Identity and Mobilization in Transnational Societies: *A Case Study of Uyghur Diasporic Nationalism*

Tian Guang and Mahesh Ranjan Debata[*]

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the identity, nationalism and transnational mobilization of Uyghur diaspora communities. The authors first introduce a theoretical framework of transnationalism and diaspora, and then discuss the history of Uyghur migration to different parts of the world in general and to the United States of America in particular. This is followed by an analysis of Uyghur settlement patterns and then of the forms of identity that have been mobilized to produce a nationalism movement. This paper suggests that a cultural rather than straightforward political approach is the most practicable current strategy for the attainment of immediate nationalist goals.

Keywords • *Cultural Rights* • *Mobilization* • *Nationalism* • *Transnationalism* • *Uyghur Diaspora*

Introduction

The community building efforts of Uyghur migrants who came to the U.S. through various means, along with the identity, nationalism, and

[1] Robert G. Tian, "Cultural Rights and Uyghur Nationalism Movement", *High Plains Applied Anthropologist* 24, 2 (Fall 2004), pp. 144-157; Robert G. Tian & Mahesh R. Debata, "Cultural Right Approach vs. Nationalism Mobilization: An Applied Anthropological Case Study of Uyghur Diaspora Community", *Practicing Anthropology* 33, 2 (Spring 2011),

transnational mobilization of Uyghur diaspora communities, have been widely studied by scholars.[1] In this paper, based on previous study and fieldwork, we further analyze and discuss the possible solutions to the problems faced by the Uyghur nationalism movement.   We will first introduce a theoretical framework of transnationalism and diaspora from anthropological perspective, then we will discuss the historical process of Uyghur migration to different parts of the world in general and to the U.S. in particular, next we will analyze the settlement patterns and the forms of identity that have been mobilized to produce a nationalism movement by the Uyghur diaspora communities. Finally, we will argue that for the benefits of Uyghur diaspora communities a cultural rather than a straightforward political approach is more practicable current strategy for the attainment of immediate nationalist goals.

Anthropologists have noted that immigrants, who live across borders, maintain close ties with their homeland even though their countries of origin and settlement are geographically distant from each other. Forging links at a variety of levels, such as familial, social, organizational, economic, religious and political, immigrants strive to sustain a high level of involvement in both their home and host societies. This relatively new way of life is termed "transnational", which emerged due to spectacular changes in the global economy, especially the extensive penetration of capital into the Third World countries. In this process, the transnational life of contemporary migrants across the world calls into question the bounded conceptualizations of race, class, ethnicity, and nation and nationalism which pervade both social science and popular thinking.[2]

The early usage of the terms "immigrants" is not known. The meaning of "immigrants", which has undergone changes from time to time, is conceptualized as (1) dispersion from one place to another, and (2) permanent settlement in host country by adopting its dialects, culture and life styles. The immigrants have developed different and multiple networks with the countries of their origin and the host countries as well. They have experienced a different life that goes beyond the boundaries of

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pp. 7-11; Yitzhak Shichor, "Virtual Transnationalism: Uygur Communities in Europe and the Quest for Eastern Turkestan Independence", in Jorgen S. Neilson and Stefano Allievi (eds.) *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and across Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 281-311.

[2] M. Kerney, "The Local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalization and Transnationalism," *Annual Review Anthropology* 24 (1995), p. 558; Nina Glick Schiller, *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. xiv.

one nation-state and assimilates both the host and mother culture into one single place for interaction and social intercourse.[3]

Scholars have began to discuss the construction of transnational identity of immigrants, exploring transformations of class practices and racial categories, as well the restructuring of people's lives in the deployment of cultural capital. They examine the relationship between transnational populations and nation states, as well as the challenges posed to nationalism by the existence of these transnational populations. The new type of migrants is referred to as "transmigrants" and the process in which they are involved is called "transnationalism". The factors behind this sudden transformation are globalization, deterritorialization, intensification of international migration flows, development of communication technology and the internationalization of the nation states.[4]

Transnationalism has wider connotation today within interdisciplinary studies, such as anthropology, sociology, geography and international migration. It is a process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-standard social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. Through constant mobility of people, labor, money and resources, immigrants now actively construct a "transnational social field" that extends beyond the single location. A distinct kind of social field emerges in which immigrants maintain familial, socio-economic, political and cultural ties.[5]

The terms 'transnational communities' and 'diasporas' are now increasingly being used interchangeably. While transnational communities refer to the migrant communities in which ethnic diasporas living abroad in the host countries maintain economic, political, social and emotional ties with their motherland and with other diasporic communities of the same origin, diaspora communities now serve as

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[3] Stephen Castles and Paul Spoonley, "Migration and Citizenship", 1997 <http://www.unesco.org/most/aotearoa.htm> (April 11 2009); Jason Bradley Defay, "The Sociology of International Migration", 2005 <http://defay.org/jason/academic/IM.pdf> (December 5 2009); Alejandro Portes, "Transnational Communities: Their Emergence and Significance in the Contemporary World System", Keynote address delivered at the 19th Annual Conference on *Political Economy of the World System: Latin America in the World Economy* (University of Miami, April 21 1995).
[4] Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy", *Public Culture* 2, 2 (1990), pp. 1-24; Thomas Faist, "Transnationalism in International Migration: Implication for the Study of Citizenship and Culture", *COMCAD Working Papers*, 16 (2007), pp. 4-19; Nina G. Schiller, *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered*, p. xiv.
[5] Lind Basch, Nina G. Schiller and C. S. Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterriorialized Nations-States* (Langhorme, PA: Gordon and Breach Science Publishes, 1994), p. 4.

