

UYGHURS AND UYGHUR IDENTITY

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**“Without Uyghur History there can be no Central Asian History;
Without Central Asian History there can be no Asian History;
And without Asian History there can be no True History of the World”**

See Dolkun Kamberi “A survey of Uyghur documents from Turpan and their importance for Asian and Central Eurasian history” *Central Asian Survey* (1999), 18(3), p. 283

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Introduction

Great politicians will pass from the earth, and the strongest imperial states will collapse and disappear from a new generation's memory, but wisdom, civilization, and cultural heritage will continue to play a significant role among human beings as long as there is human history.

The land of the Uyghurs today consists of the Tarim, Junghar, and Turpan basins, situated in the center of Asia. This region has had great importance since early times because of its favored geographic location on the ancient trade routes between the East and the West, connecting the Greco-Roman civilization with Indian Buddhist culture and Central and East Asian traditions. Burgeoning trade, commerce, and cultural exchange gave the Uyghurs' land a cosmopolitan character, marked by linguistic, racial, and religious tolerance. The Uyghurs' culture and art developed not only on the basis of the inheritance and preservation of their traditional culture, but also through cultural exchanges with others in the East and the West.

“Uyghur-land” in this article denotes a geographical location rather than a geopolitical entity. It is situated in the eastern part of Central Asia and measures at its maximum 2,000 kilometers from east to west and 1,650 kilometers from north to south. Uyghur-land comprises about one sixth of China's territory; it is now the largest Autonomous Region of China. The Uyghur region includes a great portion of Central Asia, from the northeast to the southwest; it borders Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tibet, and India.

Not only is Uyghur-land situated in a strategic position on a vital communication line in Central Asia, among three large imperial states, China, India, and Russia—it also has a unique geographic environment, rich natural resources, and a special climate. Its arid climate has helped to preserve ancient tombs, mummies, petroglyphs, city sites, Buddhist caves, innumerable cultural relics, and underground antiquities and treasures. Twenty-four different scripts, used for writing seventeen ancient languages, have been unearthed from the Tarim and Turpan basin oasis cities and are well known to scholars.[1]

In Chinese sources, at various periods, this land has been called the “Western Region” or the “Western Countries.” In non-Chinese sources, it was known as “Uyghuristan,” “East Turkistan,” “Chinese Turkistan,” or “Chinese Central Asia.” The term “Uyghur Āli,” found in a medieval Uyghur manuscript, means “The Country of the Uyghurs.” In 1884, the Qing Dynasty of China began to call the region “Xinjiang,” which means “new territory.” After 1955, the name “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region” was given to it by the government of the Peoples' Republic of China.

According to the July 1, 1990, official Chinese census, the Uyghur-speaking population was at that time 7.2495 million and comprised more than 60% of the region's population. The Han Chinese population was 5.7466 million, comprising about 30% of the 15 million total population of the Uyghur homeland. A decade later, the Chinese official census of 2000 indicated that the population of Uyghur-speakers was near 9 million, but independent sources claim that the Uyghur population is currently about 16 million. In the past ten years, the Han Chinese population in the region increased almost 32 percent. By contrast, in 1949, Uyghurs accounted for more than 90 percent of the region's population, while the Han Chinese accounted for only 5 percent of the roughly 5 million people in the Uyghur homeland at that time. Thus the Chinese population had increased 500 percent in the last half of the twentieth century.

The Uyghurs historically formed the largest population group in the Central Asian region. They possessed a rich literary art and music as well as a strong economy and military. They had the ability to conduct state affairs, even to help other groups solve their problems as well. They showed generosity: the abundant hospitality that they offered was recorded in detail both in Chinese history and in the excavated Uyghur manuscripts of various periods.

The Uyghurs and their ancestors established their reign under the rule of the Huns (second century B.C.E. to second century C.E.), the Jurjan (third century to fifth century C.E.), and the Turkish empires (522 to 744 C.E.). The Uyghurs also established their own states throughout history; these included the Uyghur Āli (744 to 840 C.E.), the İdīqut Uyghur (605-840 to 1250), the Uyghur Qarakhan (tenth to thirteenth century), the Uyghur Chaghatay (thirteenth to sixteenth century), the Yärkänt Uyghur Khanate (1514-1678), the Qumul and Turpan Uyghur Baks (from the end of the seventeenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century), and finally the Yakup Bak (1820-1877), which lasted until the Qing invasion. The Uyghurs reclaimed Uyghur-land as the Republic of Eastern Turkistan in 1933 and as the Eastern Turkistan Republic in 1944-1949.

The last Uyghur republic, established in 1944, was strongly supported by the Soviet Union. In the early 1940s, the Stalin regime sent a Soviet Army political commissar to every unit of the Eastern Turkistan Republic army, to control and monitor the situation of the latter. These Russian commissars fed information about the political views of the main leaders of the Eastern Turkistan Republic directly to Moscow. The Chinese Communist Party also closely monitored the political situation in Uyghur-land. The Eastern Turkistan leadership made a strong demand for independence from both Russia and China. Joseph Stalin endorsed the decision for the Uyghur people made at the secret conference with Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt at Yalta in 1945. He firmly believed that the Chinese Communist Party would agree to build a new China following the USSR's ideological doctrine. Stalin immediately called Alihan Tore, the Soviet-supported President of Eastern Turkistan, to Russia in 1946; Tore lived in Tashkent until 1976.

Alihan Tore's successor, Ahmatjan Qasim (1914-1949), Eastern Turkistan Army Chief General Isaqbeg (1902-1949), Deputy Army Chief General Dalilkan Sugurbayev (1902-1949), and a member of Eastern Turkistan Central Government, Abdukerim Abbasov (1921-1949), all died in a mysterious plane crash on August 22, 1949, on their way to Beijing to participate in the first Chinese Communist Party Central Committee meetings that would decide the political fate of the Uyghurs and the Eastern Turkistan Republic.

From 1946 to 1949, Russia and China attempted many governmental structural reforms in Uyghur-land. During these reforms, both Russian and Chinese government representatives promised the Uyghurs again and again that the presence of the Chinese army in Uyghur-land was intended to promote democratization, free elections, and greater autonomy, to help build the new Xinjiang, even to provide for the eventual independence of the Uyghur lands.[2] The content of those promises is similar to Zhang Zhizhong's promise at the summit of Chinese Nationalists, Communists, and Uyghurs in Urumchi in 1946. After 1950, "the communist revolutionary moment" in China touched almost every aspect of traditional culture, especially during the Cultural Revolution. The revolutionaries found that every aspect of culture in Uyghur-land was different from that of China. This included languages, writing system, arts, literature, ideas, values, attitudes, history, religion, customs, music, dance, songs, and thought, even the personal features of the people, including their clothes, style of house decoration, and food. All of these differences were attacked by the Chinese government in an attempt to change them.

The government, for example, has twice changed the writing system of the Uyghurs, Kazaks, and Kirghiz, and it has punished all levels of educated intellectuals for political reasons four times in fifty years. Furthermore, the politicians reorganized and merged the Eastern Turkistan troops into Chinese Army units. After 1966, it caused the army units of former Eastern Turkistan—as well as their generals and high-ranking commanders—to disappear.

One goal of this publication is to offer the evidence needed for the world to have a better understanding of the distinctiveness of Uyghur identity.

[1] Dolkun Kamberi, "Xinjiang Yeinqi Zaman Arheologiyisi wä Qeziwelinghan Qädimqi Yeziqlarni Qisqichä Tonushturush [Brief Introduction of Xinjiang Contemporary Archology and Unearthed Various Ancient Scripts]," *Xinjiang İjtima-i Pänlär Tätqiqati*, 1 (1984): 60-70.

[2] Zhang Zhizhong, *Cong Dihua Huitan Dao Xinjiang Heping Jiefang* [From Urumchi Summit to Peaceful

Liberation of Xinjiang] (Urumchi: Xinjiang Renming Chubanshe, 1987), pp. 166-67.

The Uyghurs

Archaeological excavations and historical records show that Uyghur-land is the most important repository of Uyghur and Central Asian treasures.

Many centuries ago, when a famous medieval Uyghur king mounted the throne, he made an ambitious proposal for his kingdom's future. He said to his courtiers and people, in verse:

män sänlärgä boldum Qaghan, alaling ya taqï qalqan.

tamgha bolsun bizgä buyan, kök börä bolsunghil uran.

tömür yïdalar bol orman, aw yärdä yürüsün qulan.

taqï taluy taqï mürän, kün tugh bolghil, kök qurqan....

I became a king for you. Pick up your bows and shields! Let the symbol become our good fortune, make the blue wolf a totem. Let our arms and armor be like [a thick] forest. Let wild horses speed on our hunting ground. Let rivers and streams run in our land. May the sun be our [royal] emblem, the blue sky our banner....

