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Transforming Houses – the Changing Concept of the *house* in Kashgar

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Abstract
This paper examines the transformation of the local Uyghur concept of *öy* (house) in an environment of increasing mobility and monetization in the city of Kashgar in southwest Xinjiang, China. The paper identifies a shift in social practices related to the *öy* as a social unit and as a conceptual metaphor, which is taking on a stronger genealogical meaning and becoming somewhat de-localized. Departing from the local concept of *öy* and related local practices of social organization, this paper examines the utility of the analytical concept of the *house*, as proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss and later criticized and developed by others, as an approach to social organization and transformation in Kashgar. The organization into units that can analytically be grasped as *houses* often serves as a useful vehicle of adaptation in times of rapid social transformation and political instability. This is due to the concept's great flexibility, which is well-captured in theoretical discussions. Change and instability have frequently characterized the social environment of Kashgar in past centuries, which may account for the centrality of the *öy* (as a *house*) in Kashgar today.

Keywords
Uyghur, Kashgar, *house*, Lévi-Strauss, transformation, mobility

Introduction

The mobility of people, information and money has undeniably increased in Kashgar and surroundings over the past decades. During my extended stays in Kashgar between 2010 and 2013, I observed that most families own electric scooters or motorcycles and the majority of people have mobile phones. In the past two decades the government has considerably extended the network of roads and railways (Adil Muhemmet 2012; Kreutzmann

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2012) and transportation is fairly cheap, even by local standards. Neighbourhood communities have decreased in significance or been eliminated in the state-led restructuring of the city. This has widely dissolved the social institutions that these neighbourhoods harboured (Bellér-Hann 2013), including several institutions of exchange and mutual assistance, not least at life cycle rituals. Such exchange is currently becoming increasingly monetized and de-localized as more and more celebrations are held in restaurants and now depend less on the support of the neighbourhood than on access to funds, which are often provided by genealogical kin. Furthermore, the traditional artisanship focussed on neighbourhood communities has widely disappeared due to the large quantities of cheap consumer goods flooding the area from coastal China (Bellér-Hann 1998) and the dissolution of such neighbourhoods. The government has initiated programmes to enable Uyghur students to study in distant cities (Chen 2008) and supports massive labour migration (Howell / Fan 2011). These changes highlight the close links between mobility, monetization and modernization, and underscore local narratives of development and the hopes and aspirations attached to the opportunities they promise. Mobility is not just ability and liberation from the confinements of a locality; it is also coercion and deprivation of the security and resources that the ties to this locality offer. Raised mobility, in the sense of this paper, is a changed habitus in a changed field (Bourdieu 1986) that loosens the bonds between people and their locality, for better and for worse.

This is reflected in, and in important ways facilitated by, changes in conceptualization of the important social unit of the *öy* (*house*[1]) in Uyghur Kashgar. The local conceptualization and practical definition of *öy* is currently shifting from a spatial towards a genealogical emphasis: from the local neighbourhood community (*jama'et*) towards the genealogically defined kin group (*jemet*). This is part of a similar shift in the general conceptualization of social relations and is particularly interesting since descent groups do not have any socio-structural significance in Kashgar (Steenberg 2013). Examining Lévi-Strauss' analytical conceptualization of the *house* and of *house* societies, it appears that the adaptability of the concept at a theoretical level may also to some degree account for the success of the local concept of *öy* in Kashgar. One of the main advantages of the concept of the *house* is its ability to incorporate several defining factors that in conventional models are seen as mutually exclusive, such as descent and co-residence or patrilineal and cognatic rendering of descent. This makes it especially well suited

[1] Here and throughout the article the term *house* (italics) means a local or analytical concept of a social category, while house (no italics) denotes the physical structure of a building and its material interior.

for contexts of societal change and transformation[2], as are taking place in Kashgar today, and arguably have repeatedly taken place in Kashgar in past centuries. As a major hub on the Silk Road between China and Central Asia, Kashgar has been subject to external influence, change and transformation throughout its history. This is certainly the case today. Both Kashgar's architecture and the social structures of the city are rapidly being reshaped, a process which has a political overtone, inasmuch as the city is seen by many as the cultural capital of the Uyghurs and much of the change is perceived by locals as government inflicted. This paper presents Kashgar as an example of a social context in which *house* as a concept and form of organization plays a pivotal role in social transformation at a local level. The paper is based on 15 months of fieldwork in Kashgar between 2010 and 2013, consisting mainly of participant observation in neighbourhoods and villages and in-depth qualitative interviews on life-cycle celebrations, gift-giving and social relations. It also draws on local scholarly literature (e.g. Yarmuhemmet Tahir Tughluq 2009; Abdukérim Raxman et al. 2008) and discussions with local social scientists in both Xinjiang and Beijing.

