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If you don't know how, just learn: Chinese housing and the transformation of Uyghur domestic space

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ABSTRACT

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is eliminating and replacing (Wolfe, Patrick. 2006. "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (4): 387-409) indigenous expressions of Uyghurness. The Party-state has narrowed the official spaces in which Uyghur language can be used and tightened restrictions on religious practice while it has broadened the criminal category of "extremist." These policies attempt to hollow-out a Uyghur identity that is animated by Islamic and Central Asian norms and fill it with practices common to Han people. The CCP has thrust these tactics into private homes. Drawing on research in the region between 2010 and 2017, government documents, and colonial theory, this article introduces and interrogates the "Three News" housing campaign. It argues that by imposing what I call "authoritarian reflectiveness," the CCP intends to uproot Uyghur configurations of order and replace them with Han domestic sensibilities.

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Since 2017, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials have been showing up at homes in Xinjiang unannounced to tell Uyghurs that their lifestyle is outdated: they must fundamentally transform their vernacular dwellings' interiors – or move into government-built housing – in order to propel themselves into modernity. An online report published by the Communist Youth League of Xinjiang (2017) documents Uyghur domestic "backwardness" in a photo essay. One image captures three individuals – staring blankly into the camera – seated around a delicate tablecloth (Uy. *dastihan*) that has been spread over an interior raised platform (Uy. *supa*). The corresponding caption retorts: "Eating on a *supa* in this manner? Inconvenient." The next image depicts three Uyghurs sitting on a *supa* while a Han cadre reads from government-issued manuals. Its caption remarks: "Studying on a *supa* in this manner? Inconvenient." As viewers scroll down the page, they

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witness subtle changes to the featured homes' furnishings. One image frames a neatly-set table towards which a Han cadre plunges his chopsticks. Meanwhile, adult Uyghurs watch the man devour his meal. The caption celebrates the behaviour change spurred by the new piece of furniture: "With a new table, eating is more convenient." The next snapshot shows a Han cadre tutoring a young Uyghur boy with Chinese homework; adult members of the family are busily reading their own texts. The caption praises, "With a new table, homework is more effective." (Figures 1 and 2).

The careful composition of this photo essay in a linear, if not teleological, progression underscores the importance the CCP places on standardizing domestic ordering of space: recent transformations are not only aesthetic but are intended to alter Uyghur behaviour. To be sure, the CCP's imposition of new material culture to transform indigenous comportments draws on tried and tested strategies from Europe, Australia, and the United States. However, the CCP does not simply replicate paradigmatic colonial programmes: Instead of relying solely on the agentic properties of material culture to yield new behaviours (Glover 2007; Mitchell 1991), officials demand these changes occur rapidly using a constant threat of state violence, especially detention. The immediate result of the confluence of these modes of power is what I call "authoritarian reflectiveness." In other words, newly arranged spaces and pieces of furniture constantly and subconsciously condition Uyghurs' – as subjects capable of persuasion and therefore reflective



在炕上这样学习？不方便

Figure 1. Han Civil Servant teaches law to Uyghur family.



有了新炕桌，吃饭更方便

Figure 2. Han Civil Servant enjoys meal on table provided by the government.

thinkers (Glover 2007, xxi) – perceptions of space and order; meanwhile, daily and weekly “chats” (Ch. *tanhua*) from Han cadres monitor family members’ commitments to the programme, and the fear created by an authoritarian government that interns any recalcitrants ensures each household’s continued compliance.

Colonization and new housing construction

Domestic space is neither neutral nor static. Rather, the containers in which life’s mundane is carried out are constantly filled with power dynamics that replicate a social reality. Therefore, the gates, walls, roofs, furniture and other barriers that surround, enclose, divide, and confine space physically and discursively also frame the activities that occur within them (Dovey 1999, 1–2). As such, it comes as little surprise that colonizers introduce and enforce new standards of living in order to acculturate and assimilate non-majority populations. Indeed, expanding empires and nationalizing states have routinely regarded indigenous spaces as disorderly, unhygienic, unsanitary, and unsafe (Edmonds 2010, 13; Glover 2007; Mitchell 1991) therefore in need of transformation. Meanwhile, cities, parks, courthouses, government

housing, and public spaces are inscribed with symbols of state authority, which legitimize its power to rule over communities (Dovey 1999, 10–13).

Colonial configurations of order are also imposed at the family level. For example, French engineers in Egypt replaced indigenous arrangements of space with villages that one British traveller described as “very neat [and] laid out in streets crossing one another at right angles” (Mitchell 1991, 44). In Victoria, Australia, concrete structures were built to teach aboriginal families how to properly maintain a house before being integrated into the “wider community” (Healy 2019). Meanwhile, in Flandreau, North Dakota, Native American boarding school students were introduced to “practice cottages” – two-story dwellings where they learned how to prepare meals, perform domestic chores, care for a “nuclear” family, and cultivate European sensibilities (Child 1998, 80–81).

