**Xinjiang Talks Back:**

**Reflections on Post-Coloniality and Gender Security**

**Introduction**

Chinese nationalist historiography represents China as the feminine “victim state” persecuted by the international community in a “century of national humiliation”\(^1\) and then as the masculine “great power” which is now ready to take its place on the world stage (Callahan, 2007, p.10). Chinese “humiliation” at the hands of western powers haunts discussion of political possibilities in China where imperialism is the enemy of China but imperialism is specifically associated with the west, with capitalism, and with democracy. For China to be good, it has to understand all western things as “evil” (Callahan, 2013, p.90). However, unlike Orientalism, official Chinese Occidentalism has tended not towards domination of the west, but instead aims to “discipline, and ultimately dominate, the Chinese self at home” (Chen, 2002, p.3). This East/West dichotomy conceals the subject of this paper: non-Western Others, and more specifically Rebiya Qadir, an indigenous, Turkic-speaking, Muslim, Uyghur woman from Xinjiang. The history of Xinjiang in the modern period between China, the Soviet Union, and Central Asia can only be understood through “in-between-ness”\(^2\). As James Millward (2007) has shown, there are many groups within the contemporary borders of the PRC whose languages and religions are the result of thousands of years of trans-border, inter-civilisational exchange, which blur the lines between Chinese, Islamic, Turkic, Mongolian, Tibetan, and Indian civilisations.

Rebiya Qadir, now head of the World Uyghur Congress, built an-all women’s bazaar in the capital of Xinjiang, Ürümchi, and became the “richest woman in China” through cross-border trade in Central Asia from 1993 to 1999 (Chen, 1994; Kadeer, 2009, p.256). Rebiya was elected to the China’s highest legislative body, the National People’s Congress, and then subsequently exalted by the party-state as an example of what Uyghurs could achieve in modern China (Mackerras, 2009, p.142). Rebiya represents a metaphorical barometer of what Michael Clarke (2007) called Xinjiang’s “problematic integration” into China. The party-state describes Rebiya as a “life or death enemy of the Chinese nation” and that she uses the “anti-human” and “anti-civilisation” idea of “East Turkestan”, the name for Xinjiang prior to the 1759 invasion by the Manchu, to harm ethnic unity and “split the nation” (Ministry of

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1 On the importance of “national humiliation” in the discourses of Chinese nationalism, which begins with the Opium War in 1840, see Callahan (2007; 2009).

2 On the “in-between-ness” and “multiple centres” of Xinjiang’s history, see: Perdue (2005); Starr (2004); Millward (2007); Brophy (2012).
Information, 2009, p.8 & 16). Rebiya, on the other hand, claims she wants to be the “mother of all Uyghurs” and that she fights “for twenty million Uyghurs worldwide” (Kadeer, 2009, p.4). The party-state attempts to co-opt representations of Rebiya into its narrative of civilisation (Chinese) where the party-state leads peoples often think of themselves through alternative civilisational discourses (Turkic-Islamic) towards development and civilisation. Representing China as a collective will requires iterating the Islamic and Turkic-speaking Uyghur as Other and as different by marking alternative readings of Chinese history as a form of political resistance to be violently excluded.

This paper will use post-colonial theory to understand narratives on indigenous women, an unexplored intersection of multiple forms of Other-ness in Chinese studies. Written histories of non-Western Others have traditionally been silenced and subordinated to master narratives of the west (‘Europe’) and the east (‘India’) (Chakrabarty, 1992, p.1). This paper assumes Asia and Europe (East/West) are mutually constituted and looks to how these narratives conceal the Eur-Asian worlds between these civilisational strait-jackets. The paper will draw from feminist theory from IR not to construct gender as a category of analysis but to uncover existing logics of gender in discourses on international politics (Masters, 2009, p.32). As neither gender nor Chinese are stable analytical categories, we have to pay attention to when gender matters and when it recedes (Hershatter, 2007, p.111 & 115). Feminist IR theory has shown how since the “war on terror” security discourses which categorise people as “with us or against us”, are superimposed onto gender dichotomies where women in Afghanistan are represented as innocent victims (Madonna) in need of “protection” or guilty terrorists with unbridled sexualities (whores) to be raped and abused as a tactic of war to uphold the social order (Franks, 2003, p.143; Masters, 2009, p.44). Feminism in IR has deconstructed the gendered assumptions of a field in which women are unreflexively associated with peace and “are not supposed to be violent” despite the expanding studies of paramilitary women and “black widows” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2009, p.2 & 10; Sjoberg, 2010, p.5-6).

Official discourses on Rebiya Kadeer are a fertile ground for this analysis because the politically contingent official narratives tell a story of a downfall from a “model ethnic minority woman” to a violent and sexually alluring “life or death enemy” of the Chinese nation. Much work on gendered security discourses focuses on conceptualisations of Other women by the west but this paper makes an original contribution to feminist IR theory by exploring non-Western Othering of non-Western Others. Developments in Asian feminisms have shown how intra-Asian projects increasingly celebrate that Asia is not a naturally occurring region but a heterogeneous project (Barlow, 2007, p.311-312). However, Rebiya and life in Xinjiang are officially framed through the prism of security. Rebiya attempts to re-regionalise Xinjiang to be part of the Chinese East Asian state but historically and culturally Central Asian. However, Rebiya’s narratives on postcoloniality and Chinese history are
understood by the CCP as a threat to the East Asian foundation of China. Much of the Chinese studies literature on women in China focuses on eastern China and the use of women labour in China’s key export industries. Rather than look to losers in the global economy or victims of violence, this paper is about the representations and counter-representations of Rebiya Kadeer, a winner in the global economy and a violent “terrorist” within the official discourse of the party-state.

The approach adopted here seeks to avoid disentangling or prioritising different forms of Othering. Instead it embraces the “aporia of political judgement”; an act of symbolic identification with the material interests of one dimension of one’s many identities (Bhabha, 2009, p.42). The “specificity” of the feminine tends to be decontextualized and analytically separated from the constitution of class, race, ethnicity and other power relations which constitute identity, any singular notion of which is a misnomer (Butler, 1999, p.7). This paper will analyse how Rebiya Kadeer, an indigenous, ethnic minority woman of Xinjiang in China, is officially narrated as a metaphor for Xinjiang’s problematic integration into China. It will then examine how Rebiya identifies through indigeneity and femininity to deconstruct China and reconstruct Uyghurs as a colonised nation. The first section will examine changing official conceptualisations of ‘women’ from the communist to the reform periods to argue that women are represented as barometers of the fate of the nation. It will then explore how this is applied to and complicated by the ambivalent inclusion in discourses on ethnic minorities. The identities of ethnic minority women are used as a barometer of national unity but the acute ambivalence of these representations reflects the problematic mode of ethnic integration in contemporary China. The second section will analyse changing official conceptualisations of Rebiya from a symbol of integration and modernity to one of danger and insecurity. Rebiya Qadir, as a metaphor for Xinjiang, is represented as the “terrorist” alternative to the standard official representations of ethnic minorities as happy, dancing noble savages. The final section will examine how Rebiya constructs gender and Uyghur identity through her own autobiography, which like official discourse represents her own life as a metaphor for Xinjiang’s problematic integration into China. As a millionaire living in Washington DC, Rebiya is not subaltern. She is a non-Western non-Other. Rebiya’s own self-articulated Other-ness vis-à-vis China is silenced and reframed as a historical and factual error.

