

## **GENDER ROLES AS SEEN THROUGH WEDDING RITUALS IN A RURAL UYGHUR COMMUNITY, IN THE SOUTHERN OASES OF THE TAKLAMAKAN DESERT**

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### **Introduction:**

Marriage and family life in pre-1949 (before the communist “libration”) Uyghur society were quite similar to those in other Muslim societies (within the Islamic religion and consistent with Uyghur customs, arranged marriage was the norm of mate selection) (Abdurehim. 1993; Beller-Hann 2008). The PRC has had remarkable impact on the Uyghur family system through education, urbanization and industrialization. From its beginnings the Chinese state paid exceptional attention to gender, marriage laws being among the first constitutional reforms. The Chinese state used its power directly to effect Uyghur family change by instituting legal and institutional reform (the Marriage Law of 1950) and indirectly, because of the pace of industrialization was simply unprecedented, and it could not have happened without a powerful state machine (Clark 1999; Xiao, 2011). Philosophers, writers, parents, doctors and ordinary people all have described and have left a large amount of historical written evidence on the subject. Gender and sexuality have been neglected topics in the history of Chinese civilization (Evans 1997; Mann 2011), as well as in the history of Uyghur civilization. As Harris Evans has emphasized (1995, 1997), all of the scientific discourses of the post -1949 government have been unable to change the

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link between female bodies and reproduction. Marriage and motherhood have remained to show that the destiny of women is subject to the control of the Chinese government, and on terms dictated by the state's birth planning administrations, despite the relatively recent attention to female sexual pleasure.

After learning about Uyghur ritual activity and practices from personal participation (I was born and raised in a strong and authentic Uyghur cultural environment), from interviews, from written descriptions, and personal observation, I then did many years of research. This research on Uyghur history, culture and society has enriched my knowledge of gender roles, how marriage rituals are conducted today and enhanced my understanding of the differences between both past and present and traditional and modern.

This paper will describe the gender role through the rituals and concepts surrounding weddings. These include: the local concepts relating to marriage, terms of reference and address related to *qiz sormaq* (asking or looking for a girl), *gultoy* (engagement ceremony), *tesliq* (official permission), *toy* (the wedding ceremony), *bash yigit* (best man and best friend of the bride), *baslatqu* (bride price), *toylaq* (general term for all of the gifts or payments during the wedding ceremony that the groom's family gives to the bride), *qiz toy* (girl's marriage), *sikilek*

*Toy* (woman's marriage), *jugan toy* (second marriage) and *qiz qachumaq* (wife kidnapping). Also the *qizni gilem ustide oyge ekirmek* (carrying the bride in a carpet to her husband's house) *qizning altigha tash kuyup ogzidin mangmaq* (put a stone under the bride and running on the rooftop) and *suzini bermek or hetini bermek* (divorce). In Uyghur culture the family is symbolized by *oy* (house) and the house is symbolized by *uchaq* (fireplace) and these concepts have become central. The newly married couple has become "home-and- stoved" (*oyluk ochaqliq*), or simply "homed". The family is very important in Uyghur life and *oy* and *uchaq* have become almost holy in Uyghur culture. Uyghurs have a popular saying; *Uchaktin tutun chiqamak* (make smoke in stove) which means marriage or keeping the marriage alive. Uyghurs also say *Bir uchaktin tutun chiqamaq asan emes* (It is not easy to make smoke from a fireplace) which means it is not easy to manage a successful marriage or family. Here fire and smoke symbolize life and marriage. Marriage is not a private affair of individuals in Uyghur society. In arranging and preparing marriages, not only close kin and neighbors but also mosque functionaries, community elders and local government administrators play a role.

Throughout all wedding feasts and gift giving, strict gender roles are maintained. These gender specific roles have an important significance in Uyghur society and it will be the main focus of this paper.



Map: The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

Source from Millward, 2007

### Local concepts relating to marriage

In Keriya, a settlement in the South along the Silk Road, like other Uyghur villages in Xinjiang, marriage is in every aspect a source of interest and concern. The wedding ceremony and the interactions preceding or following it are important, but also marital status is a fundamental part of a person's social identity. The most important adult event in the life cycle for both boys and girls is marriage *turmush qurmaq* (make/establish life).

Weddings are "public" affairs and are looked forward to as occasions when young men and woman can dance and talk together and when there is plenty of good food to eat. The actual word for the host of a wedding is *toy igis* (owner) in Uyghur and there are in fact two "owners", since weddings take in place two locations, the bride's and the groom's households.

The most widely accepted and prevailing beliefs and values about marriage are traced back to Islam by the people, and Islamic interpretations of the need for and the way of marrying are frequently invoked. Accordingly, Islam not only recommends but also prescribes marriage. The Quran and Hades, which are sources of reference for imams, describe Islamic prescription as applicable for all those except the very old, the unimportant or the very poor (because they cannot provide for the expenses of a wedding or bride price). The prophet Mohammed is quoted as having said, "Among the young people those who are strong and capable enough should marry because marriage is the best way to prevent oneself from looking at those who are haram (forbidden) and protect one's *numus* (honor)" (Tirmizi Hn. 1081, M. Mesabih Hn. 3080). An unmarried man is not only socially deprived of adulthood but also he could be considered as being *gunah* (sinful) as

he may be “looking” at those women who are *haram* for him. A woman has to be under the control of someone other than herself, and until marriage this protection is given to her by her nearest male kin i.e. her father and brother(s). After marriage, control of her sexuality is partly transferred to her husband.

### **Terms of reference and address related to marriage**

Marriage marks adult status for both men and women, but it does not mean breaking away from parental authority or acquiring economic self-sufficiency. It does not bring economic independence immediately, but confirms the adult status with symbols, terminology and more participation in the community (village meetings, public prayers, weddings and funerals).

For boys it is puberty and for girls it is marriage that is the turning point for being addressed or referred to in adult terms. Girls, until married, are called *qiz bala* (girl child) or *nariside* (the period before reaching puberty). *Qiz* means girl, virgin or daughter. After marrying and losing her virginity, young women are called *sikilek* or *chokan* (meaning married once and not being a virgin). People also refer to a woman as “married woman”, “wife” or “wife of so and so.”

Young men’s marital status, on the other hand, is not directly reflected in or evident from the reference or address terms applied. A boy of 16-17 is considered to have become a man, especially if he is to be married soon, and participates more in community ceremonies. The reference term for adult men *balghetke yetken* (the young man who has reached puberty) and not married is *yigit*.

The terms in Uyghur for the act of marriage are: 1) *toy*, 2) *Hutun almaq* and *erge tegmek* and 3) *omur sodisi* (Hebibulla, 1993:127). The first is reciprocal; it means “married” for a man or woman. *Hutun almaq* on the other hand, means “buy wife” thus meaning to marry, but only for men. *Erge tegmek*, means “go to a man’s house as a wife” and refers to women. Also it means recognition of a husband’s superior power and dependence on her husband. The third term, *omur sodisi*, is reciprocal and means “commercial trading of life”.

### **Age of marriage**

The general pattern is that women marry earlier than men. In old Uyghur tradition generally men married at 16-18 and women married at 15-17 (Hebibulla, 1993, p.237). Sometimes girls between ten and fourteen and sometimes even earlier married this of course is prior to the assumed age of sexual maturity (Beller-Han 2008:237). From my observation, the age span for a woman marrying for the first time is estimated to have changed to 17-19 and for a man to 18-24. Regarding relationships or marriage among the urban Uyghurs such as in Urumchi/Urumqi, the majority of men outlined plans and future inspirations that needed to be carried out before they could settle down, that is, engaged in a ‘committed’ relationship. For men to be successful it is necessary to be regarded as ‘serious’, ‘respected’ or ‘responsible’ men, and the final stage of attaining adult manhood is with the social status of respected, worthy men. The average age at marriage has increased much more among urban Uyghurs. Generally girls marry between the ages of 24-28 and boys marry between 24-28 or later. The average age of marriage is gradually increasing both among rural and urban Uyghurs. Some Uyghurs who have pursued careers marry in

their thirties. This has meant they have embraced choices like living on their own, being more independent, and living with or without friends or relatives, instead of staying with their parents. Fashionable dressing, going out and having progressive attitudes have become important markers of present day urban or township Uyghur identity. This also means that couples prefer to live on their own rather than with parents or kin, and there is increasing emphasis on love and companionship as a basic criterion for marriage (Moore, 1988: 116). These changes have resulted from a combination of several factors, particularly the impact of education, western culture and economics. Chinese “modern culture”, spread through Chinese labor migration, mass media such radio, newspapers and television have helped to bring new ideas into rural as well as into urban areas.