Although disparate in time and place, the above examples expose common motivations among colonizing states: they attempt to conform daily life to programmes of “government rationality” – i.e. social and political structures that create, mould, and groom upstanding citizens (Foucault 1978). At the housing-unit level, Timothy Mitchell (1991, 44) describes this process as “enframing” or the “dividing up and containing, as in the ... rebuilding of villages, which operates by conjuring up a neutral surface or volume called ‘space.’” Enframing instills order through two steps: (1) imposing microphysical power or regulation of behaviour brought about from the reordering of space and (2) creating metaphysical power or instilling the deeply-held belief that *this* order is natural and eternal (Mitchell 1991, 93–94). Operating beneath state-imposed violence, these strategies also undergird the CCP’s recent efforts to fundamentally change Uyghur concepts of space, the home, and order.

Uyghur homes

Before the peoples and places of the Tarim and Junggar Basins – modern-day Xinjiang – were incorporated into the People’s Republic of China, the region’s residential architecture changed according to the cultural currents (Mähsut and Mähsut 2000). As the area’s peoples sedentarized, urbanized, and converted *en masse* to Islam, their physical dwellings – and not necessarily the broader conceptual home (Uy. *öy*) based primarily on mutual dependence and, more recently, kinship (Steenberg 2014, 174–176) – began to reflect faith as well as their incorporation into a Central Asian milieu (Tursuntohti 2013, 46–50). As a result, many Uyghur houses conformed to a prescriptive spatial organization scheme similar to those of Muslims in the Fergana Valley (Nalivkin and Nalivkina 2016, 80–86).

A mental blueprint of a typical rural Uyghur house illuminates a matrix comprised of intersecting physical and cultural boundaries (Dautcher 2009,

11–22). Family members and guests enter the courtyard (Uy. *hoyla*) and outdoor pavilion (Uy. *aywan*) from adjacent roads through a large, often two-door wide gate (Uy. *därwaza*), which may be accentuated with carvings and latticework (Uy. *pänjirä*). The courtyard's floor is typically formed from tightly packed earth or bricks laid in a basket weave pattern. Trellises, on which lush vegetation and fragrant flowers grow, provide shade to the courtyard in the summer months, when the family would spend most of the day outdoors.

Residential dwellings are constructed from mudbrick (Uy. *kesäk*) and timber. Mudbricks are typically laid in a running/stretcher bond pattern and may be daubed by a white, straw-tempered clay plaster. Weight-bearing interior beams – numbering seven, nine, or eleven depending on the house's dimensions – are erected every 40–60 centimeters (Tursuntohti 2013, 46–50). Historically, houses were built facing north with a door that opened westward or faced west with a door that opened eastward in order provide protection from northern, winter winds and provide sunlight to the courtyard all year long (Tursun 2007, 237).

The house's interior is commonly divided and arranged into formal entertaining rooms (Uy. *saray/mehmanxana*), common rooms (Uy. *dalan*), bedrooms (Uy. *yataq öy*), and kitchens (Uy. *ashxana*) (cf. Dautcher 2009, 15–18; Tursun 2007, 233). Families routinely cover interior walls with a white plaster (Uy. *gäj suwaq*) prepared by mixing gypsum and egg whites (Tursun 2007, 236–237). Sometimes the plastered walls are adorned with large rugs. In some houses, *mehrab* (arches or niches) are carved in the wall facing the direction of Mecca, i.e. the *qiblä* (Raxman, Hämdulla, and Xustar 1996, 51–52). Beyond marking a sacred space, the *mehrab* stores bedding (Uy. *orun-körpä*) and religious articles (Tursuntohti 2013, 48). (Figure 3).

The saray is reserved for formal gatherings and special occasions. Marking a home's place of prestige, the saray's construction is distinct from other rooms and is usually equipped with alcoves (Uy. *oyuq-täqchä*) that store and display delicate porcelain, vases, and linens. The family's finest rugs cover the floor – or *supa i* (i.e. raised platform) – and may be decorated with long, rectangular cushions (Uy. *palas*) and cylinder-shaped pillows (Uy. *täkiyä*). Although perhaps the home's most exquisite room, the saray remains dark and empty on most days (cf. Dautcher 2009, 13).

Meanwhile, the *dalan* functions to strengthen bonds amongst the immediate family, distant relatives, and neighbours. Reflecting this purpose, the *dalan* is animated with constant activity (cf. Dautcher 2009, 13–14). The *supa* stands at the centre of domestic life and hospitality and marks the house's *tör*, or place of honour (Tursuntohti 2013, 55). Interior *supa* are built out of earth – or less often lumber – and raised 40–50 cm from the ground. Typically, the construction of earthen *supa* requires a large mound of soil sealed with a plaster blended from mud and hay (Tursun 2007, 234). The *supa* fulfills



Figure 3. Mehrob with family's Qur'an and doppa behind supa.

essential roles for extending and strengthening social networks beyond strictly the genealogical family to more indigenous concepts of local belonging such as relatives (Uy. *tughqan*), neighbours (Uy. *qoshna*), and community members (Steenberg 2014, 174–175). Often the site of naming ceremonies, *sünnät* circumcisions, the *nikah* marriage vows, and other life-cycle rituals (Uy. *toy*), the supa also effectively blurs divisions between the sacred on profane.