Section 1: Narrating the Ambivalent Women of China

“So today, when China appears like a superpower and the political figures and huge economic numbers in the world, I have to say that is not real China...real China is made by Chinese mothers and grandmothers, from each individual family’s hard work from last generations.”
Xinran, 2009.
Xinran, the British-Chinese journalist and author of *the Good Women of China*, narrates the Chinese superpower as built on the sacrifices made by Chinese women. Dai Jinhua (2004) critiqued the growth of this popular literature by upper class Chinese women who conceal how discussions of class and gender suppress each other. Yan Hairong’s *New Masters, New Slaves* (2008) shows how class and gender subjugation are returning specters in reform era China through the growth of domestic service and the use of women labour in China’s special export zones. Women have been unconsciously chosen as the social group who must bear the most sacrifices in China’s export-led development model (Dai, 2004, p.289). Li Xiaojiang, one of the founders of women’s studies in China, argues gender differences are entirely biological and that women’s “double-burden” is an inevitable and unavoidable price for the “social liberation of women” (Li, 1994, p.373-374). Gendered romanticism from writers such as Xinran conceals a class divide amongst women in contemporary China. However, this debate also invisibilises other dimensions of Otherness, most notably minzu, and women become a mere juxtaposition against men or crudely divided between middle and working class. “Woman”, like all bounded categories offering self-identification, is not a stable signifier but a site of contest (Butler, 1999, p.6). Most writing on Chinese history from inside and outside China tends to make women invisible (Gilmartin, 1994a, p.2). Chinese feminist writers, most notably Li Xiaojiang (1994), have worked to represent Chinese women in history and to localise women (nuren) to prevent colonisation by the North American women’s establishment (Barlow, 1994, p.357). However, this paper looks to how this (nationalised) localisation is applied to the context of Xinjiang, where the ethnic majority are Turkic-speaking Uyghurs who do not use Mandarin as their first language and tend to see Chinese civilisation as a colonial imposition (Tobin, 2011, p.17).

It is often in times of crisis and disunity that representations take particular importance in nationalist security discourses. It is at such times that women are often represented as a “barometer of social crisis” and metaphors for fate of nation (Hershatter, 1993, p.112; 2007, p.5). Gail Hershatter (1993; 2007) showed how representations of Chinese women during the Republican era were important concerns of reformist intellectuals charting the “fate of the nation”. Male urban intellectuals deployed representations of prostitutes in early twentieth century Shanghai as symbolic of the moral corruption and national decay of China (Hershatter, 1994, p.147). The language of gender is crucial to the way Chinese people have defined modernity (Gilmartin, 1994a, p.2). The representation of women in China as the “essence of national virtue” was foregrounded during wartime when imagery of raped women represented the “defiled purity of the invaded nation” (Duara, 1998, p.297). The Nanjing massacre discourse is heavily gendered by being called the ‘Rape of Nanking’ where

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3 *Minzu* is official translated as ethnicity. However, following Stevan Harrell (1990), I have opted not to translate *minzu* because the concept does not entail self-identification but is defined, in the first instance, by the state.
dominant images of mutilated bodies show raped women and decapitated men in ways that “reinforce patriarchal nationalism in China” today (Callahan, 2007, p.8). Despite the political contingencies shaping these representations, Women, as the “soul of tradition in modernity”, are expected to personify the essence of the national tradition as an “unchanging core” (Duara, 1998, p.298-301). However, as women rarely represented themselves, these representations were classificatory strategies, which served to police women and what it meant to be a woman (Hershatter, 1993, p.108-109; Edwards, 2000, p.143).

After 1949, the CCP presented itself as the “liberator” of women from feudalism, the inequality of traditional Confucian society, and prostitution (Hershatter, 1993, p.110). The official Chinese approach to gender equality is commonly represented through the Mao Zedong-era slogan that women “hold up half the sky”. Mao’s 1955 decision to solve labour shortages in agricultural collectives by mobilising women was ostensibly to “liberate” women by making them economically productive. Mao Zedong described women as a “great reserve of labour power” which “should be tapped in the struggle to build a great socialist country” (Mao, 1955). Women were to be liberated for and by the nation where they became embodiments rather than active agents of the nation (Duara, 1998, p.298). This form of “liberation” only reinforced traditional gender identities because it became seen as a gift from above which women never asked for but were grateful to receive (Barlow, 1994, p.347). Chinese feminist Meng Yue wrote that the state’s political discourse of the Communist era “turned women into an agent politicising desire, love, and family relations by delimiting and repressing sexuality, self and all private emotions” (Meng, 1993, p.118). Women faced the double-bind of abandoning femininity as they saw it or reinstating patriarchy (Barlow, 1994, p.347).

Today, 1978 is represented by Chinese media and the All China Women’s Federation as a “turning point” and a rupture of revolutionary practice, such that the planned economy has been abandoned and women have been re-liberated to again express essentialised gender differences (Evans, 2008, p.83). In this discourse, the liberation of women is determined by their ability to “improve society’s productive capacity” (Li, 1994, p.378). The self-proclaimed ‘pragmatism’ of the CCP is better understood as “enforced de-politicisation” of development in contemporary China where humans are framed as neoliberal agents of economic growth and self-development (Yan, 2008, p.10). This social and historical contingency of the meanings of gender is concealed in state-media where Xinhua suggests “Some scholars believe Chinese women have been completely liberated in the past 100 years” (Xinhua, 2012). However, the Politburo standing committee, China’s most powerful political institution, has never had a women member, nor an ethnic minority for that matter.
The CCP may have staked their legitimacy on sweeping away feudal society and liberating women but the truism that there can be no women’s movement without the CCP cannot be sustained in the reform era (Barlow, 1994, p.343). Chinese feminists such as Tao Jie (2004) argue that China’s economic reforms have stimulated debates on gender discrimination as the market economy promotes inequality and the CCP does not hold the same monopoly of representation as Mao Zedong’s era. The popular saying in modern China, “Men who get rich become immoral; women only get rich after they become immoral” (Jeffries, 2008, p.229), suggests that three decades of revolutionary ideology did not sweep away ideas about gender hierarchy even if they have been reconfigured to fit contemporary social practices. As metaphors for the nation, “Chinese women” have thus been transformed from symbols of hierarchical Confucian tradition to the egalitarianism of Communism and now free-market participants building the new Chinese superpower.

Gender is inseparable from political and cultural discourses which intersect with the constitution of class, race, and ethnicity and through which it is “produced and maintained” (Butler, 1999, p.6-7). Gender and Chinese-ness are produced and maintained in different places through different political discourses. Ethnicity has tended to be represented through the feminine in reform-era China. Popular Chinese representations Other minzu as exotic, erotic, and primitive, thus, relationally narrating majority Han identity as normal, civilised, modern, and superior (Gladney, 2004, p.13-16). Louisa Schein’s Minority Rules (2000) conceptualised official party-state discourses on minzu as “internal orientalism” where minorities are represented as agricultural, feminine, out of step with modernity but as integral components of Zhonghua Minzu (Schein, 2000, p.130). Chinese anthropologists often use the work of Engels and Morgan to explain culture through levels of development of different ethnic groups. The matriarchal structure of the Mosuo of Yunnan is popularly described as a “living fossil” from a pre-slavery, primitive communist mode of production (Walsh, 2005, p.456). This discourse of cultural evolution is drawn from universalist, European social Darwinism but mediated through Han ethnocentrism. It articulates non-Han minzu as less evolved than Han because their community is assumed to correspond more closely to feudal patriarchy. Minority-ness and womanhood are discourses of inferiority which reinforce representations of the Han majority as superior and progressive because they act as liberators of minzu women. Not enough is published on this subject despite the fact that during the revolutionary period, most active women’s associations were in ethnic minority regions such as Hainan Island (Gilmartin, 1994b, p.216). Some scholars have asserted that with the abandonment of collectivisation, we see a reversion to conservative patriarchy based on Islam in Xinjiang (Caprioni, 2008, p.149). However, some have astutely drawn attention to the power of ethnicised discourse on gender in Xinjiang to show that local Han scholars are reproducing party-state discourse to assert that patriarchy flows only from Islam and thus, China continues to serve as a progressive and liberating
force (Bellér-Hann, 1998, p.11). Official and scholarly discourse on ethnic minority regions tends to conceal the history of patriarchy all across China and instead funnels all discussion of gender through racial stereotypes and the teleology of ethnic development. Minzu women are then to be liberated twice, firstly from their own ethnic community and secondly, from Chinese patriarchy.

