The Uyghur Diaspora in Central Asia: Social Change, Identity and Music-Making

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Introduction

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and fundamental realignments in Eastern Europe not only have had major implications for changes to the global political order but have also given new impetus to the movement of populations and ideas (Hosking 1991, Hutchinson and Smith 1994, Smith 1990). The study of migrants and refugees is a relatively new aspect of inquiry for the social sciences that takes on increasing significance in this fast-changing world (Hall 1993). Anthropological examinations of the cultural milieu in which migrants and refugees have had to make sense of their state of displacement can make an important contribution to this area of research (Rutherford 1990). In particular music-making, as a personal expression of social identity and as a significant domain of shared experience and communal activity, creates reflections of the cultural lives of migrants and refugees and provides a convenient focus for research to explore these issues.

In this paper I will attempt to describe the dynamics of the relationships that link social change, identity and music-making with reference to the Uyghur diaspora in the former Soviet Union. Specifically I will focus on the Uyghur migrants to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. As these processes are complex, I will begin by providing a brief history of the events that led to the establishment of this diaspora. Secondly, I will examine music-making in these Soviet Uyghur communities and the principal forces that shaped musical change. Thirdly, questions of identity will be discussed as they relate to these changes, new cultural contacts and resultant musical creativity. Finally, in an effort to make sense of modern social complexities, an increasingly multicultural context, and a loss of any strong sense of continuity, we find identity and music-making to be fluid and subject to the political and economic realities of an uncertain future.

Uyghur Migration to the Former USSR

According to the 1989 Soviet census, there are 263,000 Uyghurs in the former USSR, making them the 40th largest ethnic group amongst 127 officially recognized "nationalities." The three largest Soviet Uyghur communities include: 185,000 in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 37,000 in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan and 36,000 in the Republic of Uzbekistan (*Natsianal'iy Sostav Naseleniya SSSR* 1991: 159). There are also 5,000 Uyghurs in the other Soviet Socialist Republics. Of

the Uyghurs in Kazakhstan, about 60% (110,000) are concentrated in Almaty, making them the most cohesive Uyghur community in the contemporary Commonwealth of Independent States. Today Uyghurs live in Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China, in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan (Fikalov 2004: 93).

There have been Turkic people in Central Asia for at least 1500 years, and Uyghurs claim a history that reaches even further back. The Turkic peoples of the area converted to Islam in a rather slow process as the religion crept across Central Asia, but certainly starting around the 12th or 13th century. The Uyghurs have spent most of their history linked to Central Asian culture, of which they are a part, rather than to Chinese culture.

Also known as *Taranchi* (Khamraev 1967: 6), they call their homeland "Eastern Turkestan," which is better known as the Chinese region of Xinjiang. (Starr 2004: 4-6) About eight million live inside China, with about one million ethnic Uyghurs living mostly in Central Asia, Saudi Arabia, Europe and North America. Uyghurs constitute a distinct Turkic-speaking, Muslim minority in northwestern China and Central Asia. According to the 2000 Chinese census, 19,250,000 people live in the region, with a heavy increase of ethnic Chinese in recent years. This region of China's remote northwest borders formerly Soviet Central Asia, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Mongolia, and Tibet.

Uyghurs have been struggling for independence since the 18th century. They have twice declared a short-lived Eastern Turkestan Republic in Xinjiang in the 1930s and the late 1940s, but have remained under Beijing's control since 1949 (Starr 2004: 6).

The October Revolution of 1917 brought many changes to the life of Uyghurs in Central Asia. Most importantly the new policies of integration and Sovietization of Uyghurs in the region were initiated (Fikalov 2004: 93), and this led to Uyghurs' becoming involved in the revolutionary movement by taking an active part in establishing Soviet authority in the region (Hutchinson 1994: 103-7, Olcott 1990: 3-7). In June 1921 *The Voice of the Poor*, the first Uyghur-language newspaper was published in Tashkent (Zatayevich 1971: 138).

During the years of Stalinism, however, Uyghurs were repressed like other peoples. According to Fikalov, "only Uyghurs were not subject to this forced migration since the majority of them were killed at the place. Many Uyghurs had to change their nationality to Uzbek, Kyrgyz and others, in order to escape the genocide. Like in other parts of Central Asia, all Uyghur cultural and educational centers in Kyrgyzstan were closed, including Uyghur schools in Frunze, Prjevalsk, Tokmak, Jalal-Abad and in the Osh region" (Fikalov 2004: 94). In 1938 a full time Russian curriculum was imposed on all non-Russian academic institutions although article 45 of the Soviet constitution (Akiner 1983: 21) guaranteed all Soviet citizens the opportunity to education in their native language (Akiner 1983: 23).

