

Uyghur Migrant Restaurants in the Netherlands

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ABSTRACT: Migrant restaurants are an important factor in the hospitality sector in the Netherlands. Uyghur restaurants in Rotterdam and The Hague are a new addition to this group. While the first purpose of Uyghur migrant restaurants was to savour traditional Uyghur culture and provide a home away from home, they have also opened their doors to Chinese, Dutch, and international guests. In this way they do not only showcase Uyghur halal food and culture to outsiders who may know very little about the Uyghur people; they also make Uyghur culture more accessible to the world.

Migrant restaurants have become an important phenomenon in Western European countries. This is partly due to former colonies, partly to the influx of migrant workers from the Mediterranean and Eastern European countries. According to an article in *Quest* magazine of 4 November 2013, in the early 1980s one in three restaurants in the Netherlands was a Chinese-Indonesian restaurant. The word ‘afhaalchinese’ (Chinese take-away) became a household name in the Netherlands with still (April 2018) 108,000 hits on Google. Chinese and Chinese-Indonesian food has practically become ‘normal’ food in the Netherlands.

This article presents one specific new group of migrant restaurants, founded by Uyghurs. We situate these restaurants on the crossroads of Chinese and central Asian food culture, taking the specific location of the Uyghur people as a starting point.¹ For the study we used a mix of interviews with the restaurant owners and workers in the restaurants, combined with participant observation (Adil Alimjan worked as a part-time waiter in one of the Uyghur restaurants) and an analysis of the menus of the restaurants.

Between 1994 and 2004 the number of migrant entrepreneurs in the Netherlands rose from 21,000 to 58,000, an increase of 181% (Dagevos and Gesthuizen 2005). Turkish people are the largest group in absolute numbers, and Turkish restaurants in the Netherlands have been well documented (see for example Schulp and Tirali, 2008). Chinese have the highest percentage entrepreneurs (15%), and they are also most successful. Most of these migrant entrepreneurs work in the restaurant business. These restaurants rely heavily on their (ethnic) social networks, especially for the first-generation migrants (Rusinovic, 2010). In following generations these restaurants tend to achieve ‘break-out’ (Rusinovic, 2010 p. 63) and develop into mainstream ethnic minority businesses. The Uyghur restaurants in the Netherlands are

still very much in the first phase: they provide a home away from home for the relatively small (2,000) group of Uyghur migrants in the Netherlands. This function is represented in the visitor profile of the restaurants.

Currently, in The Hague there are 22 Chinese, 68 Chinese-Indonesian, 29 Indian, 73 Turkish and 2 Uyghur restaurants. Rotterdam has 29 Chinese, 83 Chinese-Indonesian, 21 Indian, 126 Turkish and 2 Uyghur restaurants. In Amsterdam there are 37 Chinese, 86 Chinese-Indonesian, 84 Indian and 97 Turkish restaurants, but no Uyghur (eet.nu). In comparison, in Dublin there are 97 Chinese, 73 Indian and 3 Turkish restaurants, but no Uyghur (Irishtourist).

Profile Uyghur restaurants in The Hague and Rotterdam

At the time of the research in 2017 there were four Uyghur restaurants in the Netherlands, two in The Hague and two in Rotterdam. All four restaurants were established in recent years (Figure 1).

Restaurant Name	Town	Since	Professional Education of Owner	Professional Education of Cook
Kanway	Den Haag	2016	No	Yes
Wefa	Den Haag	2015	No	No
Urumqi	Rotterdam	2015	No	No
Kiroren	Rotterdam	2016	No	No

Figure 1. Profile of Uyghur restaurants in the Netherlands.

Urumqi in Rotterdam was the first Uyghur restaurant in the Netherlands. The owner worked as a medical doctor in Xinjiang in North-West China before he came to the Netherlands. After his migration he missed his homemade food and decided to open a Uyghur restaurant in the Netherlands. He did not have experience of restaurant operations or management, but his family owns a large restaurant in his home place, and his father was a famous chef in that area. His brother and his wife are the main chefs in the restaurant; they do not have any formal training in the restaurant business either. On their website Urumqi locates itself in Chinatown in Rotterdam

The next restaurant to open was Wefa in The Hague. The main purpose the owner had for opening this restaurant was to provide a place for the Uyghur community living in the Netherlands to eat their local

food and get together. The restaurant is quite small and cosy, five tables for six people. The owner and chef of Wefa has been in the Netherlands since 2007 when he started to work in various Chinese restaurants in different positions. He does not have a professional background in restaurant management or operation; as the chef in his own restaurant he serves homemade food for his guests.