Figure 1: “A beautiful Uyghur girl” (Renmin Huabao, 2005)

The idea that Uyghur women are particularly beautiful and submissive is a popular representation spread across China. In May 2005, the People’s Pictorial (Renmin Huabao), a popular monthly magazine under the supervision of the News Office of the State Council, published a series of photos of Uyghur women. This was titled “The Wonderful Women of Xinjiang”. All these women, bar one, were dressed in “ethnic” clothing. The pictorial stated that “Xinjiang is indeed known for its beautiful women” and that “young girls here, though typically a little shy and reserved, will often greet people with innocent and friendly smiles” (Renmin Huabao, 2005). Figure 1 is but one example of these representations and is merely titled “a beautiful Uyghur girl”. Xinjiang, like other “shaoshu minzu” regions, is in many ways represented through women. In early 2012, a Xinjiang oil-paintings exhibition, “The Affection for Motherland”, toured the Chinese cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Ürümchi to much fanfare on Xinhua. The project was recommended by Zhang Chunxian, party secretary for Xinjiang, and organised in conjunction with the state-owned China Poly Group Corporation to “propagandise and eulogise Xinjiang” and “to show a beautiful, prosperous, harmonious, and confident Xinjiang” (Hu & Shao, 2012, p.3-6). This beauty and harmony was largely presented through representations of women. Of the 90 portraits on display, 79 centrally or solely featured women or girls. Every artwork depicted women wearing traditional or “ethnic” clothing and only three of these artworks depicted Uyghur women in an urban setting. These naturalised representations and the absence of the urban articulate Xinjiang through the female and the rural. In Xinjiang, a site of near-permanent

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4 Shaoshu minzu is officially translated as ethnic minorities.

5 I attended the Beijing exhibition and the book cited here features every painting from the exhibition.
“crisis” for the Chinese state, representations of women are embedded in broader discourses which seek to attract Han Chinese migrants to Xinjiang’s exotic charm and beauty. These narratives integrate Xinjiang as part of China but as passive, rural, and feminine “frontier”. Uyghurs and Uyghur-ness are then represented via this representation of essentialised women and passivity.

It is the colonial project and the resistance it stimulates which in Xinjiang produces not so much the good women of China as the ambivalent women of the frontier. Ambivalent because they have always been represented by the CCP as wild and potentially violent in ways which do not comfortably fit with representations of women through passivity. This ambivalence is captured in propaganda posters even from the end of the cultural revolution era where “frontier” women were depicted as taking up arms against the masculinist Japanese penetration of Chinese sovereignty (see figure 2). Following an incident of unrest in Yecheng on the Xinjiang-Pakistan border in March 2012, Zhang Chunxian, party secretary for Xinjiang, stated that “we shall show no mercy to these terrorists...we shall not let them wave knives at our women, our children, and our innocent people” (Xinhua, 2012a). Xinjiang, like its women are routinely represented through one another as objects to be secured and weaknesses to be protected but the ambiguity that it may be women waving knives at men should not be ignored. Minority women are represented as wilder, closer to nature, and potentially more violent than Han women. They are thus often represented in official and popular discourse as both mother (nature) and whore (violence). Women in Xinjiang thus become a metaphor for the need to pacify and subjugate the region. For example, during a year of ethnographic fieldwork between September 2009 and August 2010, dozens of Han interviewees expressed their strong desire to sleep with Uyghur women despite “hating the men”. Many of these men openly refused to make friends with Uyghurs and this was purely a drive for sexual conquest over the ethnic Other with some saying “it would be like sleeping with a foreigner”. Performances of sexualised ethnic dominance were more disturbingly present in the security apparatus following riots in July 20096. Many testimonies of Uyghurs who were detained without explanation stated that they were released after a few days but recalled for “political education” or instructed not to leave town (AI, 2010). Some families paid 100,000 RMB for their release, including one woman who had no food or drink for several days (AI, 2010, p.21-22). After paying this large bribe, she was told by her police interrogators, who slapped her and masturbated on her face, that she should “consider herself lucky” compared to other prisoners (AI, 2010, p.21-22).

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6 On the violence of July 2009, see Millward (2009) and Smith Finley (2011).
Sexuality, gender, ethnicity, and power were being performed by the security apparatus in degrading ways. Ethnicity and gender became mutually constitutive discourses where Xinjiang’s place in China was being articulated as feminine, passive, and inferior where transgression of these boundaries is met with officially tolerated sexual violence. These images of beauty and submission offer a politically acceptable way of being Uyghur. The “terrorist” Other, to be discussed in section 2, symbolises the rejection of the officially articulated position for Uyghurs through the female, the rural, and the passive. The politically acceptable ways of being Uyghur in China is thus represented through the willingness to be dominated by the male “Han nucleus” penetrating the frontier with “modernisation”. This need to colonise the Uyghur women was best captured in the ongoing All China Women’s Federation campaign in Xinjiang titled “Project Beauty” (ACWF,
This project organises training sessions on how to use make-up and widely publicises slogans across Xinjiang such as “Ladies, please open your veils, please don’t interfere with modern, civilised society” (Tianshan Wang, 2011) (see figure 3). The veil and Uyghur women are being framed as an uncivilised remnant of feudalism which women must be ‘liberated’ from so they can learn civilised modernity from Han Chinese cosmetics experts.

Figure 3: Caption reads “Ladies, please open your veils, please don’t interfere with modern, civilised society”.

Section 2: Performing Gender, Securing the Nation

This section will explore the way Rebiya and thus Xinjiang are marked off from China, from femininity, and from minority-ness by being inscribed with security discourses which present Rebiya’s identities as a threat. This section draws from post-positivist feminist theory from IR in its attempt to uncover existing logics of gender in discourses on violence in international politics. Once a model of ethnic integration, Rebiya Qadir is today officially described as the “scum of the nation” and the “scum of her ethnic group” (minzu bailei) (Ministry of Information, 2009, p.24). The 50 Whys and other official sources on security in Xinjiang all emphasise the dangers of “separatist thought” and they identify Rebiya Qadir as the physical manifestation of this thought and the “life or death enemy” of China (Ministry
of Information, 2009, p.74-76). In official Chinese narratives Chinese Rebiya is a violent, ethnic minority woman who betrays her gender, her ethnicity, and most importantly by betraying these identities, she betrays her nation.