"exemplary communities of the transnational moment."[6] Once used as a term saturated with the meanings of exile, loss, dislocation, powerlessness and plain pain, the term "Diaspora" has become a useful, even desirable way to describe a wide range of dispersions.[7]

The word "Diaspora" is derived from two Greek words, *"dia"* which means "through" and *"speiro"* means 'scatter.' Steven Vertovec analysed three meanings of diaspora: The first and most common connotation of diaspora is by its social form, with an emphasis on a group's intra-relationships despite dispersal, whether for voluntary reasons or by forced migration. These social relationships are cemented by ties to history and geography, and play out in political orientations and economic strategies. The second meaning rests in the conception of a diasporic consciousness, a particular kind of awareness said to be generated among contemporary transnational communities. The diasporic consciousness is aware of its multi-locality, constituted by negative experiences of discrimination and exclusion, and positive experiences through identification with one's heritage. The third understanding of diaspora is through its mode of cultural production, aligned with scholarship in hybridity and new ethnicities.[8]

One western scholar, William Safran addresses transnational issues through his discussion on complex and flexible positions of ethnic diasporas between host countries and their homelands. He lists six basic characteristics of diasporas:

1. Dispersal from an original centre to at least two peripheral places;
2. Maintenance of a memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland;
3. Belief that they cannot be fully accepted by their host country; Longing to return to the ancestral home when the time is right;
4. Commitment to the maintenance and/or restoration of the homeland;
5. Development/construction of a consciousness and solidarity as a group defined largely around the continued relationship with the homeland.[9]

The term Diaspora which has expanded considerably in recent years from its original use in the Jewish Diaspora to describe all kinds of trade,

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[6] Khachig Tölölyan, "The Nation State and Others: In Lieu of a Preface," *Diaspora* 1, 1 (1991), pp. 3-7.
[7] Khachig Tölölyan, "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment," *Diaspora* 5, 1 (1996), p. 9.
[8] Steven Vertovec, "Three Meanings of 'Diaspora,' Exemplified Among South Asian Religions," *Diaspora* 6, 3 (1997), pp. 277-290.
[9] For details see, William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return", *Diaspora* 1, 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 83-84.

migrant/workers, cultural and ethnic diasporas, received comprehensive and theoretical treatment at the hands of Robin Cohen.[10] The common features of diaspora, according to Cohen, are:

1. Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
2. Alternatively or additionally, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
3. A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history, suffering and achievements;
4. An idealization of the real or imagined ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;
5. The frequent development of a return movement to the homeland that gains collective approbation even if many in the group are satisfied with only a vicarious relationship or intermittent visits to the homeland;
6. A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate;
7. A troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;
8. A sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement even where home has become more vestigial; and
9. The possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.

Cohen categorizes diasporas using a five-fold classification with specific examples: victim diasporas (Jews, Armenians, slave diasporas), labor diasporas (Indian indentured labour, Italians, Filipinos), imperial/colonial diasporas (ancient Greeks, British, Portuguese), trade diasporas (Lebanese, Chinese) and cultural diasporas (Caribbean).[11] On the line of this classification, the Uyghur diaspora seeking to establish their own republic, can be categorized under cultural diaspora, despite being dubbed as separatists by the Chinese authorities.

In recent years, large-scale international migration has given rise to interdisciplinary discussion on the production and maintenance of culture beyond the limits of locally defined boundaries. Concepts like

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[10] Robin Cohen, *Global Diaspora: An Introduction* (London: UCL Press, 1999), p. xi.
[11] *Ibid.*

"inter-ethnic relations", "border culture" and especially "diaspora" have acquired considerable significance in the analysis of the emerging processes in societies where immigrants are allowed to settle. Transnational relations have important implications for both the sending and receiving society. According to Stanley J. Tambiah, there are two types of transnational relations, i.e., vertical and lateral. Vertical transnational relations refer to the participation of immigrants in the host country to improve and impact the host nation. In this form of transnational relations, the diaspora actively participates in the social, economic and political domains of the country, thus becoming an important social and economic force in the host country. On the other hand, lateral transnational relations are manifested in the form of maintaining, reinforcing and extending the relation between the emigrant communities and their places of origin.[12] Under this type of transnational relations, immigrants send remittances to their families back home, arrange and participate in marriage and other ceremonies and rituals, sponsor home festivals and other cultural events. The exponents of such a transnational approach call this "Transnational Global Networks", which simply refers to the relationship between the diaspora and home state, as well as between members of the other diasporic community in other countries.[13]

When the issue of transnationalism or transnational social network arises, it generally refers to the sustained ties of persons, networks and organizations across the borders of the multiple nation-states, ranging from weak to strong institutionalized forms. The most significant relation here is not with the country of settlement, but rather, the deteriorating social relation with the country of origin, which has been maintained through transnational contacts.[14] The Uyghurs are not only successful in maintaining close contacts with the families and relatives back home, but are also very much successful in maintaining the transnational networks with their kith and kin in different parts of the globe, particularly in the Central Asian region and Turkey.