A history of “beautifying [Uyghur] spaces”

Uyghur organization of domestic space does not accord with Chinese-state expectations of “modern” living. Committed to bringing “civilized” and “modern” lifestyles to every Uyghur household, officials have mandated (or paved the way for) several programmes – state and market driven – that introduce new residential arrangements in Xinjiang. CCP official histories explain that after “liberation” in 1949, Uyghur families were finally able to afford sofas, cabinets, mattresses, teapots, dining tables, and television benches, a sign indicating “advancement” (Li 2009, 423). More recently, a branch party secretary in Qaghiliq County, Kashgar insisted, “In the past, the situation of rural households was relatively poor: they didn’t cultivate good living habits, most houses lacked beds, not to mention any other furniture. Families just slept on the floors or on mats on their supa; some didn’t even wash them regularly. These habits are unhygienic, unhealthy, and contrary to a modern, civilized lifestyle” (Zhongguo Kashi wang 2018). Unquestionably, the CCP considers domestic space as a key metric for modernity.

In fact, government transformations of domestic space are parts of the CCP's broader efforts to increase "civilization" (Ch. *wenming*) in society and improve the individual quality (Ch. *suzhi*) of its citizens. Construction projects in China specifically seek to enhance the interconnected concepts of material (Ch. *wuzhi*) and spiritual (Ch. *jingshen*) civilization (Cliff 2016, 34) and *suzhi*. In the eyes of the CCP, state-built housing, replete with modern amenities, can help propel all communities towards the nation's "epistemological center of civilization": urbanite Han people (Moreno 2018, 28–29). "Civilized living" – urbanized environments, proper hygiene, manners, high education and wealth – yields high *suzhi* (Anagnost 2004, 193; Moreno 2018, 33–34). Therefore, *suzhi* is both the process that produces and the discourse that defines society's privileged and downtrodden (Kipnis 2006).

The CCP initially adopted a gradual approach to "civilizing" Uyghur homes and, in the process, elevating *suzhi*. By the late 1990s in Ghulja (Ch. *Yining*), state-employed Uyghurs voluntarily moved into newly-built *danwei*-provided high-rise apartment units. Although some Uyghurs lamented the loss of intimacy with neighbours they enjoyed in *mähällä* – i.e. residential communities delineated by mosque membership (Dautcher 2009, 29) – these homes reflected newly-achieved socio-economic success. Uyghur urban dwellers continued to furnish high-rise apartment units with architectural and decorative elements common to the countryside (Kobi 2018, 220–221). In Aqsu and Kashgar, both government-constructed and privately built *shequ* gated communities are replacing the residential structures sheltering the Uyghur familial concept "people of the house" (Uy. *öydikilär*) as well as entire *mähällä* neighbourhoods (Kobi 2016, 126–129). Newly built houses adopt the layouts and amenities typical of eastern China (Kobi 2018, 146). However, these projects have been measured and surgical. For example, the CCP's plan to demolish eighty-five per cent of Kashgar's fabled "old town" (Hammer 2010) was planned to be carried out in phases that would span several years (Geens 2010). Even the post-2009 Ürümqi demonstration plans to flatten and rebuild predominately Uyghur areas of the XUAR capital targeted two main districts: *Heijishan* and *Yamalikeshan* (Byler and Grose 2018).

The CCP has acted with greater urgency since 2017 – the year in which mass incarcerations of Xinjiang's Turkic populations increased at alarming rates (Zenz 2019) – and its top brass has set into motion a series of policies that have demolished and in some cases rebuilt Uyghur spaces. During his opening address at the 19th Communist Party of China National Congress (CNC) on October 18, 2017, Xi Jinping (2017) announced his "Beautiful China" initiative. He pledged to build China into "a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful" by the year 2035. Although Xi primarily pitched the

campaign as an opportunity for international cooperation to combat climate change and as a challenge to clean-up China's polluted cities (Xinhua 2017), he also intended his remarks to raise environmental awareness and improve basic sanitation practices across the country (Beh 2017).

Yet, officials in Xinjiang invoked their General Secretary of the Communist Party's speech to justify several "beautification" programmes in Uyghur communities (*People's Daily Overseas Online* 2018). A government brief from Yäkän (Ch. *Shache*) cites Xi's call to "accelerate the reform of [China's] ecological civilization system, [and] build a beautiful China" before adding that "beautifying rural villages is an important part of building a beautiful China" (Ma and Lin 2018). This abstract pledge solidified into concrete action prior to lunar New Year's 2018, when cadres introduced the "Three News" Campaign (Ch. *San xin huodong*). At the core of this multifaceted endeavour is "advocating a new lifestyle, establishing a new atmosphere, and constructing a new order" (*People's Daily Overseas Online* 2018). Yet the programme is inspired by colonial logic. In Han-dominated areas, the programme intends to elevate the *suzhi* of the rural poor and uneducated. However, in Xinjiang, officials are assigned another task: fundamentally transform the sacred landscapes of the indigenous populations.

