



# **Uyghur Voices on Education:** China's Assimilative 'Bilingual Education' Policy in East Turkestan

**UHRP**

**UYGHUR HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECT**

A Report by the Uyghur Human Rights Project  
Washington, D.C.

## Table of Contents

I. Background .....	2
II. Personal Reflections on the Bilingual Education System.....	16
Essay 1: Reflections on <i>min kao han</i> education: My perception as a <i>min kao han</i> student on bilingual education with Chinese characteristics.....	16
Essay 2: Uyghur university graduates’ difficulties finding employment sends the message that “schooling is worthless” .....	21
Essay 3. Views on the bilingual education system in East Turkestan .....	26
Essay 4. My beloved school’s name will be wiped out from East Turkestan history .....	29
III. Recommendations .....	31
IV. Acknowledgments .....	33

Cover image: Uyghur students study Mandarin Chinese in Hotan Experimental Bilingual School,  
October 13, 2006. (Getty Images)

## I. Background

### *Policy*

Throughout the history of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Chinese Communist Party has placed itself at the center of defining the Uyghur identity. Chinese government manipulation of the social and cultural aspects of Uyghur life have attempted to assimilate Uyghurs into a broader Chinese state identity (*Zhonghua minzu*) with little regard to the individual and collective aspirations of the Uyghur people. Given the dominance of the Han ethnicity in China, not only in demographic, but also political and economic terms, many Uyghurs have perceived these state-imposed transformations of their distinct identity as a process of "Hanification," rather than one that affords social equality.

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union and resulting growth in Chinese influence in energy-rich and strategically advantageous ex-Soviet Central Asian nations, China has leveraged its role as an arbiter in what it means to be a Uyghur towards assimilation with the dominant Han culture. This has included extensive curbs on Islam through state administration of religion and engineering a diminished role for the Uyghur language in education. In *The Xinjiang Conflict: Uyghur Identity, Language Policy, and Political Discourse*, linguist Arienne Dwyer states: "[L]anguage and religion are valued by most ordinary Uyghurs as central aspects of their identity."<sup>1</sup> In order to mitigate the perceived threats to state loyalty a distinctive Uyghur identity presents China's "March West"<sup>2</sup> into Turkic Central Asia, tight state control of shared traits between Uyghurs and Central Asians has become a feature of policy approaches to East Turkestan despite the inherent cultural and linguistic advantages.

Although China's Constitution and Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law guarantee ethnic minorities the right to use their own languages, Chinese officials often portray the Uyghur language and the Uyghur belief in Islam as impediments to the "development" of the Uyghur people.<sup>3</sup> Senior government officials have emphasized Mandarin language skills as a marker of modernity and even a necessity in the fight against "terrorism." In 2002, former Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) Party Secretary Wang Lequan commented:

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<sup>1</sup> Dwyer, Arienne M. (2005). *The Xinjiang Conflict: Uyghur Identity, Language Policy, and Political Discourse*. Retrieved from <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/fileadmin/stored/pdfs/PS015.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Yun Sun. (2013, January 31). March West: China's Response to the U.S. Rebalancing. *Brookings*. Retrieved from <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2013/01/31-china-us-sun>.

<sup>3</sup> Bequelin, Nicholas. (2004). Criminalizing Ethnicity: Political Repression in Xinjiang. *China Rights Forum*, 1, 7 and CCTV.com (2013, May 19). Bilingual education boosts Xinjiang's development. Retrieved from <http://english.cntv.cn/program/newshour/20130519/102466.shtml>.

*The languages of the minority nationalities have very small capacities and do not contain many of the expressions in modern science and technology, which makes education in these concepts impossible. This is out of step with the 21st Century.*<sup>4</sup>

In addition, the following quote attributed to former XUAR Chairman, and Uyghur, Nur Bekri was cited in a 2009 *China Daily* article:

*Terrorists from neighboring countries mainly target Uyghurs that are relatively isolated from mainstream society as they cannot speak Mandarin. They are then tricked into terrorist activities.*<sup>5</sup>

In *Nation-Building And Ethnic Boundaries In China's Northwest*, scholar David Tobin describes how government propaganda about the “bilingual” education policy “suggests that by being educated using the medium of Mandarin, young Uyghurs will be driven to blossom and prosper through the guidance of the party-state and its bilingual education policy.” Tobin adds: “By omitting mention of the young students’ mother-tongue in the exhibition, the implicit suggestion is that this does not offer the same opportunities for personal growth and prosperity.”<sup>6</sup>

Although conceptualized in the mid-1980s, the “bilingual” education policy gained political momentum in the early 1990s and since that time has significantly altered the delivery of education for Uyghurs in East Turkestan.<sup>7</sup> The policy is designed to transition Uyghur students at all levels from education in their mother tongue to education in Chinese resulting in the removal of Uyghur in the classroom and presenting a fundamental challenge to a distinct Uyghur identity. The policy marks a shift from more egalitarian policies in the past that provided choice for Uyghur parents in their children’s languages of instruction. Furthermore, early Chinese state interventions regarding the Uyghur language were primarily based in orthography. For example, directives mandated the use of the Cyrillic alphabet in 1956 and the Latin alphabet in 1958.<sup>8</sup> However, “bilingual” education represents an instance of state involvement in revising the *status* of the Uyghur language.