Restaurant Kanway in The Hague was established in 2016. The name of the restaurant comes from a traditional Uyghur shirt and the proprietors of the restaurant feel proud when they explain the meaning of Kanway to their guests because it is a characteristic of the Uyghur culture. The restaurant exhibits a number of Uyghur pictures, hats, knives and musical instruments on its walls. The owner came to the Netherlands in 2010, and worked as an employee in different Chinese restaurants in various positions like front desk, backstage and manager since 2013. She does not have a professional background in restaurant management, but she has four years of experience in this field. Different from the other Uyghur restaurants in the Netherlands, the chef at Kanway has a professional background and 20 years' experience in the Uyghur cuisine.

Restaurant Kiroren in Rotterdam opened in August 2016 by four cooperative partners; they are also the main workers in the restaurant. Three of them work as chefs in the restaurant; the other one is responsible for the front desk and is also a waiter. All four had worked in different restaurants after they



Figure 3: Xinjiang, China

moved to the Netherlands. They do not have any restaurant degree or knowledge about restaurant business. Besides Uyghur food Kiroren also serves general Asian food. In Autumn 2017 Kiroren ceased business. Later it re-opened as a Kimchi Asian/Korean/Japanese all-you can eat restaurant.

What is clear from the figure is that Wefa hosts most Uyghur guests, followed by Kanway (Figure 2). This could be explained by the explicit wish of the owner to provide a home away from home for the Uyghur people. All four restaurants have a considerable number of guests who are Han Chinese, but Urumqi more than the others. Their location in Chinatown in Rotterdam, which is frequented by many Chinese students, tourists and business people, explains this. Kiroren seemed to target the Dutch market with a preference for (con)fusion kitchen. It could be a reason that they did not last.

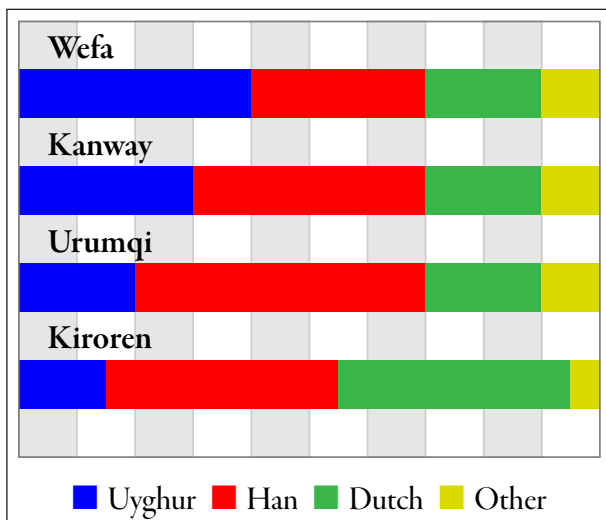


Figure 2. Visitor profile Uyghur restaurants in the Netherlands, based on owners' impressions.

The Uyghur people

All of the proprietors of the Uyghur restaurants are recent migrants from Xinjiang in Western China. Xinjiang is a provincial level autonomous region in China that was established in 1955. It is known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) (Figure 3).

XUAR covers roughly one sixth of China and is a very sparsely populated area with a population of 20 Million. XUAR is the home of the Uyghurs, the largest ethnic minority group in China. The Uyghurs make up around half of the population in XUAR, 45% are Han Chinese, and other ethnic groups are Kazak, Hui, Kirghiz, Mongol, Xibe, Russian, Tajik, Uzbek, Tatar, Manchu, and Daur (Han, 2010, p. 249).

The term Autonomous is deceptive. In recent years the region has become more interesting for the People's Republic of China: not only is it situated on the silk route (Frankopan, 2015), but it is also very rich in natural resources. China wishes to exploit both and has maintained a policy for migration of Han Chinese to XUAR. Smith (2002, p. 157) reports that 'between 1949 and 1970 alone, the percentage of Han Chinese in Xinjiang increased from 5.5 percent to a staggering 40 per cent'. There is a marked difference between different parts of the region. Han (2010, p. 249) contends that

Han Chinese are concentrated in urban areas and in the northern part of Xinjiang, while Uighurs are mostly concentrated in southern rural areas. For example, in the capital city of Urumqi, Han Chinese are now about 73 percent of the total population, while Uighurs are about 12 percent. However, in the south in areas such as Kashgar and Khotan, Uighurs make up more than 90 percent of the local population.