Kashgar

Kashgar is a city of approximately 400,000 inhabitants located near China's northwestern borders with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan in the southwestern corner of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). The city has a Uyghur majority of 82.8 per cent according to the official survey of 2005 (Ma 2008: 396). The Uyghurs are one of the largest of the 56 ethnic groups recognized by the Chinese government. The vast majority of Uyghurs are Sunni Muslims and speak a Turkic language known as New Uyghur (Friederich / Yakup 2002). The region was conquered and incorporated into China under the Qing dynasty in 1759 (Newby 2007, 1998); the name of Xinjiang (lit. New Dominion) was bestowed upon it only at the end of the nineteenth century when it was granted provincial status. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the local population staged several uprisings against the Qing and later the Chinese republican and communist Chinese governments. Independent khanates and republics were repeatedly proclaimed, only to be dissolved by the Chinese authorities or inner strife (Millward

[2] Here, transformation is understood in a broad anthropological and structural sense as continuing gradual deep changes in society in which each changing element effects a change in other elements too. Such a transformation builds on and utilizes the existing socio-cultural potentials, eventually altering these. Transformation in this sense is an ongoing process, not a shift from one stable system to another.

2007). Political tension in the region runs high even today, and many Uyghurs feel discriminated against and excluded in their own land (Bovingdon 2010; Dillon 2004). A central source of these tensions is the in-migration of Han Chinese from the bordering and eastern Chinese provinces.[3] Since the communist takeover in 1949 the ratio of Uyghur to Han Chinese has fallen from 75% : 6% to 45% : 40% in 2000 (Toops 2004: 1). These are the official numbers; evidence suggests that the number of Han Chinese is much higher.[4] The Chinese government implemented a massive programme to "Develop the West" in 2000, targeting in particular Xinjiang, and the average annual income in the region has since risen substantially (Kreutzmann 2012). Though the Uyghur are still a majority in southern Xinjiang, the population has benefited less than the north of the region, which on account of migration now has a majority Han Chinese population. Kashgar is one of the cities in the south that has received a lot of investment and today its city centre is a thriving modern metropolis. Yet, here too the in-migrating Han Chinese have been major beneficiaries, while many Uyghurs feel that they have lost out on the opportunities that this very visible state-initiated development has generated.

Kinship and the *house*

Social networks provide important spaces of security and solidarity needed to deal with the economic hardship and frustration that I witnessed during my months of fieldwork in Kashgar.[5] Upholding and expanding such networks is an essential part of life for most of the city's Uyghur inhabitants. The closest social relations are seen as relatives (*tughqan*), regardless of whether genealogical links exist or not. Genealogical ties beyond parentship and siblingship are secondary to defining who is a relative; clans or tribes do not exist.[6] Exchange and mutual obligation are the main factors that define

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3 Most of the migrants come from Henan (15.2%), Sichuan (12.7%), Gansu (12.1%) and Shanxi (9.2%) (Howell / Fan 2011: 128).

4 A large number of Han Chinese live on paramilitary *bingtuan* farms, which are not included in the surveys as they are administered directly from Beijing (Bequelin 2004; Seymour 2000), and many working migrants are not properly registered (Liang / Ma 2004; Rudelson 1997).

5 The following section draws mainly on the data collected during my fieldwork in Kashgar between 2010 and 2013.

6 Unlike in eastern and northern Xinjiang, where the concept of *jemet* as a descent community, or at least as a genealogically defined group of reference, has some prominence, in Kashgar the concept is rare and has little relevance for social organization.

the dividing line between literal and metaphorical kinship (Steenberg 2013: 17, 34, 163; Barnard / Good 1984: 40). In old, established neighbourhoods (*mehelle*) the direct neighbours (*koshna*) and members of the neighbourhood (*hekemsaye*)[7] are integrated into the kinship network through exchange, and count as some of the most important relatives. The most intense exchange relations are established through marriage, which often occurs within the neighbourhood or other spatially and socially close circles (Steenberg 2013: 164–165; Enwer Semet Qorghan 2007: 106). The affines hold a special position within the network of a household and it is the ideal for the affines to become close relatives (*yéqin tughqan*), a category defined through exchange relations and mutual obligation, or as Sahlins has put it, as "mutuality of being" (Sahlins 2013: 19, 62). Sibling groups provide the primary extension of almost every household. They include both sisters and brothers and often their respective spouses. Marriage, rather than descent, is seen as the basis of siblingship (*qérindashliq, qandashliq*) (Steenberg 2013; Yarmuhemmet Tahir Tughluq 2009: 213) since it establishes its basis and symbolical and ritual centre: the parental house or 'big house' (*chong öy*). Here the siblings and their spouses meet up for the most important religious holidays (*héyit*) and for life cycle rituals (*toy*). A household becomes a big house when the first children marry, after which rituals like the sacrifice of a sheep for the Festival of Sacrifice (*qurban héyit*) are usually performed at this house. Before becoming a big house, such units – often referred to in social science as households and families – are in Kashgar referred to as *houses* (*öy*) in a number of idioms. Among the most common expressions for marriage are *öylenmek* (lit. to be housed, to become with a house) and *öy-ochaqliq bolmaq* (lit. to become with house and hearth); in trading networks *houses* function as a counting word to define the number of involved units in a certain cooperation or transaction and the closest relatives and family are often referred to as *öydikiler* (lit. those in the house).