And then the king wrote a declaration, which was sent in all four directions by his order. It said: “uyghurning qakhanï bolamän kim yärning tört bulunginïng qakhanï bolsam keräk turur....” “I am a Uyghur king; the globe needs me; and I should be king of the world's Four Corners....” [1]

The basic meaning of the name Uyghur is “Unite,” but it may also be translated as “union,” “coalition,” or “federation.” The name first appeared in the Orkhun Kok Turk inscriptions and in early Uyghur. Later forms of the name can be found in medieval Uyghur, Manichaean, and Sogdian scripts, and in the Arabic script of the Uyghur Qarakhanid and Chaghatay periods. Apart from these Central Asian forms, the name can be found in different periods and diverse texts in Chinese, appearing in more than one hundred translations.[2]

The Uyghurs and their forebears are an ancient people who have lived in Central Asia since the first millennium B.C. Their ancestors can be traced in Chinese historical sources, as the “Di,” “Chidi,” “Xiongnu,” “Dingling,” and “Gaoche” peoples who lived north of the Heavenly Mountain (Tängri Tagh) and along the Selenga and Orkhun rivers. The territory later became known as the Uyghur Empire. The Uyghurs have left historical traces along the ancient Silk Road and also in Chinese historiography.

The Uyghurs, earlier than other prairie peoples, began to settle and build cities. Certain kinds of evidence from both archaeological excavations and historical records show that, in an important period, many Uyghurs lived a settled urban life and embraced Buddhist and Manichaean culture. Uyghur manuscripts that describe the religious and cultural interaction of medieval Uyghurs with the peoples of neighboring countries, during the period from the eighth to the eleventh centuries, show that this cultural experience contributed to the medieval Uyghur culture. An important part of Uyghur literature is devoted to the translation of Buddhist works from non-Turkic languages. That is one reason why so many loan words from different languages appear in medieval Uyghur literature.

Regarding the early medieval Uyghur culture and its kingdom, Professor Denis Sinor writes: “The kingdom of Khocho [Idiqut Uyghur Kingdom], ruled by the Turkic Uyghurs, was multiracial [and] multilingual and [it] permitted the peaceful coexistence of many religions. It enjoyed a living standard unparalleled in medieval Central Eurasia.” [3] He goes on:

Among the non-Muslim Turkic peoples none has reached the degree of civilization attained by the Uyghurs and they developed a culture in many respects more sophisticated than that of most of the Muslim Turks. In the visual arts they continued a tradition, non-Turkic in origin, of which they maintained very high standards. The script they used gained widespread acceptance both to the east and the west. The Uyghurs undoubtedly wrote one of the brighter chapters of Central Eurasian history.[4]

Medieval Uyghur life and culture flourished until the Mongol invasion, at which time Uyghur-land underwent two hundred years of war and division. A cultural renaissance began under the famous Uyghur cultural founders Sakaki, Lutfi, and Ali Sher Nawayi. For many decades, up through the present time, Uyghur scholars worked hard to save and preserve Uyghur culture, and to recover it from both assimilation into other cultures and external political pressure.

A typical example of interference in Uygher life comes from recent history. Following the assassination of Yakup Beg[5] in April 1877, Uyghur-land endured eight long years of intervention by both Russia and China. Finally, the Manchu Qing dynasty in 1884 made a secret deal with the Russians, and the two imperial forces annexed Uyghur-land. The Qing dynasty renamed it “Xinjiang Province” and ruled it harshly; this reign was succeeded by the domination successively of Yang Zenxin, Jin Shuren, and Shen Shicai.[6] These rulers enforced three decades of severe control on Uyghur-land, causing political, social, and economical instability, provoking ethnic conflict, and forcing the decline of Uyghur intellectual life.[7]

Here is an example from the small village of Tijän in Artush County near Qäshqär: the rulers arrested more than fifty men during the period 1910–1928, and some of these never came back. The fifty men who were taken away were among the most influential, some being wealthy men and others leading intellectuals. In fact, throughout all of Uyghur-land, nothing remained of Uyghur cultural and social activities, except for limited religious freedom (permission to keep some mosques open).[8] Finally, the Qäshqär uprising started under a few Uyghur intellectual leaders. The Uyghurs overthrew the cruel rulers and established a new Republic of Eastern Turkistan in 1933. The cultural renaissance that followed helped Uyghurs to enter the modern era.

From 1933 on, Qasimjan Kamberi, a cultural leader, led the Uyghurs in a literary and artistic renaissance. He organized a performance troupe in the city of Ghulcha, which then performed in other areas of Uyghur-land. He recreated the “Gherip-Sänäm” opera; he wrote plays, staged and directed them, and performed as a principal actor. He also made it possible for women to perform on the stage for the first time in modern Uyghur history.[9]

After the Republic was crushed by the Chinese government, with Russia’s help, the Uyghurs once more lost the ability to advance their own culture. But ten years later the Uyghurs took back their rights and independence. They founded the Republic of Eastern Turkistan (1944–1949), which once again created a cultural revival in Uyghur-land. The Uyghurs had survived some of the most difficult circumstances and tremendous pressures in human history. Uyghur intellectual circles, using every opportunity, successfully brought about the transfer of Uyghur cultural heritage to the new generation.

[1] *Qädimqi Uyghur Yazma Yadikarlaridin Tallanma* [Selection of Ancient Uygher Manuscripts], ed. Abdukeyim Khoja (Ürümchi: Khälq Näshriyati, 1983).

[2] See Dolkun Kamberi “A Survey of Uyghur Documents from Turpan and Their Importance for Asian and Central Eurasian History,” *Central Asian Survey* (1999), 18 (3): 283.

[3] Denis Sinor, *Inner Asia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Publications, 1969), p. 120.

[4] Sinor, *Inner Asia*, p. 121. See also Annemarie von Gabain, “Das uighurische Königreich von Chotscho, 850-1250,” in *Sitzungsberichte der deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, 1961, Nr. 5, and A. von Le Coq, *Buried Treasures of Chinese Turkestan: An Account of the Activities of the Second and Third German Turfan Expeditions* (London, 1928).

[5] Yakup Beg (1820-1877) was the founder of a dynasty (1864-1888) in Uyghuristan. Turkey recognized the kingdom in 1872. Queen Victoria of England sent a British delegation in 1870 and a second delegation in 1873, with a document in her own handwriting recognizing the kingdom’s legitimacy (Boulger, *The Life of Yakup Beg* [London, 1878], chap. 11).

[6] Saypidin Äzizi, *Ömür Dastani* [Epic of Life] (Beijing: Millätlär Näshriyati, 1990), pp. 119-24.

[7] Äzizi, *Ömür Dastani*, pp. 351-60.

[8] The researcher obtained this information from a Uyghur historian, Abduqadir Aji (1902-1986).

[9] *Xinjiang Tarikh Materyalliri* [Xinjiang Historical Materials] (Ürümchi: Xinjiang Khälq Näshriyati, 1990), 27inchi Sani, pp. 200-11.

Uyghur Linguistic Identity

The Turkic peoples historically used the Uyghur literary language. The ancient Uyghur language, which was used in the eighth century during the Uyghur Khanate, is the same as the language of the Orkhun-Yenisay inscription, called ancient TÜRki. There was no great difference between the literary language of the Iduqut Uyghur Khanate and the Uyghur literary language of Khaqaniyid.

This phenomenon proves that the ancient TÜRki literary language, which was in use before the eighth century, actually was the Uyghur literary language. As we know, until the fourteenth century, the ancient Uyghur literary language was commonly in use among the TÜRki peoples. Shämsidin Sami, the author of *Qamusul'Alam*, wrote: "Uyghurs being most advanced in cultural development, their language was the common literary language among the TÜRki peoples, since at the period during which the Chaghatay Khan was in power, the Uyghur language, called Chaghatay Tili, was famous." [1]

Based on the history, literature, religion, content, and script of Uyghur linguistic materials, I have classified Uyghur language into five different periods:

Pre-historic Uyghur language, before the sixth century B.C.E. No written material in Uyghur from this period has been found so far, but the language has come down to us through Uyghur oral literature, idiom, idiomatic phrase, folk story, folk song, and folk literature, and through the ancient mythology and legends recorded in other languages.

Ancient Uyghur language, sixth to tenth century C.E., mostly pre-Islamic literatures, whose influence spread from non-Altai languages.

Medieval Uyghur language, tenth to fifteenth century C.E. These mostly record Islamic literature and are strongly influenced by the Arabic and Persian languages.

Early Modern Uyghur language, sixteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century C.E.

Modern Uyghur language, from the end of the nineteenth century to the present.