After September 11, 2001 Chinese security forces stepped up efforts to crush Uyghur separatism. Since the People's Republic of China was founded, Uyghurs have resisted Beijing's attempts to control their religious and political activities. In the past few years, Uyghur separatist groups have been blamed for attacks in northwest China as well as the capital. Chinese officials have warned that Beijing will not tolerate separatism or social disturbances under the guise of religion. China has moved to crack down on Uyghur separatists, whom Beijing regards as "terrorists" (Gladney 2004: 381).

During the 1950s and early 1960s a large number of Uyghur migrated from the People's Republic of China to the Soviet Union for political and economic reasons (Kamalov 2005: 151). With regard to the Uyghur forced migrants and refugees in Kazakhstan today, the number is not exhaustive as only about 30 Uyghurs had the courage to show up, whereas over 500 Chinese Uyghurs are believed to be in Almaty alone, being helped by the Kazakh Uyghur community. The protection of Chinese Uyghur refugees constitutes a major challenge in Kazakhstan, as Chinese Uyghurs are considered as being linked to both the Taliban and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Furthermore, in accordance with the agreement signed between Kazakhstan and China in December 1999, both countries undertook the obligation not to tolerate the presence in their territory of "separatist groups" from the other country (Gladney 2004: 109).

In view of the above, Uyghurs are not admitted to the Kazakh national asylum procedure. Hence, there are no official statistics on the number of Chinese Uyghurs in Kazakhstan. Due to the fact that Uyghurs fear persecution from the Chinese authorities as well as mistreatment by the Kazakh authorities because they are staying in Kazakhstan illegally, they apply to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Office in Kazakhstan, where they are admitted to the refugee status determination procedure in accordance with UNHCR Statute. Those Chinese Uyghurs who have been recognized as mandate refugees by the UNHCR are resettled in third countries.

Since the migration to Soviet Central Asia, Almaty, in the Republic of Kazakhstan, has become the most important center for the Soviet Uyghur culture in the region, with an Uyghur theatre, radio station and newspaper. An Uyghur cultural center Unity (*Ittipak*) was established in 1989 in the Kyrgyz SSR at the initiative of Muzapparkhan Kurbanov, a personal correspondent of the interrepublican Uyghur newspaper *Kommunizm Tugi*, published in Almaty at that time (Fikalov 2004: 94). *Ittipak* became the first organization in the wide-scale process of the growth of national self-consciousness among ethnic groups living in Kyrgyzstan, and it led to the establishment of the Assembly of the Peoples of Kyrgyzstan, uniting all ethnic organizations for the sake of interethnic peace, civil consent and the development of each ethnic group (Fikalov 2004: 95). There is a similar organization in Almaty established by the Uyghurs in Kazakhstan. The Uyghur theatre is the most important cultural center of the Uyghur

