolic power operates in order to instill the signification of Uyghur as the undeveloped singing, dancing subaltern subject. I will begin with an analysis of Chinese cultural capital in the form of controlling the taxonomy of ethnic and national designations and inscribing a national origin myth, based on the superiority of the Han dominated Party. Then I will examine the role of museums in reproducing this signification. I will end with an analysis of ethnic unity posters as the manifestation of symbolic power in everyday social space.

Nationality Designation

In the struggle inherent in the politics of representation, where agents are employed in imposing a vision of the social world, they wield the symbolic and cultural capital acquired in previous struggles, in particular the power they possess over instituted taxonomies (Bourdieu, 1991: 239). The Communist victory over the *Guomindang* in October of 1949 ushered in 'New China' and guaranteed the monopoly of the Communist Party of China (CCP) over naming their victory and defining the ethnic

³² Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul one year 13 June 2011

composition of the new nation.

In the early 1950s the regime invited representatives of its disparate ethnic and national groups to Beijing. Gladney explains, although more than 400 separate groups applied to be recognized as distinct ethnic and national groups, there were only forty-one nationalities listed on the first census of 1953. The 1964 census included fifty-three nationalities, and the 1982 and 1990 censuses finally settled on the current fifty-six nationalities (2004: 9). In an almost Kafkaesque exertion of the power to define, according to the 1990 census there were still 749,341 ethnically 'unidentified' individuals awaiting recognition by the regime (2004: 9). This is arguably not only an example of power constructing its subjects but even leaving them 'officially' unconstructed.

The regime not only set to the task of defining the nation in terms of ethnic demographics it also began to define the core characteristics of individual ethnic groups. Early propaganda films³³ for example served this purpose as did the erection of many memorials to the 'peaceful liberation' of minority lands. In the People's Square of Xinjiang's capital Urumqi there is a large obelisk which reads *Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun Jinjun Xinjiang Jinian* [A memorial of the Chinese People's Liberation Army marching into Xinjiang].³⁴ Such inscriptions were a vital component in the early representation of minorities within official discourse. The signified is that the people living in the region were in need of liberation. It instills the discourse of the party as peaceful liberator and benefactor. The signifier is the text, memorializing this liberation. One signification, arguably, is that those minorities rely on the Party for their livelihood. But the politics of representation go deeper. In addition, the regime museumizes national representations (Anderson, 1983) to further enshrine the official discourse.

Museumized Signification

The *Minzu Wenhua Gong* [Cultural Palace of Nationalities] is a rather euphemistically named cultural museum in Beijing. On the ground floor there is a collection of photographs depicting each of China's 56 official nationalities.³⁵ Of the 55 minorities 39 were represented by a young female or predominantly female group. All of the 55 minorities were in a rural setting wearing traditional clothing

³³ An excellent example of early propaganda films is *Cui Wei, Chen Huaiai, and Liu Baode's* 1964 film *Tianshan de Hong Hua* [The Red Flowers of Tianshan]. It is a typical Communist propaganda depicting the unity and benefit of ethnic minorities working with the party for mutual development.

³⁴ Field notes, Urumqi, 22 April 2011

³⁵ Filed notes, Urumqi, 21 April 2011

and mostly engaged in musical or culinary activities. These observations are explained as the 'eroticization' and 'exoticization' of the minority (Gladney, 1994, 2004)

The Uyghur image shows a woman in red twirling on a large carpet; two men in traditional clothes kneel with instruments in hand, as several others in the background complete the orchestra for the dancer at the heart of the image. They are performing in a room that opens to a trellis hung with vegetation. It is colorful and playful. The Han representation, however, is stoic, serious and pensive. A single man in a laboratory, white coat and gloves, peers into a mechanical device.³⁶ What is the signification of such representations?

The signifier is the chromatic form, the bare image of Uyghurs dancing and singing. If the intent of these images is to produce depictions of the nature of China's nationalities, which one would assume from such a museum, one might wonder why the specific forms were selected. The signified is, presumably in the mind of the regime, the official conceptualization of the depicted group. When we look at the image again, we see how the representation is given meaning in the correlation between the two. The signification of Uyghur as only singer and dancer, living in rural environments without modern science, is signified in relation to the Han whose signification appears to be a strong, masculine, modern force. Minorities are exotic and colorful, to be seen as objects of curiosity or sources of entertainment, while the Han are stoic and the force behind advancement and knowledge.

While Gladney (1994, 2004) has detailed this representation from an exterior vantage, one is left asking, how has it affected Uyghur life? If we accept Juniper, considering this representation has been at the center of official Chinese ethnic policies and representations since the 1950s, it should have very little affect on Uyghurs after prolonged circulation. However, after examining photographs I had taken of these images with Uyghurs in Istanbul, many Uyghurs reported a similar signification.

I don't agree with these things. We say we also have professor. We also have academic people. Why government, why news don't give those people pictures. Why only give our singer... why? Maybe Chinese government think in Xinjiang, make Uyghur people think, oh the government helped us. We don't have academic people or any military. We only have dancer or singer or another thing.³⁷

This comment reveals frustration and concern at what appears to be the marginalization of

³⁶ See Appendix II

³⁷ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul four years, Turkish citizen, 26 May 2011

Uyghurs inscribed in official representations. If we continue the analysis we might wonder what exactly this Uyghur informant is critical of. Is he expressing grievance at the bare image, or something deeper?

Of course I can dance. I can sing. Everyone can dance or sing. But they don't have to make this a national thing. Dancing is only an aspect of Uyghur culture. We will dance when we are happy.³⁸

In China, Uyghurs are good at dance, good at singing. If I am talking to Chinese, the first question is can you sing, can you dance? What's the fucking idea? Some people is singer not everyone can sing and dance. Also, they discriminate against Uyghurs in Inner China. *Yang Rou Chuan*, it means kebab, you see many Uyghurs in inner China selling kebab but in Chinese mind every Uyghur selling kebab. The Chinese government does not show our good people, good culture to Han Chinese.³⁹

A female Uyghur student related several encounters she had with Han. After asking her what nationality she was they would often exclaim, “Oh, you are a Uyghur? That must mean you can dance very well. Dance for me!” These stereotypes are hurtful; she went on to say, especially for those Uyghur girls who are lured to Inner China to work as dancing girls. In response to this signification, she bluntly stated, “It's a lie!”⁴⁰ It is not against the signifier, the image of Uyghurs singing and dancing, but the signification, that all Uyghurs can do is sing and dance that my informants targeted their criticism.

A general pattern of dissatisfaction with these representations emerged when I engaged the nature of the signification with my Uyghur informants. Furthermore, their comments point toward an understanding of how the signification may be transferred into more material forms of domination. That is, the representation has been enforced by educational prejudices thereby serving to partially reify the signification. That critical responses were produced by two images is quite alarming considering the rather ubiquitous nature of such representations. In Xinjiang, I wondered if the representations would be the same. If the representation in Beijing is thus situated, how is it museumized in Xinjiang?

The introductory inscription at the *Xinjiang Weiyuer Zizhiqu Bowuguan* [Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region Museum] in Urumqi appears to maintain a related signification. It describes Xinjiang as a multi-national homeland since ancient times. It states that, “For a long time they have

³⁸ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul one year, 13 June 2011

³⁹ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul three years, 24 June 2011

⁴⁰ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul three years, 26 May 2011

been cooperated [sic] as one family to build and safeguard the borderland. Under the glory of the nationality policy of the Party, precious traditional cultures of various nationalities have received effective protection, inheritance and development.”⁴¹ This inscription relates the official historical narrative. I interpret it as the declaration of the Party's power. It claims sole responsibility for the protection, inheritance, and development of culture. If we continue with our understanding of the signification offered above and apply this to the notion of 'one family' then we must ask where Uyghurs are situated in this family, presumably dominated by the Han. In such ways, the policy of recognizing the Uyghur as a minority under Chinese rule is perpetuated (Gladney, 2003: 457).

The displays reminded me of Native American history museums in the United States that depict the cultural victims of America's colonial legacy. I felt that there was a fascination with the past that left no place for questions of conquest. The museum was full of the kind of cultural artifacts one usually finds in such places.⁴² The implication proffered by the representations in both Beijing and Urumqi, I argue, is that contemporary minorities are incapable of transcending their ancestor's situation and are therefore treated accordingly by the regime or general Han society. At least, we can extrapolate from the comments above that many Uyghurs perceive a correlation between these representations and domination. Very few of my informants had visited either museum but they were aware of symbolic power's other manifestations in social space.

Museums facilitate an understanding of how symbolic power operates in static locations, but, as many Uyghurs do, you can avoid visiting a museum if you perceive its message as part of a dominant discourse. However, in line with Foucauldian notions of power, you can never fully escape power; it seeps through the walls so to speak.

⁴¹ In full the inscription reads: “Covering an area of 1.66 million square kilometers, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region is a treasure land in the Northwestern bordering region in our motherland with vast land and richly endowed resources. The extended Silk Road linked the Eastern and Western civilizations. Being situated deep in the hinterland, it conceals the deep secret of the converged ancient civilizations of the world. Xinjiang has been the multi-national homeland from ancient times. Forty-seven nationalities live here today, among them 13 brother nationalities, such as: Uygur, Han, Uzbek, Daur, Manchu, Tartar, Russian, etc. have lived in Xinjiang for generations. For a long time they have been cooperated as one family to build and safeguard the borderland. Under the glory of the nationality policy of the Party, precious traditional cultures of various nationalities have received effective protection, inheritance and development. In the historical process of the development of Western regions various nationalities are more united to construct together a harmonious society. We hold this exhibition of Display of Xinjiang Nationality Custom to represent the gorgeous conditions and customs of the 12 ethnic minorities of Xinjiang and to show the splendor of the beautiful rarity of treasure house of Chinese national culture.” Field notes, Urumqi, 8 March 2011

⁴² Displays presented musical instruments and pottery, textiles and artwork behind glass, and dioramas of colorful minorities engaged in traditional practices, but also a number of photographs of Uyghurs in contemporary clothes participating in cultural activities.

Power on the Walls

Traveling around Xinjiang I observed several things. In Yarkand, Southeast of Kashgar, for example, the demarcation is starkly drawn along two streets, with Han exclusively living and working along *Xincheng Lu* [New City Road] and Uyghurs living along *Laocheng Lu* [Old City Road].⁴³ This is an important observation for two reasons. It relates to the opportunity for Uyghurs to reach out to Han and challenge their signification. Secondly, in predominantly Han neighborhoods there is not the same prevalence of the kind of public inscriptions as in Uyghur neighborhoods.⁴⁴

General public space in Xinjiang is marked by the ubiquity of banners, slogans and posters. I found that Uyghurs were apprehensive to speak about these things but after several conversations on the street a pattern emerged. The majority of Uyghurs I encountered in Xinjiang who were willing to discuss them treated them as propaganda. If we apply the same semiotic analysis as above I believe we will discover another artifact of symbolic power's domination over Uyghur social space. I observed the following posters in Korla.⁴⁵

Jun Ai Min, Min Yong Jun, Junmin Tuanjie Yi Jiaqing [The military loves the people, the people embraces the military, the military and the people united are one family]. In the upper right hand corner, saluting in stoic patriotism, are three Han officers, one from each branch of the military. They are facing toward the red field of the Chinese flag, with its golden stars creased in the wind. In front of the flag are four white doves. At the center of the image, behind the text, are rows of soldiers in camouflage. The bottom of the image shows pictures of the Great Wall and the iconic front of the Forbidden City, Mao's portrait hangs visibly over the entrance. Compressed at the very bottom left of the image is an old Uyghur man with a white beard and black skull cap. He is handing a red basket of gifts to a phalanx of soldiers.

Jun Min Qing, Jing Min Qing, Chuchu Ningju AiGuo Qing [Civil military sentiment, Civil

⁴³ Field notes, Yarkand, 17 April 2011

⁴⁴ For example, on every Uyghur house in all the towns and villages I visited, there was one or a combination of three plaques near the door. These read *Wenming Jiating* [Civilized Household], *Pingan Jiating* [Safe Household], and *Wuxing* [Five Star]. However, I never observed such inscriptions on Han houses. The apparent meaning, a designation of worth conferred from the state, coupled with other observations maintains the signification. The following analysis of public inscriptions is based on posters found in what could be considered general public space. While there are kinds of inscriptions that occur only in Uyghur areas, there is another that occurs in public areas with both Han and Uyghur traffic. The type and place of various public inscriptions is itself an interesting direction for future research. These observations are beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁴⁵ See Appendix III

Police Sentiment, Everywhere a Coherent Patriotic Sentiment]. Sweeping from the lower left corner upward to the top right is a large field of red, the Chinese flag, victoriously splattering the background. At the center of the image are two large white doves. In the top left corner three Uyghurs are facing a Chinese police officer, with two more officers behind him. The Uyghurs' faces tell of some unknown sorrow or concern as they shake the hand of the Han officer who is smiling confidently. Across the bottom of the poster, two uniformed Han officers are standing, smiling at an old Uyghur man with a small wispy beard and a Hotanese wool hat. The Uyghur man appears sunken and weak while the Han officer is plump and reaching out farther to meet the old man's slightly withdrawn hands.

Aside from obvious superficial differences, the signification of these two posters is the same. The first observation of note is that the Uyghurs depicted in both images are clearly receiving the support of the Han. The juxtaposition of the elderly, even frail, Uyghur man next to the younger Han officers reinstates the signification we saw above in the museum. The signified is an undeveloped people progressing under the support of the Party. The Uyghur, signifier, here is depicted as weak and in need of assistance. In relationship to the signified concept of provider, given form by the image of the Han officers, the significations are understood in relation to one another. The Uyghur is poor, the Han is strong.

The common image of the doves between the two images plays on the relationship of doves with peace. It encourages a peaceful reliance on the support of the Han. The text itself propels the visual meaning. It speaks of peaceful coexistence under the care of the military, police, and party. The space taken up by the flag in both images and the depiction of the Great Wall and Forbidden City, both powerful nationalistic symbols, further stresses the magnificence of the Party. We see a vibrant symbolic artifact that reinstates the marginalization of Uyghurs, under the Party. The comments below highlight a number of interpretations of these images made after examining photographs.

Han people are government people but Uyghur people are not government people.... Han people are police but Uyghur people are not police. Han people help Uyghur people. The Government says the Han helps the Uyghur people and also says Chinese government helps Uyghur people. And also, in Chinese news you must say minorities are very happy. Happy! Happy! Happy!⁴⁶

But not every Uyghur knows the real meaning of what the Chinese are doing. This provocation, if many Uyghurs

⁴⁶ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul four years, Turkish citizen, 26 May 2011

are not so knowledgeable and don't pay attention to the real meaning, when they see they know it is not reality. One day you are arresting Uyghurs and then you print image to lie. Children maybe don't realize this.⁴⁷

All the people, for example the young people see this and they will be upset. But little children will see this and they may think something different, so it can change Uyghur's minds after a long time.⁴⁸

I believe these comments illustrate an immediate perception of domination, one that can be understood by an application of our analysis. They demonstrate a sentiment that while these posters may be interpreted as false by a number of Uyghurs, they are still capable of affecting others. Younger Uyghurs may be influenced by the messages on the posters. However, according to the three comments, they perceive these posters as empty propaganda that serves to instill a dominant narrative that does not conform to their perceptions of reality, but serves to maintain domination. Perhaps now we can understand why the poster in the introduction was torn down.