The growth of “bilingual” education in East Turkestan has been rapid. In 1995, 5,533 students were enrolled in “bilingual” schools, by 2007, 294,000, by 2010, 994,300 and by

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<sup>4</sup> Millward, James. (2007). *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*. New York: Columbia University Press.

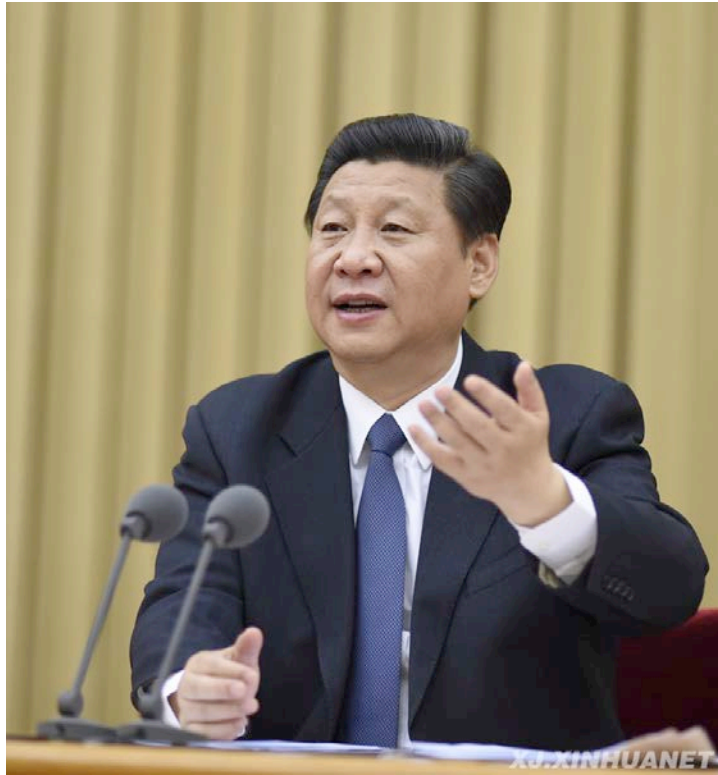
<sup>5</sup> China Daily. (2009, June 5). Mandarin Lessons ‘Help Fight Terror. Retrieved from [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2009-06/05/content\\_8250623.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2009-06/05/content_8250623.htm).

<sup>6</sup> Tobin, David. (2013). *Nation-Building And Ethnic Boundaries In China's Northwest*. *The University of Manchester*. Retrieved from <https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/uk-ac-man-scw:206253>.

<sup>7</sup> Uyghur Human Rights Project. (2007, July 24). Uyghur Language Under Attack: The Myth of “Bilingual” Education in the People’s Republic of China. Retrieved from <http://uhrp.org/uaa-and-uhrp-reports/uyghur-language-underattack-myth-“bilingual”-education-peoples>.

<sup>8</sup> Grose, Timothy. (2008). Educating Xinjiang’s Uyghurs: Achieving Success or Creating Unrest. *The Virginia Review of Asian Studies*, 11, 117-35.

2012, 1,410,000.<sup>9</sup> The regional government has set a target of 2,600,000 students enrolled in “bilingual” schools in East Turkestan by the year 2020, accounting for almost the entire non-Han Chinese student population.<sup>10</sup>



*President Xi Jinping speaks at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Xinjiang Work Forum on May 28, 2014 (Xinhua)*

According to Chinese state media funding for “bilingual” education in the region would reach US\$645 million by 2012.<sup>11</sup> Following the second Xinjiang Work Forum in 2014, the National Development and Reform Commission announced an additional US\$85 million in funding for “bilingual” education in the region.<sup>12</sup> The investment of state capital is closely followed by senior political investment into the success of the policy. In December 2014, Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Chairman Yu Zhengsheng told a group of young Uyghurs in Beijing: “If we are to maintain Xinjiang’s social stability and ethnic unity we must put education and employment work in an even

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<sup>9</sup> Reger, Amy. (2009). Human Rights in Xinjiang: Recent Developments, Prepared Statement of Amy Reger. Retrieved from <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-111shrg48222/html/CHRG-111shrg48222.htm> and CECC (2013). 2013 Annual Report. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Press.

<sup>10</sup> Reger, A. (2011). The Uyghur perspective: The missing link in Chinese authorities’ implementation of the “bilingual” language policy in Xinjiang. Unpublished paper from ASN 16th Annual World Convention.

<sup>11</sup> China Daily. (2009, September 2). Xinjiang students receive bilingual education. Retrieved from [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/ethnic/2009-09/02/content\\_8647251.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/ethnic/2009-09/02/content_8647251.htm).