Unlike the widespread Tibetan recognition of the Dalai Lama as a leader, no Uyghur has an official mandate to represent the Uyghur nation and Islam does not facilitate such a religious leader (Roberts, 2007, p.204). It is difficult to gauge popular perceptions of Rebiya due to the very strict controls enforced by the CCP on any public discussion about her ideas. For example, the Uyghur journalist Heyrat Niyaz was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment for “leaking state secrets” by giving an interview to the Hong Kong magazine Asia Weekly (Al, 2010b). In the interview he stated “they’re (Uyghur intellectuals) not interested, Rebiya basically has no ideas” (Asia Weekly, 2009). During a year of ethnographic fieldwork in Ürümchi, few Uyghurs interviewed expressed any fondness for her and all considered her unrepresentative of Uyghurs, let alone their leader. One mid-20s male businessman, a Uyghur nationalist, who in an interview quietly proposed independence for Xinjiang, even spat repeatedly on the ground at her very mention. Her introduction to conversation usually elicited responses of the kind “this has nothing to do with her” from one middle-aged self-employed businessman, “no one would listen to her” from a young, female language teacher, and “Xinjiang is not her business, she is a rich woman living in America” from a male taxi driver. Rebiya’s politics and the grievances she lists are certainly indicative of Uyghur discourse analysed in ethnographic accounts such as ethnic discrimination, resource exploitation, and mass Han in-migration. It is hard to gauge if it is her living abroad, her wealth, her presumption of leadership, her threat to masculine power within the community, or simply the fear of the implications of being associated with “terrorism” which elicits distrust from Uyghurs. However, Qadir certainly does not enjoy the widespread, popular support that would be required to personally organise a separatist movement in Xinjiang. It seems unusual to target someone who has so little official mandate to represent Uyghurs. It was when Rebiya gave a publicly available Amnesty Human Rights report to a US State Department official that she was convicted for revealing “state secrets”. Rebiya’s autobiography is published in English and she was quoted in 2005 as saying “I want to make my fights international. I want to involve anybody out there who wants to get involved” (RFA, 2005). It is not simply that Rebiya talks back that lead to her transformation but that by talking to the west, she threatens China’s monopoly on representations of Uyghurs.

According to Rebiya Qadir’s autobiography, the provocatively titled Dragon Fighter, she was born on November 15th 1946 “among the gold miners of the Altai mountains” and is a “woman from a very simple background” (Kadeer, 2009, p.3-4). Qadir deliberately rejects “elite” status to position herself as a woman of the people where by virtue of not belonging to the “elite class” she avoided persecution during the 1950s anti-rightist campaigns (Kadeer,

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7 For example, see Bovingdon (2002), Smith Finley (2002), and Tobin (2011).
Instead, *Dragon Fighter* establishes a family lineage of resistance to Chinese rule from her grandfather who set fire to the Manchu palace in Khotan to her father who “reached for his gun” to “fulfil his dream of an independent Uyghur nation” and fight in the Three Province Rebellion in 1944, which established the East Turkestan Republic (1944-1949) (Kadeer, 2009, p.7-10). As a nine year old child her family were “resettled” during the collectivisation of agriculture and she recalls that “we felt banished from our community and forced into a life as refugees” (Kadeer, 2009, p.15 & 39). She recounts how her father would tell her about the arrival of Chinese troops in 1949: “we can tolerate these guests among us for a while, but at some point they’ll have to leave” (Kadeer, 2009, p.22). Jay Dautcher (2009) showed how Uyghurs assert their own chthonic identities in Xinjiang vis a vis Chinese ‘ousiders’, perhaps best exemplified by popular folk singer Abdurehim Heyit’s allegorical song, “stubborn guest”, where an uninvited guest overstays his welcome. Rebiya’s stories, like many in *Dragon Fighter*, are repetitions of widespread discourses on Uyghur identities.

The story of Rebiya’s birth is reminiscent of the apocryphal tales of folklore Jay Dautcher highlighted as central to everyday articulations and explanations of Uyghur identity (Dautcher, 2009, p.2-3). For several months her father and the miners he employed had searched for gold in the Altai mountains. Tensions had grown as the winter drew nearer and the likelihood of finding riches lessened (Kadeer, 2009, p.10). Qadir was in such a “hurry to enter this world” that her mother gave birth prematurely (Kadeer, 2009, p.10). Her father, a “pious man” fell to his knees thanking God and in the Uyghur tradition where sunlight should not fall on the bloody linens from childbirth, he buried the sheets whereupon he found gold (Kadeer, 2009, p.10-11). The workers celebrated and her parents saw her as a gift to others telling her throughout her life “you don’t belong to us, you belong to the people” (Kadeer, 2009, p.11). Qadir tells the world “I speak and fight for approximately twenty million Uyghurs worldwide…I want to be the mother of all Uyghurs, the medicine for all their ills, the cloth which they dry their tear, and the cloak to protect them from the rain” (Kadeer, 2009, p.4). Rebiya tells this story to present her biological life and the metaphorical life of the Uyghur nation as one. Rebiya admits the story was not “perfect” but that she “wrote the book to show the Uyghur struggle from the perspective of one person” (Hammond, 2013).

Rebiya Qadir is a securitised representation of the transgression of gender roles and ethnicity in Xinjiang. In a decade, she has gone from being the “richest woman in China” to a model of ethnic minority integration in the National People’s Congress to a life or death enemy of China. The party-state attempted to co-opt representations of Rebiya and Xinjiang into a narrative of the Chinese nationalism where the party-state leads *shaoshu minzu*.

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8 While not as detailed, the documentary *Ten Conditions* (2009) tells the same narrative of Qadir’s role as leader of Uyghurs who has sacrificed her personal life to “rescue her nation”.

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towards development and civilisation. In a speech to commemorate the opening of Rebiya Plaza, Yusuf Eysa, the then vice governor of Ürümchi claimed it showed “how well the Communist Party, the central government , the people and also our autonomous region have developed together” (Kadeer, 2009, p.206). The party-state’s narrative explains that Rebiya Qadir’s “millionaireess” status is a “strong testament to China’s preferential policies towards ethnic minorities”, she speaks Uyghur because the government gave her the right to do so, and “each lie Kadeer tells will be a display of her true separatist nature” (Xinhua, 2009). After being convicted for revealing “state secrets”, she fled to the US and has since been labelled a “terrorist” (Bovingdon, 2004, p.55). This threat was captured by the Chinese blogger known as Chen-S in a blog post, “Uncle Kurban Meets Chairman Mao and Rebiya Meets George Bush”. The blog juxtaposed two images which represent the transformation of Xinjiang from “minzu harmony feelings” to the “terrorism” of today (Chen-S, 2009). The first is a popular image in China which represents Xinjiang as the elderly, grateful, and passive “Uncle Kurban” meeting Mao Zedong in 1949 to thank him for liberating Uyghurs. The second image represents contemporary Chinese fears of Xinjiang as an active, dissident woman through the “traitor” and “terrorist” Rebiya Qadir. The image showed her meeting a member of the “anti-Chinese chorus”, the capitalist and self-styled promoter of democracy, former President George Bush. Rebiya is a terrorist not because she is physically violent. She is a terrorist because she strikes terror into the minds of Chinese nationalists who view her interaction with the west as a danger to the Eastern foundation of the Chinese nation.

Now we turn to the official representations of Rebiya Qadir, which manifest all that is ‘evil’ about Uyghurs and about women. Ross Anthony referred to the process of the “production of enemies in Xinjiang”, whereby Uyghur dissatisfaction is targeted as a threat and used to justify waves of arrests under “Strike Hard” campaigns (Anthony, 2011, p.52). Rebiya is represented as a physical manifestation of the “the inside/outside Three Evils” of “separatism, terrorism, and extremism which present an existential threat to China. Much of the party-state’s discussion on “terrorism” focuses on the level of identity where the “mistaken understandings” of “The Three Evils” are said to frame Xinjiang history as non-Chinese and Uyghur identity as Turkic and Islamic (Ministry of Information, 2009, p.47, 61, & 94). This discourse securitisates how Uyghurs identify themselves because if they articulate themselves outside of Chinese culture (Turkic and/or Islamic) they are framed as security threats to the nation and to the state. Danger, thus, does not exist independently of those to whom it may become a threat (Campbell, 1998, p.1). “The Three Evils” are said to threaten China because internal discontent is being supported and deployed by “terrorists” and the west using human rights as an “excuse” to split China. The 50 Whys tells students “we must all...self-consciously engage in intense struggle with Rebiya as the head of the “inside/outside Three Evils” (Ministry of Information, 2009, p.24-25). The party-state claims Qadir organised the whole “event” of “7-5” and is said to have used “the internet and computer technology” to “spread rumours” “to stir up ethnic hatred and ethnic conflict”
internally but also to have colluded with “foreign media agencies” to split China (Ministry of Information, 2009, p.24). “Outside forces”, which refers to “western media”, then “interfered” “to destroy China’s stability and to interfere with China’s development and progress” (Ministry of Information, 2009, p.27). The friends and enemies of China are being produced in a discourse which blurs the boundary between the domestic (Uyghurs) and the international (“western media” and international “terrorism”) yet maintains an east/west dichotomy to the exclusion of Rebiya’s and Xinjiang’s between-ness.