Modern Uyghur belongs to the Ural-Altai language family, a Turkic language group of the eastern branch. Among the six major Turkic languages, the Turkish and Azari languages are very close; the Kazakh and Kyrgyz languages also are closely related; and the Uyghur and Uzbek languages are similarly paired. In each "couple," the languages can communicate with each other on simple subjects.

Modern Uyghur has two major dialects, southern and northern. According to the official Chinese census of 2000, the number of native speakers of Uyghur is nearly ten million. Of these, the vast majority lives in the Uyghur Autonomous Region under Chinese rule. There are considerable communities of Uyghur-speakers living in the Central Asian Republics and Turkey, and smaller communities live in Russia, Mongolia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and in the Western countries.

According to Uyghur Autonomous Regional law, the standard Uyghur language has served as the official language of the Uyghur Autonomous Regional government since 1955. Despite the fact that there are more than ten million Uyghurs living throughout a vast region of Central Eurasia, and despite the fact that they have possessed a very rich literary heritage for almost two thousand years, the Uyghur language has been greatly neglected by the international community. There are no generally accessible Western publications or education on the Uyghur languages and literature, except for a few early publications in Russian, and some in German and Swedish. Uyghurs have used more than eight different writing systems from early medieval times to the present. Now they use the Arabic-script-based modern Uyghur writing system.

Uyghur Writing Systems from Medieval Times to Present [2]

Brahmi Script I

Brahmi Script II

Uyghur Runic Script

Medieval Uyghur Script

Uyghur, Sogdian and Manichaean Script

Arabic-Persian-Script-Based Uyghur-Chaghatay Writing System

Modern Uyghur Script

Roman-Script-Based Modern Uyghur Writing System

See Appendix for a full description of these systems.

[1] Khämit Tömür, *Chghatay Tili* [Chaghatay Language](Qashqar: Qashqar Uyghur Näshiryati, 1987), p. 2.

[2] Turghun Almas, *Uyghurlar* [The Uyghurs] (Ürümchi: Xinjiang Yashlar-Ösmürluar Näshriyati, 1989), pp. 801-10; Annemarie von Gabain, *Alttürkische Grammatic* [Ancient Turkish Grammar] (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974), pp. 1-41; *Weiwuer Zu Jianshi* [Brief History of Uyghur], ed. by a Group (Ürümchi: Xinjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1991); Liu Yi Tang, *Weiwuer Yanjiu* [Studies of Uyghur] (Taibei: Zhengzhong Shujü, 1975), pp. 517-84; Abdukeyim Khoja, ed., *Qädimqi Uyghur Yazma Yadikarlaridin Tallanma* [A Selection of Ancient Uyghur Manuscripts] (Ürümchi: Khälq Näshriyati, 1983), pp. 37-44.

Uyghur Cultural Identity

The Uyghurs are indigenous peoples of Central Asia. They have developed a unique culture and have made significant contributions to Asian literature, medicine, architecture, music, songs, dance, and fine arts. The Uyghur economy is based on light industry and on the farming of fruits, cotton, wheat, and rice, made possible throughout this arid region by the ingenious irrigation method invented by the Uyghurs over two thousand years ago. In addition, Uyghur-land has rich oil and mineral reserves.

Generally speaking, the İdīqut Uyghurs maintained friendly relations with all their neighbors. Evidence excavated in Turpan Basin shows that the İdqut Uyghur Kingdom was for centuries a major Central Asian Buddhist cultural center. During the tenth century, Wang Yande, an envoy of the Sung dynasty, visited the İdīqut Uyghurs between 981 and 984 and was impressed by the high level of civilization he found in the kingdom. Under Uyghur rule, there were at that time more than one hundred temples in Kuchar and more than fifty temples and libraries in the city of Turpan, and welfare programs existed for the support of the poor.[1]

This level of cultural attainment is shown both by archaeological excavations in the Uyghur region and by Uyghur historical documents. The wall paintings and manuscripts discovered in the Turpan İdīqut Uyghur Khanate offer further pertinent illustrations of the cultured lifestyle and the continuity of Uyghur civilization. For instance, wall paintings discovered at Turpan offer a picture of the Uyghurs as a refined people, with elegant ladies and well-dressed gentlemen in long embroidered tunics holding long-stemmed flowers in their hands. Many other art objects and manuscripts were also recovered from the ancient Yarghul and İdīqut cities. Later, when the Taoist Chang-Chun, on his way to visit Chingis Khan in the thirteenth century, passed through the still-flourishing Uyghur kingdom, he marveled at its riches. The fields were all irrigated with water brought from a great distance. He was entertained by dwarves and musicians, offered wine and marvelous flowers, and treated to watermelons weighing some thirty pounds.[2]

Medieval Uyghur saying: “öküz adaqı bolghinchä buzaghu bashı bolsa yig.”

Modern Uyghur saying: “öküz ayighi bolghichä mozay beshi bolsa yakhshi.”

Translation: “It is better to be a head of a calf than to be a hoof of an ox.” [3]

(In other words—it is better to be a big frog in a small pond than a small frog in a big one.) The saying expresses the idea of Uyghur longing for freedom and independence. It also suggests that a person should think independently, not follow others, no matter whether the others are big or rich. This proverb encourages an individual to be a leader, although he might lead only a small or poor group or place, rather than to be a servant; to decide everything for himself; and to refuse to live under constraint. Mäkhmut Qäshqäri recorded this medieval Uyghur saying in the eleventh century. The saying has remained prevalent among Uyghurs for more than a thousand years, and it retains the same form and meaning.

The medieval Uyghurs, striving over a long period to build great cities and to develop their cultural life and agriculture, finally earned their independence and established a strong base in medieval Central Asian cultural development, as suggested in the saying quoted above. Thereafter, Uyghurs founded a strong empire in Central Asia and became leading figures among other groups of Central Asian peoples for the extent of the medieval period. For this reason, medieval Uyghur literature made an unprecedentedly rapid development. Early Uyghur manuscripts, recently excavated, will offer further understanding about this period, its religious life, social activities, urban culture, and the general cultural background of the Uyghurs. The existence of the manuscripts itself indicates that Uyghurs had a close relationship with other groups and engaged in considerable social

exchange with them.

These manuscripts include the following: (1) Maitrisimit, (2) Altun Yaruq, (3) Samsu Acharining Tärjimali, (4) Säkiriz Yükmäk, (5) Abidarim Koshvardi Sutra, (6) Guan Shi Im Pular, (7) Linhua Chächäk Üzä Itigi Yaratighi Atligh Sutra, (8) Amitaba Sutra, (9) Aryarajavavadaka Sutra, (10) Mahamegha Sutra, (11) Kshanti Qilghuluq Nom, (12) Kimqoki Vajracchetika Sutra, (13) Tishastwustik Sutra, (14) Yitigän Sutra, (15) Amitayus Sutra, (16) Agamas Sutra, (17) Prajna-Aparamita Sutra, (18) Dashakrma Budaawtanamal Sutra, (19) Lailitaristara Sutra, (20) Yogacharyabhuni Sastra, (21) Nagarjuna Liligig Ötlämäg Taqshut, (22) Insadi Sutra, (23) Mahamayuri Sutra, (24) Manijushirinama Samgiti Sutra, (25) Jataka and Awadana Story, (26) Alqu Ayigh Yawuz Yollarigh Artuqraq Uz Aritdachi Sutra, (27) Mahapaya Utlisin Yanturmish Sutra, (28) Alqu Anchulayu Kälmishläring Ushnirlaqshänlarintin Önmish Ati Kötirilmish Sitatapadra Atligh Utsuqmaqisiz Darni, (29) Oghuz Namä, (30) Chashrana Ilig Bäg, (31) Ikki Tigin Yikayisi, and many more.

The Uyghurs established an excellent writing system and, over time, created literary genres unique among all the neighboring groups. The medieval Uyghur urbiculture evinced unprecedented development, especially under the leadership of Ay Tängri dä Qut Bulmish Tängri Äl Bilgä Bögü Arslan, the Uyghur emperor who reigned 759-779 A.D. The Uyghurs twice provided significant military aid to the Tang court (618 A.D. and 907 A.D.), saving it from internal political disaster and rebuilding its political and economic power.[4] During the pre-Idqut and Idqut Uyghur Khanate (605-1250 A.D.), the Uyghurs not only strengthened their political power but also developed a strong economic society and cultural life. They played an important role in the Silk Road economy and contributed to Central Asian literature, as well as creating localized Buddhist arts.