The comments in this section point to a shared perception that the prevalent signification of the Uyghur as an undeveloped subaltern is as a source of domination. Many Uyghur respondents appear to equate this representation with either the lack or denial of education. As a few respondents above noted, this signification is perceived as a lie, perpetuated by the regime. But, Camus noted, “you can rebel equally well against a lie as against oppression (Camus, 2008: 13).” Does the rebelling actor target the teller of the lie or the lie itself, i.e. a particular signification or the regime from which it is promulgated? How is the decision to resist either the representation or the regime influenced by perceptions of opportunity? Before I address these questions in the following chapters I will discuss the second representation of Uyghur as separatist or terrorist.

2.3 The Uyghur as Separatist, Terrorist Other

The representation of the Uyghur as the violent Other has arguably been responsible for legitimizing harsh domination. This section will examine what I see as the three discourses within this representation. The first, which slightly overlaps the previous section, is the ethnic and national unity discourse. The second is the discourse on Islamic terrorism. Third is the discourse on literature as

⁴⁷ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul three years, 24 June 2011

⁴⁸ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul five years, Turkish citizen, 2 June 2011

separatism and terrorism.⁴⁹

Oppose Ethnic Splittism

As discussed above, China represents itself as a multi-ethnic nation in which Uyghurs are an historically situated integral member. However, as we have seen, the primary representation of Uyghurs within this community has been one of an undeveloped singing, dancing member, which has led to perceptions of marginalization. The official historical narrative has been used by the regime to delegitimize Uyghur calls for autonomy or independence (Bovingdon, 2010: 88). At the same time the regime has promoted a signification of the Uyghur as separatist. Below I will first analyze a number of banners as they are used by the regime to promulgate this signification. I will then proceed to examine the context for this signification.

Like the posters noted above, banners and signs are common features on the walls of Xinjiang.⁵⁰ They come in a number of constructions, such as, *Fandui minzu fenlie zhuyi* [oppose ethnic separatism], *weihu zuguo tongyi* [protect ancestral homeland unity], *weihu shehui wending* [protect social stability], and *quanguo gezu renmin datuanjie wansui* [long live the ethnic unity of all people across the country].⁵¹

These inscriptions promote a narrative of a unified, ancestral homeland to a multiethnic community. The signified is that the unity of the country is under attack. In order to grasp the signification we must dissect the text into its denotative and connotative meaning. The context implicitly points to the nature of the threat, the signified concept. As will be elaborated shortly, the signification is that the threat to the country may emanate from any Uyghur action, which is left up to the regime's monopoly of the power to define. How has the regime manipulated this signification to legitimise its actions against Uyghurs?

⁴⁹ It is not my intention to dismiss the documented use of violence by some individuals and small groups of Uyghur dissidents. For an excellent event timeline of Uyghur organized protests and violent events in Xinjiang from 1949 to 2005 see Bovingdon, 2010: 174-190. It is clear that acts of violence have taken place. It is perhaps worth noting that when all non-violent repertoires of claim-making are forbidden the regime almost guarantees more violent forms of claim-making (Tilly, 2006). However, I will argue that the regime has manipulated a relatively low frequency phenomenon to craft a categorical signification which is used to institutionalize and legitimize its domination of Uyghurs.

⁵⁰ See Appendix IV

⁵¹ Field notes, Kashgar 19 April 2011

The regime defines separatism, Articles 102 through 113 of the Criminal Law,⁵² in terminology that is vague and easily manipulated to fit any unwanted action by the regime (HRIC, 2007). This is just the case of Uyghur scholar, Tohti Tunyaz. In 1998, on a research trip to Xinjiang from Japan, where he was pursuing a PhD, Tohti was immediately arrested by police upon arrival. After holding him incommunicado for thirty months, he was sentenced to eleven years in prison for 'revealing state secrets' and engaging in 'ethnic splittism (Bovingdon, 2010: 100-101).' The crime of advocating ethnic separatism was in reference to documents he had legally obtained from an official librarian in Xinjiang and a book he was accused of publishing entitled *The Inside Story of the Silk Road* (RFA, 2006). The regime regards Uyghur historiography quite seriously, as it poses the potential of challenging the official narrative.

In 2001 Human Rights Watch reported, "Chinese authorities have not discriminated between peaceful and violent dissent, however, and their fight against 'separatism' and 'religious extremism' has been used to justify widespread and systematic human rights violations against Uighurs, including many involved in non-violent political, religious, and cultural activities (HRW, 2001)." Becquelin adds, "virtually every 'expression of dissatisfaction' with the government is immediately associated with 'separatist ideology...' (Becquelin, 2004: 43)." The regime wields its monopoly of cultural capital to control the language of separatism in order to legitimize its policies against Uyghurs (Shichor, 2005; Amnesty, 2003, 2004) and consolidate its domination (Naramore, 2002).

A revealing example of this signification of Uyghur claim-making as separatism is demonstrated in an official document by the Study Group of the Xinjiang Party Committee, *Investigative Report on Correctly Apprehending and Resolving Xinjiang's Nationality Problem Under the New Situation*. The February 2001 document states, "In the country, a few dangerous people with narrow-minded nationalist thinking are pushing national-ethnic self-respect and self-belief to extremism, inciting scorn and discrimination of other national-ethnic cultures... They one-sidedly debate a hot social issue, and fan feelings of dissatisfaction among the masses (HRW, 2005: 57)." This document raises a number of questions. What does 'pushing national-ethnic self-respect and self-belief to extremism' mean? What are 'hot social issues?' And how does the regime define fanning 'dissatisfaction among the masses?' An informed analysis of this official document reveals a policy of zero tolerance for Uyghur claim-making. I would argue it appears to even set in print a policy of

⁵² For the entire Criminal Law in English see the Congressional Executive Community on China website: <http://www.cecc.gov/pages/newLaws/criminalLawENG.php> (accessed 16 December 2008)

cultural suppression. We must realize the fact that this document comes from within the same party that has institutionalized the representation of Uyghurs that my informants have noted as being quite harmful to their self image. The language in this document precludes Uyghurs from challenging official representations, to push for self-respect and self-belief and constrains all free speech of 'hot social issues.' That is, apparently, even engaging in a non-violent challenge to representations could be signified as separatism.

Targeting separatism and terrorism has been the official justification of the numerous 'strike hard' campaigns in Xinjiang (Dwyer, 2005: 54). On a visit to Xinjiang in 2005, Luo Gan, a top Chinese law official urged, "We hope all politics and law officials, the soldiers of the armed police and the People's Liberation Army... can thoroughly safeguard social order, advance ethnic unity, and maintain lasting political stability (RFA, 2005a)." Such comments, combined with the representations presented elsewhere, begin to explain how the signification has taken hold in social space.

Posters, banners, and official announcements call upon the official narrative of a peaceful, multi-ethnic homeland. They urge the population to resist activities that contradict or challenge this narrative. When Uyghurs grumble at injustice the regime claims that they are inciting separatism because the official discourse does not allow for the existence of injustice.⁵³ In this sense, symbolic power has worked to construct the discursive reality and forced the label of separatist on anyone who challenges this reality. But who is the primary audience of such discursive formations?

To return to the banners, one is left wondering what audience they are intended for. That they were written only Chinese might be an indicator. One Uyghur in Kashgar noted, "If there really was ethnic unity, why would they need to hang this everywhere? This is just for the Han."⁵⁴ In much the same way as the depictions in the museum in Beijing were meant to represent minority characteristics, presumably for members of the majority Han, these banners serve to promote a representation of Uyghurs who are left helpless to challenge their validity because Uyghurs have no symbolic capital to rely on to refute them. Uyghurs have already been designated as backwards and in need of the support of the Party. The banners direct this signification to further shape Han perspectives. In conversation with Han in Beijing and Xinjiang the image of violent Uyghur was common. The majority of Han I

⁵³ Israeli has noted, "many claim that among the fifty-six nationalities in China, the Tibetans and Uyghurs, far from being discriminated against are actually 'privileged and overindulged' (2010: 97)."

⁵⁴ Field notes, Kashgar, 11 April 2011. I argue that, considering the repressive environment of Xinjiang and the extremely sensitive nature of such comments, they should not be treated lightly as simple anecdotes. In fact, a number of Uyghurs pointed out that the posters and banners were specifically propaganda aimed against them but intended for a Han audience.

spoke with reported that the reason they viewed Uyghurs as dangerous and violent was the fact that they were predominantly Muslim. This can be seen, in part, as a response to shifting official discourse.

I have focused on the framing of Uyghur as domestic separatist. However, scholars (Dwyer, 2005; Christoffersen, 2002; Chien-peng, 2002) have noted that since 9/11 China has altered its representation of Uyghurs as separatists to fit the 'war on terror. Comments by the Chinese Foreign Ministry from January 2002 explain this representation. Discussing unrest in China, the Ministry announced, "These people have links with the Bin Laden clique and have been infected with the jihad mentality... We should regard cracking down on these terrorists as part of the international struggle against terrorism (Dwyer, 2005: 54)." How has the regime promoted this signification change? How has the signification of Islamic terrorism manifest itself in domination?

Oppose Illegal Religious Activities

Since September 11, "the Chinese government has been conducting a comprehensive propaganda campaign, aimed at both domestic and international audiences, to label all Uighur opposition as linked to international terrorist networks (Becquelin, 2004: 39)." Human rights organizations (Amnesty 2004, 2009; HRIC, 2011) have documented that since China joined the 'war on terror' persecution of Uyghurs has increased.

As mentioned above, in the past the regime equated dissidence as synonymous with separatist ideology. However, noted in the Foreign Ministry comments, after joining the 'war on terror,' Uyghur unrest has been increasingly equated with terrorism. Considering the generally accepted global conflation of terrorism with Islam, considering Uyghurs are a predominantly Muslim it would seem a convenient frame for the application of this signification.

Bhatia has observed the interest of some regimes to over-emphasize the militant Islamic character of their opposition in the hopes of generating support from the US in the 'war on terror.' The goal is to make domestic conflicts appear as part of one big Al-Qaeda or a series of small Al-Qaedas united in purpose (2005: 13). China appears to be employing this logic.

As was noted above, certification is a mechanism that affects contention but regimes also engage in the pursuit of certification. The signification of Uyghur as terrorist received considerable certification from the US when it agreed to label The East Turkestan Islamic Movement as a designated terrorist organization in 2001. Although it was only this organization that the US placed on its list of

terrorist groups, the Chinese regime has apparently used this as *carte-blanche* to accuse all transnational Uyghur organizations of inciting separatism or terrorism (Bovingdon, 2010: 136). The signification of Uyghur as terrorist has received further certification from individual members of the US congress.

Newt Gingrich wrote in a piece for the Washington Examiner on 14 May 2009, uncritically accepting Chinese signification in reference to the 17 Uyghurs being held at Guantanamo Bay, “These Uighurs have been allied with and trained by al Qaeda-affiliated terrorist groups. The goal of the Uighurs is to establish a separate sharia state (Gingrich, 2009).” In a response printed in Foreign Policy Magazine, Nury Turkel, a prominent Uyghur rights lawyer in Washington DC, noted with concern the way Gingrich's editorial echoed Chinese propaganda in extending the label of terrorist to all Uyghurs (Turkel, 2009). We see how, in contrast to the discussions above, the signification of Uyghur as terrorist is transnational in nature. But I believe it can be deconstructed in the same way if we examine its evolution and implementation domestically.

Amnesty International reported that in the six months following 9/11, thousands of Uyghurs were arrested. In 2003, one unconfirmed source estimated detentions under charges of 'separatism' and 'terrorism' in the tens of thousands; from April to August 2002, 5,000 people were arrested in Kashgar alone, of which at least 150 were promptly executed (Amnesty, 2004). While Uyghur dissidents have admittedly used violence against the state, such widespread 'strike hard' campaigns may only strengthen separatist minded Uyghurs (Chien-peng, 2002). But a critical appraisal of the situation might lead one to assume that is the intent of the regime. After all, it would lend legitimacy to the signification; each act of Uyghur violence, presumably in response to perceptions of regime violence, may be used by the regime to further cement Uyghur otherness and savagery, as has been the case in other regimes (Bhatia, 2005: 19). Where does the original justification for crackdowns come from?

Official publications such as *Xinjiang de Fenlie yu Fanfenlie Douzheng* [The struggle of separatism and anti-separatism in Xinjiang] state that after 9/11 the terrorist threat from 'East Turkestan' forces increased (Chen, 2009).⁵⁵ In this way official sources propel the signification of Eastern

⁵⁵ The book is a purportedly an objective discussion of violent separatism. The content of the book, the text inside, identifies terrorism in connection to Islam as a potential threat emanating from East Turkestan forces within the Uyghur community. However, the symbolic force of this artifact begins at the cover. On the cover, in addition to the title, is a powerful signifier to reaffirm the signification of Islam with terrorism. Below the text is a geometric shape identical to traditional Islamic art. Because of restrictions on depicting people and animals in Islam, rich geometric patterns replace the frescos and icons of other religious art. Considering the Uyghurs are predominantly Islamic, it seems that the parallel between Islam and terrorism transfers easily onto Uyghurs with minimal prodding from the regime. A subtle analysis

Turkestan terrorists. East Turkestan is intrinsically linked to Uyghurs. This appears to contribute to the institutionalization of distrust, fear, and hatred of Uyghurs among Xinjiang's Han population. As one Uyghur related, “Why do they [Han Chinese] hate Uyghur people? This is the result of the government. And after that the government can do anything.”⁵⁶

In October 2001, authorities in Urumqi announced that they would increase the intensity of the 'strike hard' campaigns. Chinese officials in Xinjiang routinely equate campaigns against all crimes with targeting separatism, terrorism, and 'illegal religious activities.' According to an official pamphlet, *Protect the Unity of the Motherland: a Handbook*, the CCP claims that, “separatists and anti-China forces use the cloak of religion to fan national separatism (HRW, 2005a: 66),” which was soon to become synonymous with terrorism.

In July 2001 the Chairmen's Committee of the Xinjiang People's Regional Congress accepted a comprehensive series of amendments to the 1994 regulations on religion. The vocabulary change is a significant indicator of the regime's position. The vocabulary change can be seen as part of a campaign to recast religion as a source of terrorism, and institutionalize a system of greater controls for Uyghurs. While the 1994 regulations stated the '*protection* of normal religious activities,' the amendment held, “*regulate* religious activities according to law, strengthen the management of religious affairs, and *guide religion to adapt to socialist society* (HRW, 2005a: 33),” italics mine. Furthermore, the regulations demanded that 'all citizens who profess a religion' are required to demonstrate loyalty to the Chinese state but the requirement that believers oppose 'national splittism and illegal religious activities' is vaguely written. Human Rights Watch interpreted the change as “a catch-all clause that hands virtually unlimited power to the authorities to investigate or arrest any religious practitioner in disfavor with officials (HRW, 2005a: 33).” How has this conflation of religion with violence and terrorism been transferred into the social space of Han, Uyghur relations?