One of the factors leading to the emergence of this transnational network is the ease and speed of communication network and travel. As compared to earlier dispersions, where immigration often led to isolation from homeland and kin, the contemporary immigrants can easily sustain their kinship network globally. The emergence of transnational networks

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[12] For details, see Stanley J. Tambiah, "Transnational Movements, Diaspora, and Multiple Modernities, *Daedalus* 129, 1 (2000), pp. 163-194.

[13] For a detailed analysis, see Anna Amelina, "A Civilizational Perspective on the Research of Transnational Formations: A Methodological Proposal", *COMCAD Working Papers*, 18 (2007), pp. 3-16; Thomas Faist, "Transnationalism in International Migration: Implication for the Study of Citizenship and Culture", pp. 4-19.

[14] Mike Featherstone, *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity* (New Delhi: Sage Publication, 1997), pp. 1, 14.

is also the result of the rise in the activities of a number of International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs). Accordingly, the dispersed migrants across the globe can easily interact with their families as well as promote social, religious, economic and political activities on a transnational space. They also maintain their cultural identity and linkages with the places and countries of their origin.[15]

Development in the field of transportation and communication technology, which has brought about spectacular changes in transnational linkages, has enabled immigrants to network with each other while simultaneously staying at different places or any part of the world. Along with the modern means of transportation and communication, the processes of globalization, deterritorialization and the flow of capital have accelerated transnational social formation.[16] Further, the continuous circulation of people, money, goods and information between various settlements of immigrant population has given rise to the formation of a "single community", such as an "imagined community"[17] or a "virtual community".[18] A person can now feel nostalgic to talk in his/her mother tongue wherever and whenever he/she meets people from his/her community, and in the process the whole community becomes a global village.[19] The Uyghurs continue to keep in touch with their relatives and old friends in Xinjiang and in other countries through the telephone, letters, newsletters, Internet, email, satellite television, fax machine, etc. in addition to personal home visits. The socio-economic linkages are manifested in the form of matrimonial relations, kinship networks, remittances and religious ceremonies. Digital and online banking systems have given impetus to socio-economic linkages. They have also succeeded in reviving some of the traditional ideas and values. Furthermore, due to the development of Internet, it has now become possible to create a Uyghur "virtual community" or "cyber community", where the people of Uyghur community all over the world can participate.[20]

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[15] P. F. Kelly, "Canadian-Asian Transnationalism", *Canadian Geographer* 47, 3 (2003), pp.1-5; Thomas Richard Davies, "The Rise and Fall of Transnational Civil Society: The Evolution of International Non-Governmental Organizations since 1839", *Working Paper CUTP* 3 (April 2008), p. 3.

[16] Michael P. Hanagan, "An Agenda for Transnational Labor History", *International Review of Social History* 49, 3 (December 2004), pp. 455-474.

[17] Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), p. 6.

[18] Robert G. Tian and Y. Wu, "Crafting Self Identity in a Virtual Community: A Case Study of Chinese Internet Users and their Political Sense Formation", *Multicultural Education and Technology Journal* 1, 4 (2007), pp. 238-258.

[19] Kelly, "Canadian-Asian Transnationalism", pp. 1-5.

[20] Dru C. Gladney, "China's Minorities: The Case of Xinjiang and the Uyghur People", May 3, 2005 <http://www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/0/a0da2b54fc3b22e7c1256d25004c086d/$FILE/G0314169.pdf> (November 19 2008); Yitzhak Shichor, "Virtual Transnationalism: Uygur Communities in Europe and the Quest for Eastern Turkestan

Uyghur Diaspora and their Transnational Networks

The Uyghur diaspora constitutes a sizeable population in several countries around the world. They are significant in size in countries such as the newly independent Central Asian republics, Turkey, United States, Canada, Australia, and European countries like Germany and England. They maintain close contact among themselves, with the kith and kin around the world including relatives back home in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. It is believed that approximately 500,000 live abroad, amounting to about 5-6 percent of the total world Uyghur population of 15 million. Most Uyghurs outside China settled in Central Asia, the majority in Kazakhstan (some 370,000), but also in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (around 50,000 each). The language spoken by Uyghurs is called "Uyghur", which is one of the official languages of Xinjiang and the major language of the Uyghur community.

Table 1. Uyghur Population Worldwide.

COUNTRY	UYGHUR POPULATION
China	10,833,000
Kazakhstan	372,000
Kyrgyzstan	53,000
Uzbekistan	50,000
Saudi Arabia	7,000
Iran	5,600
Afghanistan	3,700
Russia	2,900
Turkmenistan	2,100
United States	1,000
Turkey	800
Tajikistan	800
Mongolia	300
Taiwan	200
Ukraine	200

Source: Joshua Project <http://www.joshuaproject.net> (July 13, 2010).