The credibility of the Uyghurs made them the regional power. They were able to achieve a developed literary life, and not only during a period in which they had a great leader or because they were briefly dominant regional figures. Their cultural achievements were built upon an endeavor to develop their arts over centuries. "For some 150 years, from about 400 A.D., the entire Central Asia region from northern Korea to Karashar [qarashähär] was dominated by the Juanjuan [Jurjan] and the ancestors of the Uyghurs; the Kaoch'e [the Qangqil] lived under their control as subjects." [5]

I have deciphered a poem unearthed from Bezeklik in Turpan that belongs to the medieval period. The poem presents the very kindly feeling of its author for his relative, who evidently lives far away. The author not only greets him, but also encourages him to study hard, giving him good advice and wishing him great success when he returns. The poem also reflects the attitude of the medieval Uyghurs toward learning. They believed that knowledge combined happiness with great honor. Thus, this well-written poem indicates that medieval Uyghurs took education very seriously. (The document is preserved in the Turpan Museum. The original document number is 80. T. B. I 522, and it measures 37.5 x 3 cm.

Transliteration :

1. özüng-ning ögränmish yandirlarta
2. öglinä ädgü-ki-mä busugh silikil
3. öngi-mä nägü-kim yanglar-ta öslü-

4. nchü-singä tägi anchulayu ol umuq-

5. luq közüm birlä oqip sanga idim.

Translation:

1. No matter what subject, study in your own way;

2. Think more; be aware; do not be a show-off;

3. Be careful and steady, whatever you engage in;

4. That is the only way to be outstanding.

5. I read this with hopeful eyes and send it to you.

Uyghur culture likely will survive indefinitely but may not hold the vitally important place it occupied in the past. That culture seems to exist only in the preserved form witnessed in the Uyghur Mäshäräp performance or in old museum pieces. A select but substantial group of scholars and readers may well continue to admire the magnificence of such medieval arts. But no matter what benefit the study of medieval Uyghur culture may confer, drastic social change cannot fail to transform the traditional culture. Yet the preservation of that culture will benefit contemporary civilization greatly, especially as it preserves the cultural identities of peoples through their arts.

[1] Geng Shemin, *Gudai Weiwuer Shige Xun* [Selection of Ancient Uyghur Poems] (Xinjiang Renming Chubanshe, 1983), pp. 5, 19.

[2] Sinor, *Inner Asia*, pp.118-19.

[3] Mäkhmut Qäshqäri, *Turki Tillar Divani* [Turkic Languages Dictionary] (Ürümchi: Xinjiang Khälq Näshriyati, 1981).

[4] See the section “Decline of Uyghurs in History” in Dolkun Kamberi, “The Study of Medieval Uyghur Drama and Related Cultural Phenomena: From *Maitrisimit* to *Qutadghu Bilik*, ca. 767-1069 A.D.” Dissertation. (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Company, 1995), chap. 5.

[5] Colin Mackerras, *The Uyghur Empire (744-840), According to the T'ang Dynastic Histories* (University of South Carolina Press, 1972), p. 8.

Uyghur Artistic Identity

Uyghur arts have spread widely and had a powerful impact on public education in Central Asia and therefore on the cultural history of the region. Such material is of fundamental importance for understanding Uyghur civilization and philosophy. Uyghurs have kept their cultural identity alive in literature and art; they have also continued to develop their traditional culture up to the present.

The Uyghurs formed a design system and decorative style of their own unique flavor in arts and crafts. The distinctive Uyghur style persists especially in clothing, hats, jewelry, boots and shoes, scarves, bed sheets, tablecloths, carpets, bed felts, blankets, wall hangings, pillows, bags, riding bags, knives, musical instruments, bedside cupboards, horse gear, doors, designs on windows and buildings, and household decorations. These designs are derived from various plants, animals, landscapes, shapes, and geometric figures. The designs are unique in form, compact in organization, and rich in subject and color. Ancient petroglyphs, Buddhist and Manichaean temple wall paintings, and archaeological finds in the Uyghur region offer evidence of the origins of Uyghur design and art.

One of the most important early medieval Uyghur Buddhist art centers, the Bezeklik monastery is located in the Murtuq River gorge of the Flaming Mountains (Yalqun Tagh), about forty kilometers east of Turpan. One can still see the traces of the performance stage, though it is ruined. The monastery consists of caves spaced for one kilometer along the cliffs on the west side of the gorge. There are eighty-three surviving caves, of which about forty are decorated with wall paintings totaling approximately twelve hundred square meters. The surviving caves date mostly to the Uyghur Idiqut Khanate period. Researchers have examined some typical wall paintings from the caves, and their analysis shows that Uyghur Buddhist art was an important feature in medieval Uyghur culture.

The German archaeologist A. von Le Coq cut out many wall paintings, shipping them back in several hundred cases to Berlin. The world was surprised by the esthetics of Uyghur Buddhist art. The consensus is that the art of the Bezeklik Buddhist Monastery is the most representative, important, and numerous as well as the best preserved of Uyghur Buddhist art objects. The British archaeologist Aurel Stein, who visited Bezeklik at the end of 1914, indicated that, in terms of richness and artistry, no other finds from similar sites in the Turpan Basin can match those of Bezeklik, which parallel the rich ancient paintings of the Dunhuang Thousand Buddha Caves.[1] Professor Albert Grünwedel (1856–1935) writes in a letter dated April 2, 1906: “For years I have been endeavoring to find a credible thesis for the development of Buddhist art, and primarily to trace the ancient route by which the art of imperial Rome, etc. reached the Far East. What I have seen here goes beyond my wildest dream. If only I had hands enough to copy it all, [for] here in the Kizil are about 300 caves, all containing frescoes, some of them very old and fine.”[2]

[1] M. Aurel Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc), pp. 353–63.

[2] Herbert Härtel and Marianne Yaldiz, *Along the Ancient Silk routes: Central Asian Art from the West Berlin State Museums* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1982), p. 41.

Uyghur Musical Identity

The Uyghurs also have a colorful and outstanding heritage in music, song, and dance. One achievement of the contemporary Uyghur intellectuals who have worked toward a cultural revival is the return of the classical suites of the Muqam and of the Uyghur songs and dances that once appeared on the stage in Uyghur-land.

The Uyghur Twelve Muqam, for example, is well preserved and very popular among Central Asians. The Muqam was a part of Uyghur theatrical culture that was recreated under Abdurishit and Amannisa Khan in the sixteenth century. Abdurishit (1533–1570) was the king and son of the founder of the Yärkänt Uyghur Khanate (1514–1678); his wife, Queen Amannisa Khan (1534–1567),^[1] was an outstanding Uyghur musician who compiled and created the Uyghur Twelve Muqam. Together they conserved and developed the muqam during the cultural revival that emerged in the sixteenth century in Uyghur-land.

The original Muqam texts came mainly from Uyghur folk songs and oral literature; the later were gradually replaced by the writings of poets and thinkers like Atayi, Muhämmäd Säkkaki, Lutfi (1366–1465), and Elishir Nawayi, Uyghur cultural revivalists and reformers active after the Mongol invasion, who made a great contribution to the literary renaissance in Central Asia. Uyghur literary development underwent an experience similar to that of other groups in the Central Asia at that time. Arabs and Persians had influenced literary history more strongly than ever during the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. Uyghur society faced a cultural decline under the rule of Chaghatay Khan's descendants. As time went on, the Muqam was in danger of disappearing from contemporary Uyghur history.^[2] But thanks to the many Uyghur musicians who worked to sustain it, it has survived to the present. For instance, one of the most famous Uyghur folk musicians, Turdi Akhun (1881–1956), who had been born into an aristocratic musical family, was still active in Qäshqär in 1950 and could play and sing the Muqam completely from memory, including the poetic texts.

In 1950, Turdi Akhun and the people of his town clearly remembered four notable generations of folk musicians from his family, preceding himself. They were: his great-great-grandfather Ibrayim Akhun, his great-grandfather Ashim Akhun, his grandfather Qawul Akhun, and his father Täwäkkül Akhun. The five generations of that aristocratic Uyghur musical family thus go back to the Yärkänt Uyghur Khanate period (1514–1678). If the father of Ibrayim Akhun were also a folk musician, he would be a person in the same generation as the well-known Uyghur poet and thinker, Nizamiddin Elishir Nawayi (1441–1501).^[3] This hypothesis offers an explanation of why there were many Nawayi poems in the Muqam's texts—not only did the old Muqam texts performed by Turdi Akhun include many of Nawayi's poems, but there were also countless verses of Nawayi in his amazing memory. He probably acquired the words directly from the earlier generations of his own family. This phenomenon offers the best evidence for connecting the continuation of the Uyghur Muqam with the social activities of the sixteenth-century female Muqam compiler and creator Amannisa Khan.

These five generations of one musical family offer an invaluable heritage of music and poetic literature, brought forward from Lutfi's and Nawayi's works to modern generations. Their lives also fill a gap in the history of Uyghur musicians that extended from Amannisa Khan to 1950, evidence of which was nearly lost. During the period 1951–1954, the outstanding Uyghur artistic leader Qasimjan Kamberi (1910–1956)^[4] organized a group of Uyghur folk musicians in Qäshqär headed by Turdi Akhun, and thus saved the Uyghur classical music Muqam.^[5] Today, such Uyghur classics as the Twelve Muqam serve as the basis of Uyghur and Central Asian contemporary music.