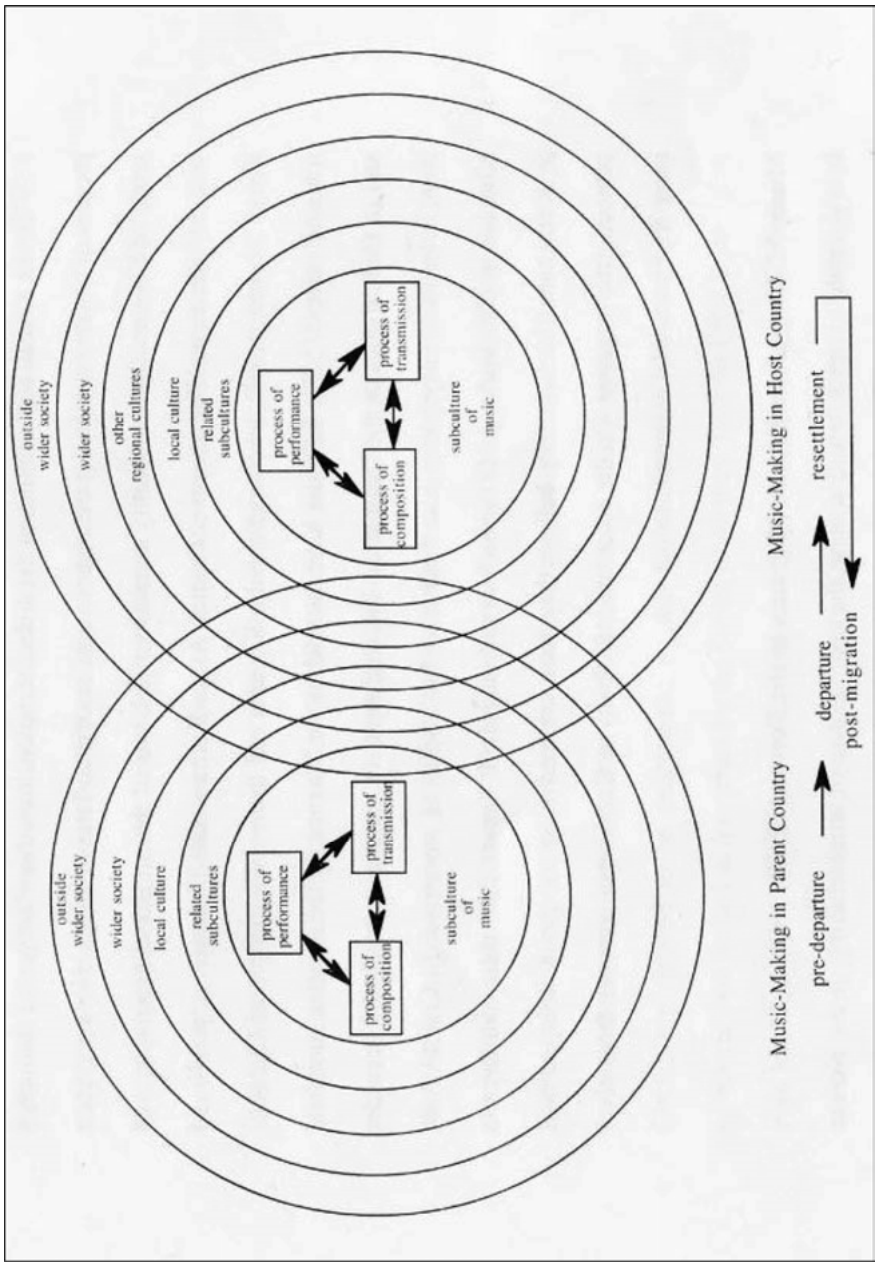
community in Kazakhstan. *Ittipak* also organized a radio program for the Uyghur community in Kyrgyzstan on the State Radio and Television (*Gosteleradio*) (Fikalov 2004: 96).

According to my observations, Soviet Uyghur communities in the different regions have been integrated through a process of migration between the regions and associated inter-marriage. However, each group of Uyghur migrants identify themselves in terms of their regional geography and cultural stereotype. For example, Uyghurs in Uzbekistan pride themselves as being more Uyghur than their counterparts in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan because they believe they have retained more of the Uyghur culture, primarily the language. On the other hand, Uyghurs in Kazakhstan consider themselves more sophisticated, i.e. European.

Music-Making of the Uyghur Migrants in the Former USSR

It is possible to describe and analyze the complexities of music-making of the Uyghur migrants in the former Soviet Union by using the model illustrated in the figure below. It is comprised of two sets of overlapping concentric circles that represent the social and cultural forces in the parent and host country that shape this creative process. The more distant and less direct elements are on the outside, and the more direct and interpersonal elements are on the inside, producing a spectrum of influences that range from the general to the specific (Hood 1982). The flow diagram underneath the circles represents the direction of migration and cultural contact (Reyes-Schramm 1990: 3-21, Hirshberg 1990: 68-88). I will not attempt to provide a detailed theoretical analysis of all the nuances and implications of this model here. However, in general it may prove helpful to describe the elements that have shaped music-making among these Soviet Uyghurs by referring to this theoretical construct.

In the figure, "outside wider society" relates to any external influence on the cultural and social life of either the host or parent country. For the Soviet Uyghurs these influences are the historical context and geo-political forces of conquest and alliance, described above in the previous section that gave rise to this diaspora. Most recently the end of the Cold War has brought changes to many aspects of life for the peoples of the former USSR. For example, the establishment of both diplomatic and economic ties between the People's Republic of China and the new nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States, such as the republics of Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, have brought changes to many Soviet Uyghur communities. These events have already resulted in a second musical migration which is having considerable impact on the music-making of Uyghur communities in the former USSR. I will describe the outcome of these influences in the next section.