<sup>12</sup> CECC (2014). 2014 Annual Report. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Press.

more prominent position and further raise the quality of bilingual education.”<sup>13</sup> The remark was preceded by comments by Chinese president Xi Jinping and premier Li Keqiang on the importance of “bilingual” education in East Turkestan.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, opposition to “bilingual” education indicates opposition to China’s senior leadership. As David Tobin notes, among Uyghur such an anti-state position on bilingual education is framed by the state propaganda as a stance of “separatists” and “terrorists.”<sup>15</sup>

### ***Employability***

In a 2009 article, scholars Ben Hopper and Michael Webber published the results of a survey on Uyghur and Han attitudes to employment opportunities. Asked whether employment conditions in East Turkestan were better or worse than 10 years ago, 76.3% of Uyghurs stated that the employment situation was worse as opposed to 48.6% of Han Chinese. Hopper and Webber’s study quotes a Uyghur interviewee who echoed the sentiments of many Uyghurs in East Turkestan: “If a Han comes from inner land, there’s always a job ready for him. Even if the Uyghur can speak Chinese and has the requisite skills, the Han won’t give him or her the job.”<sup>16</sup>

While the Chinese government asserts that “bilingual education” will provide ethnic Uyghurs with the Mandarin language skills necessary to succeed in China’s competitive job market, many Uyghur graduates who are fluent in Mandarin Chinese report facing employment challenges due to ethnic discrimination among Han employers.<sup>17</sup> As one former Uyghur teacher recalled, when he traveled with his Chinese-speaking Uyghur students to job fairs, they observed signs flatly stating “we don’t want minority people.”<sup>18</sup>

At the conclusion of the 2014 Xinjiang Work Forum, Chinese president Xi Jinping told state media that improving employment opportunities in East Turkestan was to be become a top policy concern. However, Xi did not directly address the issue of

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<sup>13</sup> Blanchard, Ben. (2014, December 10). China says bilingual education a key for Xinjiang's stability. Reuters. Retrieved from <http://news.yahoo.com/china-says-bilingual-education-key-xinjiangs-stability-115353268.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Zhao Lei. (2014, May 30). Xi endorses jobs increase in Xinjiang. *China Daily*. Retrieved from [http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-05/30/content\\_17552770.htm](http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-05/30/content_17552770.htm).

<sup>15</sup> Tobin, David. (2013). Nation-Building And Ethnic Boundaries In China’s Northwest. *The University of Manchester*. Retrieved from <https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/uk-ac-man-scw:206253>.

<sup>16</sup> Hopper, Ben and Webber, Michael. (2009). Migration, Modernisation and Ethnic Estrangement: Uyghur migration to Urumqi, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, PRC. *Inner Asia*, 11, pp. 173-203.

<sup>17</sup> Smith Finley, Joanne. (2013). *The Art of Symbolic Resistance: Uyghur Identities and Uyghur-Han Relations in Contemporary Xinjiang*, p. 44-55. Leiden: Brill.

<sup>18</sup> Uyghur Human Rights Project. (2007, July 24). Uyghur Language Under Attack: The Myth of “Bilingual” Education in the People’s Republic of China. Retrieved from <http://uhrp.org/uua-and-uhrp-reports/uyghur-language-underattack-myth-“bilingual”-education-peoples>. For more information on hiring discrimination targeting Uyghurs see: Uyghur Human Rights Project. (2012, June 27). Uyghur Homeland, Chinese Frontier: The Xinjiang Work Forum and Centrally Led Development. Retrieved from <http://uhrp.org/press-release/new-report-uhrp-uyghur-homeland-chinese-frontier-xinjiang-work-forum-and-centrally-led> and Fay, Greg. (2013, August 7). Uyghurs, Other Ethnic Groups Need Not Apply. Retrieved from <http://weblog.uhrp.org/uyghurs-other-ethnic-groups-need-not-apply/>.

discrimination in the region, but endorsed the movement of people from Xinjiang to find work and education opportunities elsewhere in China. Furthermore, Xi “asked the government to allocate more education funding to Xinjiang and said schools should push bilingual education.”<sup>19</sup>

Scholar, Joanne Smith Finley writes of the difficulty Uyghur parents face in regard to sending their children to “bilingual” schools: “[P]arents in Ürümchi confirmed that after careful consideration of the social and economic climate, Chinese-medium schools were effectively the *only* choice if they hoped to increase the life chances of their children.”<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, as scholar Robert Wilson states, Uyghurs “are still in a Chinese world” and discriminatory hiring is a reality facing recent Uyghur graduates.<sup>21</sup> In a 2013 essay, Uyghur economist Ilham Tohti wrote on the issue:

*According to official government data, only 17% of ethnic Uighur university students in Xinjiang manage to secure a full-time job by the time they graduate. This is far below the rate for ethnic Han Chinese university students. My own research reveals that the actual job-placement rate for Uighur university students approaching graduation is even lower, at less than 15%. The difficulty of finding work after graduation not only impoverishes ethnic-minority families who have sacrificed to send their children to university, it also contributes to the notion, widespread among Uighurs, that education is useless.*<sup>22</sup>

At the issue’s core, Uyghurs face a choice between forgoing education in their native language in order to be one of the fortunate ones to secure employment in an environment of discrimination, or electing for schooling in Uyghur, which through state engineering has effectively marginalized them from the job market.