[1] See *Uyghur on Ikki Muqam Häqqidä* [Regarding Uyghur Twelve Mukam] (Ürümchi: Xinjiang Khälq Näshriyati, 1992), pp. 342–47.

[2] See *Täwarikhi musiqiyum* [The History of Musicians], written by Uyghur scholar Mulla Ismätulla Mujizi in 1854, in the city of Khotan in Uyghuristan. He mentions in the preface of his book that, after receiving an order from the king of Khotan, Älishir Hekim, he started to collect materials to write his history of musicians. He described seventeen famous musicians in the book. The Queen, Amannisa Khan, from the middle of the sixteen century, was the last described and also the only female musician. At the end of the work, the author wrote “Moreover, I should explain that during each century, in each city has appeared a hundred or a thousand musicians. If a book described the events of each person one by one, there wouldn’t be room. Therefore, I selected only one from a thousand, chose someone who created the music or the Muqam, or invented one of the instruments, or wrote in this field, to become famous. I used this information about the musicians presented, in this brief introduction in front of you.” See also Abdushukir Muhämmät Imin, “Amannisa Khan he shi’er muqan,” *Sichou zhi lu yuewu yishu* (Ürümchi: Xinjing Remin Chu Ban Shi, 1985), pp. 32-35.

[3] Äli Shir Nawayi was born in a Uyghur Bakhshi family in Herat; his father’s name was Ghiyasidin Kichik. See *Uyghurlarda kilasik ädäbiya* [Uyghur Classic Literature] (Ürümchi: Xinjiang Yashlar-Ösmürlär Näshriyati, 1988), p. 351.

[4] See *Xinjiang Tarikh Materyalliri* [Xinjiang Historical Materials] (Ürümchi: Xinjiang Khälq Näshriyati, 1990), 27: 200-11.

[5] Ämätjan Hämidi, “On Ikki Muqam Tarikhidiki Yengi Namayändä [New Discovery in Twelve Mukam History],” in *Uyghur on ikki Muqam häqqidä* [Regarding Uyghur Twelve Mukam] (Ürümchi: Xinjiang Khälq Näshriyati, 1992), pp. 458-77.

Uyghur Religious Identity

A productive way to understand the rituals of medieval Uyghurs is to view them as exercises in religious practice. A number of the more insightful analysts of the medieval Uyghur manuscripts have already highlighted the importance of religious symbolism and role-playing. The ritualized quality of the religious devotions and the significance of audience participation make them very important social and cultural activities in a religious context. The symbolic implications of a variety of Uyghur religious texts and dramatic metaphors capture the mood and explain the impact of religious literature on Uyghur identity since the early medieval period.

The religious processional performance of the medieval period, first of all, embraces certain religious institutional activities in both a fixed and an unfixed form. These include daily prayer as well as religious teaching offered in both fixed and unfixed locations such as monastery, temple, mosque, or on the street—untitled, improvisational, with constantly changing casts. Though fluid in form, the religious activities nevertheless followed a historically established tradition of group participation. This means that even participants in religious events worked from familiar “scripts,” which gave a common sense of how to behave during a given action. These included: where and when to pray, how to express one’s beliefs, how to costume oneself and apply makeup when preparing to perform the ritual for calling for God’s protection from evil, and so on.

Some of these ritual performances and the makeup used in them originated in the distant past, even stretching back millennia. For example, I examined three-thousand-year-old mummies in excellent preservation from ancient tombs in Uyghur-land that offered evidence of such rituals. The male corpse was dressed in a short jacket and long trousers, all made of dark purple wool. The female wore a dark reddish-brown one-piece open-necked dress that was cut to below knee length. There were multicolored felt socks and knee-high white deerskin boots on their feet. Traces of makeup in ocher spiral sun-symbols could be seen on their faces. The presence in the tomb of two small bone spoons with dried ocher pigment in them may indicate that the makeup was applied after death. Some other ritual objects unearthed from the tomb included yarn, which may have been used as a symbol of fire, and some reed bundles bound in red wool yarn and suspended from forked branches.^[1]

Furthermore, historical evidence shows that ritual ceremony, religious institutional activities, and processional performance underwent considerable development in Uyghur-land. In medieval times, the Buddhist processional performance paraded from the fourteen largest monasteries of Khotan City of Uyghur-land during the spring Buddhist festival. People carried large images of Buddha and colorful banners emblazoned with the images of various Buddhist figures. Each monastery would perform on a certain day. The entire event would go on for fourteen days, and the participants included the king of Khotan as well as all the civilians engaged in state rituals and official ceremonies, who supplied additional “scripts” for the religious theater.

The processional performance remains very popular today in Uyghur-land; it performs a kind of ritual drama. The processional performances occur during the religious festivals or in great ceremonies of renewal, or they may appear in a more abbreviated form. The performances are offered respectfully for divine as well as for human enjoyment, and they vary little as the troupes parade from temple to temple or from mosque to mosque. Bystanders and other informants affirm that it is all just fun, a local tradition without special meaning.

Ethnographers have acknowledged the religious significance of the procession without suggesting systematic interpretations for its components. But the standardization of the elements of the procession throughout the region suggests a definite set of conventions; moreover, taboos and obligatory ritual greetings at the temples visited indicate that what goes on is more than entertainment. Even taking into account that some of the performances have lost all meaning and that some always have been purely entertaining, ritual procession may be seen as a form of fundamental play, in which both participants and observers are saying something about themselves.

The development of Uyghur Buddhism and its art is an important feature of Uyghur culture. The Buddhist heritage of Uyghur culture in the Qizil, Qumtura, Bezeklik, Siggim, Murtuq, and other Buddhist monasteries of Uyghur-land is a very important component of Uyghur civilization. Although the early Buddhist teaching of Gautama Buddha probably began in the sixth century B.C. (ca. 563–483), its oldest surviving remains and manuscripts are much later in date. The first independent evidence for Buddhism comes in the reign of the Maurya Emperor Asoka (273–232 B.C.), whose stone inscriptions are the earliest Indian historical records.

They mainly explain a benevolent creed that he called “Dharma,” a word also used in Buddhism. Dharma was a system of duties and values, as it was in Buddhism. The Gautama Buddha was born in northeast India as Prince Siddhartha of the Sakya clan. His precepts originated in a critical appraisal of the Brahman religion. The term Buddhism also includes later interpretations, which, after the Buddha’s death, were propagated by the different schools. The two most important of these schools were the Hinayana and the Mahayana. The Buddha is usually known by the title of Sakyamuni (Sage of the Sakyas), which derives from his clan name. According to the Buddhist legend, the Maitreya will be a future Buddha.[2]

The Buddhist idea is similar to other philosophic systems created in the world. The Buddhist prophets also place perfection, peacefulness, happiness, richness, freedom, hopes, and Sukhavati (pure land) in the future. If people do good deeds in this world, they will be reborn in the future. Therefore, the most pious Buddhist believers, using various forms and mediums, propagandize and eulogize the infinitely merciful kindness of the future Buddha, Maitreya. That is why legends, myths, poetic eulogies, poetry, sutras, and literary dramas about the future Buddha, Maitreya, were created throughout the Buddhist history of Central Asia and in Uyghur.

Maitreya, the future Buddha, the most famous, dramatic, and great figure in Buddhism after Sakayamuni, appeared in medieval Uyghur Buddhist manuscripts approximately between the seventh and eighth centuries. But the archaeological evidence shows that belief in Maitreya was very popular from the second century B.C. onward in Uyghur-land. Maitreya symbolizes the consummation of the rich legacy of Buddhist literature in Central and East Asia. All Buddhist monks believe that the arrival of the future Buddha will deliver all suffering creatures from a miserable life and establish a perfect state of justice, peace, purity, happiness, and truth.[3]

“Every religion, every culture, and every civilization has a characteristic view of the future as well as a characteristic way of recollecting the past, which together influence its understanding of the meaning of present existence.”[4] Historically, Buddhism has shaped and influenced the culture, and thus the values, ideologies, arts, and imagination of the medieval Uyghurs. Since Buddhism and its arts were introduced to China through Uyghur-land, it, along with India and Gandhara, became a major source for Chinese Buddhism and its arts.