The Uyghurs who have settled abroad, migrated from the northwest region of Xinjiang in the People's Republic of China. The Uyghurs' migration from Xinjiang has a long history. Uyghurs have migrated from China in waves, usually following deteriorating conditions or, conversely, when the doors were opened. Some left by the mid-1930s after the first - and short-lived - Eastern Turkestan Republic collapsed, mostly to Turkey and to Saudi Arabia. Several hundred Uyghurs, who left

Independence", in Jorgen S. Neilson and Stefano Allievi (eds.) *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and across Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 281-311.

Xinjiang in late 1949 after the communists took over China first settled in the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir and then moved to Turkey where they established Uyghur Diaspora organizations with Ankara's support. The prominent Uyghurs who came to India were Isa Yusuf Alptekin[21] and Mohammad Amin Bughra.[22] Both Alptekin and Bughra later went to Turkey, where they spearheaded the Uyghur movement for a separate homeland. In 1962, driven by the hardships related to the Great Leap Forward, over 60,000 residents in the Ili region of Xinjiang - many of them Uyghurs - fled China to the Soviet Union (Kazakhstan).[23] After Deng Xiaoping launched reforms and the Open Door Policy in the late 1970s, more Uyghurs were able to leave Xinjiang and, since the 1980s, a few thousands of them settled in different parts of the world, some with the help of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Uyghurs started migrating to developed countries in Europe and America in the early 1990s. Due to the restrictions imposed by the Chinese authorities, the Uyghurs now first go to the Central Asian countries, Turkey, Germany and from there, they move to United States of America. Uyghurs living abroad are now proud of their social, cultural and historical heritage. They are not only pursuing business activities, but also are highly educated, having gained professional qualifications in fields such as science, technology, medicine, economics, law, business management etc.[24]

Uyghur Diaspora in the United States

The activities of Uyghur diaspora organizations overseas in the last decade,[25] and the Chinese government's accusations of some Uyghur

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[21] Isa Yusuf Alptekin (1901-1995) was a principal political figure of pre-1949 Xinjiang, who fled to Turkey in 1949 just after the independence of China and took political asylum there. He and his son Erkin Alptekin took the anti-Chinese Uyghur movement forward from Turkey. His son founded the Eastern Turkistan Cultural and Social Association in 1991. Isa died in 1995 after a prolonged illness.

[22] Muhammad Amin Bughra (1901-1965) was the most influential of the Turkish Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkestan (TIRET) leadership (in 1933 in Kashgar). After the collapse of the TIRET, he fled to Afghanistan and then to India where he published his book *A History of East Turkistan*. He went back to Xinjiang in the 1940s as a senior KMT officer and became part of the coalition government in 1946. He was also a close colleague of Isa Yusuf Alptekin. Finally he fled to Turkey in 1949, where he fought for the cause of East Turkistan until his death.

[23] Michael Dillon, *Xinjiang - China's Muslim Far Northwest* (London & New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), p. 57.

[24] Jay Dautcher, "Public Health and Social Pathologies in Xinjiang" in S. Frederick Starr (ed.), *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* (London and New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), pp. 276-295; Shichor, "Virtual Transnationalism: Uygur Communities in Europe and the Quest for Eastern Turkestan Independence", pp. 294-295.

[25] Shichor, "Virtual Transnationalism: Uygur Communities in Europe and the Quest for Eastern Turkestan Independence", p. 294; Yitzhak Shichor, "Lost Nation: Stories from the

overseas organizations being terrorist organizations[26] triggered the interests of both authors to study the Uyghur diaspora community in the United States. The authors had been involved with this particular group between 2004 and 2008 as applied anthropologists. The data collected for this study include participant observations, personal interviews, newspapers and online discussions. Due to the sensitivity of the study, the Uyghur names of those interviewed and cited in this paper are pseudonyms.

During the 1990s, a number of Uyghurs migrated to the United States, mostly as political refugees,[27] fearing prolonged and ruthless Chinese suppression. The Uyghurs from Central Asian region also fled to safer countries like the United States for asylum. Though they are regarded as a small diasporic group, the ethnic consciousness of being a Uyghur has made them one of the successful diasporic communities in the United States. Uyghurs in America have particularly distinguished themselves in a wide range of industries and services such as journalism, law, electronics, telecommunication, and computers, power production and banking. Currently, their number is approximately one thousand and the population is expected to grow. They are concentrated mostly in such places such as Washington D.C., Virginia, Maryland and Los Angeles city of California State.

The Uyghur immigrants in the United States have remained attached to their invaluable culture, which finds expression in the traditional festivals and ceremonies and other socio-cultural activities. They celebrate the Uyghur foundation day and the New Year's Day of their calendar in addition to Muslim festivals like Ramadan and Eid in which large number of Uyghurs also participate in. They engage in traditional Uyghur dance theatre, drama, stage shows, etc. Professional dance troupes have been invited from Xinjiang to perform on several special occasions. While watching these performances, the Uyghurs feel a sense of nostalgia on being a member of a great civilization. It is those Uyghurs outside China who have played an important role by raising the voice for independent nationhood. Besides Uyghur magazines, newspapers and literatures, there are certain Internet web sites exclusively made for Uyghurs, which have also contributed to their cause - an independent homeland separate from China.

The strength and presence of Uyghurs in the host society is also discernible through the ethnic associations they have formed in the

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Uyghur Diaspora", 2007 <http://www.forcedmigration.org/video/uyghur/> (May 1, 2009).