The *öy* (*house*) can be constituted in several ways. It may encompass mainly genealogical relatives and be situated predominantly within networks of kin, or it may include members of the local community as relatives, though no genealogical ties exist. The defining element for membership of and association to the *house* is whether and to what degree exchange relations are upheld in the realm of economic and labour support. Like the

[7] This verbal distinction is mainly made in Kashgar. It is not rigorously adhered to and the terms are often used interchangeably or as tropes for each other, but they point to a general conceptualization of important neighbours as being both defined through the concrete networks of individual families and households based on spatial proximity and exchange as well as on membership of a neighbourhood community (*mehelle*) (Steenberg 2014b).

local concept of kinship (*tughqandarchiliq*)[8], the *house* is defined by a certain degree of mutual obligation and dependency, while it may draw on neighbourhood relations (co-residence), affinal relatives (marriage) and kin (genealogical kinship). This definitional flexibility is characteristic for the analytical concept of the *house* and suggests that some of the analytical problems in dealing with social organization and its transformations in Kashgar might be solved by reading the local concept of *öy* and its related practices as an instance of the analytical concept of the *house*.

An analytical concept and more

In 1995, a major publication jointly edited by Janet Carsten and Stephen Hugh-Jones productively reconsidered a little acknowledged part of the intellectual heritage of Claude Lévi-Strauss: the conceptualization of the *house* as more than "merely an architectural form or the locus of a household" (Gillespie 2000: 26). Rather, *houses* could be seen as social categories that locally "come to stand for social groups and represent the world around them" (Carsten / Hugh-Jones 1995: 1). As early as the nineteenth century, anthropologists like Frank Boas and Alfred Kroeber had noted that the social organization of peoples like the Yurok and Kwakikutl did not follow descent, but rather a sense of belonging to *houses* (Gillespie 2000: 25). Lévi-Strauss recognized the same kind of social category of the *house* in medieval Europe and feudal Japan as well as in contemporary South East Asia and Amazonia. *Houses* in this sense include several principles for defining belonging often regarded as mutually exclusive in conventional theory, such as agnatic and cognatic descent, co-residence and marriage alliance (Hugh-Jones 1993: 98; Gillespie 2000: 42). These principles are united in the structure of the *house*, which provides positions or roles within itself but no clear fixed priority of how they are to be filled: "Neither alliance nor descent nor any other principle has some 'privileged ontological or epistemological status, but each derives its particular meaning in relation to the rest'" (Gillespie 2000: 42; Howell 1995: 165). This is, as described above, true for social organization in Kashgar and enables what Lévi-Strauss has called an "alternative language of the house" (Carsten / Hugh-Jones 1995: 2) for naming, defining and relating social actors. To Lévi-Strauss this

[8] This is not the only conceptualization of kinship in Kashgar; more genealogically oriented notions of both cognatic and agnatic kin exist alongside it, but the non-genealogical, exchange or performance-based rendering of relatives is the most important kinship conceptualization for social organization, including the definition of social units and marriage choices (Steenberg 2013).

language of the house is mainly formulated in the idiom or 'borrowed language' of kinship (Gillespie 2000: 22, 34). This is to Lévi-Strauss the idiomatic remnant of a former kin-based organization which has ceased to be effective. Gillespie and Carsten do not agree with Lévi-Strauss that the language of kinship is a defining feature of the *house*. They see this as a return to classical kinship theory and its basic premises, such as the oppositional concepts of cognatic and agnatic descent or of descent and alliance, which was exactly what the concept of the house questioned, criticized, transgressed and moved beyond. Yet, this need not be the case. In Kashgar the language of kinship is still the prevalent idiom for close social relations and for expressing belonging to a *house*. As elaborated above, this kinship is not defined mainly genealogically. Therefore, making the language of kinship a defining factor of the *house* does not amount to re-introducing the obsolete categories of classical kinship anthropology. Carsten and Gillespie's critique seems to overlook the fact that kinship does not always refer to descent and genealogy (Sahlins 2013; Carsten 2004, 2000). Kashgar provides an example of *houses* employing the 'language of kinship' without defining this primarily in genealogical terms. Instead, gift exchange, marriage and affinity are at the heart of the *house*, just as they are at the heart of Uyghur kinship in Kashgar (Steenberg 2013). According to Signe Howell, the *house* is the result of a conjugal relation "objectified in the house" where "marriage alliance is often transformed into, or conceived as, consanguinity rather than affinity" (Gillespie 2000: 30, 37; Howell 1990). This is consistent with the situation in Kashgar, where the ideal for affines is to become close relatives and where this closeness is formulated in idioms of kinship with clear etymological connotations of consanguinity.[9] The *house* in Kashgar "extend[s] itself outwards towards siblingship" and affinal relations "rather than downwards through descent" (Gillespie 2000: 37). I suggest that among Uyghurs in Kashgar one or several households connected through siblingship or affinity and their closest relations, those recognized as *yéqin tughqan* (close relatives), can be seen as a *house* and that much local evidence and several local idioms suggest that this analytical concept is more or less consistent with the local concept of *öy* (house).