In terms of Uyghur perceptions, several Uyghur informants explained that Islam is a kind of umbrella⁵⁷ and the regime doesn't want Uyghurs coming together because the Qu'ran teaches that you are justified in fighting oppression.⁵⁸ In every conversation I had in Istanbul my informants explained religious persecution in terms of the regime's perception that Islam is a violent religion. Conversation with Han in China seems to validate the perceptions of these Uyghur informants. A number of Han I

reveals an object rich in symbolism toward promoting the signification discussed in this section.

⁵⁶ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul one year 13 June 2011

⁵⁷ Interview with a Uyghur community leader, 11 June 2011

⁵⁸ Interview with a Uyghur businessman living in Istanbul two years, Turkish citizen, 24 June 2011

spoke with explained that they would never want a Uyghur girlfriend or wife because Uyghurs are Muslims, and Muslims are violent.⁵⁹ One Han couple explained that because Uyghurs are Muslims they cannot be trusted,⁶⁰ and another, on my way to Kashgar, warned me about dangerous Uyghurs.⁶¹ This signification of Uyghurs as Muslims, ergo dangerous-potential terrorists, is reproduced in public signs, books, official announcements, and media representations.⁶² So, what role does the regime assign for Uyghurs who have not been designated as terrorists?

In the quote above, Luo Gan, continued, “The soldiers of the armed police must continue to raise their levels of deployment and capacity to intervene, continue to raise their powers in the fight against terrorism and their powers to safeguard the construction, development and stability of Xinjiang (RFA 2005a).” But if the Uyghur is predominantly signified as an unskilled subaltern, and especially in light of signification as separatist or terrorist, how does the regime envision their place in maintaining stability? In a telling announcement by Ma Dazheng, a prominent Han professor and 'expert' on Xinjiang,⁶³ we begin to form a picture. In 2001 he stated, “Hans are the most reliable force for stability in Xinjiang (Bovingdon, 2010: 61).” A deconstruction of his statement reveals, a continuation of the concept behind the banners: the unity and stability of the Party dominated 'reality' is under threat. His statement, the signifier, is divided into form and meaning: taken with the context of other Uyghur representations in the social space. It is not difficult to understand the implicit signification of his utterance. It maintains that Uyghurs are the source of the instability that must be guarded against, and, as such, they are precluded from a significant participatory role in the community.⁶⁴ How does this contribute to our analysis of symbolic power?

⁵⁹ Field notes, Kashgar 11 April 2011

⁶⁰ Field notes, Korla 3 April 2011

⁶¹ Filed notes, Korla 5 April 2011

⁶² A survey of 159 China Daily articles, from 30 June 2009 to 21 February 2011, found that the issue of terrorism or separatism was brought up 40 times. The demographic of all mentioned terrorist or separatist forces was Uyghur. These articles mostly pointed to a clear link between Islamic terrorist groups and violence in China. Where the article did dwell on the Islamic connection it pointed to overseas organizations such as the World Uyghur Congress.

⁶³ Ma Dazheng is a trusted Chinese academic and his position can be extended to represent that of the Party. Again, due to certain limitations on research in China, and the degree of secrecy with which the regime keeps its internal policies, the pronouncements of intellectuals such as Ma can lend considerable insight into the inner logic of the regime.

⁶⁴ Of course it would be incorrect to claim that there are no Uyghurs in positions of authority. The Ethnic Autonomous Region law stipulates that the titular ethnicity of a given province and prefecture must be represented in the local government with a Han counterpart. Due to China's political nature, at every level of politics there is both a government and party official. How this has transferred into practice, however, is that while Uyghurs are represented physically in political arrangements they are second in authority and power to their Han counterpart. Such conditions lead one Chinese legal scholar to point out that the political system in the Autonomous region, “certainly does not correspond to what is usually understood [by] the term 'autonomy' (Yu Xingzhong n.d., in Bovingdon, 2010: 48).

I would argue that we can identify a pattern emerging where Uyghurs are subjected to a dual signification that institutionalizes and legitimizes domination. Considering the signification that Uyghur discontent is inciting separatism or engaging in terrorism, what recourse do Uyghurs have to challenge the perceived domination of the Chinese regime? Scholars (O'Brien and Li, 2006; Hollander and Einwohner, 2004; Scott, 1985, 1990) have pointed out that people can engage in resistance while remaining outwardly submissive to the regime. Considering the relative severity and complexity of domination outlined above we would expect to see a correspondingly rich hidden transcript (Scott, 1990: 27). However, considering the symbolic nature of domination, and that hidden transcripts are often discursive or performative, how does symbolic power in China extend its domination into the realm of the hidden transcript? If we extend our discussion of the signified, the concept that Uyghur actions are conflatable with separatism and terrorism, to more unlikely places such as art and literature, we will encounter how the signification has been extended to further forestall Uyghur opportunity to challenge either the regime or the signification itself.

Oppose Terrorism in the Spiritual Form

After the publication of his short story "Wild Pigeon" in the *Kashgar Literature Journal*, the writer, Nurmuhemmet Yasin was arrested on 29 November 2004. Following a closed trial in February 2005, in which he was reportedly denied a lawyer, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison for 'inciting Uyghur separatism.'⁶⁵ A few months later the magazine's editor was sentenced to three years in prison for publishing the story (RFA, 2005b). The regime interpreted the story as veiled dissent.

The story tells of a young pigeon that flies into a new land. There he encounters other pigeons living in captivity. He asks them how their hosts treat them, "That is different," the elder replied. "The humans keep us in the pigeon cage to feed us, and it is right that they would eat us if necessary; it is a necessity for mankind to be able to catch us and eat us. That is the way it should be. No pigeon among us is permitted to object to this arrangement." In the end the young pigeon cannot stand the captivity and chooses to eat a poisoned strawberry. "...eat it, and it will set you free. Restore the honor of our flock. And remember always that true freedom comes only at a high price."⁶⁶ It is not difficult to see

⁶⁵ World Uyghur Congress Website: http://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/?page_id=8548 (accessed 10 July 2011)

⁶⁶ Selected passages are from Dr. Dolkun Kamberi's translation. Available at International PEN Uyghur Center website: <http://www.uyghurpen.org/read-the-wild-pigeon.html> (accessed 20 July 2011).

how such allegory criticizes the regime and, in light of the freedom to designate separatist acts afforded by the regime's monopoly of power, the harsh sentence fits into our understanding of symbolic power, enforced by coercive power. In this example we encounter another place where the regime controls cultural and symbolic capital to dominate Uyghurs and extend the signification onto artistic actions.

In 2002, Tursunjan Amati, recited a poem at the end of a concert at the Xinjiang People's Hall. He was arrested on charges that the “poem attacks social reality by innuendo, advocates ideas of ethnic separatism, and shows a strong tendency of opposing the society, the reality, and the government (Bovingdon, 2010: 80).” Speaking of 'reality' the regime enforces its power to define, and construct reality. His crime was later amended to 'terrorism in the spiritual form.' It demonstrates how the regime is engaged in symbolic domination to move beyond designating Uyghurs and Uyghur action but to control Uyghur words, and thought. If we analyze the official discourse we will discover how such significations have been imposed.

In 2002 the vice-director of the Xinjiang People's Congress charged that Uyghurs using 'literary means' and 'arts and literature' to 'distort historical facts' were the same people engaged in 'violent terrorist operations' of the past. He accused them of 'taking advantage of art and literature to tout the products of opposition to the people and to the masses and advocating ethnic splittist thinking (Becquelin, 2004: 43).' This has resulted in a policy that has supplanted Uyghur language in favor of Mandarin, and prompted burning and banning Uyghur-language books (HRW, 2011: 234).

The regime seeks to conflate not only overt claim-making but also 'hidden' artistic and literary action with forbidden repertoires of contention. Admittedly art can be rebellious, some might argue that is when art is best, but to transform 'arts and literature' into 'violent terrorist operations,' seems to be almost alchemical. Conflating 'distorting historical facts,' contrasting the official narrative, with terrorism, presumably means to forestal critical historiography. If the official narrative is perceived as a source of Uyghur domination how can Uyghurs hope to engage in a critical discourse against perceived domination enforced by these representations within the regime?

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter outlined symbolic power and identified the core analytic vocabulary of semiotics for deconstructing Uyghur representations. By examining the signified and signifier in multiple arrangements we were able to analyze a number of representations that contribute to a dual

signification. I demonstrated that these significations have been part of a campaign by the regime to control Uyghurs within Chinese social space.

How have Uyghurs engaged in resistance to the domination enforced by symbolic power if virtually all claim-making in China has been conflated with separatism and terrorism by the regime? Broadly speaking, Uyghurs have still employed three types of resistance: everyday resistance (Bovingdon, 2002, 2010; Millward, 2007; Baranovitch, 2003; Christoffersen, 2002); local collective action, at times turning violent, (Bovingdon, 2002, 2010; Israel, 2010; Schichor, 2005; Millward, 2004); and/ or the diffusion of contention to sites outside of China (Schichor, 2003, 2010; Millward, 2007; Gladney, 2003; Christoffersen, 2002) or the organization of contention in China from sites outside (Bovingdon, 2010: 157). This leaves us with several questions.

While there isn't room to address the conditions that influence resistance in China, one expects a considerably different environment for contention in Istanbul. However, China is engaged in transnational coercion to forestall contention abroad. How do changes in regime space between China and Turkey present openings for Uyghurs to challenge symbolic power? How do Uyghurs perceive opportunity and threat in Istanbul?

3 Deterritorialization

This chapter begins from a position that the selection of repertoires is influenced by the perception of opportunity and threat (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007; O'Brien and Li, 2006; Xi, 2007). The first section addresses Uyghur perceptions of China's coercive reach into life in Istanbul. The next section will examine the structure of political opportunity in Turkey. Political opportunity contributes to the constraint or facilitation of some forms of contention, e.g. the contained contention of established Uyghur organizations, but may fail to address the complexity of repertoire innovation among transgressive actors such as students. Cultural (McAdam, 1996; Benford and Snow, 2000) and, I argue, symbolic contexts also influence contention. Therefore, the final section will proceed to analyze opportunity from both cultural and symbolic perspectives.

3.1 Transnationalization of Threat

Transnational communities are often aware of the affect of their homeland's foreign policy on their interests, including their image, standing, self-perception, and security in the hostland (Shain and Barth, 2003: 456).” How do Uyghurs perceive China's affect on their interests in Istanbul?

In China there is too much oppression. When we come here it is still strong. All Uyghur people have this kind of feeling... People are afraid to speak with each other.⁶⁷

I have to guarantee my life's safety. Chinese government can arrest us any time in China. The Chinese government, they even control in the outside. There are so many Chinese spies here so we have to be at attention. The most important is our safety. Every Uyghur people is a terrorist in the Chinese government's eyes. They would like to control all of the Uyghur people who came from overseas.⁶⁸

Two years ago a student, who came from Kashgar or Hotan, he usually used another student's computer to send documents back to China. He was from a poor family and didn't have his own computer. The documents stayed on his friend's computer. Then this student found out that the other student had told on him, told the Chinese. So seven or eight guys went to ask him why he did this. He told them that when he was applying for his passport the police told him he had to provide them with information or they would put him in jail for seven years. The guys told him

⁶⁷ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul three years, Turkish citizen, 13 June 2011

⁶⁸ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul two years, 12 July 2011

he had to confess to the foundation [Doğu Türkistan Vakfı: East Turkestan Foundation]. The foundation told the Turkish intelligence service but they couldn't find the student's contact. He had never met the Chinese guy. They only spoke on the phone.⁶⁹

In conversation many Uyghurs in Istanbul are quite concerned about security issues, particularly as it relates to their families in Xinjiang. While a Uyghur with Turkish or German citizenship may be beyond the grasp of the Chinese authorities her family is still vulnerable. The oppressive culture of fear is not escaped simply by shifting territories or citizenship, it would seem. It is a psychic and physical reality of transnational domination. It is psychic in the sense that life in a culture of fear can leave deep impressions on Uyghurs even after flight from the material landscape of domination, and physical in the sense that the Chinese government has engaged in material actions of surveillance, intimidation and coercion abroad.

Flight from China, it would seem, whether for temporary study with the expectation to return or for premeditated expatriatism, can be seen as an act of opposition to perceived subordination in China. The official 'reality' of multi-ethnic unity projected by the Chinese regime may be negated by the act of temporary or permanent departure: if life is good why do Uyghurs leave? Is it true, as Butler has asserted, that “in the act of opposing subordination, the subject reiterates its subjection (Butler, 1997: 11)?”

The conditions of domination seem to linger in the collective consciousness of the Diaspora. It was related to me that it propels them to succeed and return to help their people or encourages them to seek citizenship in a freer country. While there are likely those who wish only for personal gain, the Uyghurs I spoke with in Istanbul were concerned with improving the conditions in their homeland, whether they planned to remain or return. Their efforts abroad appear to be part of a process of decision making, calculated for greatest affect in this goal. It seems then, that as Butler notes, in order for this motivation to maintain its force and claims their resonance, experiences of subjection are reiterated. This is demonstrated by my informant's eagerness to speak of oppression in Xinjiang. Part of this narrative of subjection is the awareness of Chinese coercion.

Even in a purportedly free society, conditioned habits of caution are deeply imbedded in behavior. This is more than theoretical psychoanalysis. One community leader pointed out that students are scared. They are affected by Chinese culture and may not feel free even outside of China. They can

⁶⁹ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul for five years, Turkish citizen, 25 May 2011

become easily suspicious of people asking lots of questions.⁷⁰ Do these perceptions change depending on the length of time away from China?

It seems to be the case that Uyghurs who recently arrive in Istanbul are generally more cautious of what they say and do than those who have been living abroad for several years.

Yeah, that's because of their lack of experience here. I experienced that when I was new here. I worried about it. Like, it was quite dangerous. Once we participated in a conference here which was just a regular conference. They were recording. We were so worried if we were recorded in TV, the [Chinese] government will come and catch us... Just a normal Turkish TV. Once we were invited by a local TV, a small TV channel. They made a program about Eastern Turkestan but several students were sitting there. A guy, a local Uyghur guy was invited to talk. He said, the government is doing bad things to us and blah, blah, blah, and one of us, he was scared and just left the TV. We always made fun of that.⁷¹

I observed similar behavior at an academic conference. The two day event was a gathering of Uyghur scholars and professionals. They presented on a wide range of subjects including the future of the Uyghur language, Uyghur history, network engineering, and astronomy. However, the unannounced attendance of Seyit Tümtürk, chairman of the WUC in Turkey, caused a stir among several students who left as soon as he arrived. Later, some organizers and students explained to me that those who left did so out of fear of association with the WUC and the repercussion if the Chinese government found out.⁷² It was reiterated that as long as an individual refrains from participating in activities symbolically coherent to Chinese perceptions as political in nature, the threat is minimal.

A number of long time residents, Turkish citizens, and community leaders noted that while some of the concern is a matter of inexperience or ingrained attitudes, the threat is existential. While one community leader felt comfortable speaking freely with me on tape he was clear that he did not want his name associated with any political comments because he had a daughter studying in Xinjiang. This perception is explained by China's documented coercive reach.