Apparently inspired by Xi's remarks, Xinjiang's officials integrated general themes from the October 2017 speech – e.g. construction, culture, order – into the new slogan. However, beneath allusions to Xi's eco-conscious plan lie targeted measures to dramatically alter Uyghur lived experiences. An un-authored document uploaded and circulated by a government-employed Han in Xinjiang describes in full each of the "Three News":

(1) Advocating a new lifestyle:

- (a) Advocate a new lifestyle ideologically: deepen the development of Chinese-style socialism's core values ... Meanwhile, resolutely uproot ignorance, discard "pagan" (Ch. *yijiaotu*) ideas, conscientiously thank the Party, listen to the Party, and follow the Party.
- (b) Advocate a new lifestyle in everyday existence: adhere to civil discussions and promote modern culture, eliminate the "four activities" [i.e. naming ceremonies, circumcisions, weddings, and funerals – celebrated by pious Muslims and even most secular Uyghurs] – which are outdated habits and vulgar customs strongly influenced by religion – lead the rural masses to a secular life, and absolutely deny religious extremism from taking hold again.
- (c) Advocate a new lifestyle in activities: colourful, healthy cultural and sports activities must be vigorously developed, in villages hold different types of ball games, patriotic singing competitions, allow the masses to sing together, and guide them spiritually and emotionally toward modernity.

- (2) Establishing a new atmosphere
 - (a) Establish a new atmosphere in everyday existence: develop night classes with many types of training programmes, change concepts toward employment – i.e. opportunities inside and outside of Xinjiang, at village “satellite factories”, on-site training employment (Ch. *jiudi peixun jiuye*).
 - (b) Vigorously develop courtyard economies (Ch. *tingyuan jingji*), promote the renovation and transformation of old courtyards and living spaces from front to back, increase the proportion of courtyard economy income in to relieve poverty ... contain extremism, guide each ethnic collectivity to rely on scientific skills to become prosperous.
 - (c) Establish a new atmosphere in the appearance of rural villages: Advance the construction of beautiful villages, improve the living conditions and ecology of rural areas, resolve the rural issues of dirt, disorder, and destitution (Ch. *zang luan cha*).
 - (d) Establish a new atmosphere in spiritual appearance: Through establishing various activities, use education to lead the masses to focus on civility, manners, hygiene while clashing against old customs, enhancing new healthy atmospheres, resolutely forbid strange clothing in order to create a positive spirit.
- (3) Constructing a New Order
 - (a) Construct a new order. Maintain the rule of law, further develop publicity work on law, resolutely root out the ideologies of “Religious supremacy”, “theocracy”, and “religion” is law while forming among the masses an atmosphere that obeys, studies, respects, and implements the law.
 - (b) Construct a new order for living. Strictly examine the use of religion to have the courage for a secular lifestyle, educate believers to establish correct beliefs, resist extremism, to guide religion to carry out its activities within the scope of laws and regulations, resolutely eliminate the problems of “religious wild police” and “wild imams” and never allow religion to intervene in administration, justice, education, or family planning.

Although in many ways ambiguous, this directive provides officials throughout the region with a set of instructions to guide its spatial and cultural transformation activities. Under the guise of modernization and beautification, cadres have introduced coordinated campaigns that seek to radically alter Uyghur lived realities – shifting them away from a Central Asian and Islamic habitus towards customs, practices, and values defined by Chinese Communist-style secularism.

Introducing and implementing the “Three News”

The “Three News” campaign’s “Establishing a New Atmosphere” initiative inspired the “Beautifying Spaces” (Ch. *meili jiating*) programme. According to *Xinhua News* (2019), this programme – launched in 2018 – will transform nearly 400 thousand impoverished families’ backwards lifestyles. As *Xinhua*’s report alludes, architectural updates are not at the core of the “construction work” (Ch. *jianshe gongzuo*): rather, officials believe these renovations will refine mental outlooks, improve sanitation, cultivate “good habits” (*Zhongguo Ribao Wang* 2019), and eliminate “outdated habits and vulgar customs” (*Shache xian guangbo dianshitai* 2018b). The efforts would begin in earnest in twenty-two poverty-stricken counties in southern Xinjiang (*Xinhua* 2019) and would first target the so-called four-type priority categories (Ch. *si lei zhongdian*) – i.e. individuals who experience extreme difficulty, individuals with disabilities, and low-income families (People’s Government of Ürümqi 2018).