Three related aspects of this analysis must be distinguished: the local concept of the *öy* as an ideal representation, the *house* as an analytical concept derived in one way or the other from Lévi-Strauss' and others' development of the concept and 'the house' as a specific, local group (Macdonald / Members of l'ECASE 1987: 5, 220; Gillespie 2000: 36). Analytical recog-

[9] Important terms defining a relative are: *qandash*, lit. 'sharer of blood'; *qérindash*, lit. 'of one womb', and *tughqan*, lit. 'born' (Steenberg 2013: 266–279).

nition of *houses* as concrete social groups at the empirical level will mostly draw on local representations,[10] yet it fundamentally depends on a definition and operationalization of an analytical concept of the *house* that has certain commonalities with the local concept of the *öy,* but does not necessarily correspond to it in its entirety.

Moral persons in the neighbourhood

Lévi-Strauss defines the *house* as "a corporate body (moral person) holding an estate made up of both material and immaterial wealth, which perpetuates itself through the transmission of its name, its goods, and its titles down a real or imaginary (descent) line, considered legitimate as long as this continuity can express itself in the language of kinship (descent) or of affinity (alliance) and (or) most often of both" (Lévi-Strauss 1982: 174, in Gillespie 2000: 27). The bracketed words are provided by Susan Gillespie from a later translation from 1987. As apparent from the two translations, the French *personne morale* was first (in 1982) translated as a 'corporate body', very much in the sense of the British school of social anthropology, which was mainly concerned with the study of social structure as consisting of concrete groups holding certain rights and duties. In 1987, this translation had changed to a 'moral person', expressing a shift towards the structuralist spirit of Lévi-Strauss' teachings. For while the *personne morale*, like the corporate groups of the British school of social anthropology, is "an entity with moral and legal personality in the sense of being autonomous and responsible, possessor of rights and subject to obligations" (Gillespie 2000: 29), at the same time, closer to French structuralist readings, "the notion of a *personne* is first defined through its roles and relationships to other such entities and to the larger society" (Gillespie 2000: 29). Gillespie points out that "houses are most visible in their interactions with other houses" (Gillespie 2000: 29), but we can go even further to claim that they are in fact constructed and constituted in these interactions. The interactions and relations within the community make the houses moral persons and also contribute crucially to making the people living in these houses moral persons in the eyes of their community. As Gaston Bachelard states, "house images move in two directions: they are as much in us as we are in them" (Carsten / Hugh-Jones 1995: 1). This interaction of "house, body and mind" (ibid.) is central

[10] The local above-mentioned idioms that draw on the metaphor of the house (*öy*), such as *öylenmek* (marry), *öydikiler* (close relatives, parents), and *chong öy* (parental home), are all examples of the ideal representation in local categories.

to Carsten and Hugh-Jones's critical development of the *house* as an analytical category: "The house is an extension of the person; like an extra skin, carapace or second layer of clothes, it serves as much to reveal and display as it does to hide and protect" (ibid.: 2). When people in Kashgar exchange gifts and offer money or labour support within their community they do this on behalf of a *house*, never just as individuals. Thus 'becoming with a house' (*öylenmek*) as an idiom for marriage also refers to establishing an own exchange unit for participating in communal exchange and gifting. One is a full member of a community only by virtue of belonging to a *house* within the community. The *house* is thus both an integrated part of the community and provides an integrating path into it. Therefore, the definition of the *house* strongly depends on the kind of community it is situated in.[11]

In the semi-rural and rural areas around Kashgar and in the old neighbourhoods standing in the city, the neighbourhood community (*mehelle*) is central to local social and spatial organization. Here, neighbourhood, kinship and household subsistence are closely associated. Many see their neighbours as people with whom "one undertakes the journey of life" and one depends on them for social security, job opportunities and access to resources (Zaili Memettursun 2012: 13). Up until the 1990s, the old shoemaker's quarters in the heart of Kashgar's old city was, according to the accounts of its inhabitants, a thriving neighbourhood in which the children of one shoemaker became his neighbours' apprentices and where competition and cooperation went hand in hand (Steenberg 2014b). Several family-based workshops and small-scale factories drew on labour and financing within the neighbourhood (Bellér-Hann 1998) and some families were specialized in preparing and selling the raw materials. The institutions even proved flexible. After cheap industrially produced shoes from eastern China[12] flooded the market in Kashgar in the 1990s, the local shoemaking industry all but disappeared. Many artisans in the neighbourhood switched to the less profitable work of sewing leather socks. For this business the intra-neighbourhood supply chains and mutual support were maintained and reinvented, including sharing assignments, lending material and repairing sewing machines. Neighbourhoods provide the basis for several social institutions of mutual support and obligation, all perpetuating and representing *houses* as central exchange units. Mutual borrowing and lending of utensils, food and money is known as a "neighbourly right" (*qoshnilarning heqqi*) (Abdukérim Raxman et al. 2008:

[11] The following ethnographic details are derived mainly from my fieldwork in Kashgar, but also draw upon local scholarly publications.