China has an increasingly sophisticated international intelligence network, demonstrated by the hacking of foreign company or government email accounts (Arther, 2011; Jacobs, 2010; Papenfuss, 2010) or the 2009 targeted Denial of Service attack on the website of the Melbourne International Film

⁷⁰ Interview with a Uyghur community leader, born in Istanbul, 21 May 2011

⁷¹ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul for five years, Turkish citizen, 21 May 2011

⁷² Field notes, Istanbul 18 June 2011

Festival in Australia before it aired a documentary film about Rebiya Kadeer (Moore, 2009). In addition to digital acts, China has also engaged in an extensive diplomatic project to influence foreign governments regarding Uyghurs (Szadziewski, 2010; UNPO, 2009). A 1996 top secret document of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, leaked by the US organization Citizens against Communist Chinese Propaganda, revealed a Chinese policy of surveillance and coercion abroad.⁷³ In line with such policies, several Uyghurs told stories about police visiting their families in Xinjiang asking questions about topics they would have only known through intrusion of private communications.

Another way that the Uyghur diaspora perceives China's transnational coercive power is in the manipulation of various actors outside of the Uyghur community but living in proximity, i.e. Chinese living abroad or certain minority groups in Turkey. In the case of the latter, I was told by two Uyghur community leaders and several students that they suspected the Chinese government of supporting the PKK or pressuring Kurds to spy on Uyghurs in exchange for material support from Beijing. According to one researcher, from the mid-1990s, China has been pressuring Turkey to suppress Uyghur separatist activities. Manipulating the sensitivity of the Kurdish issue in Turkish politics, Beijing has stressed the similarity between Uyghur and Kurdish separatism and threatened that continued Turkish support for Uyghurs would result in Chinese support for Kurds (Shichor, 2006; 3).

Whether the source of the threat is web based or personal, whether the spy is a coerced member of the Uyghur community or not, despite at times inflated degrees of fear, the situation is one for understandable caution. This fear influences the construction of and participation in different types of repertoires. It helps to explain why, outside of the borders of Chinese domination, perceptions of a Chinese threat still influence Uyghur actions. But, despite material or sentimental attachment to their homeland, and an awareness of threat, transnational communities generally adapt to the limitations and

⁷³ Section Eight Reads: Perform the related diplomatic tasks well. Limit the activities of outside ethnic separatist activities from many sides. Bear in mind the fact that Turkey, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are the home-bases for the activities of outside separatists forces. Through diplomacy, urge these countries to limit and weaken the activities of separatist forces inside their border. Take full advantage of our political superiority to further develop the bilateral friendly cooperation with these countries. At the same time, always maintain pressure on them. Considering the ethnic separatism activities outside of the border, carry out all necessary dialog and struggle. Strengthen the investigation and study outside of the border. Collect the information on related development directions of events, and be especially vigilant against and prevent, by all means, the outside separatist forces from making the so-called "Eastern Turkistan" problem international. Divide the outside separatist forces, win over most of them and alienate the remaining small number and fight against them. Establish homebases in the regions or cities with high Chinese and overseas Chinese populations. Develop several types of propaganda. Make broad and deep friends and limit the separatist activities to the highest degree. CACCP website: <http://caccp.freedomsherald.org/conf/doc7.html> (accessed 22 May 2011)

opportunities of their host country (Miall, et al, 2009: 10). How have perceptions of opportunity in Turkey counteracted perceptions of threat?

3.2 Political Opportunity

In 1995, then as mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan publicly honored the legacy of recently passed Isa Yusuf Alptekin with the naming of a section of park in Sultanahmet, near the Blue Mosque (Shichor, 2009). While such an act of naming is more symbolic than political in nature, and will be analyzed in the following section, this gesture by the Istanbul city government can be seen as an indicator of Turkish political certification. Furthermore, this was not an isolated event in Turkish political support, as I was told that Uyghurs have enjoyed a position to lobby the Turkish government since the 1950s. Political opportunity can be both international and domestic. This section aims to analyze how Uyghur perceptions of Turkish international and domestic political opportunity affect contention. Understanding these perceptions acknowledges that “if movement activists interpret political space in ways that emphasize opportunity rather than constraint, they may stimulate actions that change opportunity... (Gamson and Meyer, 1992: 287).”

International Indicators

Turkey established diplomatic relations with China on 4 August 1971. In 1982, Turkish President Kenan Evren marked a change in foreign policy as the first Turkish head of state to visit Beijing. Four years later Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang would reciprocate with a visit to Ankara. Since establishing diplomatic ties, relations have been primarily along economic trade and security issues (Daly, 2007). In 2002 the two countries signed a joint communiqué promoting increased bilateral relations. Dellios and Yilmaz (2008) have suggested that China and Turkey share several commonalities, based on rational choice, which support such bilateral cooperation. They are both strong states, although treated as outsiders in a Western system, and strategic and military powers within international organizations such as NATO, with Turkey, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), with China. What do increasing relations mean for the perceptions of Uyghurs caught in the middle?

Now Turkey and China are getting close but we don't worry about them getting close. We believe Turkey will never sell us to China. But if Turkey wants to sell us to China they can do it. We have no choice. We don't have any power. I don't care. I just leave it to Allah.⁷⁴

The two countries are using the Uyghur hitch to influence each other. Turkey wants to do some trade with China and the Uyghur hitch will come up. They make agreement maybe oppression will increase. But the government says improved diplomatic to make more position to negotiate with China about Uyghur topic. The only thing the Turkish government can do for Uyghurs is give citizenship; let them make a better life here.⁷⁵

These comments reveal a general belief in Turkish support, but one measured by awareness of both Uyghur and/or Turkish limitations. Understanding the context from which these perceptions arise will facilitate an analysis of how they shape contention in Istanbul.

Alptekin, noted above, was the *de facto* leader of the transnational Uyghur community, based in Turkey, until his death (Shichor, 2003). Around the same time, a number of Uyghur organizations began to sprout in countries outside of Turkey: in Central Asia, Europe, and the United States (Bovingdon, 2010; Shichor, 2003). This rise in Uyghur organizations represented a *scale shift*⁷⁶ in Uyghur claim-making. Despite Alptekin's death, the increasingly international salience of Uyghur groups, likely had a positive affect on maintaining whatever momentum Alptekin had achieved for Uyghur contention in Turkey. That is, the Uyghur issue was no longer an unknown ethnic contention between two nations but globally recognized. One would logically assume that it had a constructive affect on Turkish Uyghur organizations, as a source of international certification and material or moral support. Although the Turkish Uyghur community remained focused on claim-making from within Turkey (Shichor, 2009), one would assume that they remained vigilant of international affairs, particularly Sino-Turkish relations.

In 2005, Turkish Police Chief Gökhan Aydıner traveled to Beijing where he praised security cooperation between the two countries, and agreed to support China's requests regarding East Turkestan groups in Turkey. He stated his hope that the counties will improve their exchange in the field of anti-terrorism (Daly, 2007; 4). The mention of East Turkestan groups in Turkey with anti-terrorism efforts may appear to legitimize China's signification of 'East Turkestan,' as Uyghur terrorism.

⁷⁴ Interview with a Uyghur businessman living in Istanbul two years, Turkish Citizen, 24 June 2011

⁷⁵ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul for two years, Turkish citizen, 25 June 2011

⁷⁶ Tilly and Tarrow identity *scale shift* as a process of contention, capable of producing a large-scale effect. It is defined as an: increase or decrease in the number of actors and/or geographic range of coordinated claim-making (2007: 217).

The language of security has been an important part of Turkish foreign policy since the country became a regional power in the post 9/11 world (Keyman, 2009: 4). Consequently, since 2003, the Turkish security apparatus has been vigilant about potential al-Qaeda connections with migrant communities, such as the Chechens, and Uyghurs (Usla, 2009: 8). This has extended into Sino-Turkish relations. Reporting on President Gül's visit to Beijing in June 2009, China Daily reported, "Turkish president Abdullah Gul yesterday vowed not to let terrorist groups find refuge on Turkish soil, clarifying Ankara's stance on Turkish-speaking groups that fled Xinjiang bound for his country (2009c)." From this perspective, it would seem that such rhetoric is interpreted by sources in China as a change in Turkish certification of Uyghur claim-making and a gradual acceptance of Chinese signification. But it would be incorrect to assume that security issues have been the primary diplomatic link between the two nations. Generally, Turkey's relations with China and position on Uyghurs are more about political and economic concerns than security (Uslu, 2009).

We can conclude that some Uyghurs base their perceptions on what appears to be an understanding of the complexity of international relations between the two countries. Perceptions of international support are logically combined with perceptions of domestic political opportunity to inform Uyghur repertoires.

Domestic Indicators

The comments of one Uyghur community leader serve as an instructive starting point for our analysis. Furthermore, that the comments echo earlier perceptions of Turkish government support measured within a Realist worldview, where politics are based on national interest more than moral concerns, it indicates a general trend in perceptions of political opportunity.

But here, in a very short time, we will reach the Turkish government. Now there is an election, no matter who wins, they all support our cause. We have contact with every party. We have friends in every party, because we have to act like that. Beggars can't be choosers. You have to bring your cause to every party. You cannot go after one...

Without making them angry, we come up with some form of plans and projects which will not cut the pressure on the friendly relation with China. They will support us but they have to think of themselves as well. They are also a country in this world. For that reason we don't want to make a problem for them. So we have to find a policy that will support the Turkish government's friendly relationship with China. We want our people to survive

in Eastern Turkestan. All the Eastern Turkestanis and the whole world need to think of that and not themselves. Not my idea, not my policy but the policy and ideas of the people inside.⁷⁷

Turkey is a high-capacity Democracy. Whereas Freedom House ranks China as Not Free,⁷⁸ Turkey is at least ranked as Partly Free.⁷⁹ There are several, relatively, independent centers of power. In the Parliamentary election of June 2011 four parties were elected: The Justice and Development Party (AKP) maintained its majority, followed next by the Republican People's Party (CHP), the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), and finally the independent block represented by the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). Like other democratic systems, the regime is open to new political actors as long as they are able to gain the sufficient percentage of popular vote designated by the Constitution.

Shortly after the 2011 elections both the CHP and BDP parties announced a parliamentary boycott over perceptions of anti-Kurdish prejudices and other issues within parliament.⁸⁰ This is evident of instability within political alignments. Based on a number of comments from Uyghur community leaders, it appears that certain members of the politically active Uyghur community have exploited political instabilities from time to time, effectively shifting support between parties depending on perceptions of greatest opportunity. In this sense, established Uyghur political actors have managed to gain influential allies and support. As the Kurdish issue seems to be the main source of political instability, has it affected Uyghur contention?

As noted above, Uyghurs have expressed a perception of Kurdish links to Chinese transnational coercion. It is worth noting, that despite the similarities in the nature of their domination that originally lead me to wonder about *coalition formation*⁸¹ between Uyghurs and Kurds, Uyghur repertoires in Turkey have not sought support from within the Kurdish community.⁸² Based on my observations and

⁷⁷ Interview with a Uyghur political leader 17 May 2011

⁷⁸ Freedom House Country Report China (2010), website: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?country=7801&page=22&year=2010> (accessed 20 July 2011)

⁷⁹ Freedom House Country Report Turkey (2010), website: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2010&country=7937> (accessed 20 July 2011)

⁸⁰ See "Turkish Parliament Opens Amid Boycott" *Al Jazeera* website: <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/europe/2011/06/201162811315463516.html> (accessed 29 June 2011); and "Turkey Election: Opposition Boycotts Parliament Oath" *BBC World* website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-13946916> (accessed 29 June 2011).

⁸¹ Again I appropriate the specific vocabulary of Contentious Politics. *Coalition Formation*, as a distinct process means the: creation of new, visible, and direct coordination of claims between two or more previously distinct actors (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007: 216).

⁸² In fact, what I interpret as something of a paradox, when Kurds came up in conversation with Uyghurs in Istanbul they often reproduced the Turkish discourse of the categorical threat of Kurdish separatism in what appeared to be a similar signification as the one noted of Uyghurs above.

the comments of several informants, Uyghurs have not apparently relied on support of allies from among Turkish minority groups, instead preferring to focus exclusively on support from within mainstream politics in the evolution of their claim-making.

Turkey has a relatively open political structure for a diversity of the collective claim-making.⁸³ Several Uyghur leaders explained that they have taken advantage of these opportunities. In 2008 some members of the Turkish Uyghur community organized demonstrations while the Olympic Torch passed through Istanbul. On the opening day of the Beijing Olympics protests were staged to call attention to Uyghur claims. Further collective action followed the 5 July riots in Urumqi in 2009 and demonstrations took place to mark the one and two year anniversaries. However, highly politicized and salient collective action is not part of the repertoire of Istanbul's Uyghur student population. Due to the threat mentioned in section one, of participation in salient collective action, the tolerance or facilitation of collective claim-making by the regime seems to be unimportant for Uyghurs with ties to their homeland but other structural conditions have been perceived positively.

Turkish government really wants to help Uyghur Turkish people. We are all Turkish people. They don't want China to suppress Uyghur. Turkey is the one country that has helped us the most. Help foundation, scholarships. But it is not a big country so can't do to much but try.⁸⁴

The only thing Turkey can do in different way is, Turkey provides more support to keep our own culture. They support to some organizations because they consider us as relatives. So people here can participate in conference... In this way Turkey has a different role to play. But considering to the state relationship, Turkey has the same standard. They never risk their own interest with China, especially economic ties.⁸⁵

Turkey is very special. It's very special and the Turkish government is the most outspoken about the July fifth incident. Other than that we have a large population in Turkey. And we have scholarship for Uyghur people; I don't know the numbers. But still, Turkey has a kind of opportunity. And they give citizenship to some people. So many people see Turkey as a second country, homeland... traveling, I was treated very well, government officials and people. I was treated better here than in my homeland. I gave presentations. In my homeland I wasn't even allowed

⁸³ In the three months I was in Istanbul I witnessed multiple collective actions including several anti online censorship demonstrations apparently attended by a diversity of actors, two Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered (LGBT) pride marches, an anti Palestinian occupation march memorializing the one year anniversary of the June 201 Gaza Aid Flotilla-this had been organized by several Islamic groups, and a number of other smaller manifestation. From the diversity of claim-making it is clear that Turkey at least presents potential for collective action.

⁸⁴ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul one and a half years 4 June 2011

⁸⁵ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul five years, Turkish citizen, 21 May 2011

to give a single presentation.⁸⁶

While the above discussion of political opportunity is informative for understanding the salience of the Uyghur claim and addressing how contained contention has evolved, it does not appear to grasp at the core of my informant's perceptions of opportunity in Turkey. But political discourse can be used to arrive at the more salient cultural component of opportunity (Gamson and Meyer, 1996). The comments in this section represent Uyghur confidence that Turkey presents a number of structural openings for certain members of the Uyghur community that, due to the years of contained contention, have resulted in increased cultural and symbolic capital for Uyghurs living in Istanbul.

We can conclude that the regime is open to Uyghur contained contention: political lobbying by established Uyghur organizations or tolerated collective action. However, the student population that comprises the bulk of my sample are not contained actors. Progressing from an analysis of threat, there are two groups that cannot engage in contained contention: 1) Uyghurs who are still Chinese citizens and plan to return; and 2) Uyghurs who are Turkish citizens but have significant ties to their homeland, and/or expect to visit their homeland. It appears from this analysis that political opportunity in Turkey is beneficial for established Uyghur organizations and that the majority of Uyghurs have a positive perception of Turkish politics; however, in order to understand how transgressive repertoires evolve we must take into account more than political opportunity.