[26] Colin Mackerras, "Pivot Of Asia' Sees China-Pakistan Maneuvers", *Asia Times Online*, August 13, 2004 <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/FH13Ad01.html> (July 9, 2010)

[27] Robert G. Tian, "Cultural Rights and Uyghur Nationalism Movement", *High Plains Applied Anthropologist* 24, 2 (Fall 2004), pp. 144-157.

countries of their residence now. Through associations, they retain their familial and socio-economic networks with the homeland and other Uyghurs around the world.

The Uyghur American Association (UAA)[28]
As a prominent cultural association of Uyghurs in the United States, this Washington-based association works as an umbrella organization for the Uyghurs, who reside in different parts of the United States and Canada. It arranges religious festivals, social get togethers, cultural events and participates in the cultural life of the local community as representative of the Uyghur culture. The main aims of the UAA include the following:

- Promoting activities for a better understanding of Uyghur culture and exchange of information between Uyghurs of America and Uyghurs in other parts of the world;
- Bringing all Uyghurs from around the world together under one roof to fight for their cause - an independent East Turkistan Republic.

The UAA works to promote the preservation of a rich, humanistic and diverse Uyghur culture, and to support the rights of the Uyghur people living in different parts of the world including China's northwest region of Xinjiang to determine their own political future through peaceful and democratic means. The UAA has undertaken the Uyghur Human Rights Project[29] since 2004 to discuss the human rights of Uyghurs in Xinjiang and to explore measures towards improving their human rights. The main agendas of the Project include:

- Putting pressure on China to stop the prosecution of Uyghurs and political prisoners;
- Monitoring and exposing harmful development projects in Uyghur-dominated regions in Xinjiang;
- Collecting information about Uyghurs who were killed, jailed and prosecuted in China for political and religious beliefs;
- Working with the U.S. and other world powers such as Germany and England and sharing critical information about Uyghurs.

UAA continues to strive to be a focal point for all Uyghurs in nurturing and promoting the Uyghur cause, their heritage and culture through conferences and Congresses. UAA was very much instrumental

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[28] See Uyghur American Association's home page for more detailed information <http://www.uyghuramerican.org/> (August 15, 2009).
[29] See Uyghur Human Rights Project homepage for more detailed information <http://www.uhrp.org/> (August 15, 2009).

in internationalizing the Rebiya Kadeer[30] issue. Under the intense lobbying of the UAA, the appeal of Uyghur diasporic organizations and human rights groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and pressure from the U.S. government, the Chinese authorities released Kadeer in April 2005 on the eve of U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's visit to China.

The Rebiya Kadeer issue brought together all the Uyghurs across the world. Kadeer, a successful Uyghur businesswoman, was incarcerated by the Chinese authorities in 1997 for alleged anti-state activities. The Uyghurs consider Rebiya, who is currently President of both the UAA and the World Uyghur Congress[31], as a living example of Uyghur nationalism who vowed to fight against the Chinese authorities' perceived discrimination against the Uyghur community in China. In 2009, a small group of young Uyghur professionals organized a business symposium in the U.S. where they put forth their grievances before American Congressmen, as well as human rights activists from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

UAA supports Uyghur cultural artistes to visit and perform in the U.S. and helps in organizing workshops and events in association with other sponsoring organizations. Through festivals, UAA participates in ethnic celebrations in various communities in the United States. The UAA, through its newsletter and various educational programs, has been trying to improve communication and interaction between Uyghur folks in Xinjiang and America.

The Government-in-Exile of East Turkistan Republic[32]
The Government-in-Exile of East Turkistan Republic is a Washington-based organization of the Uyghurs set up to educate the American public on the history, culture and current political situation of the Uyghur people in East Turkistan (Xinjiang). Anwar Yusuf Turani, who now

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[30] Rebiya Kadeer is the current President of the Munich-based Uyghur organization World Uyghur Congress as well as the head of Uyghur American Association based on Washington DC. She founded the "Uyghur Human Rights and Democracy Foundation". She was also the winner of Rafto Prize and was nominated for Nobel Peace Prize for the years 2005-2006-2007-2008. She is known among Uyghurs as "The Leader and the Spiritual Mother of Uyghurs".

[31] The World Uyghur Congress (WUC) is a Munich-based international organization that represents the collective interest of the Uyghur people both in East Turkestan (Xinjiang) and abroad. WUC was established in Munich (Germany) on April 16 2004 after the East Turkestan National Congress and the World Uyghur Youth Congress merged into one united organization. The main objective of WUC is to promote the rights of the Uyghur people to use peaceful, non-violent, and democratic means to determine the political future of East Turkestan. For details, see <http://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/?cat=149> (April 22, 2010).

[32] Website of the Government-in-Exile of East Turkistan Republic: <http://eastturkistangovernmentinexile.us/> (March 1, 2010).

serves as Prime Minister of this organization, established it on September 14, 2004. It has a constitution composed of 14 parts and as many as 70 articles. Turani writes newsletters, press releases, and letters that generate news coverage and national and international publicity on the plight of the Uyghur people in East Turkistan. In addition, he briefs U.S. State Department officials, members of the Congress, national and international dignitaries, various organizations, media persons and human rights activists at regular intervals, providing them information on the "Chinese occupation" of his homeland, human rights violations and "Chinese repression" in East Turkistan. As a talented master musician and singer, he has been making relentless efforts to educate the American public about the culture of his nation by giving many musical performances in the United States.