In a recent study Kozhirova, Khazhmuratova and Marmontova (2016) predict a demographic explosion in the XUAR. The Uyghur people are rather different from the Han Chinese: both ethnically and linguistically they are a Turkish people; most of them are Muslims and they use the Arabic script. The demographic change in XUAR has an impact on the relationships between the original Uyghurs and the Han Chinese. Han (2010, p. 245) argues that it has led to a form of self-segregation:

large scale in-migration of Han Chinese to Xinjiang during the past few decades has brought the Uighurs into direct contact and confrontation with the Han Chinese in daily life. These intensified encounters between the two have highlighted existing linguistic, cultural, and religious differences between the two, resulting in self-imposed segregation between the two groups in Xinjiang.

Erkin (2009) describes the process of self-segregation of Uyghurs and other Turkic minority groups in Xinjiang as a result of linguistic and religious differences between the Uyghur and Han people. Quoting Daucher (2009) she writes that 'Uyghurs and Han live in worlds of face-to-face social interaction that are almost entirely separate. Residential settlement patterns remain largely segregated [...] the two groups have minimal mutual understanding, and the interactions are strained' (p. 418). Ironically, and contrary to what one might expect, segregation also increases as a result of the programmes that the Chinese government has installed to develop the economic situation of the minority groups. The more affluent they become, the more they can afford to buy imported goods from neighbouring (Turkish) countries and thus develop their own consumer identity.

Han (2010, p. 251) adds the element of time that separates the Uyghurs from the Hans when he observes that

Xinjiang is two time zones behind Beijing. However, the unity-obsessed Chinese government officially operates on only one time zone for all of China... Uighurs tend to use the local Xinjiang time, while Han Chinese often stick to official Beijing time.

The Uyghur cuisine

Ayoufu, Yang and Yimit (2016) provide an overview of the Uyghur cuisine. Wheat products are the staple food, complemented by meat (mainly lamb, beef and chicken) and fruits. Cesaro (2000, p. 226) adds that 'vegetables are consumed in much smaller quantities, and were mostly introduced by the Han, as many of their names reveal'. Teas are the main beverages. A special feature is the use of sheep fat, from the large tails and bottoms of sheep. Ayoufu, Yang and Yimit (2016, p. 766) state that,

Traditional Food of the Uyghur People lists more than 300 foods in 21 categories, including 26 types of polo (oily rice dish), 11 types of *manta* (steamed stuffed bun), 12 types of *samsa* (roasted stuffed bun), 11 types of *shorpa* (soup), 6 types of *halwa* (sweet porridge), 6 types of *chuchure* (soup with stuffed dumplings), 8 types of *langman* (stretched noodles) and 21 types of *suyuqax* (pasta soup).

There are four basic ways to prepare the food (Ayoufu, Yang and Yimit, 2016, p. 766):

roasted (e.g., shish-kebabs, samsa, roasted lamb, roasted nan bread, and roasted grilled fish), boiled (e.g., boiled lamb, langman, suyuqash, and polo), fried, or wheaten (e.g., oily pyramid and pitir-manta).

Most of these dishes can be found in the four Uyghur migrant restaurants in the Netherlands. Figure 4 provides an overview of the most popular dishes that are served in all four restaurants. They exemplify what Ichijo and Ranta (2016, p. 8) call 'perform the nation':

Difference between Chinese and Uyghur cuisine

Uyghur cuisine has been open to outside influence, both from neighboring central Asian countries and Chinese cuisine. Unlike the large majority of Chinese people who do not have many restrictions when it comes to food, most Uyghurs are Muslims with strict food laws. The Uyghurs use several terms to distinguish themselves from the rest of China. One of them is *neidi* - China Proper or Inner China (Grose, 2015). A more fundamental difference is expressed with the word *qingzhen* which includes the meanings of *halal* and *Muslim* (Cesaro, 2000). Thus food consumption is sharply divided between Uyghurs and Han Chinese. Han (2010, p. 250) observes that



Laghman: Beef with fresh peppers, tomatoes, onions with home-made pasta



Tugre: White flour, lamb or beef, onion, cabbage, white and black pepper, and salt



Manta: Uyghur dumpling with lamb mince and Chinese cabbage



Ziblik Kabab: Lamb, salt, cumin, black pepper, and chili powder



Gösh Polo: Rice, plant oil, lamb, red and yellow carrot, onion, water, and salt



Qong tehsilik tobo korumisi: Chicken, dry chili, green onion, garlic, ginger, plant oil, sugar, potato, tomato jam and pepper



Qoqura: Uyghur dumpling soup with parsley

Figure 4. Popular dishes in Dutch Uyghur restaurants

Restaurants in Xinjiang are distinguished by their halal status. Although Han Chinese occasionally dine in halal restaurants, Uyghurs would never patronize non-halal ones. Some Uyghurs even avoid patronizing non-Uyghur-operated halal restaurants because of suspicions that Han Chinese might be involved in their operation and thus the establishments may not maintain appropriate standards.