The first step in this “beautification” campaign is rearranging residential structures in a “three separate spaces” floorplan (Ch. *san qu fenli*). The three separate spaces model demands constructing clearly defined living (Ch. *sheng-huo qu*), growing (Ch. *zhongzhi qu*) and rearing areas (Ch. *yangzhi qu*) to replace current housing designs (Ma and Lin 2018). The standardized blueprint replicates government-built housing in rural Han-majority villages in eastern and central China (Ch. *neidi*). In fact, the *Khotan Daily* (2018) compares the results of its city’s housing projects – displayed with before and after photographs – with those carried out in Han areas. The paper then evokes an “old saying” (Ch. *laohua*): “if you don’t know, just learn.” This expression invokes Bhabha’s (1984) discussion on mimicry, which describes the colonial process as both marginalizing and empowering to the colonized. In other words, the ethnic “Other” can only hope to become “almost the same” as the colonizer but never equals; yet this perpetual socio-political gap allows room for subversion through mockery (Bhabha 1984, 126).

Curiously, an indirect object, or the colonizer, is absent from the above “old saying”: learn from whom? Although renovation projects draw from experiences in Han communities, the “whom” does not only refer to Han people. In his discussion of the history of design in Sweden, Keith Murphy (2013, 65) reminds us that the home is often an “aesthetic reimagining of the national.” Of course, in the People’s Republic of China, the CCP imagines its multi-ethnic population as a racialized nation called the *Zhonghua minzu* (Leibold 2007). Similarly, the three spaces home provides a microcosm of the *Zhonghua Minzu*: it is comprised of separate, clearly delineated, yet inseparable components within a Han frame, in ways parallel to the former USSR’s “communal apartment” arrangement of ethnicity (Slezkine 1994). In contrast, expressions of Uyghur-ness – as well as arrangements of the Uyghur home – are tied to a sacred locale, fluid, and built on a religious foundation.

Redesigning the framing of Uyghur homes into discrete domestic compartments – as well as realigning Uyghurness into the Zhonghua minzu – requires the absence (or removal) of the structure that blurs physical, social, and religio-cultural boundaries: the *supa*. Some officials have even called for all *supas* to be “demolished” (Ch. *chaichu*) (Kashi Lingjuli 2018). A Uyghur language post from the county government in Maralbeshi County (Ch. *Bachu*) demanded that residents “smash up” (Uy. *qeqish*) their *supa* and refuse to lay out mats and rugs (Bachu Lingjuli 2018). Unquestionably, the *supa* has been singled out as a symbol of backwards Uyghur customs, despite northern China’s Han families regularly using the same fixtures (Ch. *kang*) in their homes. Yet in Xinjiang, interior *supas* have been deemed unhygienic, inconvenient, and unhealthy to physical and mental wellness. The destruction of *supa* allows us to revisit Mitchell’s discussion of “enframing” or the colonial process of elimination and replacement. According to Mitchell’s theory (1991, 93–94), when Han cadres remove the *supa*, they effectively eliminate the space that blurs the sacred and profane. They then replace the *supa* with tables and chairs – i.e. discrete spaces designed for individuals and only a few activities. In the end, these Han workers, through the introduction of furniture, impose a new ordering of space. (Figure 4).

The project also aims to eliminate important symbolic markers that orient Uyghurs towards the Islamic world. Newly built and renovated houses are also devoid of *mehrab* arches/niches. As mentioned above, *mehrab* are carved into interior walls to mark the direction of Mecca and store daily items such as bedding. *Radio Free Asia* (2019) reports that residents in Ili, Kashgar, and Khotan prefectures have been forced to either destroy *mehrab* carvings or fill them in because officials have deemed them “extremist”; houses are demolished if the *mehrab* is part of a weight-bearing wall and cannot be removed. Although I have been unable to find government documents to corroborate this claim, I can confirm that *mehrab* cannot be found in the dozens of photographs depicting newly-built and renovated living spaces.

Tables, coffee tables, sofas, and beds fill otherwise empty concrete rooms and acquaint residents to a “new life” (Shufu lingjuli 2018b) and establish “scientific, civilized, and healthy” (Uy. *ilmiy, mädäniy, saghlam*) living standards (Bachu lingjuli 2018). Officials in Kona Shärä proclaim that “civilization begins at the dinner table” (Ma and Lin 2018), a reference to interiors *sans* *supa*. Furniture is often provided by the nearly 1.1 million “big brothers and sisters” sent to rural Xinjiang to live among Uyghur families, monitor their activities, and report their deviances (Byler 2018). The campaign commits to the “four common, four gifts” strategy, which requires cadres to eat, live, work, and study in common with Uyghur families while they gift them kindness and knowledge about policy, law and culture (Shache xian quangbo dianshitai 2018b). According to one report, the new furniture will nudge rural residents towards a “healthy civilization” (Shache xian quangbo dianshitai 2018c).



