

Peasant Paintings 农民画

Peasant paintings have become an integral part of Chinese folk art in the People's Republic of China (PRC). These colourful pieces are usually found on murals on the Chinese countryside and are frequently accompanied by slogans espousing Chinese pride and values. In Xinjiang, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has used these paintings to promote Party values and sever Uyghur culture and traditions from the principles of Islam. They typically portray Uyghurs who do not conform to Party values as violent radicals and secessionists seeking to destabilize Western China, and they often mobilize everyday concerns such as gender, relationships, and prosperity. Many of these paintings draw on the same set of symbolic imagery: Doves, blooming trees, and bright colours characterize portraits of correct behaviour, while crows, dying vegetation, and darkness represent life under extremist influences.

Mobilizing the Family



This painting won a grand prize at the “[Deradicalization Peasant Artwork Competition](http://xj.cnr.cn/2014xjfw/2014xjfw_1/201411/t20141110_516758041.shtml) (http://xj.cnr.cn/2014xjfw/2014xjfw_1/201411/t20141110_516758041.shtml).” The demonization of Islam is clear, and the fact that such a starkly prescriptive image was selected by the judges indicates that this represents the “correct” understanding of Islam and gender in Xinjiang. The niqab

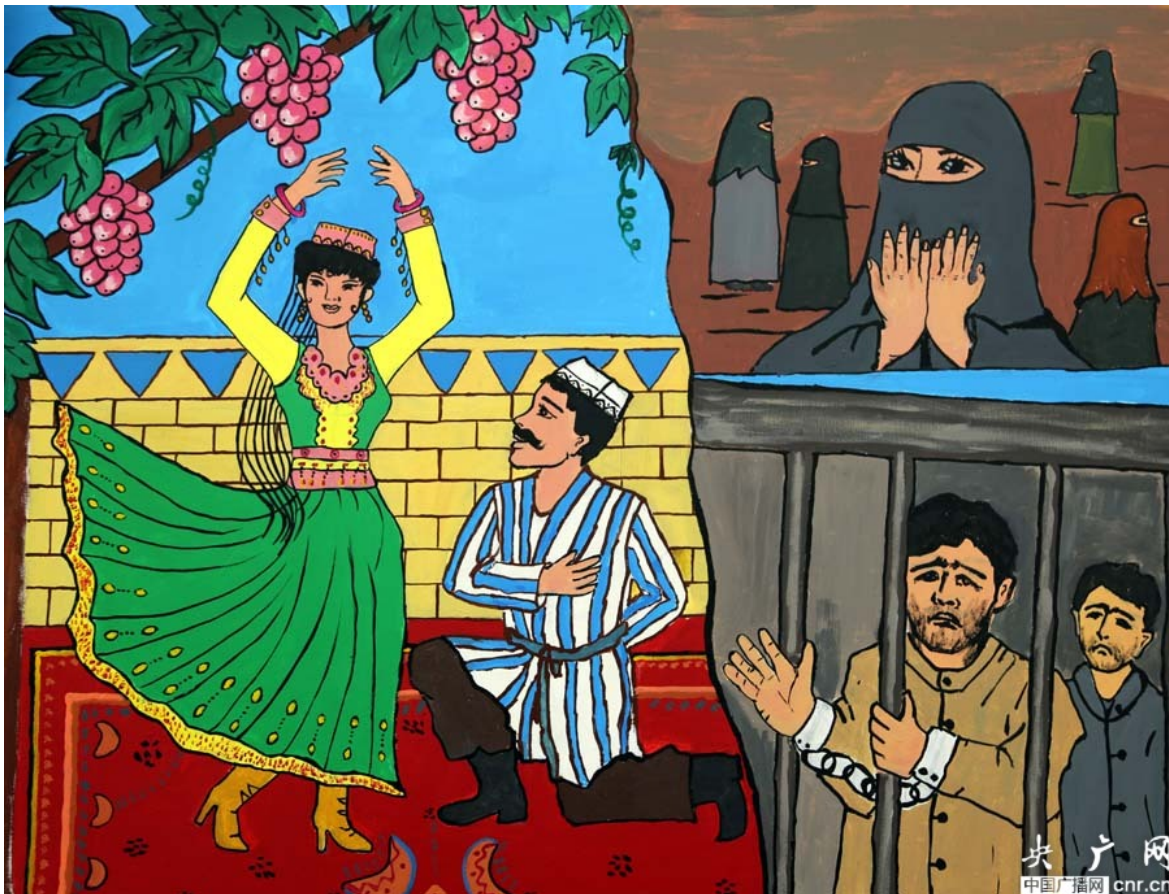
symbolizes religious repression, while the more 'ethnic style' Uyghur *Etles* silk dress advocated by the Party represents freedom and improved self-esteem. A full selection of all winning pieces can be found in [this article](http://xj.people.com.cn/n/2014/1121/c188514-22966094.html) [.\(http://xj.people.com.cn/n/2014/1121/c188514-22966094.html\)](http://xj.people.com.cn/n/2014/1121/c188514-22966094.html).