[12] To a large extent these are imported by groups of local Uyghur traders, likewise often organized around neighbourhood support networks (see Steenberg 2014b).

111), the institution of *lapqut,* mutual assistance with sowing and harvesting, building a house or at life cycle rituals, is an integrated part of neighbourly conduct (Yarmuhemmet Tahir Tughluq 2009: 44). These exchange relations are morally sanctioned within the community: "It is wrong to think: 'I don't need you, I ask nothing of you.'" (Abdukérim Raxman et al. 2008: 112), and the relations deepen each time assistance is provided (Yarmuhemmet Tahir Tughluq 2009: 44).[13] During my time in Kashgar, I lived in Kökjay, a neighbourhood consisting of about 70 low mud houses with small courtyards built in the 1960s and 1970s to accommodate the employees of a state-owned transport company that was dissolved in the 1990s. Many of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood are still drivers and regularly help each other to find work. Within the last decades several intermarriages have taken place within the neighbourhood, and for many of its inhabitants the neighbours are a prime source of labour and economic support in life cycle rituals or illness. Mutual gifts of cooked food between the women in the neighbourhood (*ash sunushush*) are important tools in establishing close relations in the neighbourhood through regular commensality (ibid.: 45). This is also an important element in the creation of community at life cycle rituals and religious festivals (Bellér-Hann 2008a, 2008b). Women conduct a large part of the exchanges within the neighbourhood[14], yet men still profit largely from the contacts created, since they are part of the same *house*. This explains Sievers' observation from similar neighbourhood constellations in Uzbekistan (*mahalla*)[15] that "divorcees [...] value mahalla much less than do their married or widowed neighbours [...and...] the more children a family has, the more

[13] Everyone in the neighbourhood is expected to participate in the exchange, regardless of their wealth or standing (Enwer Semet Qorghan 2007: 132–133), though the contributions expected and the extend of invitations offered at life cycle rituals still depends largely on the economic capacities of the household (Waite 2007: 175).

[14] For a similar situation in Uzbekistan, see Hiriwati 2008: 56.

[15] The slight difference between Uzbek *mahalla* and Uyghur *mehelle* do not necessarily reflect the actual variants in pronunciation across the region or their most important phonetic fault lines. Yet, they metaphorically capture the differences between these institutions in present day Uzbekistan and People's Republic of China well. These differences derive to a large extent from the influences of the different political regimes on the local social organization (Trevisani 2008; Newby 1998) and have yet to be described systematically. For our purposes, they are adequately described as differences in accent (a vocal switch), while the underlying mechanisms (the consonant structure of the word) are very much the same. Thus following statement by Sievers (2002: 129) about the *mahalla* in Uzbekistan applies equally well to *mehelle* in Kashgar: "In modern Uzbekistan, few weddings, emergency medical operations, university matriculations, house repairs, or funerals take place in the life of the average mahalla resident without some community financial support."

it values the mahalla" (2002: 124). Belonging to the neighbourhood and belonging to a *house* are intimately connected.

Lost neighbours

Ever since the 1980s, cities all over China have been "restructured" by bulldozers as part of government modernization programmes. Local protests, mostly in vain, have accompanied many of these schemes: Beijing's Hutongs (Global Heritage Fund 2012) and the old neighbourhoods of Shanghai (Levin 2010) are prominent examples. In the case of Xinjiang, where these developments were started somewhat later, greatly enhanced by the large-scale government programme to 'Develop the West' launched in 2000 (Kreutzmann 2012), both the protests and reactions to these have been coloured by local sensitivities towards government control held by a large part of the local Uyghur population. The discussions have been dominated by idioms of ethnicity, resistance and repression (Bellér-Hann 2013). This is especially true for the city of Kashgar, as the almost complete destruction of the architecture of the old city centre received a lot of media attention in the Western press (Wines 2009; Macartney 2009; Uyghur Human Rights Project 2012). New houses are being erected, partly financed by the Chinese government and some in a neo-traditional local style aesthetically acceptable to much of the local population, but a very high percentage of the people formerly working and living in the neighbourhoods have had to leave and move into apartment blocks on the outskirts of the city. The Chinese government offers some compensation and a financing plan for the reconstruction of new, earthquake-proof housing on the same plots of land. One option is for the government to pay for the foundation, load-bearing walls and roof of the house, the skeleton so to speak, and for the house owner to finance the rest by herself. Regardless of the financing scheme, the house owner has to contribute a large amount of funding herself, and few people in the more impoverished neighbourhoods of the old city have the means to do so. Instead, they use the compensation to buy government-sponsored apartments in building blocks outside the old city. Former inhabitants of 'restructured' neighbourhoods are given cheap credits and low prices to buy and rent such apartments. When the neighbourhood of Kökjay was destroyed by bulldozers in 2012 and 2013, the plots were sold to an investor from Zhejiang and the inhabitants of Kökjay were offered the opportunity to buy or rent apartments with government support in a designated apartment block. In the absence of a realistic alternative, most of them accepted the offer. In summer 2013 Kökjay resembled a war zone, with only a few structures still standing among the ruins and heaps of debris. The pro-