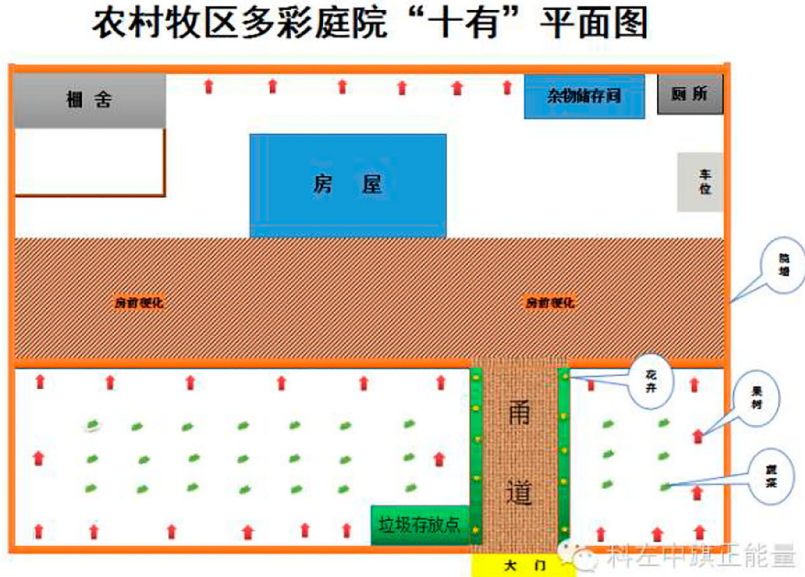
Figure 4. Destroying interior supe.

Dismantling Uyghur space; regulating Uyghur pace

The three separate spaces arrangement drastically alters Uyghur templates of domestic spatial organization, broadly known as “genotypes” (Dovey 1999, 20–21). More specifically, the government-planned layouts conform to what Hillier and Hanson (1989, 84–90) identify as a linear plan – i.e. “a string of spatial segments in sequence ... [with] no choice of pathway from one segment to another” that limits social interaction, especially entertaining guests, to a few designated spaces (Dovey 1999, 21–22). This layout controls movement at high levels and replaces the “looped or ringy syntax” – i.e. multiple pathways and diffused control of movement (Dovey 1999, 21–22) – more typical of rural Uyghur homes. Drawing on Glover’s (2007, 139) analysis on the re-ordering of houses in Lahore, we learn that clearly delineating areas for living, farming, and rearing and constructing rooms isolates specific activities and objects to specialized spaces in order to increase domestic efficiency. The result, according to Glover (139), “was the formation of new domestic sensibilities, habits, and sentiments that would be cultivated and disciplined in the newly remade spaces of the home.” Indeed, according to the CCP, newly remodelled homes and the rearrangement of domesticity introduces a

Han-dominated government-defined rationality of space and movement. (Figures 5 and 6).

Similarly, new furniture is not meant to merely update aesthetics; rather, these fittings act upon Uyghur worldviews. Drawing again on Glover (2007, xx), he argues that colonizers “shared an assumption that the material



农村牧区多彩庭院“四区分离”平面图

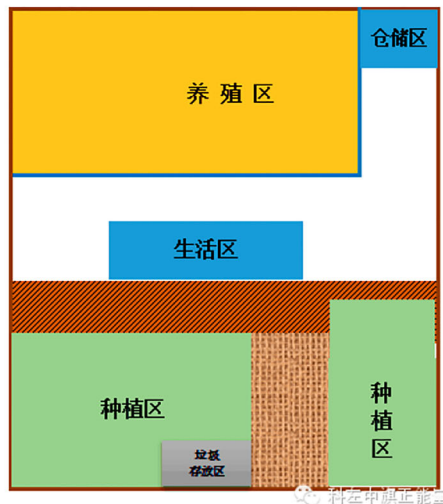


Figure 5. Three separate spaces.

world embodied immaterial qualities that were both tangible and agentive.” According to this logic, material objects – as something that can be seen, touched, moved, etc., – affect and can even make predictable the behaviours of the agents who manipulate them. Seemingly informed by this belief, officials in Yäkän proclaim that “modern furniture not only gives home interiors a brand-new look, it functions more to greatly elevate the quality of living” (*Shache xian guangbo dianshitai* 2018c). In other words, the furniture, according to this official, creates the (Han) “civilized” (*wenming*) environment that enhances the local Uyghurs’ *suzhi*.

New furniture is also conducive for face-to-face interaction between cadres and rural residents. More specifically, the new divisions of the home and accessorized furniture can, according to the CCP, facilitate learning laws and *Putonghua*. According to a village branch secretary in Qiareke (Yäkän), “We must start with the habit of sleeping on beds, sitting on