### ***Uyghur language in the media and online***

In a 2009 assessment of China’s “bilingual” education policy in East Turkestan, international human rights lawyer, Aurora Elizabeth Bewicke concluded:

*Children do not have the opportunity to develop their Uyghur language skills, and will, thus, not be able to produce new works for the coming generations...The light of the Uyghur voice is being extinguished by China's language policy, and*

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<sup>19</sup> Zhao Lei. (2014, May 30). Xi endorses jobs increase in Xinjiang. *China Daily*. Retrieved from [http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-05/30/content\\_17552770.htm](http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-05/30/content_17552770.htm).

<sup>20</sup> Smith Finley, Joanne. (2013). *The Art of Symbolic Resistance: Uyghur Identities and Uyghur-Han Relations in Contemporary Xinjiang*, p. 40. Leiden: Brill.

<sup>21</sup> Wilson, Robert Warren. (2012). A tear in my eye but I cannot cry: An ethnographic multiple case study on the language ecology of Urumchi, Xinjiang and the language practices of Uyghur young adults. *The University of Texas at Austin*. Retrieved from <http://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/19836>.

<sup>22</sup> Tohti, Ilham. (2013). Present-Day Ethnic Problems in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region: Overview and Recommendations. *China Change*. Retrieved from <http://chinachange.org/2015/04/22/present-day-ethnic-problems-in-xinjiang-uighur-autonomous-region-overview-and-recommendations-1/>

*while there may not yet be a legal protection against philocide, China's policy does constitute a clear violation of established human rights norms.*<sup>23</sup>

The diminishing significance of the Uyghur language cannot be solely equated to the effects of a globalizing and homogenizing world; it is also the product of a deliberately engineered state process. In such a configuration, the incentive to speak and write in Uyghur is particularly lessened. State rhetoric equating Mandarin with modernity and as offering an advantage in the job market, compounded with warnings against opposing the “bilingual” education policy, has resulted in a diminishing role for the use of Uyghur as a language for original expression, especially in the media and online, as well as in official use.<sup>24</sup>

In a 2011 assessment of the 2009-10 National Human Rights Action Plan (NHRAP) published by Xinhua, the Chinese government claimed progress in linguistic rights among ethnic minorities, stating: “With the allocation of 120 million yuan from the state, 36 publishing houses catering to ethnic minorities are publishing books of all kinds in 23 minority languages. Nearly 100 newspapers and 192 periodicals in ethnic minority languages are subsidized by the state.”<sup>25</sup> However, in its own assessment of China’s 2009-10 NHRAP, Human Rights Watch observed: “In Xinjiang, the Chinese government has pursued a policy since 2002 that has supplanted the Uyghur language in favor of Mandarin, prompted burning of Uyghur-language books, and imposed prohibitions on traditional customs related to weddings, funerals, and religious pilgrimages.”<sup>26</sup>

The assertions of the Chinese state regarding output of material in ethnic minority languages, including Uyghur, does not contain an evaluation of the quality of information in Uyghur, the purpose of Uyghur language state media outlets and the targeting of non-state narratives written in Uyghur. In 2012, Chinese state media launched a Uyghur-language version of the Xinhua New Agency website (<http://uygur.news.cn/>). Former XUAR chairman Nur Bekri hailed the new service as a means to “bridge the communication gap between Xinjiang and the world.”<sup>27</sup> Uyghur exiles called the initiative tantamount to “brainwashing” and claimed China wants to demonstrate it “has not stopped the Uyghur language, which is one of the reasons it draws condemnation from international organizations and other countries.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Bewicke, Aurora Elizabeth. (2009). Silencing the Silk Road: China’s Language Policy in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. *San Diego International Law Journal*, 11, 135:69.

<sup>24</sup> Bovingdon, Gardner. 2004. Heteronomy and Its Discontents: ‘Minzu Regional Autonomy’ in Xinjiang. In *Governing China’s Multiethnic Frontiers*. Ed. Morris Rossabi, p. 135. University of Washington Press: Seattle, WA.

<sup>25</sup> China.org.cn. (2011, July 14). Assessment Report on the National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2009-2010). Retrieved from [http://www.china.org.cn/china/2011-07/14/content\\_22989895\\_5.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/2011-07/14/content_22989895_5.htm).

<sup>26</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2011). Promises Unfulfilled: An Assessment of China’s National Human Rights Action Plan. Retrieved from <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/china0111webwcover.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Xinhua. (2012, October 16). Uyghur-language website connects Xinjiang and the world. Retrieved from [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-10/16/c\\_131909931.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-10/16/c_131909931.htm).

