THE ART OF LIFE IN CHINESE CENTRAL ASIA: UYGHUR DISPOSSESSION, CULTURE WORK AND TERROR CAPITALISM IN THE GLOBAL CITY [1]


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This study argues that Uyghurs, a Turkic-Muslim group in contemporary Northwest China, and the city of Ürümchi have become the objects of what the study names “terror capitalism.” This argument is supported by evidence of both the way state-directed economic investment and security infrastructures (pass-book systems, webs of technological surveillance, urban cleansing processes and mass internment camps) have shaped self-representation among Uyghur migrants and Han settlers in the city. It analyzes these human engineering and urban planning projects and the way their effects are contested in new media, film, television, photography and literature. It finds that this form of capitalist production utilizes the discourse of terror to justify state investment in a wide array of policing and social engineering systems that employs millions of state security workers. The project also presents a theoretical model for understanding how Uyghurs use cultural production to both build and refuse the development of this new economic formation and accompanying forms of gendered, ethno-racial violence. It argues that the violence of state-directed capitalist dispossession is shown to break the spirit and vitality of Uyghur sociality while linking Han life paths to this new form of domination and exploitation.

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