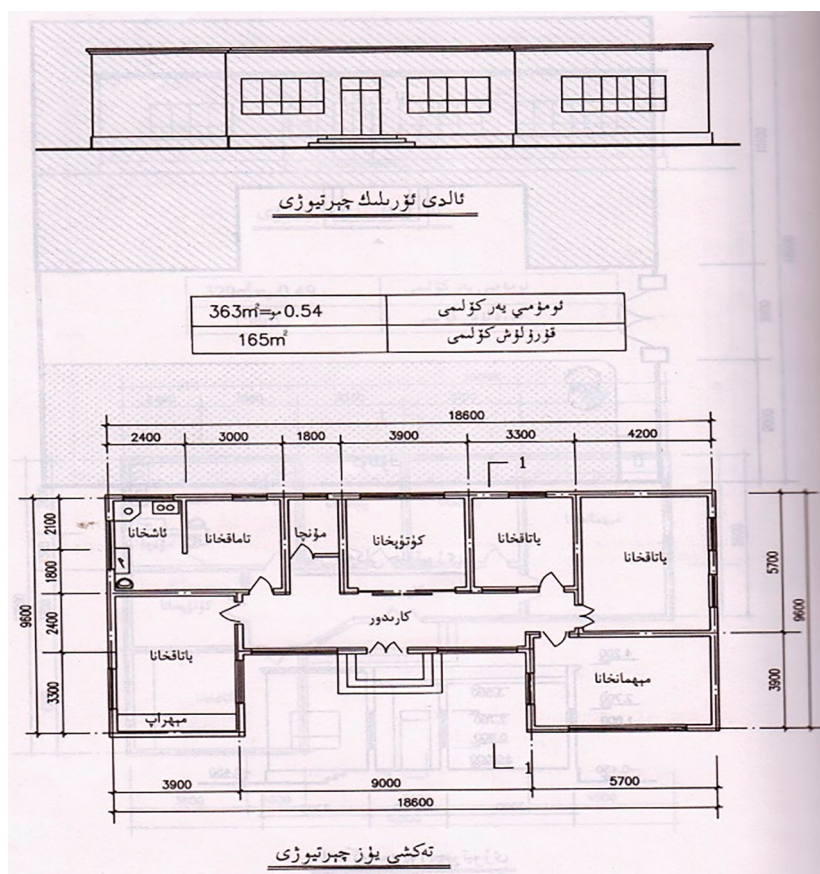


Figure 6. Uyghur house blueprint.

sofas, and eating and studying behind tables while instructing the masses on a one-to-one basis and preaching (Ch. *xuanjiang*) to them face-to-face to actively mobilize them to live a healthy and civilized modern life" (Propaganda Committee of Yäkän County 2018). Similarly, a report from Khotan praises the changes: "Currently, people have tables for eating, children have desks for studying, and adults can even use their bookshelves to understand the Party's preferential policies and transform their thinking from 'benefiting from the country's subsidies' to 'I'm going to throw off poverty's shabby hat'" (*Hetian lingjuli* 2018).

Authoritarian reflectiveness

As "projects of improvement," colonial housing is meant to appear less violent than other assimilatory programmes (Mitchell 1991, 44). Glover (2007, xxi) was unequivocal: the introduction of new material objects in Lahore houses "were largely meant to persuade, rather than force social change" therefore distinguishing this method from Foucault's (1984, 179–187) "disciplinary" practices, or the type of physical and mental subjugation imposed on a population to increase human efficiency. Yet, CCP housing policies in Uyghur communities fuse these two methods of inculcating compliance by using "authoritarian reflectiveness." That is, the state is using new materials – introducing standardized construction plans, beds, desks, etc., while removing indigenous orderings of space – *supa*, *mehrab*, etc., – as tangible and agentive objects that seek to "modernize" Uyghur lives. Put another way, the Three News project – as do other colonial campaigns – destroys in order to replace (Wolfe 2006). However, as human agents of the state, the over one million sent-down "relatives" (Byler 2018) – who from 2016 to May 2018 made 24 million house visits and conducted 33 million interviews with local residents (Grose 2018) – enforce compliance, document infractions, and punish insubordination.

Cadres follow a three-step strategy to persuade families to spend their own money on renovations. First, they focus on publicity work to garner public approval (*Xinjiang minsheng wang* 2018a). Mandatory weekly flag raising ceremonies, village PA systems, social media platforms, and required gatherings held during International Women's Day, Labor Day, and Children's Day are also used to propagate the campaign (*Zhongguo Ribao Wang* 2019). Second, work teams visit villagers who live in especially messy homes and propose a plan of action. Third, volunteer teams renovate the homes of poor families who cannot provide their own labour (*Xinjiang minsheng wang* 2018a).

Construction occurs at a break-neck pace. By April 6, 2018, all 154 households in Youkakemaili Village, Bozidun Township had their homes rebuilt in the three separate spaces model (*Yixian Jujiao* 2018). Some families require

complete rebuilds or are relocated to new “affordable housing” (Ch. *anju fang*) complexes. In fact, the central government endeavoured to construct 300 thousand such houses across the region by the end of 2018 (Xinhua 2018). This process appears to be typical of counties across the region (*Shufu lingjuli* 2018a).