The East Turkistan National Freedom Center (ETNFC)[33] was established in 1996 by the Government-in-Exile. The Center seeks to tell the world about East Turkistan and raise the cause of freedom and independence by: (1) providing information to U.S. government officials and policymakers; (2) developing contacts with the press to tell their story; (3) fostering alliance with like-minded groups and individuals, and (4) sharing their culture with all who may enjoy it. They believe that the U.S. will support the cause of millions of Uyghurs and put an end to what they consider as the untold misery of many innocent Uyghurs under the oppression of China.

Uyghur Diaspora Nationalism Movement and Cultural Right Approach

It is a common sense that the activities of the diaspora is associated with population movement, the expansion of world markets, advances in communications technology, and flow of capital and labor. Accordingly, the diasporic spread of people tends to migrate with the decline of their original or imagined nation-state as a dominant political system.[34] As such, any diaspora communities would try to keep their various political connections for their nationalism mobilization and movement. Uyghur diaspora communities are not exceptional. According to Yitzhak Shichor, Uyghur diaspora communities have formed their own associations, occasionally more than one, aimed at preserving Uyghur collective identity (i.e. culture and language), as well as sustaining and promoting

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[33] East Turkistan National Freedom Center website: http://www.etnfc.org/ (March 1, 2010).

[34] For details, see Ban Wang, "Reimagining Political Community: Diaspora, Nation-State, and the Struggle for Recognition", *Modern Drama* 48, 2 (2005), pp. 249-271.

shared national aspirations and, in the end to re-establish the Eastern Turkestan Republic, their national state.[35]

Although the ultimate objective is the same, there are some differences among various Uyghur diaspora communities. The most unsolvable conflicts or disagreements among different Uyghur diaspora groups are the strategies to be adopted in their mobilization and the nationalism movement overseas connected with their homeland.[36] In trying to overcome the fragmentation and disagreements that characterized these Uyghur diaspora organizations, attempts have been made to set up international Uyghur umbrella organizations, such as the Eastern Turkestan National Congress, which was established in Turkey in 1992, and the East Turkestan Government-in-Exile.[37] However, most of these attempts were in vain.

Apparently, the ultimate aim of Uyghurs is independence from China under the name of East Turkistan or Uyghurstan. Some Uyghurs perceive separation from China as the only way to do away with Chinese oppression and discrimination. Duorike, one of the Uyghur activists in Washington D.C., told the authors: "We have been long oppressed by the Han Chinese. It is the right time that we claim our own rights. To establish our own nation is the best way to get rid of Han oppression."[38] Alimuzi, one of the key leadership persons of the Uyghur American Association, was quoted as saying:

> "Our fundamental goal is to have our own nation-state, the Uyghur people have been suffering from the Chinese dictatorship for so many years. We realize that there is no hope for the Uyghur people if we do not fight for our own rights to be independent from China. We have the right to have our own nation-state. The Chinese are Chinese, and the Uyghurs are Uyghurs, they are two different two nations, why should they be bonded together? The Chinese authorities should realize that a friendly separate Uyghur nation-state will be beneficial to China in long run."[39]

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[35] Shichor, "Lost Nation: Stories from the Uyghur Diaspora".

[36] Dru C. Gladney, "Responses to Chinese Rule: Patterns of Cooperation and Opposition", in Starr (ed.), *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, pp. 375-396; James A. Millward, "Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment", *Policy Studies 6* (Washington DC: East-West Center, 2004), pp. 1-54; Justin Rudelson and William Jankowiak, "Acculturation and Resistance: Xinjiang Identities in Flux", in Starr (ed.), *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, pp. 299-319.

[37] Schichor, "Lost Nation: Stories from the Uyghur Diaspora".

[38] Interview of authors (April 27, 2005).

[39] Interview of authors (August 5, 2008).

The statements made by Duorike and Alimuzi reflect the views of the hardliners of the Uyghur nationalist movement. Their underlining principle is national self-determination be it through peaceful or violent means. They believe that Xinjiang's rich natural resources, including the huge amount of oil and natural gas reserves and its tourism potential, could easily support and shape an independent Xinjiang's economy. So far, various factions of the movements are unanimous on the aim of independence from China. However they differ on their approaches to achieve this objective and their thinking on what the newly independent Uyghur state should be like.