Besides Buddhism, the Uyghurs also believed in Manichaeism, and that is also an important component in the medieval Uyghur cultural development. Manichaean religion was created by the Persian Mani (216–274? or 276 A.D.) in the third century, under the influence of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Christianity. Dualist in nature, it postulates the contention between Light (good) and Dark (evil). It came under the protection of the Shapur I (r. 241–272 A.D.) of the Sassanian Empire, but was banished by Bahram I (r. 273–293) as heresy, and Mani was executed. During Mani’s lifetime and soon after his death, his religion was disseminated to Egypt, Syria, and North Africa and later to Europe.[5]

According to the Chinese official record, Manichaeism spread to the Uyghurs of the Orkhun river area in 762 C.E. The Uyghur Manichaean document discovered in Turpan is dated to approximately the middle of the sixth century C.E. Mani believed in two opposing principles: light and dark, or good and evil. The material world and especially the human body assisted darkness. He taught that time should be viewed in three phases, in the first of which good and evil were separated, in the second mingled, and in the third again distinct. The human existed as body and spirit only in the middle phase, and it was the human’s duty to abstract himself from all matter. This would help bring on a great cleansing process, which Mani believed would usher in the third phase. When that time arrived, those who had succeeded in freeing themselves from the material world would live in the region of light, those who had failed in that of darkness.[6]

Finally, Uyghurs officially adapted Islam in 960 C.E. under the Sultan Sutuq Bughra Khan, one of the medieval Uyghur kings. Thereafter, for more than one thousand years, Uyghur has had an Islamic Identity.

[1] Dolkun Kamberi, "The Three-Thousand-Year-Old Chärchän Man Preserved at Zaghunluq," *Sino-Platonic Papers*, No. 44 (January, 1994, Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Pennsylvania).

[2] W. Zwalf, ed., *Buddhist Art and Faith* (London: British Museum Publications, 1985), pp. 9-16, 26, 32.

[3] *Maitrisimit* (Urumchi: Xinjiang Reming Chubanshe, 1988), p. 1.

[4] Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre, eds. *Maitreya, The Future Buddha* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 1.

[5] Ren Ju Yu, *Zong jiao Zi dian* [Religious Dictionary] (Shanghai: Shanghai Ci Shu Chu Ban She, 1981), p. 1140.

[6] Scholars have principally used the historical texts of the Chinese version of the Toquz Uyghur inscription as evidence that Uyghurs adopted Manichaeism in 762 A.D. However, they have taken the material out of context and have not considered the entire source. It is possible to obtain a quite different reading from the same sources heretofore used by these studies. Moreover, one sentence in that particular paragraph of the source has not been explained properly. It could be translated as "...Due to ignorance in the past, Buddha was as spirits (to us)." That sentence shows that, before some of the Uyghurs received the Manichaean faith, they were adherents of Buddhism (Dolkun Kamberi, "The Study of Medieval Uyghur Drama and Related Cultural Phenomena: From *Maitrisimit* to *Qutadghu Bilik*, ca. 767-1069 A.D." [Ann Arbor: UMI Company, 1995]).

Uyghur Historical Identity

The Uyghurs and their forerunners are an ancient group of Turkic-speaking people who have been living in Central Asia since the first millennium B.C.E. Their ancestors can be traced to the people who lived along the ancient Silk Road. That territory later became known as the Uyghur Empire. The social and cultural activities of the Uyghurs can be found in historical and archaeological materials of different times, from the Bronze and Iron Ages to the modern period. Even before the leaders of the medieval Uyghurs appeared in history in A.D. 605, the world-famous Silk Road had provided not only an immigration and trade path but also a route for cultural exchanges between the East and West. Uyghuristan[1] was the main region through which the Silk Road had to pass.

In the year 757 A.D., one of the military governors of the Tang dynasty, named An Lushan, started an uprising and strengthened his military power. In the year 744, he marched against the capital of Tang (Changan) with 200,000 troops; on his way he conquered the eastern capital, Loyang, and made himself emperor (756, Yen dynasty). Tang troops were sent against him under the leadership of the Tang general Gou Ziyi, but they were quickly defeated by the uprising army; An Lushan captured Changan. The emperor Xuan Zong now abdicated and fled into Sichuan. His son, Prince Li Heng (Emperor Su Zong 756-762) also fled into northwestern Shanxi. The Tang royal families begged help from the Uyghur emperor with a promise to give a daughter of the Tang emperor as a wife to the Uyghur Bugu Qaghan, plus payment from the Tang government of 10,000 bolts of silk. And they also signed a treaty for coming years relating to the horse-for-silk trade.[2]

The second time Uyghurs gave aid was in the year 762 A.D. Another military governor, Shi Siming, rose against the central government of the Tang. He had commanded his troops to come from the Hebei region to the south and cross the Yellow River, into the central plain. He conquered the eastern capital of Tang Luoyang, and important cities including Heyang and Huaizhou. He made the Tang dynasty once again lose political and military control, seizing almost all the Tang Empire territory. In the meantime, the new emperor, Daizong (Li Yu), immediately recalled the friendship and generosity of Uyghurs and begged their help once more. The Uyghur Qaghan himself, Tängri Il Bilgä Bögü Qaghan, led troops into China, defeated Shi Siming, wrested all the land he had seized and restored it to the hand of the Tang. The Uyghurs then helped the Tang court to rebuild their power in both Changan and Luoyang. But the Tang never carried out their trade promises, except that they did give a princess in marriage. But at the time the Uyghur Empire collapsed, the Tang court still owed it countless silks.

There are many records regarding this historical event in various Chinese sources. A passage from one of them reads: "The Uyghur Empire has coexisted peacefully with the Tang dynasty for more than a hundred years." There is also a record that an envoy of the Tang told Tibet's General Shangchi Shiner: "The Uyghurs have performed the feat of saving our country from disaster, yet they never occupied a foot or an inch of our land." And he added, "There is a horses-for-silk trading convention signed between the Uyghurs and the Tang. In these trades, the Uyghurs always were creditors and the Tang always were debtors, until the Uyghur Empire went into decline." [3]

After A.D. 840, because of weak kings and internal and external political disasters, including attacks by outside powers such as the Kirghiz and the Tang dynasty, the Uyghurs' political importance greatly declined. Everyone in the Tang court still clearly remembered how the Uyghurs had twice saved them from internal political disaster only a short time before, when the Uyghurs were strong. When the Uyghurs experienced still more problems, the Tang dynasty seized the sudden opportunity and used force to clear its debts.[4]

The Tang dynasty used a conflict between the Kirghiz and Uyghurs to its own advantage. Their officials closed the border against some Uyghurs who were trying to escape into Tang territory. They withheld all help from the

Uyghurs, attempting to destroy completely their power; they then attacked them from the rear. In the year 843, Manichaean property of the Uyghurs in China was confiscated, and Manichaean books and paintings were publicly burned. In the two capital cities, Uyghurs were ordered to dress in Chinese fashion. An edict by the Emperor sums up quite candidly the ultimate aim: “Now that the Uyghurs have been defeated, they should be extirpated for good.” [5]

As a result, the central power of the Uyghur Empire collapsed. This historical event prevented the Uyghurs from retaining their position as one of the most civilized peoples and societies in the contemporary world. But the central government’s decline did not mean that the civilization of the Uyghurs disappeared at that time. The Uyghurs had a long history of urbculture and a high level of civilization as well as numerous intellectual groups in their court.

They also had developed a regional influence over the region so that the area remained solidly civilized in the Uyghur fashion. Evidence refutes some of the previous research by other scholars on these Uyghur historical events. At this time, the Uyghurs shifted the center of their power to another location or, to put it another way, they were forced to change the capital of the Uyghur Empire to another of their cities. They were able to move the surviving ruling group into the surrounding region without battle because their civilization extended throughout the area. Scholars have never found a historical record or even a single piece of evidence in any historical document that says that the Uyghurs used force when their remnants, driven by the Kirghiz, came down into the area of the present Uyghur-land. This is a true even though the Chinese historians of the Tang court left behind rich historical materials about the Uyghur Empire and detailed reports related to the history of the Uyghurs of that time.

After the Uyghurs shifted their central power and the surviving populations into the present Uyghur-land, they joined with that area’s civilization to establish the Uyghur Qara Khanate and Idïqut Uyghur Khanate. They developed their culture in the present southern and eastern parts of the Uyghur region, reorganizing and rebuilding as well as further advancing their culture. And they made the region into a center of civilization of Central Asia once again, which lasted until the Mongol invasion.