What is interesting about Rebiya Qadir, as a representation, is that she is a specific, identifiable individual threat, which charts the “fate of the nation”. On the 15th October 2009, following news announcements on the executions of Uyghurs allegedly involved in the violence of “7-5”, a 20 minute CCTV video broadcast played on every Xinjiang television station. This was the first footage of the July violence shown since the immediate release of limited material. The video opened with an image of blood dripping from the numbers “7-5” and broadcast footage of Uyghurs brutally stamping and dropping rocks on the heads of Han residents. The graphic images of violence were interspersed with staged public confessions of Uyghur prisoners admitting they had harmed the nation’s unity. It then shifted to the image of Rebiya Qadir’s face and the logo of the World Uyghur Congress, identifying her as the primary instigator. The end of the video performatively enacted Chinese unity and development as an alternative to the violence and destruction offered by Rebiya and East Turkestan. The voiceover stated that “stability, unity, and the party” mean that Xinjiang has a “bright and developed future”. Over a backdrop of smiling, dancing Uyghur girls on a hillside, this performed the position of “normal” Uyghurs as contented, rural, and passive against the discontented, international, and active threat of “abnormal” Rebiya Qadir. This juxtaposition performed the roles of Uyghurs in China but through a gendered lens where Uyghurs ought to be women but also that as women, they ought to be pacified and entertaining for Chinese men. To paraphrase Mary Anne Franks (2003), they are to minzu Madonnas or terrorist whores.

In 2004, Rebiya’s contribution to improving women’s lives in China by establishing a Women’s Bazaar in Ürümchi was acknowledged with the award “Flag Bearer of the 8th March (International Women’s Day)” (Kadeer, 2009, p.186). For example, Rebiya Qadir’s company built the Rebiya Plaza (Rebiya Dasha) in 1992 when she was a successful businesswoman working in wholesale, retail, and later in real estate in the region and in Kazakhstan. It was emblematic of her wealth and her contribution to China. However, by 2009 Rebiya Qadir was identified as the sexualised “femme fatale” instigator of terrorism (see figure 5). The second hit on google images for the phrase “old femme fatale” (lao yaopo) in Mandarin is an image of Rebiya Qadir accompanying an article for the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference on “anti-Chinese forces”. The security threat of the sexualised outside of “the Three Evils” was reproduced outside of official channels and
online amongst Chinese netizens. An attack on the Kaohsiung Taiwan film festival website by unknown hackers replaced its cover page with a digitally-altered photo of Qadir and the Dalai Lama accusing the pair of sexual promiscuity alongside the slogan “anti-Xinjiang independence, anti-Tibet and anti-Taiwan independence” (Child, 2009). The sexualisation of Rebiya’s politics was also evident in the representation of Rebiya Qadir in a series of large propaganda poster displays at the children’s park on Youhao Lu (Friendly Street) in Ürümchi. This was designed and erected by division 9245 of the People’s Armed Police, which enforced martial law in Xinjiang from July 2009. The posters told the story of the “grave and violent incident” of “7-5” in the standardised way, defining “7-5” as an “internal” problem and blaming the “inside/outside Three Evils” for “interfering” in Xinjiang. The PAP poster display draws specific attention to the location of Qadir’s activities in Germany, a capitalist democracy “outside” the Chinese nation and the space for “villains” (Rebiya Qadir and the Dalai Lama) to collude and split China (Figure 4). However, the images also sexualised the seductive nature of “the Three Evils” by describing Qadir as an “old femme fatale” (lao yaopo) who abuses her sexuality to lure “ignorant students”, as The 50 Whys describes them. This gendered violence suggests that it is “abnormal” that a Uyghur woman could be anything but “shy and reserved” and in a position of submission to China. Even in her 60s, Rebiya is represented as a threat to China through her aging but burgeoning sexuality as an “old femme fatale”. She reminds viewers of The 10 Conditions of Love herself that when building her business empire, she was “very beautiful” with long flowing hair (10 Conditions, 2009). Rebiya would have been in her 40s by the peak of her wealth when cadres were telling her she was “very likeable” despite being in sharp political disagreement (Kadeer, 2009, p.274).

Figure 4: Main caption reads “Rebiya in Hamburg paying a special visit to Dalai - two villains colluding together”.
The Akida Trade Center, filled with Uyghur businesses and known as Rebiya Tower, was demolished in September 2009 to little fanfare. However, its demolition would change the Ürümchi cityscape forever. As a symbol of the influence of Uyghur contribution to modernity, it was incompatible with official identity politics in Xinjiang which positions Uyghurs in a perpetual state of backwardness. As the protruding masculine presence of Rebiya Qadir was removed, a symbol of Uyghur modernity was being negated after Uyghurs and Rebiya Qadir had rejected their place as submissive women in a male-dominated Han China. The assumption that women get rich in modern China because they are corrupt is a specifically sexualised stereotype because it marks corruption of women as sexual and different from the ‘normal’ financial corruption amongst Chinese men. Qadir’s politics are being de-legitimised by placing her in opposition to the de-sexualisation and virtue of the pure Communist female thus articulating gender and national characteristics through one another. Rebiya Qadir represents the transgression of gender and ethnicity where women and Uyghurs are positioned as inferior and obedient to men and Han. In this sense Rebiya Qadir is a threat to the nation because she behaves like a man and she is a “terrorist” because she is a threat to the boundaries of gender and the nation. Rebiya talks back.
Section 3: Xinjiang Talks Back: Rebiya’s Reflections on Gender Security and Chinese History

Prasenjit Duara (1998) called the mother-figure the “soul of tradition within modernity”. However, this imagery of natural, unbreakable motherhood is used to resist the hegemonic orthodoxy of Chinese nationalism which seeks to articulate gender and ethnicity for Uyghurs. Chinese nationalism was always personified through male figures such as Sun Yatsen and Mao Zedong which militated against a mother-figure and gave a masculinist tone to this discourse (Gilmartin, 1994, p.206). The same cannot be said of Uyghur nationalism which as we shall see deploys and is deployed by women in their struggle against Chinese colonialism. Rebiya Qadir inverts discourses of national humiliation to commemorate China’s national day in 2013 with a speech in Washington DC conceptualising China as a colonial state by saying: “All Uyghurs’ intellects, rights, and self-respect were taken by the Chinese. Today marks China’s dishonourable occupation. Today, to make known our existence, our desire to retake our homeland and to show our dissatisfaction we gather before China’s embassy” (UHRP, 2013). Rebiya Kadeer sees her struggle not simply as one for self-determination for Uyghurs. It is a struggle for recognition of the “existence” of Uyghurs, which is concealed by civilizational discourses of East-West. Rebiya’s autobiography outlines her own perspective that she refused to be a “political puppet” and realised her formal political work was a “complete waste of time” (Kadeer, 2009, p.245 & 259). After falling foul of the then party secretary for Xinjiang, Wang Lequan, when he told her “you always talk about ‘my people’…they’re not ‘your people’”, there was little hope of furthering politics as a career (Kadeer, 2009, p.249). This story represents the problematic integration of Xinjiang into China where Uyghurs feel they are denied the right to peoplehood and are instead the colonial possessions of China’s male Han leaders. As we will see, Rebiya herself collapses the east/west dichotomy because she identifies as an indigenous woman (non-Western) but turns to the West to help defeat non-Western colonialism. If we re-think security to start from the perspective of individual women’s lives we change what security is and how it is acted upon (Sjoberg, 2010, p.5). The many narratives of Rebiya Kadeer are not contradictions. Instead they embody the embrace of aporia of post-colonial thought and how security and identity may feel fixed at any given time to any given individual but they are deeply intertwined discourses which reflect an unending process of aporetic tension.