At the same time, the Uyghur nationalist movement was dealt a fatal blow in recent years when the Chinese government publicly and severely suppressed the Uyghur national movement under the name of anti-terrorism after the 9/11 terrorist attack on U.S. soil and the subsequent war on terror in Afghanistan. It is, therefore, imperative to gain international understanding, sympathy and support for the Uyghur nationalist movement in terms of the current and future international situations.[40]

For the Uyghur nationalists, one of the choices is to break away from the current Chinese communist regime in favor of the establishment of a separate culturally homogeneous sovereign political unit completely detached from China. However, it seems that this choice is impractical and too costly to bear. First, the creation of a new nation-state would unavoidably involve violence and conflicts. China would by no means be willing to compromise its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national interests in this case. It would be impossible to separate from China peacefully. Unless immense changes take place at the global level and inside China concurrently, for example, the total disintegration of current Chinese communist regime, or "a fundamental breakdown in China,"[41] attempts at separatism will surely lead to violence and war. This would be a disaster for Uyghur nationalism. Just as Holsti put it, if war creates nation, it destroys nation too.[42]

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[40] Graham E. Fuller and S. Frederick Starr, *The Xinjiang Problem* (Washington DC: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, the Johns Hopkins University, 2003), pp.1-79; Gladney, "China's Minorities: The Case of Xinjiang and the Uyghur People"; Caroline Hoy and Ren Qiang, "Socio-Economic Impacts of Uyghur Movement to Beijing" in Robyn Iredale, Naran Bilik and Fei Guo (Eds.), *China's Minorities on the Move: Selected Case Studies* (London & New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), pp. 155-174; Tsui Yen Hu, "Uyghur Movement within Xinjiang and its Ethnic Identity and Cultural Implications" in Iredale, Bilik and Guo (Eds.), *China's Minorities on the Move: Selected Case Studies*, pp. 123-138; Tian, "Cultural Rights and Uyghur Nationalism Movement", pp. 144-157.

[41] Thomas Heberer, *China and its National Minorities: Autonomy or Assimilation* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1989), p. 126.

[42] K. J. Holsti, *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order, 1648-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 324.

The international community cannot provide any definite support to Uyghur separatism in the foreseeable future. This is especially after the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) was labeled by the United Nations in October 2002 as an international terrorist organization for having links with Al Qaeda, Taliban and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), besides being involved in several terrorists activities in Xinjiang in recent years,[43] including the attacks in Kashgar in August 2008 and the Urumqi riots in July 2009. While the international community acknowledges and supports self-determination, it too would prefer the existing international order and de facto stability to avoid international conflicts stemming from pro-separatism nationalist movements. Second, since the sovereignty principle is universally recognized, the majority of countries would prefer to sustain the de facto sovereignty of existing countries rather than self-determination aspirations of separatist movements, unless there are sufficient reasons to justify humanitarian intervention in this direction. Finally, the Uyghur separatist movement must also take into consideration the interests of the other ethnic groups that live within Xinjiang since not all minority groups in the region would support separatism from China.

Moreover, the authors of this paper believe it is important for the leaders of Uyghur diaspora communities to realize that the national separatism might not be the best choice for Uyghur nation itself. As separation through self-determination becomes the unique end of nationalists, they must convince their members to believe that the only way to end the suffering and injustice is to fight for a new nation-state. Here, the nationalists must afford guidance to their utopia, that is, a nation-state without oppression or torture through separation. As argued before elsewhere, the cultural nation and political state is not the same thing. The former stresses culture, while the later emphasizes politics and law. If nation is identified with state, the nationalist would certainly require all members of a state to bear the same language, culture, religion and even the same ethnicity, besides being of the same political-legal characteristics. This ideology will surely induce extremist nationalism and even racial cleansing.

Graham Fuller and S. Frederick Starr have suggested that the Uyghur nationalists should recognize the fact that the full independence of Xinjiang is extremely unlikely, and that it would only come about at the price of great bloodshed, with little, if any, international support among countries. They suggest that the Uyghur nationalists should focus on attaining meaningful autonomy for the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region within the People's Republic of China, in such a way as to provide

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[43] Mahesh Ranjan Debata, *China's Minorities: Ethnic-Religious Separatism in Xinjiang* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2007), pp. 212-213.

cultural security and preservation of the Uyghur homeland and a major local voice in all policies affecting the region.[44]

While subscribing to Fuller and Starr's position, the authors of this paper would further argue that separation from China will not automatically assure the creation of liberal democracy protecting the uniqueness of national culture and individual rights, nor will it benefit the Uyghur people economically. Fierce political and violent conflicts may even occur among competing Uyghurs factions who have different visions of what their new country should be like. Under such circumstances, the nationalists would mobilize their supporters through emotional beliefs and slogans instead of prudent rationality. During this process, certain individual rights and values would likely be ignored or abandoned because they may not be consistent with the group interests. Moreover, the economic welfare of Uyghur people could be seriously damaged due to the separation from China.

The authors, therefore, propose a cultural rights approach for the Uyghur diaspora communities to consider - in terms of Uyghur political mobilization and nationalism movement. The culture rights-based nationalism requires that national self-determination be based on individual self-determination by legal, peaceful and rational measures at its best. Cultural rights-based nationalism consists of special national rights and national cultural developing rights in terms of national identity. This demands that nationalism must take individual rights as its core value, and regard individual liberation as its end. Collective rights should not displace individual rights.