Transgressive contention is somewhat informed by political structures but it by nature transcends regime boundaries, involves newly identified actors, and involves the greatest amount of repertoire innovation (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007). Contained contention and salient collective action claims are generally targeted at the Chinese regime itself but what opportunity is available to shift the target of claim-making, as will soon become an apparent constituent of transgressive contention?

3.3 Reexamining Opportunity

Cultural Opportunity

The one point is, yes, if somebody directly goes to Germany or Japan, he or she has that opportunity to realize their identity there. But in Turkey, as we have more chance to speak, to see our own lives here, the kids from Urumqi

⁸⁶ Interview with a Uyghur Professor 22 June 2011

will realize it. Oh, we are Uyghurs, we have our own history. We realize our identity more.⁸⁷

I want to stay here. Turkish culture, religion, food... In USA or Europe I will feel lonely. I will feel different. I will feel like an alien.⁸⁸

And they can feel much free. Yeah, they can feel free. That's why they prefer to stay here. The people, I mean Turkish people, they do not see them like foreigners and they love them. The government loves them. They always say welcome. And not the feelings in Europe. Yeah, Uyghurs in Europe now are guests.⁸⁹

Maybe that is the core of the most important reason why Uyghur come here. They treat us like family here.⁹⁰

A shared narrative evolves from the comments expressed above. First is the perception that, while life in Europe or the United States may afford certain freedoms and the potential for self-discovery and personal development, the cultural difference may result in feelings of alienation. While Uyghur immigrants in Europe may be relatively free from the significations enforced upon them by the Chinese regime and generally accepted, the narrative is that they may be faced with the difficulties of having to adapt to a foreign culture, and language; they are disadvantaged by limited cultural capital. The implication is that Turkey is different. Shared religion, culture, similar language, and such values afford an increase in capital. This is in line with Benford and Snow's observation that the most relevant cultural material in contention includes beliefs, ideologies, values, and the like (2000; 629). McAdam notes the dramatization of glaring contradictions between salient cultural values and social practices contribute to contention (1996: 25). If Uyghurs feel accepted, feel that their culture is validated by its similarity and acceptance in Turkish culture they are probably more likely to engage in contention targeting what they perceive as the contradictions of Chinese social practices.

Secondly, feelings of belonging, feeling like family, empower Uyghur symbolic capital. It increases their perceptions of place in society. The emotional reaction to cultural similarity and perceptions of familial acceptance, coupled with perceptions of political support, is instructive for understanding how repertoires develop. This may further lead to facilitating the discussion of imposed grievances or the perception of vulnerability or illegitimacy in the Chinese regime.

⁸⁷ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul five years, Turkish citizen, 21 May 2011

⁸⁸ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul one and a half years, Turkish citizen, 4 June 2011

⁸⁹ Interview with a Uyghur community leader, born in Turkey, 21 May 2011

⁹⁰ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul one and a half years, 4 June 2011

I would argue that the above comments point toward Uyghur perceptions of an environment that is conducive to freely expressing grievances. It was far easier to discuss grievances and perceptions of domination with Uyghurs outside of China. Furthermore, increased symbolic capital in Istanbul psychologically, I would argue, validates Uyghur perceptions of the illegitimacy of the Chinese regime. As Uyghur discussions of the contrast between life in China and Turkey illustrate:

I am comfortable here. Nobody says, 'you are Uyghur; you can't stay in this hotel. You can't have this job.' You know, I studied in Beijing and Tianjin, a port city of Beijing. I traveled with [Han] friends and I was the only one who couldn't stay in the hotel. Psychologically you are hurt when you are in China.⁹¹

I am really happy to be here. I felt so well after I came to Istanbul. Turkish people are much closer to us and I don't feel anything strange. But in Kashgar, even though it is my hometown, I felt strange there. I was feeling true pressure.⁹²

It is likely that the majority of Istanbul's Uyghur population shares similar perceptions. Where life in China was perceived as oppressive, Istanbul has provided a new social space and set of opportunities for engaging in contention. What is important about these comments is the nature of opportunity expressed by the majority of my informants. For students who are constrained by perceptions of threat of Chinese coercion abroad political opportunity appears less salient than cultural explanations of opportunity.

To conclude our analysis of cultural opportunity, we should inquire about the availability of an innovative 'master frame (McAdam, 1996: 25)' within which Uyghurs students can map their grievances and demands. Has the increase in cultural and symbolic capital equipped Uyghurs with the ability to craft a 'master frame' in Istanbul? If we approach this from a semiotic perspective we should understand that any 'master frame' would derive its significance in relation to other symbols in the social context of contention. I would argue that in order to fully understand where increased cultural and symbolic capital comes from, and understand what symbols are available for constructing a 'master frame,' and thoroughly analyze cultural opportunity, we must ask how Uyghurs perceive symbolic opportunity in Istanbul.

⁹¹ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul three years, Turkish citizen, 13 June 2011

⁹² Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul one year, 13 June 2011

Introducing Symbolic Opportunity

I argue it is through perceptions of symbolic coherence that we should analyze political and cultural opportunity. In order to understand and analyze Uyghur perceptions of symbolic opportunity, I will return to the park naming mentioned in the previous section. In 1995, after Erdoğan's act of certification, China exerted pressure on the Turkish Foreign Ministry which resulted in a request to rename the park. Erdoğan refused. His official response included quite a different signification for 'East Turkestan' than the one that has been promulgated by China.

We would like to remind China that Turkey is not Eastern Turkestan where they can order people to do what they want, imprison, torture and execute them as they wish. Before pressuring Turkey to close Isa Yusuf Alptekin Park China should first end its atrocities against the Turkic people of Eastern Turkestan (ETIB, 1995).

He did not mince words in his representation of 'East Turkestan.' He was not eliciting a signification imbued with the meaning of separatism and terrorism, or a reference to an historical fabrication: the Chinese signification. Erdoğan identified East Turkestan as a region in China that is under oppression. By reproducing the counter-narrative expressed by the Uyghur Diaspora he was delegitimizing China's monopoly of symbolic power to name the region. Because of the contentious nature of these words, such certification likely has a deep resonance among the Uyghur community.

In the past Turkish politicians and journalists have declared their commitment to Uyghur claims by using the term 'East Turkestan' rather than 'Xinjiang (Shichor, 2009).' Because China has attempted to conflate the utterance or concept of 'East Turkestan' with terrorism, Erdoğan's comments translate into potential capital for resignification. If the signification of East Turkestan in Turkey is changed to represent an historical republic and contemporary occupied land, Uyghur claim-making may find a certified discourse for a 'master narrative' by which to frame their contention. How does this translate into Uyghur perceptions?

Some of my informants lamented that since 2009 the Turkish government and media has actually not been as consistent in its certification. Several Uyghurs complained to me that they are disappointed when they read or hear 'Xinjiang' in political or journalistic representations. While none of them expressed a perception of a serious policy change, the representation was symbolically coherent.

I am upset. Because nowadays when Turkey in television or newspapers, in the past they always said *Doğu Türkistan* or East Turkestan but some regular newspapers or television now say Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region or something like that in Turkish. When I heard that I feel really upset, because in the past they always said *Doğu Türkistan*.⁹³

Every day I read Zaman [a popular Turkish newspaper]. Sometimes they say Xinjiang. I want to go to press. They don't have to worry about anything. They can just say *Doğu Türkistan*. They don't have to say Xinjiang. When I see some videos on Youtube or TV program, Turkish PM or professors, if they speak about East Turkestan I am impressed by that. Everytime they say East Turkestan I feel different.⁹⁴

While these comments are not necessarily reflective of universal perceptions of changing representations they are instructive in combination with others to understand the significance of symbolic certification. For the reasons I outlined above, regarding naming as a source of challenging China's symbolic power, the significance of media representations—although they do not necessarily portend policy change—are important. Gamson and Meyer (1992) have pointed out that media access and attention are crucial for perceiving and defining opportunity. But this does not mean that all Uyghurs uniformly perceive media representations and symbolic opportunity.

Maybe that is the idea. Because, you know, China came into Xinjiang and some Uyghur people, 2,000 people in 1949, 1950 came to Turkey. The Turkish government says Chinese government pressures. Turkish people know Chinese government pressures Uyghur people for 40 years. But America has only known for 20 years. Most Turkish people know China pressures Uyghur people.⁹⁵

Before July 2009, many Turkish people don't know Uyghur people. After five July many people now know the Uyghur situation in the Uyghur autonomous region. Before that time, in 1997 violence in Ghulja, after that, these media also make some news after something happens in East Turkestan and some activities in Turkey.⁹⁶

What these apparently contradictory perceptions have in common is a narrative of the importance of Turkish popular awareness and support. Again, this factors into understanding increases in Uyghur cultural and symbolic capital and provides opportunity for challenging Chinese

⁹³ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul five years, Turkish citizen, 2 June 2011

⁹⁴ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul one and a half years, 9 July 2011

⁹⁵ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul four years, 26 May 2011

⁹⁶ Interview with a Uyghur PhD student and community leader living in Istanbul seven years, Turkish citizen, 31 May 2011

representations. The reference made to the importance of five July by the second informant points again to McAdam's note on sudden grievances. The sudden violence and resulting crackdown after the Urumqi riots resulted in, what several informants have described as, increased opportunity for Uyghur claim-making. Furthermore, Erdoğan's response to the violence and certification of Uyghur claims, it would appear, presented a stark opening for further claim-making and increased Uyghur symbolic capital.

Erdoğan equated the situation to genocide. These utterances had a distinct symbolic coherence on Uyghur perceptions of support, as noted by a number of informants, but also resulted in an online backlash from China's blogging community.⁹⁷ This implies that such speech acts are symbolically coherent in China as well, which appears to be a consideration Uyghur actors take into account. Erdoğan went on to threaten to take China to the UN Security Council. However, as Nury Turkel⁹⁸ and others have pointed out, tough words are not always followed by action. This contributes to a conception of the importance of symbolic rather than causal coherence associated with such discursive acts. In addition to the role of media and political representation, in light of perceptions of cultural support, I wondered how else Uyghurs perceive symbolic opportunity in Istanbul social space.

Sipping tea in the shade of a sunken cafe next to Süleymaniye mosque I was interested to see the blue East Turkestan flag hanging alongside its Turkish counterpart. At my behest my Turkish friend asked the cafe owner about the flag. He explained that although he was not a Uyghur he hung the flag in an act of solidarity after seeing videos from the Urumqi riots. It is nowhere near as common as the Turkish flag but it does turn up occasionally in random places. I have touched on its significance in other contexts but it would be remiss not to include it here as a factor in informing Uyghur perceptions of symbolic opportunity in Istanbul.

First I should note, not everyone I spoke with placed significance on the flag. One noted, "It doesn't mean anything. It's a small thing. I think the flag can't do a thing here. If I can hold that flag in East Turkestan, that's the issue. China doesn't care about such small things."⁹⁹ Another student, who had only been in Istanbul for four months, reported that it was a simple representation of the Uyghur

⁹⁷ See Mo Lingjiao, "Turkey, another axis of evil!?" *Global Times Online*: <http://opinion.globaltimes.cn/commentary/2009-07/445195.html> (accessed 4 July 2011); Xiao Qiang, "Mo Lingjiao: Turkey, Another Axis of Evil?" *China Digital Times*: <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2009/07/mo-lingjiao-turkey-another-axis-of-evil/> (accessed 4 July 2011).

⁹⁸ Skype interview 2 May 2011

⁹⁹ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul three years, approved for Turkish citizenship but has not decided whether to abandon Chinese citizenship, 24 June 2011

ethnic group, implying no deep significance for him.¹⁰⁰ However, the majority of responses reflected a perception of the flag rich in signification.

I have read some books and I know the meaning. It is blue. Turkic people like the wolf. It is our spirit. Wolf called blue wolf. In my imagination I will feel like, it was in East Turkestan when we were independent. We had East Turkestan Republic in 1933, East Turkestan Islamic Republic in 1944. I just think about those times when I see the flag, how they put that flag in our motherland.¹⁰¹

I am sitting someplace, seeing the flag for the first time, others are talking and I am just thinking: There will be a day when I take this flag and stand in front of the Urumqi provincial government, the national government, me or my son, or my grandson.¹⁰²

As with the rebellious youth and his tote bag, one Uyghur informant related:

When I was in middle school I drew the flag on paper. At first I felt proud. After a minute I started to feel a little scared. Then I erased it, drew over it. Yeah, what does it mean? I have a desire for freedom. Maybe every Uyghur child has this feeling and desire... It's very hard to explain what's the real feeling. So many things I was thinking when I see this. It begins from history, the thinking, and then from history to the future.¹⁰³

The symbolic significance of the flag is discovered through the same deconstruction we applied above. The signified is an independent country but the signification is more than just a correlation with an independent nation and a flag. For many Uyghurs it inspires hope; it signifies the image of Uyghurs as they see themselves, once freed from Chinese representations. It is not just a blue and white signifier, but rather an empowering signification, and perhaps a metaphor for an innovative repertoire.

This moon, star, blue flag is our national flag. We had our republic in 1933 and in 1944. And maybe you know the World Uyghur Congress, they act to establish a republic in the Uyghur Autonomous Region. All of the Uyghurs love their flag, love their nation. Me too. But we don't have power. We don't have any military power or economic power. We are so poor. So, at this time we have no way. We have to help so many students to become educated and organize lots of educated people to do work for Uyghur culture or Uyghur language. After that, maybe ten, maybe

¹⁰⁰ Interview with a Uyghur Student living in Istanbul four months 9 July 2011

¹⁰¹ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul one and a half years 9 July 2011

¹⁰² Interview with a Uyghur student living back and forth between Istanbul and Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, eight years 25 June 2011

¹⁰³ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul one and a half years 25 June 2011

twenty years, so many things...¹⁰⁴

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter began by examining Uyghur perceptions of threat. It became apparent that if Uyghurs had significant ties to their homeland, they were constrained in their actions by an awareness of the regime's transnational coercion. These threats should be measured against perceptions of opportunity. While Turkey has been a supportive political environment for Uyghur claim-making since the 1950s, political opportunity generally only facilitates analysis of contained contention. We moved on to inquire of other forms of opportunity. Uyghur comments revealed a narrative of the importance of cultural and symbolic opportunity. Narrative analysis points to the salience of symbolic coherence in shaping Uyghur perceptions of opportunity. Can we assume that symbolic coherence will also shape Uyghur repertoire innovation?

4 Resignifying 'Uyghur'

This chapter focuses on how Uyghurs have engaged in resistance in Istanbul, particularly in terms of repertoire innovation. I will begin with an analysis of organizational structures, as an easily observable and informative institution in the evolution of contention (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007; Zald, 1996; McAdam, 1996; Gamson and Meyer, 1992). How have Uyghurs maneuvered within changing opportunity and organizational structures? How have Uyghurs engaged in claim-making and what kinds of repertoires have been employed? I will present an analysis of two types of organization; beginning with organizations for contained contention, I will move on to examine a new front in the Uyghur symbolic struggle. The next section will address my informants comments related to the question, is education resistance. Can we apply semiotic analysis to conceptualize this repertoire innovation as resignification? The final section will directly address my central question and analyze

¹⁰⁴ Interview with a Uyghur student and community leader living in Istanbul seven years 31 May 2011

what I argue to be Uyghur attempts to resignify Chinese representations.