Chingiz Khan conquered Eurasia in the thirteenth century (during the period 1219-1225). The war ruined innumerable cities, cultures, and antiquities. The Uyghurs, like other Central Asian groups, were forced to change their cultural life completely under both political and social pressure following the Mongol invasion. The Uyghurs also had changed ideologically, having converted to Islam in 960 A.D. But neither the Chinese, the Persians, the Arabs, nor the Mongols could assimilate them. The Uyghurs persisted as a distinct culture through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Regarding Uyghur civilization destroyed by the Mongol war, the scholars Thomas Francis Carter and L. Carrington Goodrich have described it as follows:

It is known that the Uyghur civilization did not long survive the drain on its manpower caused by the Mongol wars. Therefore, the date at which the Turpan documents come to an end cannot be much later than the close of the thirteenth century. It may therefore be said with a fair degree of certainty that a number of the best printed pieces—and perhaps a very considerable number—belong to the thirteenth century and the opening years of the fourteenth, when Uyghur printing came to its climax and ended. How far back this art goes can be only matter for conjecture. It may possibly go back as far as that at Tunhuang or further. It is certain that there is a large amount of very primitive printing and near printing, which may indicate several centuries of development. Some would assign much of the printing in the Uyghur language to an early date, because the Uyghur civilization rose to its height during the ninth and tenth centuries.[6]

There were many Uyghur scholars who have led Uyghurs to preserve Uyghur cultural heritage and maintain their cultural identity across time. These were: Tonyuquq, Yola Tegin, Zäkäk Bägän, Tängri Bögü Äl Bilgä, Sïngqu Säli, Chü Tashygän, Pïrtanrakshit, Kiky Qorsa, Sultan Sutuq Bughra, Yüsüf Khas Hajip, Mäkhmud Qäshqäri, Barchuq Arat, Akhmät Yüknäki (seventh to twelfth centuries C.E.). Later scholars were Atayi, Sekaki,

Lutfi, and Elisher Nawayi (thirteenth to sixteenth centuries C.E.). They played significant roles in their lifetimes in protecting the Uyghur cultural identity and ethnicity since the early medieval times. Their names and works live among the Uyghurs and in Central Asian cultural history.

Every historian understands that much evidence has not yet and may never be found. Numerous Uyghur scholars and their great leaders (the Arslan Khans) who have contributed to Central Asian civilization, silently passed away unknown to their own people and public, left without even a tomb in history. A sense of their names and traces will be remembered by the Central Asian people, in the way one modern Uyghur poet unites the past with the present:

IZ [Trace]1. We were young when we made the long journey on horseback,

It happens that those grandchildren of ours, in a way, have now mounted up.
We were few when we mounted horses for the demanding journey,
Now, leaving a trace in the deserts, we emerged as a great caravan.
The trace still remained through the deserts, sometimes in mountain passes,
So many lion-hearted ones[7] were left in the plain, in the desert, without graves.
In a field where the tamarisk turns red, don't say "left without graves,"
Our graves wrap themselves in blooms and flowers at dawn, in spring.
A trace lingered, the halting place lingered, and all of them lingered, far away,
When a storm comes up, even if the dunes shift, they will scarcely bury our trace.
From the route of the ceaseless caravan, although the horses grow emaciated,
One day, our grandchildren, or great-grandchildren, will most assuredly find this trace,
No matter what. [8]

The poem is a highly artistic condensation of Uyghur history. It comprehensively traces the dramatic changes in Uyghurs society and reveals the continuous development of Uyghur civilization.

[1] The name Uyghuristan, like "Uyghur-land," is used in this monograph as a geographical location rather than a geopolitical term. "Uyghur Äli," found in a medieval Uyghur manuscript, means "The Country of the Uyghur."

[2] Turghun Almas, *Uyghurlar* [The Uyghurs] (Ürümchi: Xinjiang Yashlar-Ösmürlär Näshriyati, 1989), pp. 681-700. See also *Jiu Tang shu*, Juan 217, *Huigu Zhuan* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shujiu, 1972).

[3] Feng Jiashen, Mu Soulo, and Mu Guang wen, *Weiwuer Zu Shilao Jianbian* [A Brief History of the Uyghurs] (Beijing, 1955), p. 15.

[4] Turghun Almas, *Uyghurlar* [The Uyghurs] (Ürümchi: Xinjiang Yashlar-Ösmürlär Näshriyati, 1989), pp. 681-700.

[5] Denis Sinor, *Inner Asia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Publications, 1969), p. 117.

[6] Thomas Francis Carter and L. Carrington Goodrich, *The Invention of Printing in China and Its Spread Westward*, 2nd edition (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1988), pp. 143-44.

[7] "Lion" ("Arslan") here refers to the title given by Uyghur leaders across time to their kings. The author tries to remind new generations of Uyghurs not to forget their historic leadership and independence, even though the Arslan-like kings of the Uyghurs are gone without trace ("left without graves"). As soon as the season turns into "spring"—when the political weather turns fine—the names of the "Arslanlar" will be memorized by the hearts of the people forever.

[8] Abdirehim Ötkür, 1984. For details, see “A Gentle, New Allegory by an Older Uyghur Author,” trans. and annotated by Edward Allworth and Gulamettin Pahta, *Central and Inner Asian Studies* 1:107-16 (New York, 1987).

Uyghur Regional Identity

According to Uyghur legend, people call Uyghur-land “three mountain grip three basins.” The Tängri Mountains divide the entire Uyghur-land into two different natural geographical areas: the Yarish Basin in the north and the Tarim Basin in the south. The Turpan Basin and the Qumul district lie to the far east of Tängri mountain ranges, contiguous to the Buddhist caves of Dunhuang.

At the center of the Tarim Basin lies the Täcklimakanian Desert, which has a surface area of 0.32 million square kilometers. One of the world’s oldest civilizations and the richest urbculture of the Uyghur city-kingdoms (which included Yotkan, Aksepil, Tokoz Saray, Niya, Kroran, Lelelik, Subexi, and Miran) was buried under the Täcklimakanian sands. The 2,000-kilometer-long Tarim River intersects the Täcklimakanian Desert, allowing both sides of the river to be cultivated; here the Uyghur created their civilization, unique in all the world. Among the Uyghur people there is the belief that “Täcklimakanian” refers to a place where, “If you go in, you will never come out.” However, the original meaning of “Täcklimakanian” in ancient Uyghur is “Vineyard,” and the meaning of “Tarim” is “cultivated land.”

Geographical formations separated Uyghurs throughout history into the natural oasis communities of the south and the north, divided by the Tangri Mountains; one result is the difference in dialects spoken by southern and northern Uyghurs. Uyghur-land has a dry climate typical of the region, with rich natural resources; these include coal mines, metals, gold, silver, oils, gas, a vast green steppe for animal husbandry, vineyards of long cultivation, and orchards that, owing to its geological formation, produce various fruits unique to this land.

Conclusion

Archaeological excavations and historical records show that Uyghur-land is the most important repository of Uyghur and Central Asian treasures. Indeed, there are only a few places in the world that can claim the religious, linguistic, cultural, and artistic diversity at any period that Uyghur-land can. Shamanism, Buddhism, Manichaeism, Nestorianism, and Islam flourished in Uyghur-land side by side and one after another, along with the traditions of early ethnic Uyghur cults. Uyghurs are an indigenous people of Central Asia; they have developed a unique culture and arts that made significant contributions to the Asian culture. The Uyghur intellectuals have struggled to renew and keep their cultural identity since the tenth century C.E., and the best way to understand Uyghur identity is to learn Uyghur history and civilization.

By carefully examining the various aspects of Uyghur Identity, I hope I have demonstrated what I deeply believe: that neglecting Uyghur civilization is neglecting Central Asian civilization, neglecting Central Asian civilization is neglecting Asian civilization, and neglecting Asian civilization is neglecting world civilization; in other words destroying the Uyghur cultural heritage is destroying a rich part of the world's cultural heritage. Saving the Uyghur culture is saving Central Asian, Asian, and world culture.

Appendix: Uyghur Writing Systems from Medieval Times to Present

Brahmi Script-I

Vowels

𑀓 a 𑀕 ā 𑀡 (aya=) ä 𑀛 i=i 𑀜 u 𑀝 ū 𑀞 (uyu=) ü
 𑀟 e 𑀠 (eya=) ē 𑀡 ai 𑀢 o 𑀣 (oya=) ö 𑀤 (oyo=) ø

Consonants

𑀧 ka	𑀨 kha	(𑀩 ga)	(𑀪 gha)	𑀫 na
𑀬 ca	𑀭 cha	𑀮 ja		𑀯 ña
				𑀰 ṇa
𑀱 la	𑀲 tha	𑀳 da	𑀴 dha	𑀵 na
𑀶 pa	𑀷 pha	𑀸 ba	𑀹 bha	𑀺 ma
𑀻 ya	𑀼 ra	𑀽 la	𑀾 va	
𑀿 śa	𑁀 ṣa	𑁁 sa	𑁂 ha	
𑁃 -k	𑁄 -p	𑁅 -m	𑁆 -r	
𑁇 -l	𑁈 -ś	𑁉 -ṣ	𑁊 -s	
𑁋 qa	𑁌 ga	𑁍 da	(𑁎 dza)	(?) 𑁏 wa
𑁐 za	(𑁑 za)			