Hence Uyghur nationalists need not only the task of protecting their traditional culture but also to develop it, which is much more crucial. The uniqueness of the Uyghur national culture should not only be dug out and preserved, but also be promoted to a higher level of cultural identity and refreshment. Thus, it could serve as the basis for the Uyghur nation to get a deal with China. At the same time, Uyghur nationalists should use every opportunity to appeal for cultural rights peacefully, to demand for true national autonomy, and to share the benefits of Chinese progress and prosperity. Both the authors believe that such a cultural-nationalist approach would surely win international sympathy and support. This is provided the Uyghur diaspora nationalists struggle peacefully together with their fellow citizens in Xinjiang itself; because the core value of cultural-nationalism stands in line with the universal norms such as protecting diversity and individualism. In turn, on the basis of cultural rights, the Uyghur nation should promote "cultural development" and "political development" in order to realize new identities based on nation and the state.

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[44] Fuller and Starr, *The Xinjiang Problem*, p. 72.

Development itself serves as a standard to measure progress and this standard can only grow from universal rights. In Europe and North America, nationalism goes together with the changing social, economic and political reality. It takes rationality and general humanism as its theoretical base, relates itself closely with democracy, liberalism and constitutionality, and aims at individual liberation. The protection of cultural characteristics, including religion, language and living norms, should go in accordance with cultural innovation such as the pursuit of universal cultural rights to realize its political, economic and cultural self-determination. The protection of culture should not be identified with cultural conservatism. Cultural-nationalism should take individualism as its root to achieve a new association among individuals. Its core is to refresh the common dominant ideal of the nation. This ideal determines, in a large sense, the features of the given nationalism. The rational, liberal nationalism argues for free constitutionality or pluralism and against authoritarianism. The formation of a rational nation is the result of a rational mass based on an educated population. Education enables the population to form and assess independent criticisms and judgments among various contradictory arguments, and also helps defeat cultural bigotry. Language and letter are the important carriers of culture. It reflects the cultural contents of a given nation and it is also the symbol of historical continuity and cultural independence. Language is not the culture in itself; however is a communication tool used to convey values and thoughts. Uyghur nationalists should work to expand Uyghur culture by absorbing modern civilization in order to educate modern Uyghur elites. Modern history proves that colonial education incited the awakening of nationalism and intellectuals who had modern education are the pioneers and nucleus of nationalist movement.

On the issue of state identity, the Uyghur nation faces a transition from tradition to modernity. Modernity refers to the cultural phenomenon connected with modernization. It resembles the new appearance of the former authoritarian structure and the birth of the modern state. In pre-modern countries, religion assumes the function of morality, economy, politics and education. The mysterious legitimacy supported social morality and political beliefs. Modern countries are totally different from the pre-modern countries in social, cultural and legal terms. It destroys the legitimacy of power and authority in traditional society and creates diversities in religion, values, political parties and interests groups. Self-government to limit conflicts between social members displaced the formerly held absolutism. Rationality replaces mythology; self-restraints replace supernatural constraints; history relativeness replaces absolute theology. The legitimacy of state comes from the permit of the people instead of the gods. Individualism,

natural rights, equality before the law, power distribution between central and local governments under the direction of federalism.

The Uyghur diaspora nationalism leaders should be aware that individual rights are more basic, absolute and non-volatile in comparison with state power. The pursuit of nation-state independence should promote rather than violate individualism. In any case, there should be no illusion of an omnipotent nation-state during their struggle for national independence. It is dangerous to think that an independent nation-state can resolve every problem. It is imperative to keep vigil on state power, not only to prevent it from doing harm, but also to ensure that it does good as well.[45]

For the Uyghur diaspora nationalists, another important and practical task is to cultivate an independent, diversified, vivid and powerful civil society. This is to uphold a new identity, a new devotion to an integer that unifies various races and cultures, a devotion to an integer that can be identified and loved by the masses, a devotion beyond races and ethnicities. This common identity will exceed narrow racial or religious identities. It is independent from the ethnic sense of belonging, religion, culture and race. It is a concept, a sort of systems in connection with every individual rights and freedom. This higher identity is based on the universal and essential values shared by all nations. It is these basic and essential values that consolidate the foundation of liberal democratic states.

Conclusion

Various approaches, such as political rights, economic rights, ethnic identity power, etc. have been used to understand nationalism and nationalist movement. Cultural rights approach is viewed as the most important foundation for nationalism in the post-modern era. As applied anthropologists, the authors of this paper suggest that Uyghur nationalist movement leadership should adjust their objectives given the current international situation and their limited resources. To fight for cultural rights in current circumstances would be more reasonable and attainable for the Uyghur nationalists than the struggle for immediate nation-state independence. The Uyghur diaspora communities living in different parts of the world and those residing in the U.S. in particular should give serious thought to this. Since any violent activity by the Uyghurs to achieve their goal would incur the wrath of the central authorities in China and perhaps the international community, the traditionally peace loving Uyghurs should press for the fulfillment of their cultural rights as

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[45] Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1978), pp. 6-9.

well as maximum autonomy within China instead. The Chinese central government, in turn, should be tolerant and flexible in dealing with Uyghur nationalists advocating cultural rights. The central authorities of China should make an all their effort to help integrate the hapless and hopeless Uyghur minorities into the national mainstream, putting an end to all forms of discrimination against Uyghurs and enabling maximum autonomy. This way, the Uyghur goal for achieving cultural rights and Beijing's aim at securing unity, territorial integrity and stability in Xinjiang can be realized. As long as both sides are willing to enhance cultural rights of the Uyghurs, a win-win situation will definitely emerge.