## Marriage Process

### a) Match making

The concept of *qerz* (debt) and *periz* (obligation) expresses a major cultural value, and is a window into the Uyghur parent-child relationship. Rural Uyghur parents explain their responsibility and obligation to their children as *yaxshi bala chong qilamq* (raising well behaved children) and *oyluk ochaqliq qilmaq* (helping them get married). That responsibility is slightly different among most urban Uyghurs. Urban Uyghurs generally explain their responsibility and obligations as raising well behaved children, choosing the right type of education, helping them get a good job or preparing them for some type of career, and, finally, helping them get married. *Razi qilish* (satisfying) cultural expectations in the moral realm is another important Uyghur cultural value (Clark, 1999, pp 80-81).

The Quran states that marriage is a partnership to be shared between a man and a woman, based upon love, respect, and consent. Marriage is seen as the joining of two families, and parents have great deal of say about the choice of marriage partner both among rural and urban Uyghurs. There is now a general acceptance among educated urbanite families that young people should be able to choose their spouses freely (Clark, 1999). In Keriya, like other Uyghur villages, the marriage process starts from *qiz sormaq* (asking or looking for a girl). First, the parents of the boy ask about a suitable girl from their relatives, neighbors and friends and try to find the right girl for their boy. When a groom’s family is looking for a bride, their first priority is to find *tigi bar kiz* (a girl from a good or noble family) and *ehlaqlik* or *yawash* (well behaved). The suspicion that a girl might have done something to cause her to lose her virginity prior to being safely married with her father’s consent, will shame and mark out, not only her, but also her father and brothers. It will label them as incapable of living up to local norms of masculinity. If that happens a man may be forced, even against his will, into violence against an errant daughter or sister in order to reclaim his own social standing. She may be beaten, thrown out of the family home, and in many cases married off to a much older man unlikely to demand a virgin.

Uyghurs have a popular saying, *Ansigha karap qizini al* (See her mother and then marry her daughter) and *Anisi buzuqning qizi buzuq* (If the mother is depraved then her daughter is also depraved). Knowing the girl is not enough; the groom’s family needs to learn more about the girl’s family before asking for the girl from her parents. This is where the knowledge of relatives, neighbors or friends is important. This process is called in Uyghur *qiz sormaq* or *qiz surushturmek*. After choosing *muhapik birini* (someone who

fits their criteria), they then send the *elchi* (ambassador) to ask for the girl. The *elchi*'s role in the marriage process is as a matchmaker or negotiator. There is another kind of match making event that might take place for the specific purpose of bringing marriageable young people together. Although found in cities, this type of matchmaking is not very popular in Uyghur society. This match making tradition still exists in many Muslim counties, Central Asian states, part of Ireland and Tibet (Monger, 2004).

In Keriya, like other Uyghur villages, respectable, influential older people are sent to the girl's family as *elchi*. Generally 2-3 *elchi* go to the bride's family home in the evening to test the family's willingness. Through the *elchi* the boy's family indirectly learns about the girl's family situation and tries to gauge their willingness to the marriage. Girls and their parents also have their own criteria which is usually marriages with good families that can provide for the girls' economic well-being and peace. The ideal marriage candidate, according to the bride's family is a young man who has a secure form of employment with a skilled job, such as carpenter, cook, businessman, even better if he has a professional job such as a mechanic, teacher or doctor. Mostly girls and parents want wealth for girls' security, not for getting rich.

The bride's family does not easily say 'yes'. If the girl's father (or her brother or uncles if she does not have a father) says, *Hudayim buyrusa, nisipse bula* (If God is willing, it will happen) and that they will consult with rest of the family members or elders, this means "Please come back some other time," and that means a possible 'yes'. If the girl's father says, *Qizimiz kichik* (our girl is not of a marriageable age yet), *Beshi baghlaghliq* (she is engaged already) or *Bir yerge suzumiz bar* (we gave a promise to someone else), it means definitely 'no'. In the case of a possible yes' the *elchi* must go more than one time to make sure.

After the groom's parents have got a positive and clear answer from the bride's parents through the *elchi*, then the groom's parents go to the girl's family to ask for the girl. Generally the bride's family knows that the groom's parents are coming, so they are welcomed by the bride's parents and offered tea and food. When groom's family comes, according to Uyghur custom, they bring bread, rice, sugar, tea, scarves, coats or other presents. It depends on the bride's family's economic situation. After the parents say hello to each other, the father of the groom starts to explain the purpose of the visit. He says, "We have a grown boy and you have a grown girl. In our tradition when boys and girls are of marriageable age, they should marry. So in the name of the God we have come to ask for your girl for our boy." The girl's family does not easily say yes. The girl's father (or representative) says; *Qizimizning risqi siling oyde ohshaydu. Beguluk, silige bermey kimgе birimiz*. (It seems that our daughter's lot in life is fated to be with your family. We could give her to you; if we do not give her to you, then who shall we give her to?). Then the groom's parents stand and say, *barikalla, barikalla* (thanks, thanks) and also bride's parents stand and say, *mubarek bolsun* (congratulations) and they congratulate each other.

After both families agree about the marriage, they then prepare for the *barikallisi* (thanksgiving ceremony). The families schedule the thanksgiving ceremony through the *elchi*. Families' relatives, neighbors and friends are invited to the ceremony which is a public announcement of the marriage. This ceremony marks the marriage's "legal status" in the village and means the girl belongs to or is engaged to the boy. The groom does not

go to the thanksgiving ceremony, nor does the bride walk around as she is ‘in hiding’ on this day. This is a custom expected by both families. If the bride-to-be walks around freely at the ceremony, people might think that she is not a good girl or does not know the proper custom.

In some cases in Keriya, some groom’s parents express interest in a particular teenage girl and poliely, directly or indirectly, let the girl’s parents know about their interest. This interest is followed up over the years. This tradition is called *qiz igilimek* (to obtain a girl). This happens among close relatives, good friends and neighbors. In most cases it ends with no marriage.

### **b) Engagement Ceremony**

*Gultoy*, also called *meslat chay*, *gul qoymak* or *gul qoydi* and *pacha toy* are the processes before marriage. *Meslet* (from *meslihet*) means to discuss. *Meslat chay* means the discussion ceremony. *Gultoy* is the day of mutual agreement of *toylaq* (gifts for the bride) and *baslatqu* (bride price). The day that the wedding arrangements are settled, a council of elders is convened that includes men, women and children, about 50-100 people. It depends on how big the groom’s family is. Village leaders, mullahs, close relatives, neighbors and friends participate in this ceremony. However, the men and women are separated during the ceremony. At least one woman is invited to the ceremony that must not only be eloquent, but be respected by her fellow villagers. Her job in the ceremony is to help the groom’s family to negotiate the *toylaq*. The guests come from the bride’s side and from the groom’s side, but mostly from the groom’s side. *Gultoy* is celebrated in the bride’s family house. The groom’s family and guests come to the ceremony only to sit, talk, drink, and eat the whole day while the bride’s side prepares all of the food, fresh *koruma*, *kumech* and *polo*. The groom’s family and guests bring gifts (salt, rice, a sheep or goat, cooking oil, tea, sugar, bread, scarves, coats, trousers and fabric...etc.) to the bride’s family. The groom’s relatives, neighbors and friends who come to ceremony help the groom’s family to bring the gifts to the bride’s house. Sometimes the groom’s *mihmanliri* (guests) share or divide all of the gifts to bring. They get together at the groom’s house before they go to bride’s house and put all the *dostihan* (tablecloth) one place. This tradition call *Dostihan yogimek* (wrap up *dostihan*) Then the groom’s side brings all the *dostihan* to the *oghul teretp* (groom’s side).

In the *Gultoy* ceremony, the men’s group and the women’s group are separated and divided. Women from the groom’s side discuss and negotiate with women from the bride’s side about the details of *toylaq* (gifts to the bride which includes socks, scarves, traditional coats, shirt, hat, boots etc.) In the *Gultoy* they also discuss and negotiate gifts to the groom (generally socks, traditional hats, coats, trousers, belts, shoes or traditional boots). Men from the groom’s side discuss and negotiate with men from the bride’s side about the *baslatqu* (bride price). *Baslatqu* is also called *sut heqqi* or *anisning sut haqqi* (to give or repay for her mother’s milk). It is mostly gold or it can be cash. *Toylaq* and *baslatqu* in bigger cities is about 10 times more than in the villages. It depends on the two families’ economic situation and social status. For the first time a girl is married, she can expect to get or has the right to get *baslatqu*. Then the second or third time she marries, she mostly does not get *baslatqu*, but only gets a small number of gifts, many fewer than at the first

marriage. There is the connotation of the *baslatqu* being a payment for the girl's virtue or virginity. So after a woman has been married once, she is no longer a virgin and can be called *sikilek* (one who is married and no longer a virgin), so she cannot get *baslatqu* at her second or third marriage. Because of this, a few Uyghur young men who cannot afford the *toylaq* and *baslatqu* marry a *sikilek*. Recently Uyghurs in the city break this tradition and at the second or even at the third marriage the bride's side requests *baslatqu*.