“Reading between the lines”, to borrow Bhabha’s phrase, we see how hegemonic discourses can be inter-textually inverted as modes of resistance. Rebiya is not a silent subaltern; Xinjiang talks back. Rebiya Qadir is an example of the problem identified by Prasenjit Duara of nationalists employing “living embodiments” for their own political goals because their agency can challenge how they are represented (Duara, 1998, p.296). The party-state claims
that Qadir is a “regular liar and a bald-faced one at that” because of her allegations of cultural assimilation and her acknowledgement that there were peaceful protests prior to the violence of July 5th (Xinhua, 2009b). Qadir has since responded in kind saying that the CCP’s claim that she is to blame for the violence of July 2009 was a “patent lie” (Kadeer, 2012a). Rebiya writes *Dragon Fighter* to tightly narrate equivalence between herself and the Uyghur nation, particularly that she is a selfless devotee of the people (Kadeer, 2009, p.11 & 19). Rebiya positions herself in the book as a leader of the Uyghur people and a key figure in the 1989 Ürümchi protests and Ghulja 1997, as well as a keen supporter of the Tiananmen protests and Tibetan autonomy (Kadeer, 2009, p.199-200 & 278-279). She even recounts a tale of an inter-ethnic fight where she intervenes between the masculine Uyghurs who “quickly overpowered our adversaries” and the “fallen Chinese” on the floor (Kadeer, 2009, p.185). It is impossible to verify her claims that she persuaded an assembled crowd in Kashgar after the Ghulja massacre to “solve our problems without violence” (Kadeer, 2009, p.278-279). However, these narratives serves her purpose well of positioning herself in opposition to the party-state as the “real” leader of the Uyghur people and in opposition to the discourses of “the Three Evils” as a woman of peace. Rebiya claims that “no other Uyghur before me has ever experienced our homeland from as many different perspectives: as a refugee child, as a poor housewife, as a multi-millionaire, as a high official in the National People’s Congress of the (People’s) Republic of China, as a political prisoner jailed for many years, and now as a political dissident exiled from my own land” (Kadeer, 2009, p.6). It is these multiple perspectives which she draws on to position herself not only as a Uyghur but as an embodiment of the Turkic Uyghur nation when she says “in order to better explain the Uyghurs and myself, I would like to tell my life-story” (Kadeer, 2009, p.6).

Rebiya Qadir’s political views are a combination of Uyghur nationalism, feminism, and democracy and human rights activism. She consistently uses the name East Turkestan in her writings and speeches instead of Xinjiang, explaining that “in honour of those who gave their lives for our Uyghur nation, my parents used only the term East Turkestan to describe it” (Kadeer, 2009, p.20-21). It is de facto illegal for Uyghurs to even utter the term East Turkestan in the PRC today due to the association with the two independent Eastern Turkestan Republics established in Kashgar 1932-1933 and Ghulja/Yining 1944-1949 (Dwyer, 2005, p.52; Millward, 2007, p.ix). When positioning herself in a family lineage of resistance to Chinese rule, Rebiya inverts the party-state’s drive to represent China as a timeless, multi-ethnic nation where:

“For as long as I can remember, Uyghur people have been tortured and subjugated by foreign powers. We have always been menaced by persecution and murder. Truly, I come

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9 For example, see Kadeer, Rebiya (2012a; 2012b).
from a land that has been fighting for its independence for a long time – today more than ever before” (Kadeer, 2009, p.4).

Rebiya Qadir narrates Uyghur history in precisely the way party-state accuses of “separatist history” by framing Uyghurs as a nation timelessly in conflict with the Chinese coloniser (“foreign power”). This is not an uncommon narrative amongst Uyghurs but Rebiya is narrating the tale to position herself as personification of this resistance in her role as “mother of all Uyghurs”. However, Qadir is keen to stress Pan-Turkic cultural connections across Central Asia. On the independence of the former Soviet Socialist Republics of Central Asia, she says “our neighbours and Uyghurs formed one cultural community as evidenced by thousands of years of heritage together. Our history, our language, and our architecture were examples of this common culture” (Kadeer, 2009, p.210). This appeal to cultural Pan-Turkism inverts Chinese party-state discourses of China’s timeless history of minzu unity and timeless history by stressing these are things which are being broken rather than fostered by the party-state. Qadir recounts her childhood saying “the Kazakhs were like relatives to us. They understood our language. We understood theirs” (Kadeer, 2009, p.21). On arrival in Ürümchi for the first time, she asks her mother “why are there no Kazakhs in Ürümchi?” (Kadeer, 2009, p.46). She even highlights how the midwife responsible for bringing her into the world was a Kazakh woman (Kadeer, 2009, p.10). This writes the history of Xinjiang as multi-cultural but under threat by the establishment of Chinese cities (Ürümchi) and mass Han in-migration.

When Rebiya testified to the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs she framed China as a dangerous outside when she warned of “the assimilation of the Uyghurs and their homeland into a greater Han China” (Kadeer, 2012b). *Dragon Fighter* discusses the post-1949 history of Uyghurs saying that “almost all forms of cultural, economic, and religious autonomy have been stripped away” (Kadeer, 2009, p.4). Qadir then claims she was consulted by the central government on problems in Xinjiang and uses the section of the book to position herself in resistance to the Chinese leadership and list the grievances, which are commonly heard amongst Uyghurs: “behavior of high officials”, “corruption”, the “large unemployment rate”, “population settlement policies”, and resource “wealth transferred to the interior” (Kadeer, 2009, p.247-248). Qadir, like many Uyghurs highlights economic problems in Xinjiang but relates them to identity politics and “cultural autonomy”. Rebiya wrote a column for the Wall Street Journal on the 3rd anniversary of July 2009, explaining that “Beijing has deliberately assaulted the Uyghur identity of our region by compelling millions of ethnic Han Chinese to settle in the area and at the same time co-ercing Uyghurs to move to other parts of the country” whilst “it has tried to eliminate the Islamic religion” (Kadeer, 2012a).
Qadir’s Turkic nationalism is more internationalist than inward-looking. She couches this nationalism in democratic and liberal terms by emphasising “human rights violations in East Turkestan” and attacks on religious freedom (Kadeer, 2012b). Qadir turned to the West to save her nation from Eastern colonialism in her Wall Street Journal article to narrate the position of Uyghurs in the world by contrasting the July 4th weekend as a time “for the people of the United States...to celebrate the struggle for independence and democracy” against the “grim reminder that we have not yet won our freedom” (Kadeer, 2012a; 2012b). She continues to say that Uyghurs “will only taste democracy when the outside world understands that there is a moral and strategic imperative to curb China’s brutal reign” (Kadeer, 2012b). This appeal to the ‘outside’ and to democracy is what the party-state presents as an excuse to “split China”. However, its greatest threat to China as officially conceptualised through security is that inside and outside are reconfigured to challenge the structure of the Chinese nation. Rebiya Qadir, like many Uyghurs, resists official identities and securities when they resist the impulses to secure them from the outside world and secure China from the international exposure to Uyghur discontent. Qadir relationally frames China as an outside threat and Uyghurs as peaceful when she frames “peaceful liberation” by the Chinese military in saying that “our peaceful culture was foreign to them too” (Kadeer, 2009, p.11). She explains that with regard to academic history debates as much as official politics, “anyone who thought differently was considered a threat...going abroad was a Uyghur’s only chance” (Kadeer, 2009, p.286). The dangerous outside of democracy of capitalism in official discourse is reconfigured by Qadir to articulate Uyghurs not only as a nation distinct from China but as eager to enter a globalising world through commitments to democracy and human rights.