The serving of, and possible contamination with pork is the main concern and trust is a major issue here. Cesaro (2010, p. 230) quotes one of her spokespersons, ‘we never eat anything that has been touched by the Han because we don’t trust them’.

Patronage of Uyghur restaurants in the Netherlands

With this self-segregation in mind, how can we explain the patronage of the Uyghur restaurants in the Netherlands by Han Chinese? Gladney (1996) provides a theory that he named Relational Alterity. Gladney presents opposites in a ‘nested hierarchy’ (p. 454). It basically holds that two parties may be at odds with each other but confronted with higher order opposition they will unite. Figure 5 presents a schematic picture of the relative position of the Uyghur minority versus the Chinese majority on both a local and global level. In the Netherlands both Uyghurs and Han

Chinese would be regarded as relative outsiders and thus tend to look for each other.

Gladney explains why Han Chinese would visit Uyghur restaurants outside the XUAR, just as they frequent Uyghur restaurants in Beijing where ‘Uyghur-owned “Xinjiang-style” restaurants attract a mostly Han clientele’ (Grose, 2015, p. 117).

Conclusion

Migrant restaurants have become an important factor in the hospitality sector in the Netherlands. Chinese and Turkish restaurants are the main representatives; they are in the second or third generation and have professionalized over the years. Uyghur restaurants are a new branch and they show all the signs of first generation migrant restaurants. They largely serve as a home away from home for Uyghur migrants, the proprietors and chefs generally do not have a professional background and, compared to the large number of dishes mentioned in *Traditional Food of the Uyghur People* quoted by Ayoufu, Yang and Yimit (2016), the menus are rather limited. The visitor profiles, however, do show diversity with a mix of Uyghur, Chinese and Dutch visitors, especially in Rotterdam. In this way Uyghur restaurants in the Netherlands have an opportunity to present Uyghur halal food and culture to outsiders who may know very little about the Uyghur people and to promote Uyghur to the world.

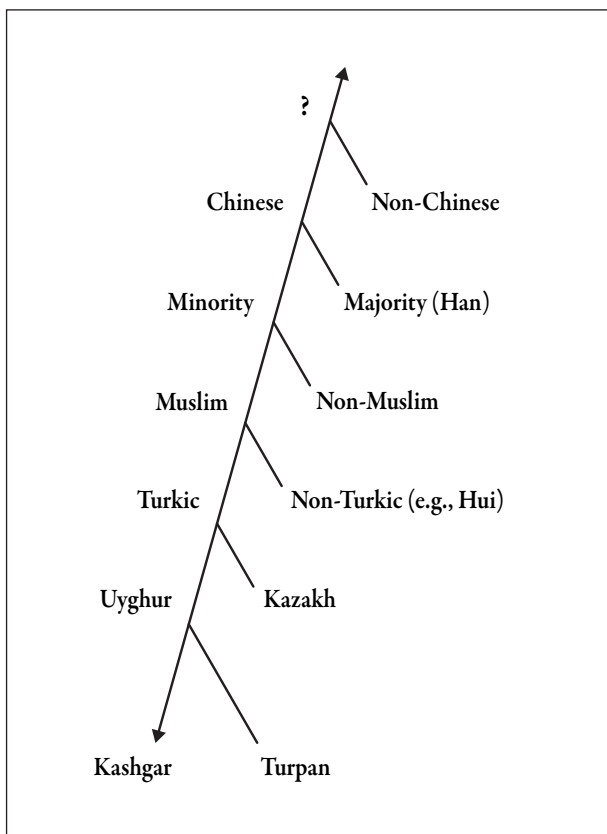


Figure 5: Adapted from Gladney (1996), p. 460.

About the author

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Notes

1. The author thanks his Uyghur friend Adil Alimjan [name is fictional] who wishes to remain anonymous.

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