<sup>28</sup> Lipes, Joshua. (2012, October 16). Xinhua ‘Brainwashing’ Uyghurs. *Radio Free Asia*. Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/xinhua-10162012182634.html>.



According to UHRP Project Manager Greg Fay, Xinhua's Uyghur service is "half-hearted at best." Fay adds: "When it was launched...the government lauded it as a breakthrough for providing authoritative, precise and timely information to Uyghurs. In fact, the site consists of only some original pieces and translations, and mostly links to China's more robust government-controlled Uyghur news services, China National Radio and regional site TianShanNet."<sup>29</sup>

Nur Bekri's assertion of an existing "communication gap between Xinjiang and the world" fails to mention the 10-month Internet shutdown between 2009-10 initiated by the Chinese state that preceded the Xinhua launch.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, according to UHRP findings, the "communication gap" was exacerbated by widespread deletion of original writing in the Uyghur language. UHRP researchers found:

*When the Internet was restored in May 2010, at least 80% of Uyghur-run websites, including Diyarim, were wiped from the web in what added up to a digital book burning of Uyghur content. On the forums of Diyarim and the other two most popular sites, Xabnam and Salkin alone, over 200,000 users had contributed over 2 million posts in 145,000 threads. Not a single website that was deleted by authorities after July 5 was devoted to religion. Instead, the sites were mainly devoted to literature, entertainment, culture and computers.<sup>31</sup>*

As UHRP's findings indicate, space for original writing in Uyghur declined in the wake of the July 5, 2009 unrest. Although new websites have appeared since 2010, which do enable communication in Uyghur, state censorship, and consequently, self-censorship has increased. Many available forums open to extensive Uyghur language writing on current events and cultural and scientific matters appear to have been relegated to official websites, and in many cases these articles have been translated from Mandarin.

### ***Case Study: Abduweli Ayup***

Abduweli Ayup is a linguist with a passion for promoting the Uyghur language. Educated in China and abroad, Ayup was awarded a Ford Foundation scholarship to attend the University of Kansas from 2009-2011.

After returning to China, in 2012 Ayup and two business partners Dilyar Obul and Muhemmet Sidik opened a Uyghur language kindergarten in Kashgar. Authorities shuttered the school in March 2013, though it reopened in January 2014.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Fay, Greg. (2012, November 20). Xinhua Uyghur's Limited Coverage of Leadership Change. Uyghur Human Rights Project. Retrieved from <http://weblog.uhrp.org/xinhua-uyghur-leadership-change/>.

<sup>30</sup> Herold, David Kurt and Marolt, Peter. *Online Society in China*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> Szadziewski, Henryk and Fay, Greg. (2014, July 22). How China Dismantled the Uyghur Internet. *The Diplomat*. Retrieved from <http://thediplomat.com/2014/07/how-china-dismantled-the-uyghur-internet/>.

<sup>32</sup> Sulaiman, Eset. (2014, January 31). Investigations Into Case of Jailed Uyghur Language Activist Extended. *Radio Free Asia*. Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/language-01292014183031.html>.



*Abduweli Ayup (R) with his wife and daughter while studying in the U.S. in 2010. (Radio Free Asia)*

Ayup and his associates were taken in police custody in August 20, 2013. For nearly 9 months, Ayup was imprisoned with no formal charges against him. In December 2013, family members anonymously told Radio Free Asia that Ayup was in poor health and his family was denied visiting him or bringing him medicine.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, on May 17, 2014, the prosecutor's office of Urumchi issued a formal letter detailing the charges that Abduweli was accused of having collected "illegal donations."<sup>34</sup> Their fundraising means included online fundraising as well as "selling honey and T-shirts emblazoned with the school's insignia," according to the New York Times.<sup>35</sup> He was sentenced to 18 months in August<sup>36</sup> and released on appeal in November 2014 along with sentence reductions for Obul and Sidik.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Sulaiman, Eset. (2013, December 27). Uyghur Activist 'Very Weak' in Prison, Denied Family Visits. *Radio Free Asia*. Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/activist-12272013153041.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Sulaiman, Eset. (2014, June 20). Uyghur Language Activist Formally Charged, Thrown in Notorious Prison. *Radio Free Asia*. Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/charged-06202014162139.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Jacobs, Andrew. (2014, May 11). A Devotion to Language Proves Risky. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/12/world/asia/a-devotion-to-language-proves-risky.html? r=2>.

### *School Conditions*

What is termed “bilingual education” is nearly a monolingual education in Mandarin, eliminating Uyghur language from the academic sphere of young Uyghurs’ lives and assimilating Uyghurs into the Chinese culture. Implementation of the government’s bilingual education policy has resulted in reduction in the availability of Uyghur instruction, closing of Uyghurs schools, poor conditions in schools serving Uyghur communities, and unemployment difficulties for Uyghur teachers not capable of teaching in Mandarin. A shortage of bilingual teachers has led to the hiring of unqualified Han instructors to fill the gap.