In the *Gultoy* ceremony, both sides sometimes discuss all details of the marriage ceremony and even schedule the date of the ceremony, which may be a few weeks or months later. But sometimes it does not happen immediately and weeks or months later the groom's side and bride's side make decisions about the date of marriage and other details by themselves or through the *elchi*. It depends on how long it takes to get the marriage certificate and if the groom's family is ready for the marriage, especially economically. One or two days after the *Gultoy*, 2-3 people (mostly women) from the groom's family visit the bride's family to say thanks and make sure everything is okay. When the groom's family visits, they bring fresh food, for example, *polo* (with meat), *manta*, *soqta kumech* or bread and sugar cubes. This visit is called *haduq somaq* and is one of the processes during marriage in the Uyghur tradition.

### C) Official permission

After the *gultoy*, generally the bride's and groom's family start to concern themselves with the *tesliq* (permission). *Tesliq*, also called *toy het*, (marriage letter). According to Chinese Civil Law, Chinese citizens must get permission (a marriage certificate) before the marriage ceremony. This certification, called *tesliq*, *toy het* or *hongshu* (hongshu is the Chinese term, it means red book) and goes by these three terms and all are used by Uyghurs these days. The fundamental conditions to obtain the marriage certificate are: the bride and groom must be age 18 or older, they both had to have graduated from no less than elementary school and neither must have a serious infectious disease. However, these rules are not always applied in Uyghur villages. All of the people who want to get married must go to the fangyizhan (prevent illness station) in Keriya City for their medical check. In Keriya, marriage without the *nikah* (religious marriage ceremony), which is commonly called *imam nikahi*, is unacceptable. This means that the civil marriage (getting permission from the government) does not confirm a marriage; only a religious ceremony confirms the marriage. From 1980 the government started to control marriage and tried to impose Chinese civil law, but were still not always successful. Most middle-aged and older villagers still do not have marriage certificates in Xinjiang.

### D) Preparations for the Marriage Ceremony

After getting the marriage certificate and scheduling the date of the marriage the families both start preparing for the *toy* (marriage or marriage ceremony). Between 4 to 8 people from both sides separately go to Keriya City and shop for all the necessary things (the *toylaq* and *baslatqu* for the bride and gifts for the groom, for example: rice, carrots, cooking oil, and plates...etc) for the *toy*. This shopping is called *Toyining kam kusasini qilmaq*. When buying the *toylaq* and *baslatqu* (generally golden necklaces, bracelets, earrings and rings or cash) the bride's side (the bride and her family representatives)



is asked what they like and then the groom's side buys it. Everywhere in Xinjiang the bride participates when buying *toylaq* and *baslatqu*. After the shopping is finished the families start to deliver *baghaq* or *teklipname* (invitations). In the past the invitations were delivered orally, but now most of marriage ceremonies are announced by proper paper invitations *teklipname* which come from the Dongkovruk section of Urumchi. Invitations are delivered just 3 or 4 days before the ceremony. In Xinjiang outsiders (including Han Chinese colleagues) are readily invited to a Uyghur wedding, but they are less likely to be asked to participate in a Uyghur funeral or a commemoration feast for the dead.

*Toy* is one of the best times to be together and have fun for all. In the days before the feast it is also necessary recruit all the people who will be setting up the feast area, preparing food and serving the guests. Both the bride's and the groom's families participate. Friends, relatives and neighbors, both men and women, help with this. Men are responsible for slaughtering and butchering the animals, setting up large cooking pots and the cooking area. Women prepare nan and lumech, traditional Uyghur bread. Some younger men and boys help with peeling and cutting up carrots for the polo, but otherwise, the cooking is done by women.

### **E) The Wedding Eve**

*Pacha* (part of something) or *pacha toy*, means part of the marriage or marriage ceremony. According to Uyghur tradition, one day before the marriage ceremony, the groom's side brings salt, cooking oil, rice, a sheep or goat and one donkey cartload of wood to the bride's family. This activity is called *pacha toyini apamaq*. The exact measure of these things is decided by the groom's family; if the groom's family's economic situation is good and when the bride's side expects more guests, then the groom's side brings more salt, rice, cooking oil and wood. The purpose of all this is for the next day's celebration, when the groom's side comes to take the bride, as the bride's family cooks food and offers it to the bride's side (100-150 guests). The bride and groom do not participate in this *pacha toy* ceremony. Also it is time for the groom's side and the bride's sides to learn from each other the latest situation regarding the preparations for the marriage. Both sides make final preparations for the marriage ceremony.

### **F) Feast and Wedding Celebration**

The ceremony among Uyghurs and other Turkic people in Xinjiang today extends over several days and can be divided into three parts: the religious wedding (*nikah*), the traditional wedding (*toy*), and the official civil marriage ceremony (*resmi toy* or *tesliq*). These three parts vary widely in their combination and sequence during the entire wedding ceremony. In towns in which the authority of the state is more present, *Tesliq* is an obligation. Islam has also played a major role in the development and maintenance of ethnic identity among Uyghurs. In a fundamental sense the beliefs and practices of Islam touch the life of every Uyghur. Kemal Karpat describes how pre-Islamic Turkic culture survived, in a transformed manner, after the arrival of Islam by adapting to and acquiring elements from the religion (Karpat 1984). From birth, circumcision, marriage to death there are both Islamic and pre-Islamic symbols and rituals. Most of the educated

urban Uyghurs are intimately familiar with its symbols, and incorporate them into their conception of Uyghur ethnic identity.

During the marriage ceremony, music is arranged for various venues. The team is normally made up of 25 people and is arranged for by the groom's side. This music team plays Uyghur traditional music and sings songs. Young apprentices play percussion on the *dap* (flat round frame drum) while the master sings and plays the *dutar* (a two-string long-necked lute), the *tambur* (another long-necked lute, with a double melody string) or the *rewap* (a mandolin-like lute with double strings and a round, skin-covered body). The young men from the groom's side dance Uyghur traditional dances and sing in a separate room or area from the men and women. After taking the bride to the groom's house, all the young girls (the bride's invited friends) dance to lively music about one or two hours. Also these days electronic music from VCDs and tape recorders have been introduced in daily life and subsequently into the marriage ceremony. This modern mode of music has slowly begun to replace the traditional music team. Today there are a lot of marriages in the city that are celebrated in a large restaurant or club where modern popular and western music and dance has replaced traditional Uyghur dance.

### **Wedding Feast and Gift Exchange**

There is a desire among Uyghurs to match the expectations of the Uyghur community by demonstrating overwhelming hospitality especially at weddings. With the whole village present, the *toy igisi* (host of the wedding) is expected to provide much rich food. Feasting still provides an avenue for individuals and families to acquire respect and prestige in addition to political and material support. Since the reform era, especially since 1990s guest lists have continually been expanding, and wedding parties, of necessity, have moved out of the home into either state-run cafeterias or, for the wealthy, private restaurants. These days food services and celebrations continue to expand even among the township Uyghurs. The main course is always polo, a rice pilaf dish cooked in oil with shredded carrots, onions, and topped with mutton. Meat is an essential ingredient for every course. It is not uncommon for poor families to cut costs by serving a plate of polo or plate of vegetable soup with only a few small pieces of meat per person.

Throughout the early twentieth century until today there have been cultural struggles over wedding feasts, which were demonstrations of hospitality and generosity. Families would go into debt in order to pay for the wedding feast for the whole community. Jadid reforms of the early twentieth century argued that this was a waste of money, and those weddings, and funeral ceremonies and feasts as well, should not be occasions for conspicuous consumption. These days some *yengi molla* (new mullah) and young people promote being modest, not wasting money and not going into debt for the sake of "show" in Uyghur society.