Processes of Music-Making in Migration

For both sides of the diagram "wider society" refers to the interactions between institutions in general and the influences of social, political and cultural systems. In migrant communities, for example the Uyghurs in the Republic of Kazakhstan, these interactions would include the relationships established between the Uyghur theatre and the Uyghur radio station in the city of Almaty and contacts with other regional cultures, which would include involvement of the Uyghur community in local folk festivals organized in cooperation with other ethnic groups. These festivals were frequently organized with the sponsorship of both the local and central Soviet government. Ethnic folk ensembles also used to go on performance tours all over the former USSR with similarly coordinated official patronage between Moscow and state authorities. The traditional culture was considered to be a community culture which teaches the superiority of the group over the individual (Kerblay 1983: 271), providing it maintains a "culture national in form and socialist in content" as defined by the Communist Party (Lane 1985: 209).

"Other regional cultures" on the right side of the diagram refers to the cultures of other ethnic groups who also reside in the host country. For example, in the Republic of Kazakhstan these are principally the Kazakhs and Russians as well as various smaller minorities such as the Germans, Ukrainians, Uzbeks, Tatars and Koreans (Kho 1987: 24). Relationships between individual members of these groups can become quite personal, for example, when I visited Almaty in 1994 I met with a group of Uyghur, Russian and Kazakh musicians who had worked together on compositions. During my 1989 fieldwork in Tashkent, the capital of the Republic of Uzbekistan, I met an Uyghur musician, now a successful businessman, who used to write Uzbek pop songs for his Uzbek singer friends.

The "local culture" represents any regional variation within the geopolitical boundary of the given country under examination. With reference to the right side of the diagram, it refers to the local culture of the migrant community in the host country. For example, the urban Uyghur community in Tashkent, Uzbekistan has adopted Uzbek popular songs into their musical culture. On the other hand, the rural Uyghur community on the collective farm of Polit-Ozel, in Uzbekistan, still retains the Uyghur music which they brought with them from China.

The "related subcultures" indicate any other cultural arenas that are associated with a given musical genre or form, for example, literature, theatre, dance, etc. In Soviet Uyghur communities, music-making has been inseparable from these related arts. For example, Soviet Uyghur plays are always performed in conjunction with music and dance. In fact, the acclaimed Soviet Uyghur poet and writer Jusup Gapparov is also a director and actor as well as a composer and singer (Zatayevich 1971: 145).

The "subculture of music" refers to the arena of interacting individuals, such as musicians, composers, audience and mediators, who are involved directly in

the creative process of music-making in a particular musical genre or form. However, within the "subculture of music," I would like to suggest that there are three interrelated processes of music-making, namely, the processes of composition, performance, and transmission. For example, the process of composition is influenced by the process of transmission in the sense that the style of the Uyghur songs newly composed in Central Asia is derived from the songs which the migrants brought from China. And the processes of composition and performance are also closely related to each other in as much as many Soviet Uyghur songs are often improvised when performed. The processes of transmission and performance are also linked to each other since the learning of songs in Soviet Uyghur communities usually takes place in a performance setting.

The arrows at the center of the diagram are bi-directional suggesting that a cyclical process is operating in which aesthetics is both generated by and influences other aspects of music-making. These socially enabled and constructed aesthetic values of the individuals in different social classes, regions, genders and age groups will differ from each other. For example, the older generation in Central Asia appreciates traditional Uyghur *khälq nakhshiliri* (folk songs) and the Uyghur songs derived in China during the early part of the 20th century, whereas their grandchildren prefer modern Russian and Western popular songs. In Uyghur weddings in Soviet Central Asia, both Russian and Uyghur popular music are played in Kazakhstan, while Uzbek popular music is also included in Uzbekistan.

Identity and Music

The ethnomusicologist Alan Merriam considers music to be "one of the most stable elements of culture" (Merriam 1964: 304), and the sociologist Janet Wolff suggests that "the stylistic convention and aesthetic autonomy of a particular genre can survive automatic social determination" (Wolff 1981: 71). These propositions may well be true, especially in the case of transplanted music, which is often used and viewed by the members of migrant communities as symbols of cultural identity. For example, some music which Uyghur migrants brought with them from the parent country has survived several generations and can be viewed as a marker of their ethnic identity. An Uyghur popular song from the 1920s is still sung by Central Asian Uyghurs although it is no longer performed in Xinjiang.