*A Chinese teacher in Mekit County, near Kashgar, instructing Uyghur students. (Tianshan Net)*

The vast majority of Han Chinese teachers in the bilingual education system can only speak Mandarin, not Uyghur. In fact, they are not bilingual teachers at all. It is highly unlikely that Han teachers will lose their jobs due to a lack of proficiency in Uyghur. For Uyghur teachers, on the other hand, fluency in both Uyghur and Mandarin is required, and Uyghur teachers whose Mandarin is insufficient face unemployment. The “bilingual” policy therefore demonstrates an ethnic inequality in the labor conditions for teachers in

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<sup>36</sup> Sulaiman, Eset. (2014, August 26). Uyghur Linguist, Two Associates Sentenced After One Year Detention. *Radio Free Asia*. Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/language-08262014235118.html>.

<sup>37</sup> Sulaiman, Eset. (2014, December 11). Chinese Court Frees Uyghur Linguist Following Appeal. *Radio Free Asia*. Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/linguist-12112014153845.html> and Jacobs, Andrew. (2014, December 12). China Is Said to Have Freed Jailed Uighur Linguist. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/13/world/asia/china-is-said-to-have-freed-jailed-uyghur-linguist.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/13/world/asia/china-is-said-to-have-freed-jailed-uyghur-linguist.html?_r=0).

East Turkestan in that Uyghur teachers face requirements that Han teachers do not face. This approach is another manifestation of the discrimination Uyghurs face in the job market in East Turkestan, as well as the need for Uyghurs to be more qualified than their Han counterparts when applying for jobs of the same grade.

RFA reported that at least 1,000 primary school teachers lost their jobs from 2010-2011 because of their Mandarin level. One teacher of 20 years at Nogayto primary school who lost her job, with 30 other teachers from her village, told RFA: “We are good educators who love the students, but now the government will only allow people who speak perfect Mandarin to teach them.” A professor at the Xinjiang Early Childhood Training College also reported that 20 Uyghur professors at his school had no lessons to teach because the government required that their classes be taught in Mandarin. In 2011, only 12.7% of minority teachers in East Turkestan, or 18,342 of 144,780 total teachers, could teach bilingually.<sup>38</sup>

The rapid expansion of bilingual education has resulted in a shortage of teachers who can effectively teach in Mandarin. In 2014, the government earmarked US\$40 million to fund bilingual training academies and 19 new bilingual boarding schools in 17 counties and cities in the region.<sup>39</sup> Yet even with increased teacher training, Chinese sources report a vast shortage of bilingual teachers. A February 2015 state media report stated that there exists a shortage of 30,000 teachers proficient in Chinese and Uyghur or another local language, with 70,000 teachers currently employed.<sup>40</sup>

The government has attracted new teachers by offering incentive programs to Hans in mainland China, and Chinese media offer positive reports on the arrival of volunteer teachers.<sup>41</sup> In a recent article, UAA Vice President Ilshat spoke with a teacher from an elementary school in Kashgar’s Yengisheher County who questioned new Han teachers’ qualifications. Among dozens of supposed university graduates in her program were graduates of less competitive 4-year technical schools and even 2-year technical school programs, and others still who possessed fake diplomas. The government pays and arranges work for families to accompany Han migrants, and after five years, the teachers are offered an option of transferring to government work. The teacher noted that not only do the Han instructors in her school not speak Uyghur, but their segregated housing and Mandarin-only speaking requirements on campus also restrict their ability to learn.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Abdilim, Mihray. (2011 September 23). Uyghur teachers are losing their jobs as authorities ramp up bilingual education in Xinjiang. Radio Free Asia. Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/teachers-09232011160635.html>

<sup>39</sup> Yin, Peter. (2014, June 24). “Xinjiang Receives Fund to Improve Bilingual Teaching.” *Women of China*. Retrieved from <http://www.womenofchina.cn/womenofchina/html/news/charity/17/3848-1.htm>

<sup>40</sup> Xinhua. (2015, February 25). “Xinjiang short of bilingual school teachers.” Retrieved from <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/908706.shtml>

<sup>41</sup> Xin Lin. (2014, August 27). China’s Mandarin Teaching Drive Sparks Uyghur Anger. *Radio Free Asia*. Retrieved from: <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/teachers-08272014122902.html>

<sup>42</sup> 伊利夏提 [Ilshat]. (2015, April 4). 民族压迫中被牺牲的维吾尔儿童[Uyghur Children Sacrificed by Ethnic Pressure]. *Boxun*. Retrieved from <http://boxun.com/news/gb/pubvp/2015/04/201504040842.shtml#.VS6DPZTF-VU>

Bilingual education has been pushed back further into early education, to primary schools and even kindergarten. A 2004 policy document made Mandarin the primary or sole language of instruction in elementary and middle schools. In addition to starting Mandarin as the main language of instruction, 50 minority and Han schools were merged in that year. In some areas, bilingual education came to mean Mandarin instruction as early as first grade, and Uyghur instruction only as a second language.<sup>43</sup>