In Uyghur cultures, the sexes do not mix during wedding, funeral and many other ceremonies Uyghur often reference Prophet Muhammad saying "that when man and women are alone together there is a third among them-Shaytan or Satan" (Tirmidhi). Customary rules backed by Islamic law ensured the maintenance and reproduction of the household by prescribing normative behavior and modes of conflict resolution (Beller-Hann, 2008) and it is still true for contemporary Xinjiang. In Uyghur villages, male and female guests

are entertained separately in the wedding ceremony. Generally there are three different sections in the Uyghur traditional *Toy* and they are hosted in different rooms. Men, women and young men (the groom's friends) make up three sections of the groom's family. Men, women and young women (the bride's friends) also make up three sections in the bride's family. Children are free to go anywhere in the *Toy*. In the other public ceremonies, (except the *Toy*) there are two sections divided into men and women. This division is only among the relatives; guests who are friends are not divided. However, most of the time the owner of the household entertains them in a special guest room which depends on their relationship (close or far). If they are very close family friends, they can share the same room with the family members. If not, they are entertained by the head of the house (normally the father and mother of the bride and groom) in the guest room. Each guest brings gifts to the host of the *Toy* which gifts can be cash or in-kind. When another person in the circle gets married and holds a wedding, he is obliged to send a gift of equal value. The gifts given to the *Toy* owners are called *shokum*. *Shokum* can be cash or in-kind. Similar cultural practices and rituals, such as hosting and gift-giving in Zawut, Ghulja and among urban Uyghurs in Urumchi have been discussed by Dautcher (2009) and Clark (1999).

The *shokum* is given to the women, normally the mother of the bride or the groom's sister, by the women guests. Men never give or take *shokum*. Therefore men always go to the *toy* or other public ceremony with their wife or daughter.

People believe *Shokum* is an expression of friendship and also a kind of "investment". A woman believes that if she gives today, then she can get back something later when her son or daughter marries or in some other family ceremony. The processes of the wedding ceremony and gift exchange in Keriya are quite similar with rest of both rural and urban Uyghur society in Xinjiang (Clark, 2005; Dautcher, 2009) and in Central Asia. This symbolic meaning of gift exchange as just described is of course by no means confined to the Uyghur cultural climate, but is universal.

In the villages, the *Toy* starts from about 7:00 am until about 1:00 pm, the groom's side entertains guests and celebrates together in the groom's family home and the bride's side does likewise in the bride's family home. About 1:00 pm, (or earlier if the bride's house is far from the groom's house) about 100-150 wedding party members of the groom's side go to fetch the bride. About 20-30 *oghul yigit* (young men who are friends of the groom) comprise one group, men comprise the second and women from the groom's side are the third group. The 20- 30 *yigit* shout all of the way to bride's house and all the way back to the groom's house. On the way to the bride's house they shout, *Alla, Alla*, when the *yigit* get close to the bride's house they shout, *Alla, Alla teyar bolsun kiz balla (Alla, Alla, get the girls ready)*. It is an announcement to everyone that they are coming to take the bride and her female companions. When the *yigit* arrives at the bride's family house area, they start to shout more vociferously, a traditional music ensemble plays music and sings. The *yigit* accompanies the musicians in singing and the young men dance.

After a short negotiation between the bride's side and the groom's side, the women from the groom's side are welcomed to come into the courtyard and are shown to the main reception hall. Then the men from the bride's side come out of the gate to welcome the men's group from the groom's side and shake hands and say hello to the guests one by one. Then they enter the courtyard and are shown into another guest room. And then

young men from the bride's side carry bread and meat to welcome the young men *yigit* outside the big gate. Young men *yigit* from the groom's side shake hands and say hello to the representatives from the bride's side one by one. These three groups are entertained in three different rooms. Women from the groom's side carry all the *Toylaq* and *baslatqu* to the bride. Young men from the groom's side also bring some fruit (apple, grapes etc.) and seeds to the bride and her female friends. Only one or two young men give these gifts to a representative of the bride's friends. The rest of the young men and men do not see the bride until she arrives at the groom's house.

In the past brides only invited their female friends and the groom only invited his male friends to her/his wedding ceremony. But these days some brides and grooms can invite their male and female friends. It depends on her/his family and location. Some families have accepted this practice, some of them not.

After the groom's side has arrived, the bride's representatives immediately start the tea service with bread and then the *Toylaq achmaq* starts. The *Toylaq achmaq* (open or show the *toylaq*/gifts) and *nikah* (religious ceremony) are two important parts of the marriage ceremony. When showing the gifts one woman from the groom's side loudly announces the name of each gift and shows it to the bride's representatives one by one. For example, the woman from the groom's side says, "This is Tohtihan's hat, this is Tohtihan's summer shoes and this is Tohtihan's socks and this is Tohtihan's gold ring etc. (Tohtihan being the bride's name.) This "show" ceremony is the most lively and exciting part of the marriage ceremony. The bride's relatives and neighbors watch this ceremony with great interest. The bride's representatives watch the unfolding display and check the all gifts very carefully against their list. As indicated, both sides have an agreement and have made a list of the gifts before the marriage ceremony. So *toylaq achmak* is "show" time as well as "check" time. These gifts mean a lot for the bride's family in terms of respect and prestige. If the bride receives a lot of gifts, it means more prestige and respect. If the gifts are too few it can cause gossip by some relatives and neighbors. During this ceremony, the bride's family gives special food to the groom, *tosh* (the chest of a sheep) and eggs. At this time, the groom's friends joke with him and say, "Eat more and stay strong for the wedding night".

The next step in the process is the religious ceremony. It is called the *Nikah toy* (religious ceremony) or *Nikah Uqumaq* (read a Quranic verse). Couples and their parents, however, do not consider themselves properly married until they go through the traditional Islamic wedding ceremony known as *Nikah Uqux*. *Nihak* is the strongest and most provocative form and an act of resistance in ritual terms, because it challenges, tests and tries governmental decisions on religion. The Imam, who is contracted by the groom's family and comes to the bride's house with the men on the groom's side, reads the Quranic verse two times in two different places. First the Imam goes to the bride's house to read the Quranic verse. The bride's father is involved in the *Nikah* ceremony as a *guvachi* (witness). During the Quranic verse reading in the bride's room, the Imam asks the bride's father, "Are you willing to give your daughter to X's son X?" The bride's father answers, *He, oz rizaliqim bilen berdim* (Yes, I willingly give my daughter.) The Imam then asks the bride, "Are you willing to marry X's son X?" Normally the bride answers, *tegdim* (yes) even if she is being forced to marry by her parents. After finishing the first part of the *Nikah*, the Imam then goes to the room where the men are gathered for the second part. The

groom, two or three friends of the groom, the bride's father and a few men from the bride's side are involved in the second part of the ceremony. The Imam reads the same Quranic verse and then asks the bride's father once again his willingness to give his daughter. The bride's father says the same thing the second time. Then the Imam asks the groom and he says loudly *aldim* (I bought). At the conclusion of the *nikah*, the imam recites a prayer from the Quran. After the Imam finishes praying, he recites from the Quran to a small bowl of salt. People believe that this prayer to the salt is holy. He then takes two pieces of bread, dips them into the salt and gives one to the groom and sends the other one to the bride in her room. The groom always tries to eat first because people believe that whoever eats the salty bread first that his or her word is much more influential and decisive for the rest of their lives together. The groom is in a much better position to be the first to eat as he gets the bread directly from the Imam. This marriage custom of eating the *nan* dipped in salt is pre-Islamic. On account of the basic nature of salt and *nan* to human life, these two elements are considered holy among the Uyghurs.

After finishing the *Nikah* ceremony, the women of the bride's family and her friends start to prepare the bride. The bride changes all her clothes with the help of her friends. The groom also changes his clothes after the *Nikah*. Before the bride dresses in her new clothes, she sends one pair of shoes back to the groom's women's side". The bride's side says "These shoes are not big enough and we want bigger shoes". The groom or someone from his family puts some money, about 5-10 Yuan, into the shoes and sends them back to the bride.

During the whole marriage ceremony the bride is expected to be shy and to look upset or pretend to be upset. She cries, even if she is willing to marry. It is also expected by the community. If she cries and is upset, it means she loves her parents and family and she does not want to leave them. If the bride does not cry, it causes gossip in the community. People will say *Qashirip qaghan aran qiptiken. Kuzdin bir tamche yash kelmidi* (She is such a shameless young woman who cannot wait to get married and have sex with her husband). Therefore the bride cries all the way to the groom's home from her parents'. One would think that the bride feels ashamed and frightened, but her crying is expected behavior. It symbolizes the fact that she has left her father's home and moved in with her husband's family. In other words, crying is not an expression of personal feelings, but is instead part of the rituals. This is not to say that brides (or grooms) do not feel shy, especially since they had often not seen their partner before, or not since the day they applied for the marriage certificate.

