

Zunun Kadir's Ambiguity
The dilemma of a Uyghur writer under Chinese rule

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my own original work under the supervision of Prof. W.J.F. Jenner and Prof. Geremie Barmé. No part of this dissertation has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or equivalent institution and to the best of my knowledge and belief contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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*I dedicate this work to my husband Richard,
my son Adam and my daughter Denise.*

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Abstract

This thesis considers the work of the influential Uyghur writer Zunun Kadir (1912-1989), and through it charts some aspects of Uyghur identity and aspiration, while explaining the background of his work in relation to the culture and history of the Uyghur people of East Turkistan (Xinjiang).

Growing up in a poor and conservative family under Chinese rule, Zunun developed a commitment to nationalism and socialism in the belief that these would serve as the best basis for the advancement of the Uyghur people. In middle age he witnessed the absorption of the East Turkistan Republic into the People's Republic of China (PRC) established by the Chinese Communist Party, and he adapted himself to work under that government. This involved accepting a political agenda that called upon him to support a unified greater China to the detriment of Uyghur national interests. This situation presented Zunun Kadir with an enduring dilemma: how to resist the cultural domination of the Han Chinese and maintain the distinct cultural identity of the Uyghur people, while ensuring his freedom to write and publish in an environment controlled by the CCP.

In the volatile political environment of the PRC, this balance could not be maintained indefinitely and Zunun was eventually subjected to official criticism and sent to the Tarim desert to undergo labour reform. After 17 years of exile he was rehabilitated in the Deng Xiaoping era, and he returned to Urumqi to resume his career as a Uyghur writer. His later work indicates a degree of disillusionment and caution, but also shows how he reconciled his choices by balancing his idealism with the reality of his environment. The use of ambiguous language and imagery allowed Zunun Kadir to pass the political scrutiny required of a publishing author in the PRC, and at the same time to offer different layers of meaning to his Uyghur-reading audience through cultural and historical references to Uyghur life.

Illustration a)

East Turkistan (Xinjiang)



Illustrations b)



Zunun Kadir as a young writer



The bust on Zunun Kadir's grave.



Zunun Kadir with young Uyghur writers in Gulja (Ili), August 1986.
(Photographs by courtesy of Zunun Kadir's family members)

Note on translation and transliteration of Uyghur language.

The process of translation can never be perfect, and in cases where the Uyghur idiom does not translate exactly, I have employed the closest English equivalent. In such cases, the Uyghur term is usually included in the text for reference. In certain instances where the same word has been written differently in the Uyghur original (to reflect dialect pronunciations - eg. *Kashkhar*, *Kheshkher*) I have followed the original in my transliteration, rather than imposing a standard usage. I have abridged translations for the sake of clarity in English, and have also left out some repetitions that in my view did not add to the meaning, and also leaving out some passages of extended description not relevant to the discussion in the text. For any deficiencies in translation and analysis, I will willingly accept criticism and alternative interpretations.

There is currently no universally accepted standard for the expression of Uyghur sounds using Roman characters. The English keyboard set presents some difficulties, and many Uyghurs are unsatisfied with systems derived from the Chinese “*Hanyu pinyin*” romanisation.¹ The Pinyin based system uses a number of characters not available in general international usage, and adds some unique characters for particular Uyghur sounds. The Turkish Roman alphabet also contains an insufficient range of characters for all the sounds in Uyghur, and some characters are unfamiliar to most English-language readers. In considering what system to adopt, I have referred to elementary teaching materials used in Xinjiang (East Turkistan), and have followed with interest an ongoing debate on some Internet discussion forums concerning the transliteration of Uyghur for English keyboards. I referred to Reinhard F. Hahn’s work *Spoken Uyghur* (written in collaboration with Ablahat Irahim).² Finally, I have drawn on my own experience as a native speaker of Uyghur with experience of the Turkish, Hanyu Pinyin and English writing systems.

The romanisation adopted in this thesis is as close as possible to standard English characters or combinations of the characters for the expression of Uyghur sounds.

¹ Bilal Shimshir, *Türk Yazı Devrimi* [The Turkish Orthographical Reform], Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara, 1992, p.339.

² Reinhard. F. Hahn *Spoken Uyghur*, University of Washington Press, 1991

Where there are no appropriate direct correspondences for consonants, I have used two-letter combinations (ch, sh, gh, kh, ng, jh, hk) that are widely used by Uyghurs in international correspondence. For vowels that are not represented in the English alphabet, I have used Roman characters as applied in modern Turkish and some European languages, which are included in standard character sets available for word-processing and Internet use.

Table: Transliteration from Uyghur to Standard Alphabet

Standard Alphabet	Uyghur Alphabet	European approximation
a	ئا	<i>ah</i>
b	ب	<i>boat</i>
ch	چ	<i>china</i>
d	د	<i>dog</i>
e	ئە	<i>apple</i>
f	ف	<i>fire</i>
g	غ	<i>good</i>
gh	گ	<i>Rohre (German)*</i>
ng	نڭ	<i>king</i>
h	ھ	<i>hat</i>
hk	ھك	<i>loch (Scottish)*</i>
i	ئى	<i>sit</i>
l	ل	<i>soften</i>
j	ج	<i>joke</i>
jh	چھ	<i>decision</i>
k	ك	<i>king</i>
kh	كھ	<i>macht (German)*</i>
l	ل	<i>lamb</i>
m	م	<i>mother</i>
n	ن	<i>nation</i>
o	ئو	<i>occupy</i>
ö	ئۆ	<i>Goethe (German)*</i>
p	پ	<i>poke</i>
r	ر	<i>run</i>
s	س	<i>sit</i>
sh	ش	<i>shame</i>
t	ت	<i>time</i>
u	ئۇ	<i>put</i>
ü	ئۈ	<i>tu (French)</i>
v	ۋ	<i>vest</i>
y	ي	<i>yak</i>
z	ز	<i>zip</i>

* Non-English examples drawn from Hahn *Spoken Uyghur* op. cit. pp. 33-90.