Rebiya’s politics appear to be fairly straight-forward Uyghur nationalism positioning China as a colonialist outsider severing Turkic cultural links and threatening human rights. However, the way she genders nationalism and nationalises motherhood is a challenge to conventional understandings of Uyghurs as a male-centred society and to how we think about gender roles in contemporary China. Rebiya Qadir was a celebrity during her rise to fame and she offered retail space at reduced costs to Uyghurs, particularly to Uyghur women at the women’s bazaar and claims that “because of my wealth, many Uyghurs began to call me ‘the saviour’” (Kadeer, 2009, p.260). Qadir’s politics exemplify resistance to the party-state’s claim that Chinese women have been “completely liberated”. She also resists representations of Uyghurs through the masculinity and violence attributed to Islam. Dragon Fighter is littered with tales of her “struggle” against Chinese “patriarchy”. For example, Qadir invites the government to be involved in the Rebiya Plaza project. However, she is told by the then governor of Ürümchi, Zhang Guowen, she has lost her mind and as a
Uyghur she “should work in a field and sip your soup out there” (Kadeer, 2009, p.189). The vice governor of the regional government, Huang Bozhang, then asks her “you? A woman? You want to build a house?” (Kadeer, 2009, p.190). She proclaims that when her department store opened in 1992, “it embodied my strength and my spirit of resistance against opponents… it was a symbol of a Uyghur woman achieving what even some were not able to accomplish” and contrasts it against erdaoqiao as a government-built bazaar (Kadeer, 2009, p.212). Rebiya is narrating her own resistance against Chinese patriarchy which is an obstacle to her own business and in helping liberate Uyghurs. When Qadir turned down the opportunity to be promoted to a position in Beijing in 1996, she claims she was told “you’re a stubborn woman…you’re a very likeable woman…you’re only a woman and you can’t solve the problems of an entire people” (Kadeer, 2009, p.274). Of course, Rebiya’s self-performed role as “mother of all Uyghurs” means she intends to do just that.

Every step of Rebiya’s business expansion is beset by the need for bribes because of Chinese corruption and the need to justify herself to Chinese patriarchs who tell her “you’re only a woman”. Nation and gender become gradually inseparable in Rebiya’s narrative because she also frames the external boundary between Uyghurs and China through gender. She describes her sister, Zohre, as a “princess” with her “charming character and graceful fashions” until the arrival of the Chinese where she has to wear a Mao-suit at school thus becoming de-feminised (Kadeer, 2009, p.26). Qadir says her and her classmates at school “felt sorry for each other and for ourselves in our new outfits” while her mother remarks that the bobbed Chinese haircuts which replaced long braids made “all the women look like plucked chickens!” (Kadeer, 2009, p.29). China thus becomes an external threat to Uyghur identity but also to gender as a form of identity-security. The “bobbed hair” of Chinese women became symbolic of communist modernity and a rejection of Confucian patriarchy during the Republican era (Duara, 1998, p.300). Fashion became a political statement and bobbed hair symbolised emancipation from traditional gender roles (Gilmartin, 1994b, p.201). However, in Xinjiang, China and its “bobbed hair” were problematised in a different way; as a Chinese discourse on tradition and modernity which sought to colonise Xinjiang. “Bobbed hair” transgressed the boundaries of ethnicity and gender at the same time because it sought to incorporate Uyghur women into Chinese history and enabled Han men to define liberation for Uyghur women.

Rebiya’s Otherness cannot be reduced to ethnicity. While Qadir is keen to express the natural-ness of the Uyghur community and its boundaries, this does not entail support for an indigenous native patriarchy. Rebiya repeatedly stresses that she struggles against Uyghur patriarchs as much as Han Chinese officials. She argues that China reinforced patriarchy through gendered recruitment drives. As Chinese businessmen arrived in the
“Uyghur nation” under government orders, they sought to recruit Uyghur girls with job adverts for the service sector saying “you should be slim, tall, and good-looking” (Kadeer, 2009, p.262). Qadir narrates China as a patriarchal security threat which commands gender roles where women were to become men unless they were good-looking enough to remain so for the pleasure of Chinese businessmen. However, she also claims until Uyghurs knew her name “all Uyghur women had been convinced of their destiny to stay at home” but now “other women began to believe that they too could also achieve meaningful work” (Kadeer, 2009, p.171). Rebiya is articulating the double-otherness of being a minority woman in a patriarchal China and as a woman in a patriarchal ethnic group.

Rebiya narrates the Uyghur nation to disrupt China, the coloniser and the internal Othering of Uyghur women by Uyghur men. She explains that there is a long tradition in the history of the Uyghur people of “heroines...women who successfully stood up to the patriarchal traditions of our culture” (Kadeer, 2009, p.26). Qadir cites Iparhan as the most important in the long tradition of heroines and that “she symbolises our fight against occupying powers” (Kadeer, 2009, p.26). Iparhan or in Mandarin, the “fragrant concubine” (xiangfei) was one of the emperor Qianlong’s many concubines and her story is told as one of passive integration or violent resistance depending on the politics of the narrator. For example, Rebiya recounts the Uyghur narrative of Iparhan who hides a dagger under her clothes and swears to “kill anyone who tried to get near her” (Kadeer, 2009, p.26-27). Rebiya says that it was “those stories told to her by her father about “our heroines that made me who I am today” (Kadeer, 2009, p.27). The tension between inclusion and exclusion of Xinjiang is captured in James Millward’s (1994) article on how the meaning of Iparhan has been cast and recast according to the political exigencies of the time. Iparhan today has been re-appropriated by the state as a tale of minzu tuanjie represented by her marriage as a Uyghur with a Chinese Emperor. For example, the explanatory text at the tomb just outside Kashgar tells visitors that Iparhan’s entrance into the “imperial harem” expresses “the good wish for unity and mutual love between different nationalities since ancient times”. Iparhan is symbolic of minzu tuanjie and an integral part of the Chinese nation. However, she is still an ‘exotic’, ethnic Uyghur outsider. Furthermore, most Uyghurs follow Rebiya’s narrative that Iparhan refused to sleep with the emperor as an act of resistance against China.

Rebiya reserves her greatest ire for Uyghur men she considers Sinicised through corruption. Qadir has a real estate deal cancelled by Uyghur developers who instead allow the Chinese military to use the building. They tell her she cannot buy the property because the building also houses a mosque and she is “not religious enough”, “did not wear a headscarf” and “danced” (Kadeer, 2009, p.177). Rebiya talked back:

\[10\] I visited the site three times in 2007.
“This part of the house of God, which you wanted to turn over to the occupiers, I brought back to the Uyghur people. But you would rather give these floors to the Chinese who caused your fathers and mothers great pain. You didn’t take me seriously because I am a woman. But don’t forget that your wives and daughters are women like me. You don’t comprehend that in this same moment you are also insulting your wives and your daughters” (Kadeer, 2009, p.177).