After the *Nikah* and when the groom is dressed, the *yigit* (groom and his friends) leave the bride's house and start to shout, "*Alla, Alla teyar bolsun kiz balla, saqlap qaldi oghul balla*" (Alla, Alla, get the girls ready, the young men are waiting.) outside the bride's house. They also play music and dance. During the waiting time there is plenty of singing, dancing, and joking around. When the bride is ready to go, her brothers or close male relatives put her on a carpet, blanket or rug and four men carry her to the horse or truck while the bride covers her face and hair, so no one can see. In line with Islamic traditions, hair must not be shown to strange men and village etiquette requires the wearing of the headscarf from puberty onwards. The custom is less diligently observed by township Uyghurs.

In rural areas, usually after the bride is taken from her family, the procession does not

go directly to the groom's home. First, the bride, groom and their best friends are taken by the driver and they ride or drive around her family's house with the horses, jeep or truck. If the bride's family has sand dunes around their house, they can go in any direction around the house for about 10 minutes and then bring the bride back to her parent's house. At this time, the bride unveils to let the parents see her face for about five minutes before she is covered again. This ceremony is called *korsetme* (to show). The rest of the women, men and young men wait and watch the *korsetme*. In most of the villages in Keriya the *korsetme* ceremony takes place late in the afternoon or the next day. Rituals "are means of acting on the world" (Horton, 1982), "they are ways of doing things with symbols" (Gerholm, 1988 p190). This comparison considers how different versions of the "same" rituals, they bear the same name, are acknowledged locally as comparable, and are performed at different times, albeit in different social contexts and are intended to act in different ways.

On the way to the groom's house, the young men shout "*Alla, Alla begenlirige heshqalla, Alla, alla bir tekide yatqanlar* (Alla, Alla, and thanks for giving us the bride... the couple who sleep on one pillow...) they play music and dance on the way back to the groom's house. After bringing the bride to the groom's house and seating her in the large reception hall, the groom's side starts serving tea and then food is served. After relaxing for half an hour, the groom's mother must dance and give *chachqu* (scattering raisins, candy or money) before she can see the bride's face. Even if her face is uncovered, the bride is not involved in any conversation and sits silently. After half an hour, the young girls and young boys can have a dance party with music, sometimes with live music, for about one hour. Sometimes religious families do not allow dance parties in Keriya, but in rural areas no one cares. The groom and his best man sit next to the bride until she shows her face. After unveiling the bride's face, the groom leaves and goes up to the roof, while the bride sits below, and walks back and forth several times. People believe if the groom walks on the roof when he marries, the bride will listen to her husband for the rest of her life and the groom's word will be very effective. Also before the bride has come, the groom's family puts a stone under her cushions. It means that the bride will stay forever in the new home. It is both a belief and a desire.

Two or three hours after the bride has been taken, a group of people (women, men and children) from the bride's side come to visit the bride and in her new home, if the groom's house is close by. But the bride's father does not come at this time, although the rest of her family can come. This ceremony is called *arqasidin kelmek*. The bride's *yengisi/yenge* (woman who acts as advisor to the bride) comes with this group of people. She brings *soqta kumech* (made with meat, fat, onions, flour and cooked in oil) to the *yigit* (young men). Sometimes the *yegne* willingly gives it to the 30-40 young man, but sometimes the young men, if they know who the *yenge* is, may attack her, snatching at and quarreling over the *kumech*. Whoever gets a bigger part, is called brave. During all the snatching and quarreling, the *kumech* falls into small pieces in the young men's hands and falls to the ground. Sometimes it cannot be found as it becomes very dirty. All the young men enjoy this *kumech* snatching and quarreling ceremony which is called *kumech talashmaq* (quarrel the *kumech*). It is a highlight and one of the most exciting parts of the wedding ceremony. However, this ceremony is slowly disappearing.

In the evening, at about 9 or 10, most of the guests go back home. The bride's *yengisi*

brings the bride to the groom's room and helps her enter the Bridal Chamber. Before she leaves the Bridal Chamber, the *yenge* gives some sexual education to the bride such as how to start, how to behave towards her husband etc. When the *yenge* leaves, she never tells the bride she is going to leave. She says, "I forget something and I need to get it" or "I need to do something out side. I will come back very soon, don't worry". The *yenge* then also advises the groom to treat his wife nicely. Most of the time the *yenge* says to the groom, "The bride is very young, she is yours forever, don't hurt her, please tame her slowly etc". The best man gives a *sawat* (introduction) to the groom before he enters the bridal chamber. For example, he describes how to take off her clothes and how to persuade her to have sex...etc. Only a man who has been married can be the best man. After the *yenge* leaves, and the best man gives his introduction, the groom goes to the bed.

Even if the bride and groom have had sexual experience before, they do not necessarily have specific knowledge and education about sexual relations. This topic is not discussed within the family, school or in public. Only the groom learns a little knowledge from the street when he is young. Sexual relations are still a secretive topic in Uyghur society. The *yenge* is the first person who comes to see the bride the next morning. She brings tea and sometimes brings the bride water to wash herself and instructs her on how to wash and pray. She then takes her to the groom's parents' home or room. This morning is considered very "shameful" and is an embarrassing time for the bride and groom. Because of this, the groom runs away from his family house early in the morning before the *yenge* comes. He goes to his friend's house or someplace else and he only comes back at noon with a friend. When most Uyghur young man marry they do not have an independent house, especially in rural areas and so he and his bride stay in his parents' house for several years and only then can they build their own house and move.

### **Best man and Best Friend of Bride**

*Bash yigit* literally means the head of young men and translated means the best man and maid or matron of honor. *Yigit* is a general term for a young man of marriage age, but also the bride's friends who come to the marriage ceremony are called *kiz yigit* (female *yigit*). Uyghur villages in Keriya, the bride and groom each have one *bash yigit*, but in the city, brides and grooms have three. The second and third *bash yigit* assist the first one and follow the first one's orders. The bride selects her *bash yigit* from among her best friends. The friend who will be her *bash yigit* can be married or not, it does not matter. But groom selects his *bash yigt* from among the men who are married, have experience and who and is well-respected in the community. The *bash yigit* organizes and entertains the *yigit* and makes sure food is served. Especially important is the *oghul bash yigt* (male *bash yigit's*) responsibility to keep the *yigit* from arguing and fighting and to give *sawat* (introduction) to the groom about his behavior in the bridal chamber. In a lot the wedding ceremony is the *yigit* often uses a lot alcohol, hashish or marijuana. It is supplied by the groom. These, however, are frowned upon by the general Uyghur community

The *yenge* is one of the bride's close female relatives (usually an aunt) who is more experienced in adult roles, She is selected as *yenge* by the bride's family and female relatives. The *yenge* stays at the groom's house for the night and has the responsibility of bringing the bride to the bridal chamber. She gives the bride detailed information and lets

her know about the secrets of the Bridal Chamber. Lack of information about sexuality and birth control are the cause disastrous results. There are no programs to teach women (men as well) about sexuality and sexual problems. Those topics are not talked about at home, school or in the community. Gender performance and the vital importance of projecting appropriate masculinities, in particular the honour-and-shame *numus* complex that dominates social relations in this setting, means that men tend to focus more on their ability to control their womenfolk as a symbol of their sexual powers.

The *yenge* comes back the next morning, and is the first person to say hello to the bride. She has the responsibility to bring the bride to meet the groom's family. She only leaves in the afternoon of the day after the wedding ceremony. In Keriya some groom's families have in the past requested proof of virginity. They put a *aq daki* (soft white cotton fabric) on the bed, and the next morning, after the *yenge* brings the bride to the guest room, they check the fabric. If they find blood, it means the bride was a virgin. If there is no blood, the grooms family slits open a *kakcha* (flat bread) and slips the white cloth inside. When the bride's family comes for a visit to the bride the next day, they silently show the pristine cloth. This has been the cause of divorce at times and was considered to be a big scandal's for bride family. The virginity test was never very common or strict in Keriya and that test no longer exists.

The rituals that surround the wedding night reflect this society's beliefs and values. For Uyghurs, this means reference to Islam and strictures associated with the protection of women and the maintenance of family. "Most people in the world are faced with recurrent practical problems of an economic and social nature. Some of them can only be resolved with the help of a specialist and, in many societies, such a specialist is people with a privilege access to higher powers. Other kinds of problems are existential ones; they may deal with the mystery of birth or fear of death, or simply ultimate meaning of life. Rituals are largely directed towards problems of the later kind, dramatizing them and giving them articulation-if not necessarily resolving them. Ritual has been defined as the social aspect of religion" (Erikson, 2010: 227).