Numbers

𑀧 1 𑀨 2 𑀩 3 𑀪 4 𑀫 5 𑀬 6 𑀭 7 𑀮 8
 𑀯 9 𑀰 10 𑀱 20 𑀲 30 𑀳 40 𑀴 50 𑀵 60 𑀶 70
 𑀷 80 𑀸 90 𑀹 100 𑁀 14

Brahmi Script-II

𑀓 nī 𑀔 nā 𑀕 yū 𑀖 lā 𑀗 nā 𑀘 qā 𑀙 mā
 𑀚 lā 𑀛 cā 𑀜 kā 𑀝 li 𑀞 gi 𑀟 lī 𑀠 ni
 𑀡 nu 𑀢 yu 𑀣 lu 𑀤 qu 𑀥 tu 𑀦 rū 𑀧 lū
 𑀨 tū 𑀩 yū 𑀪 rū 𑀫 lū 𑀬 rū 𑀭 pra 𑀮 la
 𑀯 te 𑀰 le 𑀱 lai 𑀲 hai 𑀳 to 𑀴 lo 𑀵 lō
 𑀶 kō 𑀷 sau

𑀸 kṣi 𑀹 krām 𑀺 nti 𑀻 nri 𑀼 jñā 𑀽 ŋcu
 𑀾 tkū 𑀿 tti 𑁀 tra 𑁁 tru 𑁂 trū 𑁃 tṣū
 𑁄 ntu 𑁅 nda 𑁆 nya 𑁇 -nt 𑁈 plu 𑁉 ymā
 𑁊 rni 𑁋 rtā 𑁌 rdhā 𑁍 rri 𑁎 rlā 𑁏 lnu
 𑁐 lso 𑁑 lqu 𑁒 śrā 𑁓 śru 𑁔 ślā 𑁕 hśa
 𑁖 -hk 𑁗 lra 𑁘 qli 𑁙 gsi 𑁚 zwa

𑁛 iki 𑁜 isi 𑁝 umu 𑁞 uya 𑁟 ula 𑁠 lr

Uyghur, Sogdian and Manichaean Scripts

a-				χ	= γ	= γ	
-a-				h	= g	= g	
-a				k	= g	= g	
ā-				l			
-ā-	= -a-	= -a-	= -a	m			
-ā	= -a	= -a	= -a	-m			
ī-, i-; ī- i(e)				n			
-ī-, -i-(e)				-n			
-ī-, -i				ŋ			
o-, u-				p	= b	= b	
-o-, -u-, v				q			
-o-, -u-, v				-q			
ō-, ü-				-r-			
-ō-, -ü-				-r			
-ō-, -ü = -o	= -o	= -o	= -o	s			
b				-s			
-b				s	= s		
č, ġ				t			
d, ð				-t			
đ	—	—		v	= -o-	= -o-	
j	= w	= w		w			
γ				y			
-γ				z, ž			
g				z			
-g							

Uyghur Runic Script

No				No		
1	↓	1	χ	20	9	p ?
2	↑	↑	l, i	21	3	ε
3	>	>	o, u	22	↓	r
4	⌈	⌈	c, u'	23	⌋	
5	∩	∩	g	24	⌈	⌈
6	△	▽	i, i, i	25	⋈	m
7	↓	↑	o, u, o, u	26	4	4
8	⋈	⋈	gh	27	↑	r²
9	7	>	k	28	↓	v
10	⌈	⌈	c, ü, ko, kü	29	Y	l²
11	ε	ε	g	30	λ	λ
12	⋈	⋈	t'	31	Y	i
13	h	h	t²	32	Y	s'
14	⋈	⋈	d'	33	l	s²
15	x		d²	34	⋈	x
16	1		p	35	⌈	4
17	∩	∩	b'	36	⊖	nt
18	⋈	⋈	b²	37	3	n
19	∩	∩	y'	38	M	lt
				39	i	ax
				40	∞	bax

Medieval Uyghur Script

No					No				
1				a	13				d
2				ə	14				l
3				i, ʔ	15				m
4				o, u	16				n
5				θ	17				r
6				b, p	18				ch
7				w	19				s
8				gh	20				x
9				q	21				y
10				h	22				z
11				k, ʒ	23				z
12				t					

Uyghur-Chaghatay Writing System

ENDING MIDDLE PREFIX CAPITAL

ا	ا	آا	ا	a	ELIP
ب	ب	ب	ب	b	BÄ
پ	پ	پ	پ	p	PÄ
ت	ت	ت	ت	t	TÄ
ث	ث	ث	ث	th	thÄ
ج	ج	ج	ج	j	JIM
چ	چ	چ	چ	ch	CHIM
ح	ح	ح	ح	h	HÄ

ENDING MIDDLE PREFIX CAPITAL

ع	ع	ع	ع	i	ÄYIN
غ	غ	غ	غ	gh	GHÄYIN
ف	ف	ف	ف	f	FÄ
ق	ق	ق	ق	q	QAP
ك	ك	ك	ك	g. k	KAP
گ	گ	گ	گ	g (persian)	GAP
ل	ل	ل	ل	l	LAM
م	م	م	م	m	ḤIM
ن	ن	ن	ن	n	RUN
و	و	و	و	w, v, o, u, ö, ü,	WAW
ه	ه	ه	ه	h	ḤÄ

ENDING MIDDLE PREFIX CAPITAL

ى	پ	ى	g, T, i, i.	YA
نك	نك	نك	ng, g	NGA

UYƆIUR TILI ELIPBƏSI

Roman-Script-Based Uyghur Writing System

Aa	Bb	Dd	Ef	Fe	Gg	
<i>Aa</i>	<i>Bb</i>	<i>Dd</i>	<i>Ee</i>	<i>Ff</i>	<i>Gg</i>	
a	be	de	e	ef	ge	
Hh	Ii	Jj	Kk	Ll	Mm	Nn
<i>Hh</i>	<i>Ii</i>	<i>Jj</i>	<i>Kk</i>	<i>Ll</i>	<i>Mm</i>	<i>Nn</i>
ha	i	je	ke	el	em	ne
Oo	Pp	Qq	Rr	Ss	Tt	
<i>Oo</i>	<i>Pp</i>	<i>Qq</i>	<i>Rr</i>	<i>Ss</i>	<i>Tt</i>	
o	pe	qiu	ar	es	te	
Uu	Vv	Ww	Xx	Yy	Zz	
<i>Uu</i>	<i>Vv</i>	<i>Ww</i>	<i>Xx</i>	<i>Yy</i>	<i>Zz</i>	
u	ve	wa	xi	ya	ze	
ƆƆ	Hh	Kk	ƆƆ	ƆƆ	ƆƆ	Zz
<i>ƆƆ</i>	<i>Hh</i>	<i>Kk</i>	<i>ƆƆ</i>	<i>ƆƆ</i>	<i>ƆƆ</i>	<i>Zz</i>
ƆƆ	he	ka	Ɔ	Ɔ	ü	ze

Modern Uyghur Script

transliteration	final end	medial mid	initial prefix	isolated single	
A	ا			ئا	(1)
Ä	ە			ئە	(2)
B	ب	ب	ب	ب	(3)
P	پ	پ	پ	پ	(4)
T	ت	ت	ت	ت	(5)
J	ج	ج	ج	ج	(6)
CH	چ	چ	چ	چ	(7)
KH	خ	خ	خ	خ	(8)
D	د			د	(9)
R	ر			ر	(10)
Z	ز			ز	(11)
Z	ژ			ژ	(12)
S	س	س	س	س	(13)
SH	ش	ش	ش	ش	(14)

transliteration	final end	medial mid	initial prefix	isolated single	
GH	غ	غ	غ	غ	(15)
F	ف	ف	ف	ف	(16)
Q	ق	ق	ق	ق	(17)
K	ك	ك	ك	ك	(18)
G	گ	گ	گ	گ	(19)
NG	ڭ	ڭ	ڭ	ڭ	(20)
L	ل	ل	ل	ل	(21)
M	م	م	م	م	(22)
N	ن	ن	ن	ن	(23)
H	ه	ه		ه	(24)
O	و			ئو، و	(25)
U	ۇ			ئو، ۇ	(26)
Ö	ۈ			ئو، ۈ	(27)
Ü	ۉ			ئو، ۉ	(28)

transliteration	final end	medial mid	initial prefix	isolated single
W	ق			ق (29)
E	ي	ب	ب، پ	ي، ئي (30)
I	ى	د	د، ر	ى، ئى (31)
Y	ي	ي	ب	ي (32)
LA	لا			لا (33)

The Uyghur Vowels Harmony

	low Open	middle Halfopen	High C l o s e d	Rounded/Un.
Back	ا			un
Back	ئو، ئو	o	u	R
Front	ئە، ä	ئې، e	ئى، i	un
Front		ئۈ، ö	ئۇ، ü	R

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