4.1 Organizational Structures

Contained Contention

As we have seen, the Chinese regime places importance on the symbolic coherence of words and actions by Uyghurs both in China and Istanbul. This observation does not appear to have escaped Uyghur perceptions.¹⁰⁵

In the Chinese government's mind, some association, they hold their name as East Turkestan and they hold the East Turkestan flag and make some protests against China, especially the Chinese embassy and consulate. Make some statements clearly against China. The Chinese government thinks these organizations are clearly the political organizations.¹⁰⁶

Before four years ago I came to Turkey. I went to our foundation [Doğu Türkistan Vakfı]. They said, 'you study in Turkey. You study very good but don't join in any demonstration. You don't enter in any political organization, political group. You only study school. If you join organization it is very dangerous, dangerous for you and your family. If you join this organization, Chinese police will go to your home and find your father or mother...' what will they do? This is a very difficult problem so you don't join this group or organization.¹⁰⁷

In Turkey we are afraid in taking participation in too many political activities, concerned about our families.¹⁰⁸

As would be expected from the discussion of perceptions of threat, the majority of my informants expressed a reservation in associating with established Uyghur organizations in Istanbul. I believe an analysis of these organizations is important because, as will become apparent, perceptions of threat and organizational shortcomings, informed by non-political opportunity and incremental structural changes resulting in a paradigm shift, have influenced repertoire innovation.

¹⁰⁵ I should elaborate that many Uyghurs explained that the nature of the activity generally mattered less than the organization who was organization it. Therefore, even cultural events, if organized by a 'political' organization, could be considered as a political activity, and therefore perceived as a potential threat.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with a Uyghur PhD student and community leader living in Istanbul seven years, Turkish citizen, 31 May 2011

¹⁰⁷ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul four years, Turkish citizen, 26 May 2011

¹⁰⁸ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul one and a half years 4 June 2011

The first organization in Turkey was the *Doğu Türkistan Göçmenler Derneği yayini* [Eastern Turkestan Refugee Committee], founded in 1960 by Isa Yusuf Alptekin, and others. A few years later *Doğu Türkistan Gençlik ve Kültür Derneği* [East Turkestan Youth and Culture Association] and *Doğu Türkistan Vakfı* [The East Turkestan Foundation] both opened their doors in 1976 (Shichor, 2003: 288-289, 2009: 18-20). The Foundation is the most recognized and established of the Uyghur organizations in Istanbul, functioning symbolically as a Uyghur consulate.¹⁰⁹ *Doğu Türkistan Maarif ve Dayanışma Derneği* [East Turkestan Education and Solidarity Association] is a more recent organization, opening in 2007.¹¹⁰ A number of my informants explained that Maarif is popular among the more radical youth population but it calls among its active members those Uyghurs who do not feel constrained by attachments to Xinjiang, either those who do not feel constrained by ties to their homeland or those born abroad.¹¹¹

These organizations have engaged in both *cosmopolitan*¹¹² and *parochial*¹¹³ claim-making, aimed at two interconnected targets and at two different audiences. Outside of the Uyghur community their goal has been to enlist certification for independence. Inside the community, their goal has been to preserve Uyghur identity, revive the history of the East Turkestan republics, and sustain Uyghur culture and language (Shichor, 2003; 288).

*Modular*¹¹⁴ collective action in high visibility areas of Istanbul from tourist saturated

¹⁰⁹ The recognition of the Foundation was apparent in multiple conversations. The sentiment of *de facto* Uyghur consulate as related by one Uyghur professor: Interview 22 June 2011

¹¹⁰ Maarif Website: <http://www.maarip.org/en/index.php> (accessed 10 July 2011)

¹¹¹ This actually presented a complex dilemma in my research. Members of Maarif with whom I spoke told me that, while they could never return to China, they still maintained communication with their families. They all reported the same kind of intimidation of their families in Xinjiang as my other informants. Despite conventional logic, it would seem that the members of Maarif with whom I spoke actually still maintained attachment to their homeland. What accounted for their willingness to engage in political contention anyway? I asked them how they made the decision to risk what they had for the Uyghur cause. They were not very willing to explain their rationale. Equally, I discussed this issue with a number of students and community leaders. How does someone decide to engage in more political contention, knowing the risks? How does the rest of the Uyghur community feel about individuals who put their neighbors and family at risk? This issue was obviously a sore point among the Istanbul Uyghur community. Although I received a number of interesting answers, I do not feel that they contribute to the flow of the argument. Or, in order to incorporate them I would have to side track into a great deal of psychoanalysis.

¹¹² Cosmopolitan repertoires facilitate claim-making on scales larger than the locality: whole cities, regions, countries, and the international arena (Tilly, 2006: 54).

¹¹³ Tilly defines parochial action as: concentrating on local targets, and basing themselves on local groupings rather than local segments of regional and national groupings (2006: 52).

¹¹⁴ Modular actions are performances in the repertoires transfer easily from place to place, issue to issue, and group to group (Tilly, 2006: 54). The burning of Chinese flags or the waving of the East Turkestan flag is a common feature of Uyghur collective action in multiple sites of contention. It is a modular performance among Uyghur claim-making.

Sultanahmet to the Chinese Consulate is part of a *bifurcated*¹¹⁵ repertoire aimed at claim-making to the community and the world. I asked several of my student informants about such demonstrations, if they were not at risk, whether they were willing to participate in them. One explained:

If nothing could happen then maybe I would participate in those demonstrations but I am not really interested. But, yes, all Uyghur people are willing... Maybe it will not have too big an affect at least we do what we can. But affecting the people around us, the world of technology, each other, this can have some affect.¹¹⁶

However, some have reported, more than the fact that they would put them in jeopardy, many of the past repertoires may in fact have been counterproductive.

Of course, all those Uyghurs running around trying to take care of the Uyghur problems, they don't have enough political knowledge, diplomacy knowledge. So we should first of all, uh, educate people. More and more people. Right now, one of the strongest weapons is not the atomic bomb; it is knowledge. If you have knowledge you can build your own atomic bomb... I can go out and demonstrate and yell, and 'Hell with China' and 'I want freedom.' We cannot ask for freedom. We have to get freedom. Who is going to support you? Which world country is going to support you? To be able to get your freedom you have to be together. You have to have a big economic backing behind you. And you have to have the military power in your hand. Do you have those? No. At this time, maybe if you yell freedom, the people in the country [Uyghurs in Xinjiang], it's making their lives worse and worse. We don't want that.¹¹⁷

I agree with what you are saying. But I don't like to go into detail. Because those people, or some people, lack knowledge they think it is the best way but it is not the best way, in my consideration. But I don't want to say or do anything against them. In my thinking there is only certain things you can do abroad.¹¹⁸

I don't expect any kind of big contribution coming from Uyghurs outside. What we can do is better education. What can we do to help our people in the homeland? Just go to demonstrations? It is a kind of propaganda but it won't change much.¹¹⁹

Perceptions of threat in participating in any organization with 'East Turkestan' in its name or

¹¹⁵ Bifurcated action is divided between direct action with respect to nearby objects of claims and action mediated by dignitaries and powerful people with respect to distant objects of claims (Tilly, 2006: 52).

¹¹⁶ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul one and a half years 4 June 2011

¹¹⁷ Interview with a Uyghur community leader 17 May 2011

¹¹⁸ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul two years 22 June 2011

¹¹⁹ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul two years, Turkish Citizen, 25 June 2011

joining in political activities from lobbying to collective action is important for deciding what kind of repertoire a resistance minded student *is* willing to engage in. While the use of 'East Turkestan' in conversation is an act of hidden transcript resistance, once 'East Turkestan' is associated with a public transcript it carries with it certain perceptions of threat. However, in dealing with contained organizations Uyghur students also expressed pragmatism, as with concerns of counter-productivity above.

While several organizations have, for years, helped to find scholarships for Uyghur students and engaged in salient claim-making to increase structural openings, several students related that actions by the last Foundation president resulted in a setback for Uyghur claim-making. The general narrative as it was explained is that he gave preferential treatment to relatives of Uyghurs already established in the Istanbul community. Scholarships that were designed to help promising young Uyghurs coming from Xinjiang were going instead to nepotism.¹²⁰ Because the selection process was based less on academic merit, the result was a pool of less capable individuals. I was told that graduation rates among Uyghurs studying in Istanbul for most of the 2000s was low which translated into a setback for claims of empowering self-image.¹²¹

In 2009 a new organization was established, apparently responding to these perceived deficiencies. Not only does the Uyghur Academy demonstrate an evolution in organizational structure it appears to be adapting to perceptions of opportunity and threat to launch an innovative repertoire that repositions the target of claim-making.

¹²⁰ These are Turkish government scholarships. It was explained to me that while the East Turkestan Foundation and private individuals in the community are able to offer a few scholarships or sponsorships the majority of financial assistance for Uyghur students coming from Xinjiang comes from the Turkish government, Uyghur Turkish citizens do not qualify for the same kind of scholarship. These organizations facilitated the student's scholarship application process, helping to secure sought after financial support. However, I was surprised to hear that several Uyghur students are also studying on small grants from the Chinese government; however, these grants are generally only held by Uyghur masters students who had done their undergraduate degrees in inner China, such as at *Zhongyang Minzu Daxue* [The Central Nationalities University] in Beijing. I did not discover a correlation between students with Chinese study grants and perceptions of distrust among their peers. In this situation, while skeptics may be critical, the Chinese government appears to be, without ulterior motives, supportive of Uyghur academic advancement. One point worth noting however, noting China's concern over self-image public relations, such scholarship present a positive face to the world while job placement, even for well educated Uyghurs, remains abysmal in Xinjiang and the rest of China. That is, the signification of lazy, backwards, singing, dancing kebab seller is not rattled by a few degrees. Many informants complained about unemployment and hiring prejudices. One provided an anecdote about his sister. With an advanced degree in history, after months of unsuccessful job applications the local government advised her to 'sell vegetables in the bazaar (Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul two years, Turkish citizen, 25 June 2011).'

¹²¹ A majority of the Uyghur students with whom I spoke freely offered this criticism and pointed to it as a serious problem. I would argue that in this case the actual graduation rates are perhaps less important than the perceptions of these Uyghurs related to the shortcomings of these other organizations. They point to how their perceptions may have informed a change in their actions, or a general paradigm shift that a new organization is necessary.

The Uyghur Academy

There are about 60 East Turkestan organizations outside of China. All of them are political. The fifth July violence in Urumqi had an impression on all the Uyghur people. We can't do many things for the Uyghur people in East Turkestan. The Uyghur people have to get educated. The Uyghur people want a peaceful life. The Uyghur people want to live in Democracy. All these things depend on education. There are so many East Turkestan or Uyghur association but there are not many special or qualified politicians in these associations. All of them need young and qualified Uyghur people. That's why they have not done many things.

The second thing is the international situation in these days. The most needed is to qualify and educate people. Their human rights and some political issues, so we think if we educate more Uyghur people we can organize, do some works for Uyghur people, especially some cultural and educational work. And then, maybe, we can attain the other, our own nation... Also we are a political organization. But we are a soft political organization. Actually, we are not political but cultural and educational...¹²²

This comment reiterates the narrative above, particularly regarding the symbolic coherence and perception of threat of involvement with previous organizations and the need for education, and develops our understanding of repertoire innovation. By distancing itself from the contentious public title of 'East Turkestan,' the Uyghur Academy is able to present itself as a symbolically coherent apolitical organization, in the perception of Chinese coercion, to organize the disparate Uyghur students who otherwise might have been confined to individual hidden transcripts of resistance (Bruins, 2009). I argue that it is the exploitation of increased cultural and symbolic capital, and a repertoire of education, that has resulted in a new foundation for a symbolic struggle.

The Academy evolved from incremental structural changes, perceptions of opportunity and threat, and the trigger of the violence in Urumqi in 2009. Several members expressed a strong correlation between the affect of the violence and the establishment of the Academy.¹²³ It was officially set up two months after the riots. The riots and aftermath: 1) dramatized the glaring contradiction between Uyghur cultural values and Chinese social convention; 2) resulted in a sudden and drastic increase in the flow of grievances; 3) highlighted the vulnerability and illegitimacy of the regime in the minds of Uyghurs; and, 4) for a time, brought Uyghur claims into greater Turkish and international

¹²² Interview with a Uyghur PhD student and community leader living in Istanbul seven years 31 May 2011

¹²³ Interview 31 May 2011, Interview 22 June 2011

attention which arguably allowed for the re-articulation of an existing 'master frame,' i.e. education.

Whereas previous organizations included education in their mission they focused primarily on the regime itself. The Uyghur Academy appears to have responded to perceived shortcomings and re-articulated education as the 'master frame.' It provides assistance to students, promotes cultural and educational events, and works to promote Uyghur issues outside of traditional politics.

It is important to note that when it went public to the Uyghur community it was criticized from several sides within the Turkish Uyghur community.¹²⁴ Apparently, the primary criticism was against its stated mission; originally, on its website it noted that it is an apolitical organization: a *boundary forming*¹²⁵ mechanism separating it from previous organizations. The criticism from contained actors suggests a paradigm shift by the new, transgressive actors. The vocabulary reveals a perception among its organizers that it is responding to the foreclosure of resistance that other, politically perceived, organizations placed on student contention and an awareness of the symbolic coherence of naming Uyghur organizations. We can furthermore assume that its origins come from a belief that contained contention had not had the affect desired by certain members of the Uyghur community; rather than being seen as redundant its membership has increased steadily.¹²⁶ How does this inform our understanding of repertoire change?

The most noteworthy structural repertoire change is the increase in digital *cosmopolitanism*. The strict denial of political activity, no mention of 'East Turkestan' in any of the organization's publications, the stated claim of pure educational and cultural activity is more than innovation at the margins (Tarrow, 1998). Arguably, it has provided an opportunity for diffusion of claim-making. Because of its outward representation the Uyghur Academy is able to operate a Uyghur language website that, till now, has been accessible in China. The websites of all other Uyghur organizations in Istanbul, almost all overseas Uyghur organizations in fact, are blocked by the Chinese firewall.¹²⁷ As

¹²⁴ This was explained to me by two of the founding members. However, in later conversation with a leader of a different organization, they claimed that they had supported the Uyghur Academy since the beginning. It is of course unlikely that they would admit to me the details of animosity within the Uyghur community. Again, we are confronted with multiple narratives; however, I believe what is important is the perception expressed in this quote rather than the actual degree of support or criticism.

¹²⁵ Boundary Formation refers to the creation of an us-them distinction between two contentious actors (Tilly and Tarrow, 2006: 215)

¹²⁶ The Uyghur Academy did not relate the exact number of student members in Istanbul but suggested that there are several hundred members, and internationally more than 2,000.

¹²⁷ There are many Uyghur websites originating from Turkey and the international community. They are predominantly composed in Uyghur, Turkish, and English, with other respective language of host country sites. However the non existence of a single Chinese language website disseminating the Uyghur claim represents an unfortunate trend

several students mentioned they hadn't heard directly of the Foundation, only of an organization that could help them once they arrived but The Uyghur Academy exists in digital space behind the Chinese firewall. "The Uyghur Academy inspired me before I came here."¹²⁸ This means that, despite the potential to theoretically affect international political actors that contained Uyghur organizations have wielded, the Uyghur Academy may be situated to effectively diffuse its affect throughout the Uyghur community less impeded by Chinese coercion.