Scholars have commonly promulgated the idea that "sex was a taboo subject during the period 1949-1980, when any materials relating to sex... were strictly forbidden" (Evans, 1997:3; Zha & Geng, 1992). Attention to matters of love and sex was for decades treated either as the shameful expression of warped minds or evidence of bourgeois individualism and detrimental to collective welfare. During that period, men and women were offered "no advise" on the these subjects (Evans 1995). Similar rules and practices existed in the Soviet Union regarding gender and sexuality (Kon, 1995). Xinjiang has endured decades of Chinese Puritanism, a time when the government's stance was that people naturally have sufficient knowledge of sex and do not need help. Indeed the very word was banned. The concept was that too much time and energy spent on this might distract people from building the socialist/communist state. This had left even the most highly educated Uyghurs ignorant of sex. For Muslims, however, sex has always been an important part of religion, and the Islamic jurists encouraged men to satisfy their wives (Imam 1997). Even though this has not informed popular practices in Xinjiang, the emphasis on sex has remained but is unfortunately no longer accompanied by the relevant knowledge. Even pre-marital sexual contacts for men are rare. Xinjiang, both in urban and rural area, has



neither psychotherapists nor marriage consolers to whom people can turn when they have personal issues or when their relationship is in trouble.

It appears, though, that a double standard still applies in Uyghur society, where it is more acceptable for men to actively pursue sex, and take multiple partners (or wives among the wealthy Uyghurs in urban cities). On the other hand, women are sanctioned for being sexually active, constructed as ‘loose’ and promiscuous. It is taboo for women to have had sexual experiences prior to marriage. Where women fear that expressing their sexuality will bring accusations of lack of femininity or of unfaithfulness, they will find it difficult to relax enough to enjoy themselves. In Xinjiang girls are watched closely, especially among the rural Uyghurs, so that most young people do not even get the chance to kiss or pet prior to their first intercourse on their wedding night. They may in fact not have set eyes on one another before the wedding, and the bride will most likely never previously have experienced any conscious sexual feelings. Coupled with the ignorance of most men on the subject of female physiology, this makes it extremely rare for brides to enjoy anything about sex, especially in the beginning. Pahlen (1964) and Colette Harris (2004) write of similar cultural practices and problems regarding gender and sexuality in the Central Asian Muslim states.

## Payments

### A) Baslatqu

*Baslatqu* is also called “*sut heqqi*” or “*anisning sut aqqi*” (to give or repay for her mother’s milk) and “*qizliq heqqi*” (girl’s virtue or virginity). *Baslatqu* is a kind of deposit or guarantee of her marriage. If for any reason the bride is divorced by her husband, the bride has the right to keep her *baslatqu* (jewelry or cash). If the bride commits a dishonorable misdeed, such as having an affair, or the bride divorces the husband, then the husband’s family has a right to ask for the return of the *baslatqu*.

### B) Toylaq

*Toylaq* is a general term for all of the gifts or payments during the wedding ceremony that the groom’s family gives to the bride. *Toylaq* includes *baslatqu*. After a woman has been married once, she is no longer a virgin and can be called *sikilek* (one who is married and no longer a virgin) and so she get less *toylaq* at her second or third marriage. Because of this, a few poor Uyghur young men who cannot afford the *toylaq* and marry with a *sikilek*. If a young man who has never been married marries a *sikilek*, it means he and his family loses his face in the community and is subject to gossip for many years. People believe that if a young man’s first marriage is to a *sikilek* it means she might bring bad luck to him. There is a popular saying; “*Sikilek bilen toy qilsa tetur pishane bup qalidu*” (If a young man marries a *sikilek* his luck will be reversed). Even if a girl has lost her virginity before she marries she is still counted “*kiz*” (virgin). In this case, she and her family are eligible and have a right to ask for *toylaq* (gifts and bride price). Virginity is important in Uyghur tradition. Even though grooms always expect to marry someone who is a virgin, they often do not make any effort to verify her virginity after marriage. Even if a groom finds she not a virgin, most of time he will prefer to keep silent. Uyghurs do not have strict requirements, punishment or controls on virginity and affairs like people in the Middle

East. According to my data, in a remote herding area, recently there were two brides who had babies six months after they married. Their husbands got angry. The groom's friends laughed and made fun of them and people gossiped about the grooms and the brides. But grooms and their families accepted the brides and their babies. This is an unusual event for most Uyghurs in Xinjiang, but this happens in rural areas in Xinjiang.

### **The hair-tying rituals**

In Keriya a middle-aged woman, about 30-40 years old, is called a *jugan*. A girl's first marriage is called *kiz toy* (virgin marriage) and *jugan toy* is a lady's or woman's marriage. Men and woman (husband and wife) celebrate their marriage again when they are mature (30-40 years old) and when they have two to three children. We can say *jugan toy* is their second marriage. It is also called *chachvagh toy* (the hair-tying rituals) and *bileklik*. In Uyghur society, hair has symbolic meanings. Ideally a Uyghur woman should grow her hair as long as possible. (Long hair symbolizes femininity and is traditionally associated with good luck.) Having a *jugan toy* means that a man and a woman have reached maturity and it is time to show this. After the *jugan toy*, the husband and wife have their own family property (house, sheep, goats and land) and they make their own decisions. Before *jugan toy* men, women and their children belong to the extended family of the husband's parents. They work together and they share the produce (crops or money) with the entire household.

When to celebrate their *jugan toy* is not only the couple's decision but also their parents should agree and support their decision. Only then can the *jugan toy* ceremony take place. The groom's parents should believe that their 'bride' will stay with her husband forever. If the groom's side cannot see that the wife is secure in her husband's house, they will not allow the ceremony to take place. If the bride's family believes their daughter's place is secure, then they allow the couple to celebrate their *jugan toy* and support them by giving them sheep, goats, boxes, rugs, blankets etc. The *Jugan toy* ceremony is only celebrated in Keriya and these days it is disappearing, only living on in remote areas.

These days, in a lot of villages in Keriya, like in the big cities, families celebrate the couple's household establishment just after the marriage. Sometimes this happens the same day as the marriage. This ceremony is called *yoqlash* (to visit). In this ceremony both the bride and the groom's side give gifts (pillows, bowls, spoons, pans, blankets, rugs etc.) to the new married couple to support their new life.

### **Marriage Types**

Uyghur custom is that a man usually marries only one woman, but a polygamy system does exist among the Uyghurs. Polygamy has been banned since 1949 (Hebibulla, 1993). Today there are few polygamous marriages that exist underground or secretly among the Uyghurs across Xinjiang, especially among rich Uyghur businessman. Polygamy has never been popular in Uyghur society now or in the past. However, sometimes a man's wife who was very sick and could not fulfill her duties such as sexual companionship or cooking, allowed her husband to marry second wife. It is also not very popular among a man's children because they do not want to share the family inheritance and also because this kind of marriage is not welcome in the community. However, it existed as late as the 1990s in Keriya.

### a) Relative Marriage

Relative marriage is one the important marriage types in the villages in the Keriya such as the Pulu, Shiwol and Atchan. Relative marriages are of two types. The first of them is parallel cousin marriage; the second is cross cousin marriage (Ornek 1975). Parallel cousin marriage is the same sex sibling's children's marriage and cross cousin marriage is different sex siblings' children's marriage

In Deryabuyi, a remote rural area, when parents are looking for a bride for their son, their priority is to find a bride from among their close relatives' daughters and then, if unsuccessful, look for a bride further afield. Two clans make up the population of Deryabuyi. They are the *Bark tam* and *Teki tam*. They have been exchanging wives for the last several decades, which mean that the people in Deryabuyi are all relatives of each other. The purposes of relative marriages are to prevent the division of family property and cash, to improve relatives' relationships, and to nip or stop spouse's uneasiness. Also payment (gifts and bride price), trust and acquaintance with the groom are the main factors of concern about relative marriage. According to Delaney, "Marrying relatives and marrying within the village are the same things, do not trust to the strangers and try to stay close. It is said, 'always relatives', it is true" (Delaney 1991:134).

In Deryabuyi most of the marriages are within the village because Deryabuyi is an isolated place, with harsh geographic conditions and life style, so girls from other villages in Keriya do not willing go to Deryabuyi. In Keriya giving wives to outsider is acceptable if the wife takers are of a high socio-economic status. In Deryabuyi only four men have taken wives from outside of Deryabuyi and two girls have been given to outsiders as a wife. Those six men's families had high socio-economic status, three of them businessman and three of them government employees.