cess of reconstruction always starts with the destruction of both houses and other infrastructure, after which reconstruction can take several years. In the meantime, the former inhabitants must move elsewhere, even if they intend and can afford to move back to their old plots later. A further important factor in changing the demographics of a neighbourhood is the fact that rents for new shops in the old city are much higher than before. This contributes to an almost complete change in both the working and residential population in many of the neighbourhoods; this is especially visible in the former shoemakers' quarters in the old city of Kashgar. Only the wealthiest could afford to stay. Two wealthy shoemakers in the neighbourhood also entered the shoe-trading business and became agents for the recruitment of shoemakers for factories in eastern China (especially Wenzhou 温州), where several of the young underemployed shoemakers went to work. Their sewing workshops in Kashgar moved to the outskirts of the city, and many were forced to leave the trade because without the environment and infrastructure of mutual help, sharing of assignments, easy access to materials and other synergy effects that the old neighbourhood offered they were unable to make a living. As the population of the neighbourhoods change, most of their social institutions vanish. They developed over decades or generations of mutual support and shared spatial structures between *houses* in the neighbourhoods, aided by the architecture of small alleyways and courtyards. In the new neighbourhoods these structures and institutions, which are at the same time also under attack from various other sides in the wake of economic, social and administrative transformations in Kashgar, have been only partially recreated. Experiences from other cities in Xinjiang, such as Ürümchi and Aksu, do not suggest that this will change in the coming years. Partial recreation of such institutions happens more readily when the new neighbourhood consists of ground floor courtyards (*pingpang öy*) rather than apartment buildings (*bina*).

The transforming *house*

The move from ground floor courtyards into apartments (*bina öy*) brings severe changes for the *house*. Firstly, it becomes disconnected from one of its main defining frames, the local neighbourhood and, secondly, it experiences a spatial fragmentation of its members into separate apartments. As the apartments are built mainly for the state-propagated nuclear one-child family (Rudelson 1997: 106), they are much smaller than the ground-floor houses. Therefore, people belonging to one *house* and living together in a courtyard are dispersed and the *houses* become multi-local. This does not

mean that they cease to exist. In many ways their exchange and interaction mirrors that of families living in separated rooms of ground-floor courtyard houses. The courtyard of the *house* has been spatially spread out (Bray 2005; Graham / Marvin 2001), as have the closest social relations and its community. This development excludes neighbours and increases the focus on genealogical relatives. As the neighbourhood community no longer plays the same role in defining and morally legitimizing the *house*, its position within the genealogically defined group of kin becomes more important. The *house* turns increasingly genealogical. In his description of neighbourhood institutions in Uzbekistan, Sievers makes a point that supports the argument of this paper: Sievers' data, collected mainly in structured interviews in neighbourhoods across Uzbekistan, suggest that the neighbourhood community is less important to people with nearby extended family (2002: 125). It is important to note that when Sievers writes about 'extended family' he has genealogical kin in mind. This is not the same as the definition of 'close relatives' in Kashgar, which, as elaborated above, includes many non-genealogical relatives. Yet, allowing for this important qualification, Sievers' observations hold for Kashgar as well. They indicate that belonging to a community of neighbours and belonging to a group of genealogically defined kin are in some ways alternatives. Sievers explicitly expresses it as follows: "Uzbekistan currently offers three general risk-spreading institutions: extended family, social mahalla, and administrative mahalla" (2002: 128). The extended family denotes genealogical kin and affines, 'social *mahalla*' the neighbourhood community and 'administrative *mahalla*' state institutions (Trevisani 2008). The definition of a 'close relative' (*yéqin tughqan*) in Kashgar may draw on either of the first two[16] to various degrees (Steenberg 2013). Likewise a *house* may to a greater or lesser extent be situated within a neighbourhood community or a network of genealogical kin, and the local concept of the *house* may rely on either as its dominant framework. In the recent past, and to a large extent still today, in many social contexts of Kashgar and the city's rural surroundings the dominant frameworks have been the sibling group, the neighbourhood community and affinal relatives, while genealogical kin beyond siblings have merely played a secondary role. This seems to be changing in Kashgar city today. Genealogical kin is becoming more important and the neighbourhood community is losing much of its significance as mobility rises, imaginaries (Rasanayagam 2011) of life narratives become increasingly multi-local and neighbourhood communities are dissolved by the state or made obsolete by the expanding money economy.

