Zunun Kadir's Ambiguity

The dilemma of a Uyghur writer under Chinese rule

Dilber Thwaites

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University

April 2001
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.

Dilber Thwaites
Canberra
April 2001
I dedicate this work to my husband Richard, my son Adam and my daughter Denise.
Acknowledgements

This work could not have been completed without the direct support of several people. My long-term teacher, Professor W.J.F. Jenner, was particularly assiduous in helping me develop my research, presentation and analytical skills. He also offered me timely warnings and advice regarding the difficulties that I would inevitably encounter in pursuing my chosen field of research. I gratefully acknowledge my debt to Bill Jenner, who has so significantly supported me in my effort to make a contribution to the knowledge of Uyghur culture among non-Uyghur scholars and readers.

I am also grateful to Professor Geremie Barmé, who took up the chair of my supervisory committee when Professor Jenner left the Australian National University (ANU) in early 2000. Dr Barmé’s advice and suggestions on structure, form and presentation were essential to my bringing this work to a conclusion.

Dr Miriam Lang, formerly also of the ANU, provided me with detailed and careful suggestions on clarifying my argument and examples, and I am deeply appreciative of her contribution to the final form of this work. Others who gave me substantial help and advice were Dr Lewis Mayo (who suggested several valuable sources), Dr Ian Wilson (who provided several helpful comments on my manuscript) and Dr Jonathan Unger (who offered valuable comments and suggestions regarding the broader Chinese context of my work), and Dr Vieta Dyer, who always made herself available as an adviser to me.

I express my gratitude to the Australian National University, the Faculty of Asian Studies and the China and Korea Centre and their staff, in particular Pam Welsey-Smith, and Panida Thamsongsana from the Japan Centre, for providing both practical and moral support for my research and for enabling this doctoral project through provisions made for field study, conference attendance and library and office facilities.
My husband Richard Thwaites always encouraged me to continue my interest in Uyghur affairs. Without his help in typing and editing the actual text, and his unfailing emotional support, I could not have completed this task.

Above all I am grateful to the family of Zunun Kadir, who were crucial in providing background information to my research. Zunun’s widow Zileyhan, son Perhad and daughter Seyare were generous with their time and gave me access to their own copies of Zunun Kadir’s works and other related materials.

In connection with my research in Xinjiang, I must thank the staff of the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences and the Xinjiang Writers’ Association for their hospitality and assistance in my quest for secondary sources and first-hand accounts of Zunun Kadir and his works. Of the many who helped me, I would like to mention Muhammad Polat (editor of The Works of Zunun Kadir), Arzugul Turup, Gulzar and Halime. In initially facilitating my visit to Urumqi, I must thank the Foreign Affairs Office of the Peoples’ Government of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and their helpful staff. I will not mention all of the many writers and academics with whom I was able to speak, and without whose help this work could not have been completed, since I have footnoted their various comments and acknowledged their help within the text.

I also extend my thanks to all those scholars in Almaty (Kazakhstan), Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), Istanbul and Ankara (Turkey) who provided many insights and also some precious source materials. In particular I thank Prof. Sultan Mahmud Kashgarli and Ablikim Baki for providing me with copies of their own scholarly works. Mehmet Emin Buğra’s family (Fatima Hanim and Yunus Bey) and Haji Yusup Anat provided support and useful materials. Finally I would like to record special gratitude to Ahmetjan Halilov and Sadet Ayup, who both gave me great practical assistance and personal support in my researches in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzistan.
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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.

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