According to my data, many people in Deryabuyi and other villages in Keriya know about relatives' marriage negatives. For example, they know that close relatives' marriage cause mental and physical disabilities in children and cause big problems between relatives if there is divorce. Some relatives never talk to each other because of divorce. Uyghurs have a popular saying *Yatqa ber qizingni, yattin al suzingni* (Give your girls to stranger and divorce by a stranger). Generally people in villages still look for a girl from their relatives first because strange girls are *bisinagh* (unknown, untested) and also her adaptation to the new home takes a long time. Economic factors are also important. Marriage costs a lot of money, so everyone expects a good girl and tries to keep her forever in the family. So people naturally desire someone who they know to marry into their family.

### b) Exchange Marriage

Wife exchange marriages form a significant part of Uyghur traditional marriages. Turkic people had exchange marriage from very early time (Inan 1998). In fact, it was a preferred pattern of marriage. It is called *iki qat bolmak* (being two strata/side) or *qosh kiyin buyan bolmaq* (qosh means double, kiyin buyan mean bride and groom's parents call each other kiyin buyan/buyinim, or being double relatives or being double affinal relatives) in Uyghur. Thus it is a marriage arrangement where the marriages of at least two couples are made conditional on one another. For instance, if one household head gives a daughter to another one as a wife for their son or takes a wife for his son, he can later demand a

wife or husband in return under the name and right of *iki qat bolmaq*. An *Iki qat* marriage, therefore, is a wife exchange marriage where least two couples are engaged and wedded, mostly not at the same time.

### C) Wife and Husband Inheritance

Wife and husband inheritance has come down from early Uyghur times (Hebibulla 1993). Wife and husband inheritance was a traditional form of Uyghur marriage but is not practiced very often now days. It involves marrying the widowed wife of one's elder brother; hence, the young brother "inherits" the elder's wife. It is called in the local language, *Qiyini inisi bilen evlenmek*" (marry with husband's younger brother). The widowed husband of one's elder sister can inherit the elder's sister husband. This is called *Qiyin singlisi bilen oylanmek* (marry with the wife's younger sister). The practice is associated with the case where a significant bride price has been paid, the widow has small children, and taking care of children and the widowed wife prevents division of family property.

In Uyghur tradition, a widow can not marry her dead husband's elder brother; she can only marry her dead husband's younger brother. Also a widowed husband can not marry his wife's elder sister because people believe that a religious marriage is not suitable (*Nikah chushmeydu*) under these circumstances.

Although known, this type of marriage form is not practiced very often nowadays in Uyghur villages in Xinjiang.

### d) Wife Kidnap and Elopement

According to my data and what I heard about kidnapping in Uyghur society, these are consensual and do not go against the girl's will, such as in Kazakhstan where non consensual kidnapping takes place (Werner, 2004). People frequently refer to the practice of kidnapping or elopement to justify the belief about the vulnerability of unprotected women and unpredictability of violent acts from men. Elopement differs from wife kidnapping in the process, if not the fact. Usually but not always the couples expected to marry. It brings women's decision and will out to the public. When what should be kept private becomes public in such a way, the expressed female decision is underplayed, disguised, and manipulated by men emphasizing how cunning the man or "loose" the woman is. Elopement always brings shame to the woman's immediate kin. But for the man's immediate kin it is just the opposite. Bride kidnap might occur after a refusal to allow a couple to marry, when the girls' father requests a higher bride price, or the bride's father does not like either the groom or his family. In addition it saves money and time or when the couple or family wants to avoid a big wedding feast and gifts, or when the marriage may be delayed for a long time. One reason young men may kidnap a girl is if she is especially attractive and desirable. Families who kidnap a bride are not exempt from paying money to the bride's family. However, the standard amount for a kidnapped bride is less than the standard amount for an arranged marriage bride thus providing a less expensive option. Virginity is expected before marriage, but unwed pregnancies are not considered to be too scandalous as long as the girl is quickly married to the father of child. The groom's relatives send an official apology (*kechurum*) to the bride's house. By the time the apology arrives, the brides' parents may have already heard what happened to their

daughter or they may at least have their suspicious. The delegation usually consists of two or three respected males from the groom's side.

On the other hand wife kidnap and elopement may be arranged by agreement; that is before the kidnap and elopement the man's and woman's family discusses and agrees to the kidnap and elopement. This type of marriage is only acceptable for people who have already been married or widowed. This type of kidnapping and elopement is numerically significant and the general interest in the event is remarkable. The purpose of this type of marriage is for the family to avoid paying more *toyla* (gifts).

### 9. Divorce

Divorce in Uyghur villages in Xinjiang is not considered a good thing and is not a positive event. As we know, marriage in Keriya not only relates two people, it relates two families and sometimes relates two relative's groups. So divorce also is automatically related to the two groups. People's traditions and attitude are protective of an undivided family and so relatives look hard for other options and solutions rather than divorce. Also the popular relatives' marriages are one of the most important factors to prevent divorce because relative marriage is a guarantee of the two sides to continue a good relationship. One important factor which contributes to the stability of the marital relationship in a village setting is the close and regular contact with other relatives who are part of the extended family. The women are never alone in the absence of their husbands. The close relationship with kin serves as a form of guarantee that both spouses will have a measure of support when there are problems in marriage. Gustafsson (1999) suggested that a majority of men claim a form of social dominance which not only gives them the right to make decisions about household economy, but also the right to use violence toward their wives. Most Uyghur women would agree that some women deserve to be punished. On the other hand, few women want to marry aggressive men, and the community as a whole shows respect for those men who do not use violence against their wives. Violence is not only used to discipline adults; parents often use it on their children. In Uyghur society, even teachers still use it to discipline students in Xinjiang. The Quran makes it clear that women will be judged by the same standards as men (24, sura 4: v. 32). Men have authority over women because God had made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient (Ibid., sura 4: v. 34).

Many both urban and rural Uyghur girls are unhappy in their marriages. Recent research has suggested that many men benefit from the institutions of marriage; that is, just being married, regardless of the quality of the relationship, makes men healthier, wealthier, and more generous with their relatives (Nock 1998). Unlike men, women get the most benefit from a good marriage (Steil, 1997).

The main reasons to divorce are; childlessness, lack of harmony, disobedience and interference of a third party. From time to time spouses' lack of harmony has causes a woman to leave her house and husband and to go back to her parents' home. It is called in Uyghur *yamanlap ketti/ketmek* (left or unhappy and left). It creates tension in the two families' relationship. After a while the two sides' close and respected relatives become involved and try to make peace between spouses and build family unity. Although widowed men and women can easily remarry if they want, divorce is still regarded as a

misfortunate. After marriage a man is obliged to meet his wife's needs, which are generally taken to include providing one or two sets of clothes annually, to be given to the wife at the two major religious holidays (Qurban Eid and Ramadaan). Beyond these minimum requirements many women want such gifts more frequently. A man's failure to meet these demands is often said to be the cause of family arguments and even divorce.

### **Conclusion**

The motivation behind this paper has been to emphasize with a concrete examples, the importance of cultural influence to gender roles through the wedding practices and rituals among Uyghurs in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. By focusing on the specific case of the wedding in Keriya and using comparative research about weddings in urban cities, we were able to point what are meant by cultural influences. The case studies describe in the social context to show how the context shapes men's social, economic and cultural positions and how this intersects with their relationships with women. Uyghur families and wedding strategies, while deeply influenced over the past half century by the political economy of China (Clark 1999 & 2001; Xiao, 2011), have developed and have heightened Uyghurs own sense of being a distinct people. There has been a more egalitarian environment in the homes, fostered by the state, which has given women more power in the decision-making process in all the family strategies, especially among urban Uyghurs (Clark 1999 & 2001). Nick Megoran (1999) suggested that that gender cannot be seen as an issue separate from the study of ethnicity, nation-state and nationalism in Central Asia, but rather these are gendered both in process and in the way they affect people Jay Dautcher argues that the stylized narratives of folklore play an important role in creating shared Uyghur social identities. Based on his interpretations of such narratives, he suggests that an important theme in Uyghur social life is the cultivation and public display of masculinity by men (Dautcher, 2009). Yet women have not entered the labor force in equal terms with men, therefore there remains a strict gender division of labor in the denwei (work units) and women were still, in many respects (for example in the allocation of housing), considered dependent (Liu 2007). New opportunities are available for some Uyghur women, particularly the young, urban and privileged. In the context of economic development and globalization, new life styles and practices in urban cities, such as Urumchi are pushing the traditional moral boundaries. However despite the economic liberalization, the scope for development of sexual discourses among Uyghurs is very limited.