Rebiya narrates Uyghur-ness whereby Uyghur men who collaborate with Chinese “occupiers” from the outside are symbolic of assimilation. It is not just Chinese-ness which is a threat to the Uyghur nation. Unbridled masculinity and self-interest of Uyghur men without the care and self-sacrifice of the mother to guide them will bring humiliation to the Uyghur nation. Rebiya, as a Uyghur, demands respect from Uyghur men over Chinese men. She also articulates that as a woman she naturally deserves respect within the Uyghur community. Equating injury to her person to injury “your wives and your daughters” is a performative enactment of equality of respect for women and men within the Uyghur community. Otherwise, its boundaries will be transgressed by China, which seeks to impose its own order upon ethnicity and gender.

When Rebiya tells readers her “mother was a perfect, fairy-tale Uyghur girl” she is articulating what it means to be a Uyghur woman and a leader of a family and a community: “discreet, obedient, adept at needle-work, and willing to sacrifice everything for her family” (Kadeer, 2009, p.7). Rebiya says she was taught by her mother to be a real Uyghur girl and “sit upright and still- in the presence of men” (Kadeer, 2009, p.18). She also claims to have inherited her mother’s “lively spirit, her willing self-sacrifice, and the love she felt for her children” (Kadeer, 2009, p.18). Rebiya, the multi-facetted Other and the multi-faceted rebel, challenges both the patriarchal practices of Uyghur men and the Chinese representations of Uyghurs as patriarchal. These passages serve a dual purpose of articulating Rebiya’s femininity as an inheritor of the stereotypical traits of passivity and her Uyghur-ness by couching all of these gender roles in terms of ethnic resistance. She articulates her role as a mother, where her primary responsibility is to protect her family and this is why she has turned to politics. In many ways this reads as a redemptive text, which articulates why she behaves in seemingly non-feminine ways as a leader of a relatively radical political organisation. Rebiya quotes her husband who inverts the CCP claim that she and Uyghurs can only prosper through loyalty to China by saying “most women were obedient but Rebiya Kadeer was not one of them. Only because of this she managed to become who she is today” (Kadeer, 2009, p.242). Rebiya says that she inherited her features from her father’s family and says her father was the “essence of love” because while like other “Uyghur men”
hid their feelings, he would cry when recounting tales of Chinese “mass murders” from the 1940s (Kadeer, 2009, p.18-20). These tears for the nation and involvement in politics instead of domestic responsibilities (“needle-work”) are articulated by Qadir as masculine traits but which she herself adopts. Rebiya is expressing anguish that China is colonising Xinjiang by making her masculine, thus, transgressing ethnic and gender boundaries at the same time.

Rebiya is articulating a challenge to traditional gender roles in Uyghur society rather than articulating that she wants to become like a man. China has transgressed the boundary of family by harming her children (Uyghurs). In her role as “mother”, she now must “sacrifice everything for her family” (the nation). Rebiya’s involvement in politics does not run counter to her femininity but is central to it. She reorients femininity where it is to be “obedient” within the bounds of the Uyghur family but if the family is threatened the mother becomes a fierce figure of resistance. She celebrates her own mother’s protest against the “resettlement” of her family by dressing up as if participating in a Uyghur festival “in a gesture of defiance to the indignities of banishment, (she) stood tall, dignified, and composed” (Kadeer, 2009, p.41). Qadir refers to the importance of “beauty” to women throughout the book. In the prologue, she takes up the position of her mother when about to face trial for “leaking state-secrets”. Her request to see her children is denied so instead she requests a mirror where she sees a “beautiful woman” and says aloud “how beautiful I’ve become. Someone who belongs to the people doesn’t look good in gold chains, but looks beautiful in hand and ankle cuffs” (Kadeer, 2009, p.xv-xvi). Rebiya becomes her mother. When facing the possibility of execution, she is overcome by “stillness” and her own beauty in a desire to retain her femininity defined through beauty as much as resistance even in the face of death.

Conclusions

Official Occidentalism in China produces a mirror-image counter-narrative to western Orientalism, which assumes the moral and cultural superiority of the east, yet which ultimately preserves and reinforces master narratives of west and east. These master narratives silence Others in non-western societies such as Uyghurs and Tibetans who disrupt this ordering of the world by representing their own contemporary life experiences as colonial. The CCP has long insisted China is different from the west because it does not promote ‘universal values’ (pushi jiazhi), which are framed as an “excuse” to “split China” (Ministry of Information, 2009, p.44-45). However, the moral superiority of Chinese exceptionalism conceals a universalism drawn from ‘Europe’ and re-configured as ‘Chinese’. Marxism is a legacy of the European intellectual heritage of modernity and European theory is always indispensable yet insufficient for analysing Asian politics (Chakrabarty, 2000, p.4).
However, Chinese elites do not explicitly acknowledge the deep influence of ideas of the European origins of Marxism and state sovereignty. In a sense, China cannot acknowledge its European-ness because the CCP has to continue the struggle against colonialism (‘the west’) to conceal its own colonial project in Xinjiang. The European legacy in China cannot be understood if we see this as a mere cultural ‘import’ and should instead be viewed as a form of intercultural translation. From the outset of the Chinese revolution the party-state has adopted a self-avowedly “universalist theory”, which applies to all of human history and its future, where minzu exists because class exploitation remains from earlier stages of development (Shijian Bianji Bu, 1965, p.213). Today, the party-state narrates a universalist conception of world history by explaining that “the world we live in is a world of minzu” (State Council, 2009a, p.1). However, it also reinforces a sense of exceptionalism by insisting that China is unlike the western nation-state because it is a “multi-minzu nation commonly created by all (Chinese) minzu” (State Council, 2009a, p.1).

Studies of women in China have thus far largely focused on Han Chinese women and this paper sought to address this gap. Gender and minzu are categories which can conceal each other. This paper studied how the two are articulated through one another. Itanalysed narratives of and by Rebiya Kadeer, an indigenous, ethnic minority woman from Xinjiang, as a metaphor for Xinjiang’s problematic integration into China. The first section showed how contingent official conceptualisations of women in China represent the fate of the nation and how ethnic minority women were used as barometers of ethnic unity. The second section analysed how changing official conceptualisations of Rebiya Qadir, from a symbol of integration and modernity to one of danger and insecurity, reflected concerns about Xinjiang’s position in contemporary China. The final section examined how Rebiya narrates gender and Uyghur identity through her own autobiography to represent her own life as a metaphor for Xinjiang’s problematic integration and its Otherness within China. Rebiya’s appeals to the ‘outside’ and to democracy are what the party-state presents as an excuse to “split China”. Rebiya Qadir resists official identities and securities when she resists the impulses to secure them from the outside world and secure China from the international exposure to Uyghur discontent.

This paper has shown how post-colonial theory and feminism can help us analyse the ways in which multiple modes of Otherness intersect which defy easy conceptualisation and can be invisibilised in grand narratives of West/East or Europe/Asia. Non-western Others are invisibilised by east and west alike because these categories are mutually constitutive. Xinjiang is a region between east and west and is written out of history when we use these categories. Xinjiang, like Rebiya, is Eurasian. Rebiya’s struggles, as a Uyghur nationalist against China, as a capitalist against communism, as a politically active women against official representations of passivity, and as a feminist against Uyghur patriarchs, illuminate
the multiple modes of Otherness and in-between-ness we invisibilise if we continue to study the politics of identity solely through orderings of the world into East/West.

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