[16] Extended family, i.e. genealogical kin or 'social *mehelle*', i.e. spatial proximity including exchange.

Increased mobility

Transportation has become convenient and affordable for large (but by no means all) parts of the population of Kashgar. The labour markets and urban environment of the large cities in northern Xinjiang, like Ürümchi, Karamay and Shihezi, are well suited for migrants, due largely to the influx of Han Chinese from other provinces, which is sponsored and encouraged by the government (Howell / Fan 2011). In addition, the infrastructure of the eastern coastal cities facilitates migration, notwithstanding the disappointments and exploitation many migrants face at their destination. Government programmes bringing both Uyghur labourers and students to other Chinese provinces have existed for at least two decades (Chen 2008), but much is also privately organized. When migration involves large distances, affines and genealogical kin are approached for local support at the destination, and increased migration and mobility enhance the importance of such channels. Genealogical relatedness is a primary non-spatial means of tracing connections, and increases in importance as spatial means become weaker or inadequate.

There is also a more conceptual side to the heightened mobility: to many young Uyghurs in Kashgar mobility equates with opportunities. Mobility offers attractive narratives of success that are closely associated with the conceptualization of the city (*sheher*), which hierarchically ranks above the village (*yéza*). Moreover, long-distance trade has a very positive connotation (Steenberg 2014c), as do narratives of modernization and development (*tereqqiyat*) when contrasted with the backwardness (*qalaq*) attributed to the so-called traditional (*enenewiy*) life, which is conceptually associated with immobility, neighbourhood community and village life. Especially young people increasingly imagine a career and opportunities in faraway cities. In wealthier communities in rural Kashgar agricultural work is increasingly done by paid labourers; few young men are eager to take over their father's farm. As one old peasant lamented, he had brought up eight children, including five sons, but was now in his sixties working the fields by himself, while his children had abandoned him. His children, who worked as cooks, drivers, traders and government workers in various cities across Xinjiang, discussed the issue amongst themselves and jointly coerced the least successful of the younger sons into returning to their parental home to care for their father and the farm, though he had personal ambitions of going to Ürümchi and abroad. Imagination and dreams, too, are becoming de-localized.

Restaurant celebrations

The *house* is an economic unit defined through exchange. Thus, as the type and objects of this exchange transform, so does the institution of the *house*. For instance, in recent years it has become popular among government workers and other middle class families in Kashgar to hold central celebrations such as weddings and other life cycle rituals in restaurants (Steenberg 2013).[17] This changes the social relations between neighbours and relatives and the position of the *house* within the neighbourhood and the network of kin, respectively. At celebrations held at home in established neighbourhoods the local community fulfils important tasks. The celebrations would not be possible without their help. Neighbours offer their houses and courtyards as spaces for the events and act as hosts. They contribute tableware and labour, help organize the event and offer gifts and financial contributions. The celebration depends on the infrastructure of the neighbourhood, including the *molla* to perform the *nikah* (religious wedding celebration), specialists for circumcision, and the large pot and stove on which the communal meal is cooked.[18] The exchange of gifts, labour and access to space at such celebrations is complex and intimately bound up with the neighbourhood (Steenberg 2013; Bellér-Hann 2008: Ch. 5). In contrast, at restaurant celebrations the neighbourhood practice of providing help becomes obsolete; neighbours no longer take on hosting roles and neither the neighbour's houses and labour nor the neighbourhood's spaces and infrastructure are needed. Gifts of money become the main contribution. In the sense of Bourdieu's capital types (Bourdieu 1986), social capital (labour help and access to neighbour's rooms) is replaced by economic capital (hired service and rented space). This changes the relations between *houses*. It reduces the importance of the neighbourhood and increases reliance on genealogical and affinal relatives, from whom large loans can be expected (Steenberg 2013: 174; Abdukérim Abliz 2011: 26–29). A similar, though less voluntary shift, also involving a substitution of economic capital in the form of money for social capital in the form of neighbourly support is experienced by those who have lost their neighbourhood communities in the course of urban restructuring. In the absence of social networks and community to draw on in their small apartments on the city's outskirts, even poor households are forced to hold their celebrations in restaurants and to pay for services, material, labour and

[17] Restaurant celebrations have been common in Ürümchi for many years and the effects on social organization can beneficially be compared (Clark 1999).

[18] Pot and stove are commonly purchased for the neighbourhood with contributions collected by the imam and are kept at the local mosque.

space instead of receiving these as mutually obligatory gifts from neighbours within the neighbourhood institutions. This drives many into debt, as for many poor *houses* stronger genealogical ties are scant compensation for the lost of neighbourhood community. Like in Uzbekistan, "given the critical importance of risk-spreading institutions in the lives of [people], fundamental disruptions in any of these institutions [...] produce misfortune for large numbers of [people]" (Sievers 2002: 128).

Conclusion: *house* societies or an element in social transformations?