However, any strong notion of a static model of musical continuity precludes much of the dynamic reality of music-making. If music is "an ideal form for the study of relationships between patterns of social interaction and the invention and acceptance of cultural forms, which in turn may influence further action" as Blacking suggested (1987: 48), the study of transplanted music should provide an insight into the life of migrants and their changing identity influenced by cultural contact and social changes. I believe the examples given above and used to illustrate the model of social and cultural change demonstrate the truth of Black-

ing's conclusion. Some more specific examples may help to add weight to the thesis that such changes are inextricably linked to questions of identity.

For example, there are new musical genres whose origins are linked directly to the refugee experience. These new genres reflect the history of migration and social and political changes in the host country, all of which in turn influence changes in cultural identity. For example, the songs of the October Revolution, sung in Russian and Uyghur, mark the beginning of the Sovietization of Uyghur migrant culture in Central Asia. After the resettlement in Soviet Central Asia in 1937, new Uyghur songs from collective farms began to appear. Additionally the folk songs of local ethnic groups, such as the Kazakhs and Uzbeks, also became a part of their song repertory through the process of adaptation to local regional cultures. The songs of longing for the home country, which are found in all Uyghur communities in the former Soviet Union, have different musical styles dependent on their region.

Some of these new genres are also closely related to new forms of literature and theatre as found in the work of the Soviet Uyghur poet Jusup Gapparov (1876-1938). For example, as illustrated in the following extract, the theme of Gapparov's *Chal Naghmani* (Play Your Tune), is associated with the cultural life of a socialist state (Zatayevich 1971: 145).

> Play the *naghma* [tune] to make me feel better!
> Sing the songs, so that people are woken up!
> Write slogans, so that other proletariat could hear them!
> The oppressed people are willing to get freedom,
> to join you when you play the *naghma*!
> Sing the song, so that other people from different countries could listen to it.
> As a result, the proletariat will be active.
> Tune your *naghma*, so that it would speak like a man
> and the proletariat would find a way to liberate the oppressed.
> Play, *naghmanchy* [the player of the *naghma*], tune your *naghma*,
> so that the proletariat would gain equality of rights.
> The oppressed proletariat would listen to you from the bottom of its heart.
> Squeak the *gidzhak*, strum on the *dutar* and the *tanbur*.
> I wish the proletariat would be liberated and put the imperialism to the complete rout.

Born in 1876 in Xinjiang, Jusup Gapparov lived in Kazakhstan, and his poems were widely appreciated and sung by Soviet Uyghurs throughout the former USSR as well as in his homeland of "Eastern Turkestan." He also took part in the establishment of the Uyghur theatere in Almaty (Zatayevich 1971: 145).

In addition to the changing cultural identity of Soviet Uyghurs, reflected in their music-making, described above, identity is also influenced by issues of citizenship. Among the Central Asian Uyghurs, it is quite common for members of the same family or close relatives to have different citizenships. In spite of the complexities of citizenship, most Soviet Uyghurs strongly identify themselves as being Uyghur.

Conclusion

The life of the Soviet Uyghurs in Central Asia has been influenced by social and political changes in their host and home countries as well as the broader political forces that have given shape to our modern world. The migrations to Central Asia, the process of Sovietization since 1917, adaptation to local ethnic cultures in Soviet Central Asia since the forced migration in 1937, changing cultural influences from the homeland of East Turkestan, and the process of de-Sovietization since the dissolution of the former USSR in 1990 are all to be understood in these contexts.

Just as much as the life of the Soviet Uyghurs has been influenced by new cultural contacts and social changes, their music-making has been subject to these same forces. For example, the music-making of Soviet Uyghurs in their "subculture of music" has always been undertaken in association with the "relevant subcultures" of theatre, dance and literature. In the "local culture" of Soviet Uyghur communities, this process of music-making often takes place in contact with the "other regional cultures" of the various ethnic groups in the "wider society" of the former USSR. However, this artistic development is also influenced by the policies of the state which are, in turn, subject to external cultural, social and political forces described above.

Music plays an important symbolic role in Soviet Uyghur communities in the construction of their cultural identity. Not only because their music has survived for several generations as one of the most stable elements of their culture, but also because the newly created musical genres and forms reflect the dynamics of their changing identity shaped by personal experiences, cultural contacts and socio-political events. The identity of these Uyghur migrants is now subject to increasingly uncertain social and political forces that will give rise to an as yet unknown future. However, given the artistic creativity of these resilient peoples, we can be sure that their music making will continue to play an important role in defining their place in the world – as they find it.

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