Expansion of bilingual education into kindergarten has been aggressive. In 2010, a multi-billion yuan investment funded programs at nearly 1,700 kindergartens.<sup>44</sup> The government invested in 1,016 new bilingual pre-schools with aims to recruit 20,000 bilingual pre-school teachers, and 60% of regional pre-schoolers in the region received 2-year bilingual Mandarin education at the time.<sup>45</sup> By February 2015, 450,000 children have received bilingual education from kindergartens and of 34,500 recruitment vacancies listed by the education department, 3,500 are for kindergarten teachers.<sup>46</sup>



*Uyghur kindergarten students learn Chinese characters in Urumchi, February 26, 2009. (Xinhua, Zhao Ge)*

<sup>43</sup> Schleussel, Eric. (2007). "'Bilingual' education and discontent in Xinjiang." *Central Asian Survey*. 26:2, Page 257.

<sup>44</sup> Wang Hanlu. (2010, July 26). "290,000 Xinjiang kindergartens students receive bilingual education." *People's Daily Online*. Retrieved from <http://en.people.cn/90001/90782/90873/7080823.html>

<sup>45</sup> CCTV. (2012, February 14). Xinjiang to send more pre-school bilingual teachers to countryside. Retrieved from <http://english.cntv.cn/20120214/117653.shtml>

<sup>46</sup> Xinhua. (2015, February 25). "Xinjiang short of bilingual school teachers." Retrieved from <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/908706.shtml>

Researcher Guljennet Anaytulla writes in a 2007 paper about the implementation of bilingual preschool program in Kashgar. She describes great difficulties for educators to provide the necessary Uyghur instruction: “Although all of them had undergone training in Han [Chinese language], most of them expressed themselves poorly in Han, had not mastered the basic tonal vacations, and used inaccurate pronunciations.... For these and other reasons, the teachers experienced great mental pressure, and even the best of them were unable to give full rein to their abilities.” As for the students, “Most children in the younger, intermediate and older classes learned by rote and did not know the meanings of the songs they memorized.” In another class, students had to read textbooks because they were unable to understand the poor Mandarin of both their teachers – including both the Uyghurs and even some Han with thick regional accents.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to issues with the quality of bilingual education, a serious funding gap exists for Uyghur and Han Chinese students. In a 2013 essay, Uyghur scholar Ilham Tohti reviewed class sizes at the three high schools in the city of Atush, and found that Uighur class sizes averaged 50 students per classroom, versus only 30 for Han Chinese.<sup>48</sup>

Schools closing as a result of bilingual policies have also negatively impacted Uyghur students, not only from the reduction in Uyghur language instruction. Radio Free Asia reported in 2012 that seven of eight townships in Aksu’s Uchturpan county had shuttered middle schools in recent years, and as a result of combining the schools, increased travel times for many students particularly in rural areas had created too great a financial burden on families and led to an increase in dropouts.<sup>49</sup>

### ***Mainland Class Program***

The mainland high school class program (CH: *Xinjiang gaozhong neidi ban*) is another part of the government’s bilingual education campaign. The program’s mission is to strengthen ethnic unity and assimilate Uyghurs through the education process, by transferring them and other ethnic groups from East Turkestan to complete high school in mainland China, focusing especially on Mandarin training and a pro-China curriculum.

The program was launched in East Turkestan in 2000, based on a similar program in Tibet launched in the 1980s. It grew from 1,000 high school graduates in 12 cities in its first year to 22,000 students in fall 2010, after authorities launched an expansion

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<sup>47</sup> Anaytulla, Guljennet. (2008). “Present State and Prospects of Bilingual Education in Xinjiang: An Ethnographic Perspective.” *Chinese Education and Society*, 41:6, Pp 37-49.

<sup>48</sup> Tohti, Ilham. (2015, April 23). “Present-Day Ethnic Problems in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region: Overview and Recommendations (2).” *China Change*. Retrieved from <http://chinachange.org/2015/04/23/present-day-ethnic-problems-in-xinjiang-uighur-autonomous-region-overview-and-recommendations-2/>

<sup>49</sup> Juma, Mamatjan. (2012, February 1). School Merger Results In Dropouts. *Radio Free Asia*. Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/dropouts-02012012185932.html>

campaign at the May 2010 Xinjiang Work Forum.<sup>50</sup> In 2014, enrollment was over 36,740 students in 45 cities and 93 schools.<sup>51</sup>

The program's goal, as described in a 2006 article *Our Good Han Mothers* by Chinese researchers Tao Jiaqing and Yang Xiaohua is:

*To make use of the economic and educational advantages of the developed regions in the interior, organize these developed regions to intensify educational assistance for border region ethnic minority districts, and make concerted efforts to train and cultivate a large number of high-quality minority personnel who firmly support the motherland's unity and ethnic unity.*<sup>52</sup>

With regard to the program's intended outcome for students, the article states:

*Xinjiang Class students said they had come to understand that students in the Xinjiang Class represented the future of Xinjiang and its ethnic minority peoples.... They would return to Xinjiang after completing their studies to build up a new Xinjiang and with concrete action requite their Han mothers for their kindness and affection.*