Social units that can be meaningfully analyzed applying the concept of the *house* often compete with other forms of social organization, such as lineage or the nuclear family household. Historically, they can appear and disappear in any given social context. "Under certain conditions entire societies may transform themselves into *sociétés à maison* [house societies], only to later become less 'housy'" (Gillespie 2000: 33). The *öy* (*house*) in Kashgar is not disappearing in the wake of modernization and raised mobility; it is transforming. The concept accommodates different defining factors of belonging and, therefore, provides a framework for the competition of seemingly conflicting models within itself. It draws on the flexible and "dynamic quality of the kin-like, economic, ritual and co-residential relations that are enacted within the physical and symbolic framework provided by the house" (Gillespie 2000: 42). Several important defining criteria for membership of the *house* co-exist, and historically their relative importance meanders back and forth. In Kashgar we observe a shift in the hierarchy of these criteria, moving from spatial proximity and daily mutual assistance towards genealogical relatedness and the provision of funds in the form of loans, i.e. from the local (*jama'et*) to the genealogical (*jemet*).[19] *Houses* in contemporary Kashgar lose their roots in local communities as mobility increases, neighbourhoods are destroyed and money replaces neighbourly support at celebrations. Many aim to compensate for this by consolidating their belonging to networks of kin. This leads to de-localization and increased genealogicalization of social relations and of the *house* in Kashgar. These changes play into a general monetization of daily life in Kashgar, which emphasizes social connections that provide access to money, often affines and genealogical kin. This can

[19] The phonological closeness of the two words *jama'et* (local community) and *jemet* (descent category) points to their derivation from a common Arabic stem, which neatly captures them as historical variants of a similar concept.

be sensed in changes in local institutions on a small scale. For example, there is a growing tendency to reduce or cancel the institution of *onbeshkünlük*, a celebration held some days after a wedding for the wider community. It is argued that relations between affines should be sought at a more personal and intimate level through smaller scale mutual visiting that excludes the local community. Recalling Siever's "three general risk spreading institutions: extended family, social mahalla, and administrative mahalla" (2002: 128), in Kashgar the first seems to be gaining momentum over the second, to the detriment of mainly the poorer segments of the population.

The relationship between the *house* and social transformation in Kashgar goes even deeper. The *house* is not only being transformed, but is also aiding and accommodating transformation in the society in general. As a dynamic concept, it becomes instrumental in social dynamics. This agrees poorly with Lévi-Strauss' understanding of the *house*, but quite well with the thoughts developed from this by later scholars. Lévi-Strauss saw the *house* as indicative of a certain type of society, which he called *house* societies (*sociétés à maison*). Such societies, according to Lévi-Strauss, arose historically as the organization of relatively simply organized 'kinship societies' reached stages of higher complexity in which kinship was no longer adequate for social organization (Gillespie 2000: 33). Lévi-Strauss saw these societies as representing a step between kinship and class organization. This evolutionary scheme has been widely rejected (Gillespie 2000: 51; Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995: 10), but it is broadly recognized that *houses* play "a significant role in socio-political transformations" (Gillespie 2000: 51). The social environment in Kashgar has shifted radically several times since the Qing conquest of 1759. This includes the establishment of a Qing administrative system (Newby 2007, 1998), the era of Yaqub Beg, the Qing re-conquest (Millward 2007: 125–133), the republican era with its many political upheavals (Millward / Tursun 2004: 80), the communist victory in 1949 and the various communist and market reforms in the People's Republic of China (Millward 2007; Dillon 2004). The institution of the *house* seems to have proved a useful way of coping with such change and with restrictive government policies (Clark 1999). *Houses* have the great advantage over descent groups, households and to some extent even marriage alliances that they can evade state control and sanctions. Households and marriages are captured in surveys, and many state attempts to limit the basis for local non-state power have targeted patrilineal groups. This was the case with the Qing 'avoidance law', which prohibited the direct inheritance of offices from father to son and restricted the number of office holders from one agnatically defined family within a certain area (Newby 2007: 25, 1998: 290), and with the communist marriage law of 1950, which prohibited marriage between

agnatic cousins (Bellér-Hann 2004: 18; Engel 1984: 956). Houses as social units evade such schemes since they are not as easily traceable, lacking a single defining feature. Old and new political instabilities and major demographic and economic transformations (Millward 2007; Toops 2004: 1) in Kashgar have been partly accommodated at a micro-level by the institution of the *house*, including the recent shift in the definition of close social relations from spatiality and daily assistance towards genealogy and money lending. Since the concept and social unit of the *house* contains within itself seemingly conflicting structures and "combines what seems mutually exclusive"[20] (Gillespie 2000: 32), it acts as a perfect vehicle for transformation, staying intact and even gaining strength at the cost of less flexible models when the definition of close social relations and their frame of reference shifts. The example of Uyghur Kashgar suggests viewing both the idiom of kinship (going beyond genealogy) and the close relation to social trans-formation as an inherent feature of concepts of the *house* more generally.

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[20] Such as descent vs. alliance, patrilineality vs. matrilineality, unilineality vs. cognatic descent and descent vs. residence.

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