This piece presents another juxtaposition of a Uyghur woman's life before and after de-radicalization. On the left, her existence is portrayed as repressive and empty. On the right, following de-radicalization, she is portrayed in colourful Uyghur clothing and surrounded by vibrant flower petals.



As in the previous examples, this representation of Uyghur women draws on the CCP's gendered and secular perceptions of Uyghur self-actualization and conformity. After becoming de-radicalized, and having shed and repudiated the Islamic clothing, they are free to express themselves and show off their beauty. The characters on the clothing [吉里巴甫服] are the Chinese name for Jilbāb (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jilb%C4%81b>) in Xinjiang.



This painting, from the same competition as the first, won a second place prize and follows a similarly dichotomous and gendered logic. Adherence to Islam draws men to terrorism and leaves women repressed and alone. Adherence to secular Party values, on the other hand, leads only to happiness and a successful relationship. Niu Yuanfeng, a member of the Party Committee of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and a Director in the Department of Propaganda, noted that paintings such as this would be disseminated throughout the region to showcase the importance of 'de-radicalization.'



As in the previous example, this painting illustrates the underlying promises of the CCP's campaign in Xinjiang, although in this case it emphasizes economic prosperity rather than family. Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other ethnic minorities who reject extremism and embrace national values will enjoy a life of plenty enabled by the Party. According to this logic, everyone who renounces extremism will have access to an abundance of work, food, and joy. Those who fail to embrace de-radicalization will lead lives of deprivation.

Eliminating Extremism



This painting depicts an axe bearing the crest of the Chinese Communist Party cleaving into corpses of men and women wearing traditional Islamic clothing and a large serpent. Weapons such as knives, axes, and home-made bombs, as well as flags with the Islamic star and crescent symbol, litter the floor. The caption at the bottom states "Vow to Destroy the 'Three Forces' (<https://xinjiang.sppga.ubc.ca/glossary/>): extremism, terrorism, and separatism.



This artwork shows a mass of armed people including Chinese policemen, Uyghur farmers, school children, and others killing and chasing away rats. The piece is titled “‘The Three Forces’ Are Rats in the Street; Together We Will Chase Them Down” [‘三股势力’ 过街老鼠人人喊打] and adheres to a long-lasting mode of representation for internal state enemies. For more historical context and comparison of this symbolism in propaganda, this [blog post](https://ianpace.wordpress.com/2015/11/17/macs-cartoon-in-the-mail-the-symbolism-of-the-rat-and-der-ewige-jude-1940/) (<https://ianpace.wordpress.com/2015/11/17/macs-cartoon-in-the-mail-the-symbolism-of-the-rat-and-der-ewige-jude-1940/>) traces the rat as a symbol of persecution and scapegoating from Nazi Germany through to the migrant crisis in the early 2010s.



Following the symbolic logic of the previous painting, this piece, titled “The End of the Three Forces” [三股势力的下场], characterizes these enemies as being surrounded by all sectors of China’s society. Rural people, the military, and cultural workers are shown to be united in their effort to eliminate terrorists, separatists, and extremists.



This painting depicts a giant shovel in the process of sweeping away radical Islamic thinking, which includes content from extremists on the internet and 'toxic' religious dogma. The writing on the shaft of the shovel calls for "controlling the three forbidden acts and eliminating religious extremism" [治理三非铲除宗教极端思想]. The three forbidden acts refer to illegal religious activities, illegal internet distribution, and illegal publications. These measures were introduced by the CCP to stop terrorism and the spread of extremist ideals in Xinjiang.



This painting, titled "Extreme Forces Go to Hell" [极端势力下地狱] depicts men carrying weapons and bombs marching toward hell on the blade of a sword. Unlike most peasant paintings denouncing the three forces—many of which invoke the might of the CCP and the support of the masses—this piece has an explicitly religious dimension.

Institute of Asian Research, School of Public Policy and Global Affairs

1855, C.K. Choi Building, West Mall

West Mall

Vancouver, BC Canada V6T 1Z1

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