Its stated goal is education and cultural empowerment, as with established organizations, but the subtle difference in name may have enough symbolic coherence to position it, in relation to perceptions of threat, as an opportunity for resistance minded students. It seems to have directly responded to perceptions of Chinese symbolic power and coercion. I argue that the Uyghur Academy has provided an organizational foundation situated to challenge symbolic power, through education. The comment at the beginning of this subsection revealed education as necessary for informed and qualified political contention but we must ask whether education can be analyzed as a more fundamental form of resistance.

4.2 Unmasking Power

Butler (1997) encourages us to ask what can be made of resistance that can only undermine, but which appears to have no power to re-articulate the terms by which subjection is installed. This is where resistance goes beyond the form of everyday resistance and begins to re-articulate the terms of subjection in the context of a symbolic struggle.

Symbolic struggles over the representation of the social world may take two forms. On one side agents engage in individual or collective representation, such as demonstrations to exhibit the group, its numbers, strength, or cohesiveness, meant to assert a certain reality. Such action is designed to manipulate one's self image and position in the social world. On the other side, agents may attempt to transform the cognitive and evaluative structures through which categories of perception and understanding of the social space are constructed (Bourdieu, 1989: 20). The contained contention of established Uyghur organizations fits into the former. Moreover, it seems unlikely that collective action

considering the need to reach out to the Chinese community. See "Cyber Activism without Reaching out: Uyghur Websites and Chinese Audiences," *Xinjiang Review.com Blog*: <http://xinjiangreview.wordpress.com/2011/04/24/cyber-warfare-without-target-uyghur-websites-and-chinese-audiences/> (accessed 9 July 2011)

¹²⁸ Noted in an interview with two Uyghurs students living in Istanbul eight months and one year 13 June 2011

is triggered by a signification. It is likely a response to the material domination brought to life by the signification. Although contained contention may name the invalidity of certain representations, it generally challenges the regime from which they spring. The later refers to not only challenging the representation but engaging in the semiotics of resistance. The later case, I argue, is the process of subjugated agents attempting to generate their own symbolic power in order to resignify the perceived domination of previous representations. Applying semiotic analysis to Uyghur discussions of education will reveal the coherence between Chinese symbolic power and repertoire innovation.

We are reminded that recognizing symbolic power is insufficient to challenge it: it requires an analytical repertoire of revealing the intentions of the representation or unmasking it (Barthes, 1972: 127). Is this the meaning behind education as resistance? In order to answer this, we must not treat resistance in a consequentialist way, but understand it through the explanations participants give for their behavior (Scott, 1985: 290).

It is not very easy to win a political war against China. You must be strong in other fields, academics. To be strong and get other people to help you or help yourself.¹²⁹

It is the only thing we can do and the most important thing to do. Education is the most important thing. We fought for 50 years and nothing happened.¹³⁰

What is the best way to challenge Chinese propaganda? Increase scientist population. If we Uyghur students can be admitted to the top universities and study well, that is also a kind of propaganda. Or sometimes it is necessary to build websites or to write. Moreover, those Uyghurs living abroad, if they can live well in their community, that can also be a kind of propaganda. In Turkey that is crucial. Before Uyghur were not well educated, 2005, 2006. But now the student numbers are increasing. They will play a positive role for improving Uyghur image.¹³¹

These comments continue the narrative that has been unfolding. My informants have emphasized the importance of education in the struggle against China. However, we are confronted with resistance that is not targeted at the regime itself, but a repertoire, in many respects, situated to unmask the signification at the base of perceived domination. How does education facilitate such a challenge to Chinese symbolic power?

¹²⁹ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul two years 4 June 2011

¹³⁰ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul eight months 13 June 2011

¹³¹ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul two years, Turkish citizen, 25 June 2011

I should first acknowledge education as a source of material development. Business or technology degrees provide a vehicle for gaining greater economic and symbolic capital, which we should not disregard as probably the primary conscious motivation behind Uyghur insistence on institutionalized education. Advanced degrees offer Uyghurs the chance to escape from material exploitation and find well paying jobs, which affords increased symbolic capital as they reach the professional or social antithesis of the dual significations discussed above. The majority of Uyghur students I spoke with in Istanbul were studying some branch of engineering. However, beyond the economic and symbolic capital conferred by advanced degrees and job placement, that all my student informants related they independently pursued study in Uyghur history and literature requires deeper analysis.

In a capitalist society there is less material value afforded to history than engineering, for example; therefore, pursuing these studies does not appear to be based on material motivations alone. I asked my informants why it was important for them to study history. A number of them apparently directly connected studying history with uncovering the social-historical context behind the Chinese narrative, at the root of Uyghur representations.

History, Chinese people said that Xinjiang is their land. They said Xinjiang has been their land from 2000 or 3000 years until now. They said Uyghurs moved from other places and came to Xinjiang. I think, learning history and analyzing the situation today will bring us into the future. And if we couldn't learn our real history, we have to face assimilation, become the Chinese people.¹³²

To teach children to be proud, you must teach history. For history is the most important in national psychology. For example, before I came to Turkey I didn't know what is the real history of the last 100 years of Uyghur history. Then I learn. It is very important to learn history. The two republics is very important to know. It gives us a kind of encouragement.¹³³

I learn from studying history. The plane crash [The 1949 crash that killed Ahmetjan Qasimi and others] left the uneducated in charge. It was a mistake to put all the smart leaders on the same plane. It left the country without any leadership. Easy to control.¹³⁴

¹³² Interview with a Uyghur student and community leader living in Istanbul seven years, Turkish citizen 31 may 2011

¹³³ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul one and a half years 25 June 2011

¹³⁴ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul three years 24 June 2011

Chapter two analyzed how the regime has manipulated the 'official history' to find ideological support for its representations of Uyghurs. It resulted in a signification of backward subaltern which reified marginalization. Furthermore, I argue that depicting a predominantly unified history allows the regime to construct the image of Uyghur as separatist as not only a source of violence but an exogenous source of violence that does not belong to the official history, therefore legitimizing domination. Investigating and analyzing history, Uyghurs in Istanbul are effectively unmasking this 'official history.' Understanding the intentions behind symbolic power and the signification they are unmasking can be analyzed as a constituent in the process of re-articulating not only their place in history but their place in the present, and steering their course into the future. It is the foundation of resignifying 'Uyghur' away from the image projected by Chinese symbolic power.

The second grouping of knowledge discussed as resistance is access to forbidden texts, historical but also literary. Chapter two outlined a number of ways that the regime has dominated cultural capital and manipulated literature to further the signification of Uyghur as separatist. Where the regime was engaged in a symbolic attack on Uyghur identity by monopolizing art and literature, I argue that open access to print media in Istanbul has two results. One is the more obvious, the general hidden transcript defiance of Chinese domination. The other, the freedom of access, coupled with the increase in counter-discourse producing information, is resignification. As I noted at the opening of this section, “agents may attempt to transform the cognitive and evaluative structures through which categories of perception and understanding of the social space are constructed (Bourdieu, 1989: 20).” This theoretical analysis explains the comments of a number of my informants.

When we do not have the chance to study our own literature then we will have much less chance to know who we are. So this must be the purpose and this must be the first stage of assimilation.¹³⁵

It doesn't matter, the freedom of speaking here. The main point is, after coming to Turkey, coming to another country, not only for Turkey. Like, our point of view is enlarged. I have, I personally have a different point of view now than before. Something I never considered while living in China. It affected me this way. I may look at it from another way. Being in a different environment helps you recognize more about your own identity... Because I can read anything, speak freely, so I can think freely. I can think more. I can consider more.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Interview with a Uyghur graduate living in Istanbul five years, Turkish citizen, 21 May

¹³⁶ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul five years, Turkish citizen, 2 June 2011

While this level of analysis may seem abstract I believe it will be validated by a further examination of Uyghur narratives of how they perceive themselves situated to challenge the perceived domination of Chinese symbolic power.

4.3 Resignifying 'Uyghur'

It is a bad thing. Heavy problem. I think the propaganda is for the world. The outside. It is controlled by the government. People just know Uyghur from Chinese propaganda.¹³⁷

Chinese look down on people from our region. Once [studying in Inner China] my roommate lost his stuff and I was the first suspect. The media plays an important role. They never talk about anything good. When they do it is singing and dancing. But when it is bad they show everything. As long as they manage to give this image to the foreigners, make the Chinese image innocent, a kind of good government to the foreigners, the government is doing good but the Uyghurs are doing bad. This is their aim.¹³⁸

We have to get a new image in the world. We have to help some people to have success. Make Uyghurs successful, known in the international stage and people will ask why we are here and not in China.¹³⁹

China says Uyghur people are only singer and dancer. It is a lie. So, Uyghur people in Turkey must go to university, graduate university. It is good for our culture, our nation.¹⁴⁰

The comments above can be analyzed as targeting signifying possibilities: 'improving Uyghur image,' 'new image in the world,' and point to a direct correlation between Chinese symbolic power *qua* domination and at least some forms of Uyghur resistance. Chapter three explained how symbolic coherence presented an understanding of threat and opportunity in Turkey, which shaped a paradigm shift in organizational structure. Here I will analyze precisely how it has influenced resistance.

I spoke with all of my informants not only about Chinese symbolic power, examining and discussing posters and banners, but also about how they felt poised to challenge signification while in Istanbul. I was unsure what kinds of responses I would get. I was anxious that I would be able to translate the concept of symbolic power into concrete questions and then input the answers into the

¹³⁷ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul for one and a half years 25 June 2011

¹³⁸ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul for one year 13 June 2011

¹³⁹ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul eight months 13 June 2011

¹⁴⁰ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul four year, Turkish citizen, 26 May 2011

discourse on semiotics in order to analyze the data. As I spoke with more students a common narrative unfolded, reproduced by recent arrivals and longer residents, citizens and non-citizens. A number of them illustrated in unencumbered vocabulary what a theoretically informed analysis conceives of as an awareness of symbolic power and a repertoire of resignification.

I explained in chapter two that symbolic power oppresses by working to construct a particular signification for myriad targets within the regime. That signification is produced by the relationship between the signified and the signifier. As a target for resistance, this relationship “produces the possibility of a reversal of signification, but also opens the way for an inauguration of signifying possibilities that exceed those to which the term has been previously bound (Butler, 1997; 94).” This is where resignification moves away from targeting the validity of the regime to control Uyghur 'image' and positions educated Uyghurs to exceed the signification to which they were 'previously bound' by the regime. Their material success results in symbolic capital to re-articulate the 'Uyghur' signifier. Cultural and symbolic opportunity in Istanbul has provided a foundation for the re-articulation of the signified, the concept of what it means to be 'Uyghur.' Uyghurs are still Uyghurs. But this means a radical shift in the meaning behind the form.

Resignification is not a full liberation from the dominant symbolic force of the regime. I do not mean to imply that it represents a radical freedom. There are too many other factors involved in domination to say that once Uyghurs have challenged the signification they are free from all forms of dominant power. But we can understand it, in Butler's terms, as working within the hope of replaying power, restating it in new ways (Olson and Worsham, 2000). Distinct from contained contention, it is not political power but autonomous power that propels resignification as repertoire innovation.

Above I pointed to the digital *cosmopolitanism* ushered in by the Uyghur Academy. The second major repertoire innovation in response to symbolic power, I argue, is the increasing ease of *autonomous*¹⁴¹ action, in one sense restating claim-making power away from an organization to the individual. The claim target in the resistance discussed in this chapter is the signification and not the regime itself. Uyghur students are able to speak directly to the object of that claim. As I mentioned in chapter two, power not only oppresses but forms the subject. By treating themselves as a constituent in spreading the representation, Uyghur students are targeting themselves in material advancement but at

¹⁴¹ In repertoire performances Tilly explains that autonomous actions call attention to the greatly diminished roles of patrons and intermediary authorities in making claims; the people involved speak directly to the objects of their claims, including national authorities (Tilly, 2006: 54).

the same time directly targeting the perceived dominant representation forced upon them by the regime.

The increasing autonomy of Uyghur students to engage in symbolic resistance marks a split from the contained actions of East Turkestan organizations, or the merely undermining attempts of the hidden transcript. By changing the target of the claim Uyghur students participate in a boundary spanning repertoire where once it was forbidden to almost all but the hidden transcript. This directly relates to Butler's (1997) challenge to situate resistance than can do more than undermine, but may have the power to re-articulate the terms of subjection. The apolitical framing of re-articulating Uyghur and targeting symbolic domination rather than the regime demonstrates repertoire innovation. I argue it represents a potent repertoire for re-articulating Uyghur position in their symbolic and, consequently, material struggle against perceived Chinese domination.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter began with an examination of contained Uyghur contention and organizations. This was important because, as we saw, a number of Uyghurs perceived threats or shortcomings in these organizations. The result was the establishment of a new organization situated to capitalize on certain structural, cultural, and symbolic opportunities afforded by the efforts of established organizations but, responding to perceptions of threat and the symbolic coherence of name, allowed for a boundary spanning foundation for innovative contention. The insistence on education and the repositioning of the target of claim-making from the regime to the representation marks repertoire innovation in the Uyghur symbolic struggle against Chinese symbolic power. I argue that this new repertoire be understood primarily as resignification. It explains how Uyghur students have responded to Chinese symbolic power, in both domestic representations and transnational coercive symbolic coherence, to engage in transgressive contention in Istanbul.

5 Conclusions

The guiding question of this thesis was to understand and analyze the affect of Chinese symbolic power on the evolution of Uyghur repertoires in Istanbul. We came to an understanding of symbolic power as the regime's monopoly over, principally, cultural and symbolic capital, although at times enforced through a monopoly over coercive power. Many Uyghurs perceive the dual signification of undeveloped subaltern or violent Other as a source of domination, but the regime attempts to tightly constrain their ability to engage in resistance against these significations. Transgressive actors among the Istanbul Uyghur community appear to have not only evolved their repertoires based on perceptions of symbolic coherence but have begun to engage in a repertoire of resistance against symbolic power. However, one is left to ponder whether repertoire innovations discussed in this thesis are capable of moving the challenge to symbolic power outside of Turkey, back into the regime space of China to re-articulate the significations. Summarizing my observations and analysis may provide some detail in addressing lingering questions.

After years of contained contention in culturally and politically supportive Turkey, established Uyghur organizations succeeded at generating increased salience of the Uyghur claim. This resulted in increased cultural and symbolic capital. The combination of increased cultural and symbolic capital resulted in new opportunities for contention. While participation in contained contention was forbidden due to perceptions of threat, understanding symbolic coherence and exploiting increased capital affected the innovation of organizational structures. Transgressive actors have taken advantage of these openings to institute a new repertoire in contention. Furthermore, analytical perceptions of symbolic power at the root of Uyghur domination resulted in the shifting of the claim-making target: to the

signification rather than the regime. The repertoire of resistance took on the form of education toward resignification. Specifically, outside of traditional structural analysis, what factors appear to be salient in both our analysis and Uyghur narratives?