Maintaining a “good” family status – incentivized with rewards – compels most residents to conform to the standards of the three separate spaces. Officials conduct regular inspections to evaluate each family’s commitment to the “five beauties” – i.e. (1) an environment that is clean and hygienic, (2) possessions that are placed away neatly, (3) a living space that is laid out beautifully, (4) a green space that is pleasing, and (5) a family who is civilized and harmonious (*Xinjiang minsheng wang* 2018b). Inspections identify households as compliant or deviant using a color-coded banner system. For example, on April 8, 2109, representatives from Toqsu County’s Women’s Federation and Party Committee inspected each household of Airike Village (Khotan). Those who passed inspection were presented with a “Beautiful Spaces” door plaque; outstanding families were awarded a rotating red flag, which can be transferred to other households (People’s Government of Toqsu County 2019). A resident of Duolaitebage County (Kashgar) named Alimjan told reporters his family felt proud that officials chose their home as a model for others: “This is the first honor [certificate] awarded to my family. We will continue to work vigorously to beautify our home and will compete hard retain this award” (*Xinjiang minsheng wang* 2019).

These remarks demonstrate how colonial housing projects, which introduce new desires and expectations of space, seek to create envy (Djiair 2009, 172). In addition to awarding banners, officials dole out furniture. According to a village branch secretary in Qiareke (Yäkän), “All the villagers are scrambling to purchase new furniture. Neighbors compare whose sofa is nicer, ask where they purchased their blinds, or inquire about where one can get the best furniture at the best price” (Propaganda Committee of Yäkän County 2018). A middle age woman from Yäkän similarly remarked:

I went to my neighbor’s house and saw that their newly bought sofa and coffee table were so beautiful and comfortable. Our local cadre’s relative has always been telling us that we need to live a modern life ... with her help, I bought a new sofa and teapoy. She also assisted in designing my home to make it more beautiful. When my family saw how modern these changes made our home, we were very happy. (*Shache xian guangbo dianshitai* 2018c)

In his widely cited and analyzed (Djiair 2009, 172–173; Mitchell 1991, 164–165) passage from *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1961, 29–30) wrote that “the colonized man is an envious man” because imposed modernity purposely partitions society. Although this Uyghur woman’s comments should be understood as performative political speech, they nevertheless demonstrate how

state-mandated “civilizing projects” impose a materially-defined apartheid based on, one end, the state’s envisioned “order” and its embrace by the periphery, and, on the other end, those who preserve indigenous norms.

Gifts enmesh Uyghur families in a suffocating social bond forged from material and emotional debt and repayment, or “human feelings” (Ch. *renqing*) (Yang 1994, 68). Although *renqing* operates within the complex realm of – largely Confucian-defined – interpersonal ethics, it can be unpacked by analyzing the dynamics of gift-giving. In her canonical book on social relationships in China, Mayfair Yang (1994, 70) explains, “Gifts require reciprocity, and so do relationships; therefore the ethics of gift-giving are extended to all human relationships.” In other words, the material gifts are commodified objects of the CCP’s compassion (Yang 2013, 106–110).

Those failing to conform to the Party’s standards are ostracized and punished. A party branch deputy secretary in Tage’airike Village (Khotan) reports that village cadres conduct random inspections each week to determine compliant and deviant households with, respectively, red and black banners (*Jiashi Lingjuli* 2018). In Maralbeshi County (Ch. *Bachu*), weekly village meetings announce blacklisted households, who are given a deadline to correct violations. Families placed on the blacklist three times are paraded on stage (Ch. *liangxiang*) in front of their peers where they promise to rectify their faults. Officials are confident that public shaming will help villages to establish a morality system in which “poverty is disgraceful, wealth is honorable, laziness is shameful, and diligence is glorified” (*Xinjiang Zizhi Qu Xumu Ting* 2018).

Conclusion

This article has introduced and examined the CCP’s Three News Campaign. It reveals how officials reconceptualize and apply colonial housing projects to impose immediate and, from their calculations, permanent changes to Uyghur perceptions of order, domestic space, and modernity. The resulting strategy is “authoritarian reflectiveness,” or the process that combines the agentive potential of new material culture with the constant threat of state violence. Indeed, the fear of incarceration will coerce families into conformity; otherwise, they will be removed from society. Since 2016, Uyghurs numbering in the tens of thousands, some estimate as many as one million (Cumming-Bruce 2018), have been placed in “concentration re-education centers” or sentenced to prison (Buckley 2019). To avoid being “disappeared,” Uyghurs have stopped attending mosque prayers (Smith Finley 2018) and even deleted family and friends living outside China from social media sites (Cockerell 2019). Uyghurs have few options other than to comply with the Three News Campaign.

Yet, if we recall Bhabha (1984), the programme and the methods for complicity can only produce mimicry. In other words, Uyghur use of these new

spaces, the furniture that fills them, and learning from Han cadres may “slip” into mockery. Uyghur adoption and adaption of these new norms will likely remain superficial at best; at worst for the CCP, they will become exaggerated and transform into mockery of Han norms. Mimicry “conceals” (Bhabha 1984, 129). Therefore, the Three News Campaign, as well as the entire colonial project in Xinjiang, risks creating a precarious situation for the Party state – one in which the CCP may never accurately gauge Uyghur assimilation, loyalty, or resistance.

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