This paper shows that gender is socially constructed by using the sociological and anthropological method to explore how gender roles are revealed through the Uyghur wedding and how gender has been expressed differently in different times and places. We learn that different cultures have different ways of doing gender. Differences between women and men are socially constructed, gender is learned and practiced from/ in weddings, life cycle events and every day relations that conform to norms, rules, and scripts. Gender inequalities are continuing in Uyghur society and social problems around gender remain. The process of individualization and globalization fosters new ways of fashioning gendered selves among Uyghurs. Rapid social, cultural and technological change in Xinjiang continues to affect gender among Uyghurs and thus wedding rituals both in rural and urban areas.

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### *Abstract*

#### *Gender Roles as Seen Through Wedding Rituals in a Rural Uyghur Community, in the Southern Oases of the Taklamakan Desert*

Sociologists have distinguished between sex and gender. Sex refers to whether a person is considered female or male, based on the kind of body they have. Gender describes the idea and practices that constitute femininity and masculinity. This paper describes gender roles through the wedding practices among Uyghurs communities in Xinjiang and the extent to which these have affected the role and status of men and women in contemporary Uyghur society. Modern marriage among Uyghur, and the procedures adopted in choosing partners, have changed radically since 1980. Changes such as these are easy to observe. However, traditional ideals continue to form the coexistence of traditional gender models and modern ideals. This paper examines the roots of gender roles in traditional culture as seen through wedding rituals, and will then return to a consideration of the contemporary. Weddings are not just for the two families, but are important gatherings for the entire village. Uyghurs perceive the act of marriage as a series of rituals taking place over many months, even years sometimes. Some of the more unusual rituals will be described and links will be made between the rituals and differing gender roles in the society. As Uyghur society shows much equality at times, this is reflected in the mutual exchange of *toydaq* (gifts) between the girl's side of the family and the boy's side. However, the superior role of the husband in the



household can be seen in other rituals such as *elchi evetmek* (match making) *qizning altigha tash kuyup ogzidin mangmaq* (put a stone under the bride and running on the rooftop), an old custom that shows the dominance of the groom over his bride. Also the *qizni gilem ustide oyge ekirmek* (carrying the bride in a carpet to her husband's house) is an old custom that can be seen as showing respect to the bride. Other customs, such as *qiz qachumaq* (wife kidnapping), while seemingly putting the bride in a position of no agency, is almost always a mutual decision by the young couple to avoid obtaining permission from unwilling parents. *Suzini bermek or hetini bermek* (divorce) is not uncommon and in this case, the bride may keep her gifts and the bride price, except under unusual circumstances. This paper will describe these more unusual rituals and customs and will compare an isolated village with its more modern urban counterparts. It will show that gender is socially constructed by using the sociological and anthropological explorations of how gender has meant different things and how roles have been expressed differently in different times and places.

**Keywords:** Gender roles, Wedding Rituals, Femininity, Masculinity, Sexuality, Rural Uyghur, Uyghur Identity, and 'Xinjiang'.

## Öz

### *Taklamakan Çölü'nün Güney Vahalarındaki Kırsal Uygur Topluluğu Düğün Ritüellerinde Görülen Cinsiyet Rollerini*

Sosyologlar cinsiyet terimini genellikle bedenin erkek ya da dişi olarak tanımlamasına neden olan anatomik ve fizyolojik farklılıkları ifade etmek için kullanırlar. Toplumsal cinsiyet ise tersine erkek ve dişiler arasındaki toplumsal ve kültürel farklılıklarla ilgilidir (Giddens 2009). Cinsiyet doğal bir kategori olarak görülmekte birlikte cinsiyet rolleri bir kültürdeki normatif erkeklik ve kadınlık tanımlarıyla kaçınılmaz biçimde birbirine bağlıdır. Birey kadın veya erkek rolleri yerine getirerek sosyal dünyaya katılır. Kadın ve erkek rolü verili olarak toplumda yer almaz, inşa edilirler. Kadının ve erkeğin bu rolleri toplumsal cinsiyetini ortaya çıkarır. Toplumsal cinsiyeti Virginia Clarke ve Victoria Braun üç farklı bağlamda değerlendirir. Bunlar doğal olarak toplumsal cinsiyet, yetiştirilmenin sonucu olarak toplumsal cinsiyet ve toplumsal bir kurgu olarak toplumsal cinsiyettir (Clarke ve Braun 2012). Bu çalışmada Çin Uygur Özerk Bölgesi (Doğu Türkistan olarak da bilinmektedir) Taklamakan Çölünün Güneyindeki Uygurların evlilik pratiklerinde ortaya çıkmış olan cinsiyet rolleri ve bunun çağdaş Uygur toplumu içindeki erkek ve kadının rol ve statüsü üzerindeki etkisini ele alacağız. Uygur düğünlerinde, eş seçme prosedürleri 1980'li yıllardan beri radikal değişiklikler başlamıştır. Bu değişime karşın, geleneksel ilkeler ve cinsiyet rolleri ve çağdaş ilkelerle bir arada devam etmektedir. Bu çalışmada geleneksel kültürdeki cinsiyet rollerin kökenleri düğün adetleri üzerinden incelenecektir. Uygurlarda düğün sadece iki aile arasındaki bir olay değil, tüm köylünün bir araya gelmesiyle gerçekleşen önemli bir ritüeldir. Uygurlarda düğün aylar ve yıllar süren sıralı adetlerin yaşandığı bir eylem olarak görülebilir. Yazıda, çok alışık olmayan adetler betimlenecek ve toplumdaki farklı cinsiyet rolleri ile bağlantıları kurulacaktır. Düğün vesilesi ile görülen önemli unsurlardan biri eşitlik üzerine yapılan vurgudur. Kız ve oğlan taraflarının karşılıklı hediyeleşmesi olayı

*toylaq* bunun önemli göstergelerinden biridir. Ancak bunun yanında erkeğin ailedeki üstün rolü diğer birçok adette kendini göstermektedir. Örneğin, *elchi evetmek* (aracı yollayarak kız istemek) *qizning altigha tash kuyup ogzidin mangmaq* (gelinin altına taş koymak ve çatı tepesinden yürümek) gibi eski adetler damadın gelin üzerindeki egemenliğini gösterir. Bunlardan başka *qizni gilem ustide oyge ekirmek* (gelini halı üzerinde taşıyarak damat evine getirtmek) gibi adetler geline olan saygıyı göstermektedir. *Qiz qachumaq* (kız kaçırmak), ebeleyenlerin kızın evlenmesine izin vermediği durumlarda genç çiftlerin karşılıklı rıza ve kararıyla eyleme dönüşmektedir. *Suzini bermek or hetini bermek* (boşanmak) çok yaygın bir davranış değildir. Eğer boşanma gerçekleşirse, damat tarafından gelin tarafına verilen hediyeler geri alınmaz, onlar gelin tarafında kalır. Bu çalışmada çok yaygın olmayan adet ve gelenekler incelenmiş ve ıssız, nüfusu hayli azalmış köy ve kasabalar şehir hayatı ile karşılaştırılmıştır. Bu araştırma sonucunda aslında, toplumdaki cinsiyet rollerinin toplum tarafında inşa edildiği gösterilerek sosyolojik ve antropolojik açıdan cinsiyetin nasıl farklı anlamlara geldiğine de değinilecektir. Sosyo-antropolojik yöntemle cinsiyet rolleri Uygur düğünleri üzerinden açıklanarak, farklı zaman ve mekânlarda cinsiyet rollerinin nasıl inşa edildiği örneklerle gösterilecektir. Buradan hareketle aslında cinsiyet rollerinin farklı kültürde cinsiyet rollerin farklı olduğu da görülmüştür. Uygur toplumunda cinsiyet eşitsizliği ve cinsiyet rolleri üzerindeki toplumsal problemler içinde bulunduğumuz zamanda da devam etmektedir. Bireyselleşme ve küreselleşme süreci Uygurlar arasında rollerin yeniden dağılmasına ve biçimlenmesine de sebep olmaktadır. Aynı zamanda bu bölgede (Uygur Özerk Bölgesi, Doğu Türkistan) kendini gösteren hızlı siyasal, toplumsal, kültürel ve teknolojik değişim Uygur toplumunun yeniden şekillenmesini sağlamaktadır. Çin hükümetinin 60 yılı aşkın zamandır, Uygur toplumuna uyguladığı aşırı ayrımcı ve baskı politikaları Uygur ailesi yapısı üzerinde derin etkilenmelere sebep olurken, Uygurlar kendi etnik ve dinî kimliklerini korumak için direnmekte ve bunun için çaba göstermektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Cinsiyet Roller, Düğün Adetleri, Kadınlık, Erkeklik, Cinsellik, Uygur Kimliği, Doğu Türkistan.