To condense my analysis and propose a potentially transferable model to other sites of symbolic struggle I propose the following Symbolic Opportunity Structure. (1) The access to cultural and symbolic capital within the social space; (2) The availability of resonant 'master frames;' (3) The degree to which the signification is culturally or socially accepted; (4) The perceived instability of the relationship between the signified and the signifier; (5) The extent to which the signification is enforced by coercive power; and (6) The dimension of the spatial field in which coercion is able to enforce the signification.

If we restate this with our data and analysis we will see that: 1) while China controlled all cultural capital, to the point of equating language with terrorism, and symbolic capital in the sense of representing Uyghurs as undeveloped subalterns, Turkey offered considerable increases in both forms of capital. 2) As we saw with cultural opportunity, Turkey provided considerable support for articulating a 'master frame' of Uyghur grievances. It also facilitated the re-articulation of autonomous education as an innovative 'master frame' for resistance. 3) Contained contention in Turkey challenged the Chinese regime and brought the Uyghur claim into salience which resulted in diminishing the acceptability of the signification that is highly enforced, if not generally accepted in China. This challenge was later shifted to target the signification by transgressive actors. 4) While the Chinese regime manipulated history and representations in myriad formations to legitimize the relationship between the signified concept of Uyghur and the represented signifier of Uyghur, the above mentioned Turkish political certification of the Uyghur claim, among other factors, worked to unmask and challenge the relationship between the signified and signifier presented by Chinese symbolic power. 5) While China is engaged in severely enforcing the signification through its monopoly of coercive power, it appears to have limited ability to enforce the signification in Turkey. 6) However, as we saw, China is engaged in various forms of coercion abroad but the threat posed by transnational coercion is apparently evaded by perceptions of cultural and symbolic opportunity and the positive conditions of (1) through (5).

While my proposed Symbolic Opportunity Structural analysis model is somewhat rudimentary, because it is based on a single case study, I argue: 1) it at least adequately summarizes the analysis of this thesis; and 2) presents a potential tool for future analysis of similar phenomenon in the politics of

representation that are not analyzable based on causal coherence or political and cultural opportunity models alone.

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Appendix I: On the objectivity of social research.

If the nature of research is discursive then the researcher is arguably participating in not only understanding but also reproducing the discourse.

One thing that came up while conducting research was a concern over the affect of my research on the psychological state of my research subjects. Of course there is discussion in academia around the effect of research: can research into a phenomenon help or hinder the causes or conditions under investigation. But my concern is more focused on the individual agent. Namely, how do subjects of social research react with that subjectification and how do they perceive the role of the researcher? Specifically, while conducting my research I wanted to also understand how my informants felt, knowing they were subjects of research. Understanding this concern leads to more than a moral discussion of social scientific research. I argue it also directly challenges assertions that social research can be objective.

Despite all attempts to maintain a barrier between the observer and the object of observation, the perceptions of the subject can bring the observer into the phenomenon as a participant, directly or indirectly. The researcher may not be a direct participant in the phenomenon but he or she is still an active agent, at least in the perception of their subjects. Recognizing this, and conducting research informed by at least these observations, may facilitate research that steps outside the boundary of abstract objectivity, as it may often be enforced by the structures of power. Below I have included a series of responses to illustrate this rudimentary analysis.

You will add this to your thesis and some day maybe someone will read your thesis and understand our current situation and this is a win for us. I have seen what you are doing in your work and it is really useful for us.¹⁴²

I feel encouraged. Maybe, although you are not Uyghur, maybe you have more knowledge than me. Maybe I can obtain knowledge from you... Maybe you use your language, English, to help poor people. Let the world know this.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Interview with a Uyghur businessman living in Istanbul 31 years, Turkish citizen, 12 July 2011

¹⁴³ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul four months 9 July 2011

We are very glad to talk about our situation. If someone knows, it is good. These things we cannot explain in our hometown.¹⁴⁴

We are happy. We want people to know the truth, know the reality. We want to do things but we can't. We don't have power. We can only explain the true situation.¹⁴⁵

We welcome that. We want the world to know about Uyghurs. Know that we are not terrorists, that we have our own culture and ways. And also some smart guys. We want the world to know about that.¹⁴⁶

Maybe last year, I think, I met another guy from the United States. He say we was interested about Uyghurs and, not like you, but asking questions about our situation in Eastern Turkestan. After a long time, maybe one year, I learn he was not just a student but he was working for an organization calling information about East Turkestan. Maybe, you are not a student. Maybe you are working for CIA or FBI... If one foreigner from United States or Europe is interested about Uyghurs, I think, worried, just collect information for his country or organization. But maybe you are not. I don't know. But I support your work. It will be something good to our ethnic group and for our Uyghurs to be known by the world.¹⁴⁷

Throughout this research project I was concerned with not only the concept of social scientific objectivity but also, perhaps more so, objectifying the subjects of my research. This stems from a concern over how people identify themselves; that is, does every Uyghur identify as 'I am a Uyghur' first, or as a man or woman, student, Muslim, conservative, liberal, etc.? The researcher must, essentially, profile that component of identity that fits into the sampling frame expedient to their research. While I cannot develop this here, it marks an interesting direction for future thought.

Appendix II: Representing Nationalities in Beijing: The Cultural Palace of Nationalities

¹⁴⁴ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul three years, 24 June 2011

¹⁴⁵ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul two years, Turkish citizen, 24 June 2011

¹⁴⁶ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul one year 13 June 2011

¹⁴⁷ Interview with a Uyghur student living in Istanbul one and a half years, Turkish citizen, 4 June 2011



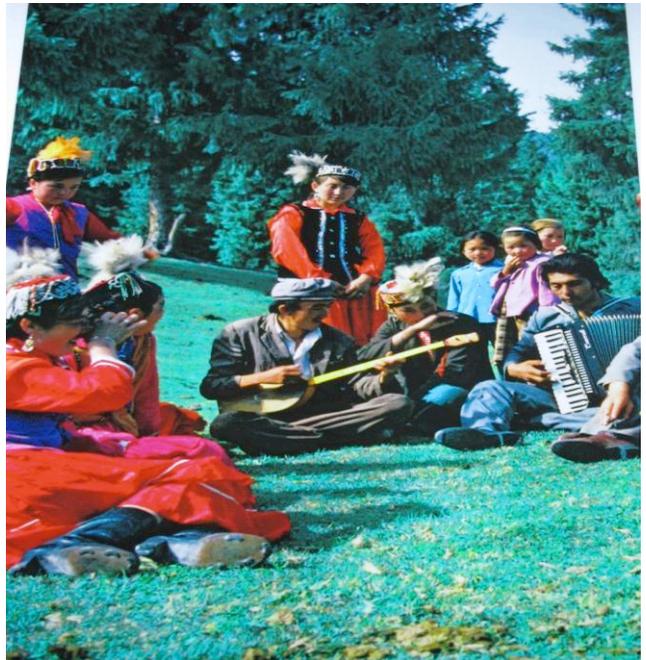
Uyghur



Han

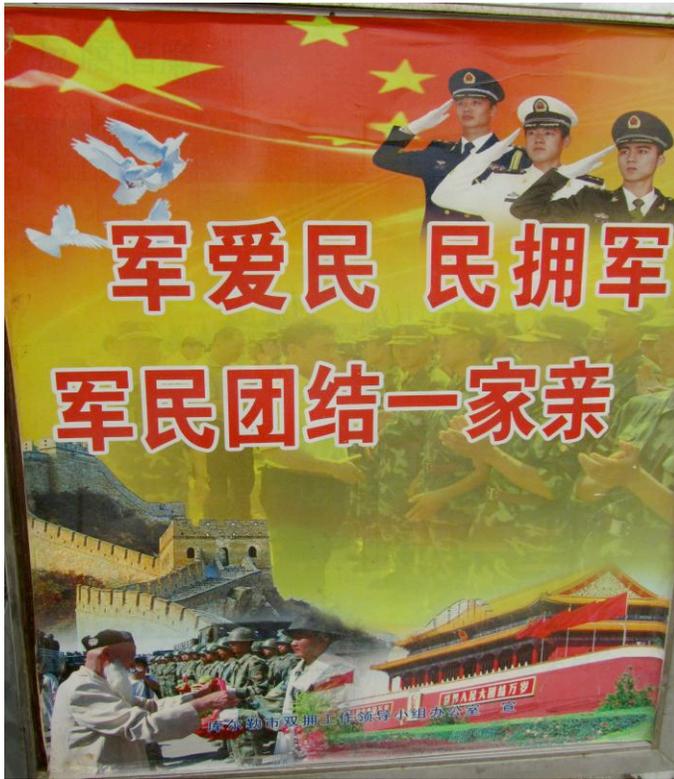


Uzbek

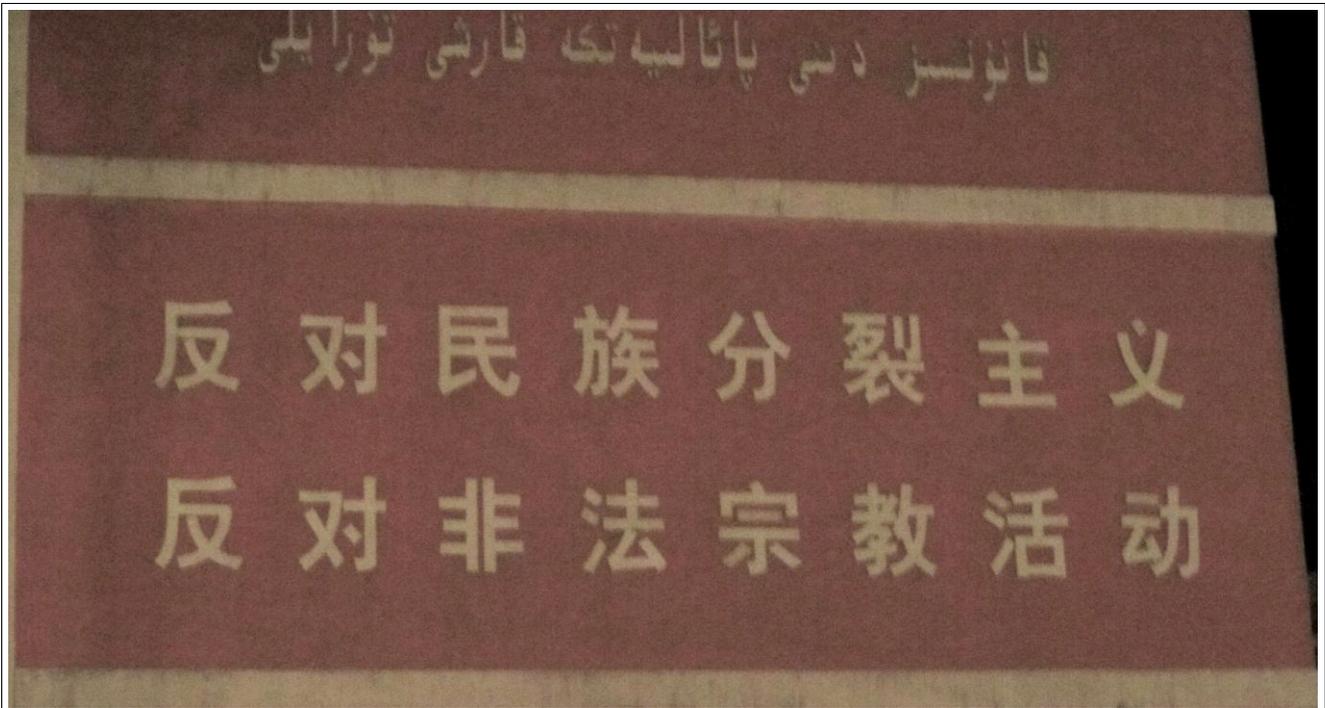


Kazakh

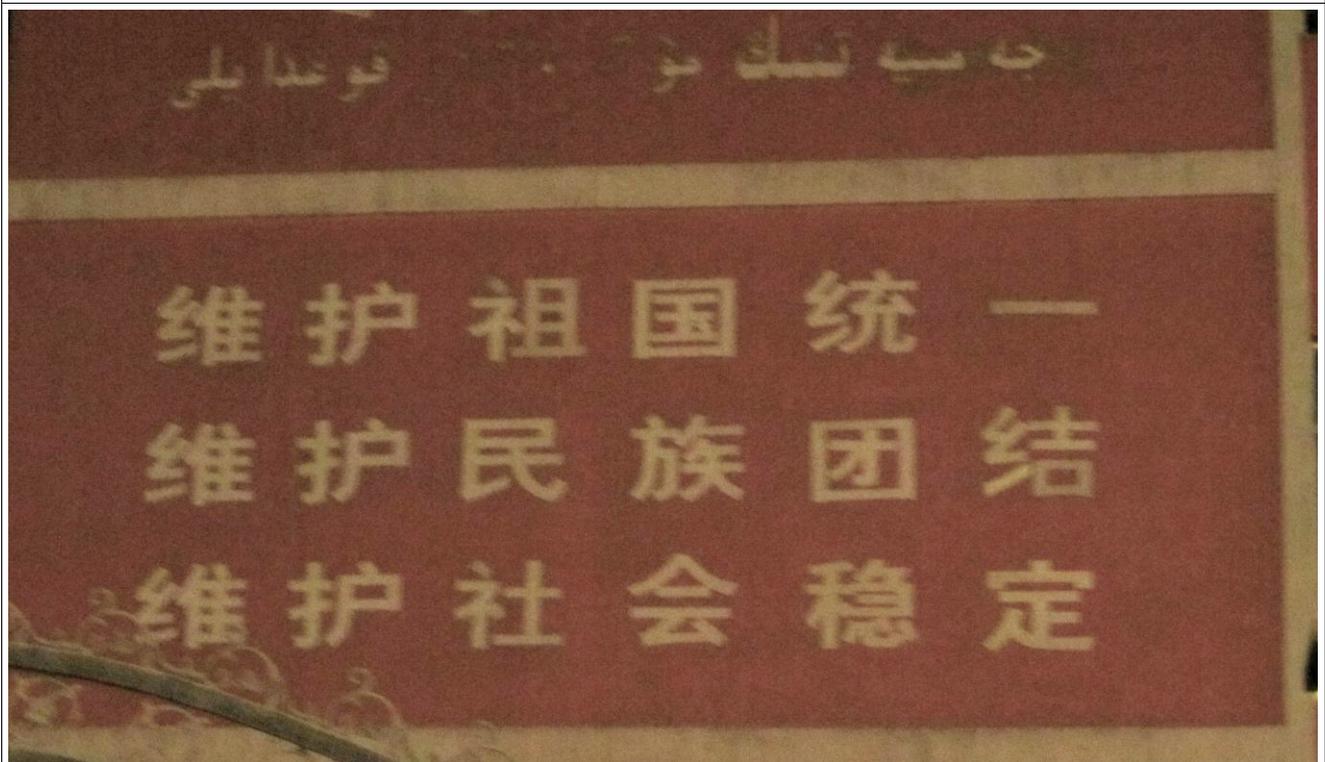
Appendix III: Unity Posters



Appendix IV: The Writings on The Wall



1) Oppose Ethnic Splitism; 2) Oppose Illegal Religious Activities



1) Protect Ancestral Homeland Unity; 2) Protect Ethnic Unity; 3) Protect Social Stability