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Down a Narrow Road: Identity and Masculinity in a Uyghur Community in Xinjiang China (Harvard East Asian Monographs)

Jay Dautcher

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The Uyghurs, a Turkic group, account for half the population of the Xinjiang region in northwestern China. This ethnography presents a thick description of life in the Uyghur suburbs of Yining, a city near the border with Kazakhstan, and situates that account in a broader examination of Uyghur culture. Its four sections explore topics ranging from family life to market trading, from informal socializing to forms of religious devotion. Uniting these topics are an emphasis on the role folklore and personal narrative play in helping individuals situate themselves in and create communities and social groups, and a focus on how men's concerns to advance themselves in an agonistic world of status competition shape social life in Uyghur communities.

The narrative is framed around the terms identity, community, and masculinity. As the author shows, Yining's Uyghurs express a set of individual and collective identities organized around place, gender, family relations, friendships, occupation, and religious practice. In virtually every aspect of their daily lives, individuals and families are drawn into dense and overlapping networks of social relationships, united by a shared engagement with the place of men's status competition within daily life in the community.

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