The program has been effective both in attracting high quality students and in creating a positive environment for the students, at least in terms of facilities and Mandarin instruction. Part of its effectiveness is attributable to savings for parents on the cost of education. Scholar Tim Grose explains that the program's fee structure offers significant savings over receiving state education in East Turkestan, which is a major factor attracting lower-income families to join. One student told Grose he paid only US\$145 per year to join the mainland program, whereas staying local would have been US\$350.<sup>53</sup>

In addition, students in the program are served halal food and the school organizes celebrations of selected Uyghur holidays. Commenting on the excellent facilities, a student interviewed for a recent CNN report on the program said: "Eastern China is more developed than Xinjiang and we get to enjoy better educational resources here."<sup>54</sup> This impression is part of the program's indoctrination of Uyghur students with the goal that they will return home to develop their homeland along party lines.

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<sup>50</sup> Reger, A. (2011). *The Uyghur perspective: The missing link in Chinese authorities' implementation of the "bilingual" language policy in Xinjiang*. Unpublished paper. ASN 16th Annual World Convention April 14, 2011

<sup>51</sup> Xinhua. (2014, August 4). 新疆内高班继续扩招 2014年录取新生9880人. [Xinjiang Neidi High School Class Continues expansion in 2014 enrolling 9880 new students]. Retrieved from [http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2014-08/04/c\\_1111931439.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2014-08/04/c_1111931439.htm)

<sup>52</sup> Tao Jiaqing and Yang Xiaohua. (2010). "Our Good Han Mothers." *Chinese education and society*, 43:10, pp 64-72. Translated by Ted Wang.

<sup>53</sup> Grose, Timothy. (2010). "The Xinjiang Class: Education, Integration and the Uyghurs." *Journal of Muslim Affairs*. 30:1.

<sup>54</sup> McKenzie, David. (2014, November 2). "Is China's grand ethnic experiment working?" *CNN*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/02/world/asia/china-ethnic-experiment/>



*Uyghur kindergarten students learn Chinese characters in Urumchi, February 26, 2009. (Xinhua, Zhao Ge)*

In interviews UHRP Project Manager Greg Fay conducted in 2008, graduates of the program stated that after high school, they felt limited in their options for university because they were not given a choice to attend university back in East Turkestan, and were displeased with the poor facilities in the university program to which they were admitted in northeastern China. They said they attended high school outside of East Turkestan because of low costs, and because it was an honor within their communities. However, since they were among the first graduates of the program, they did not know their future options would be so limited.

Grose argues that the program has limited effectiveness in encouraging Uyghur participants from mingling with Han classmates and from speaking Mandarin outside of class. He explains that students encounter racism in the program, and upon graduation, have difficulty finding work and obtaining permits to remain in interior China, if they are interested in doing so. Overall, he questions the program's effectiveness in achieving its stated aims of integrating Uyghurs and increasing ethnic solidarity.



## II. Personal Reflections on the Bilingual Education System

Versions of the following essays by four Uyghur writers have appeared on the Uyghur Human Rights Project blog in Chinese (the fourth in English). They give firsthand accounts of experience in the bilingual education program, its outcomes and its difficulties.

### *Essay 1. Reflections on min kao han education: My perception as a min kao han student on bilingual education with Chinese characteristics*

To any student from East Turkestan (so-called Xinjiang), “bilingual education” is a policy with which we’re all too familiar. Since before I can remember, as soon as we flipped open our course books, the first thing we saw was not our mother tongue but Pinyin Roman characters representing Mandarin Chinese. I also cannot remember when I lost the ability to use my mother tongue for even basic terms in daily life. It is even more difficult to recall how long it has been since I stood upright and placed my hand over the left side of my chest and offered a traditional greeting to my elders. In this way, those of us who have received “bilingual education” have been completely mentally immersed in what I see as an altogether foreign language world. Under this subtle influence, my mother tongue and my own customs have started to slowly fade from memory. Only once I was 17 years old, which was the year when I opened a Uyghur language course book for the first time, did I finally realize the impact “bilingual education” had on changing me as an individual.

My decision to study the Uyghur language came very suddenly. Even though it has been a long time, I can still clearly remember the scene. I recall I had just entered the high school of my dreams, and I happily told my parents that since I had started at the school I had never been more excited, and that the school’s environment and the other students in my classes were so ideal. Now that I had completed this major goal, the next step was to enter into the right university. I firmly stated that I would definitely become an outstanding diplomat one day. I wanted to be recognized by everyone, to leave my name in the history books of foreign relations.

At that time, my father who had always been quiet and unspeaking spoke. “Well how do you plan to introduce yourself?” my father asked. I said, “Of course with my name, my ethnic group, my...” My father interrupted me and asked, “What is your ethnicity?” I didn’t quite understand. “Uyghur, what are you getting at, Dad?” My dad responded, “Well if I were an ambassador from another country, I would definitely ask, ‘As a *minority* ethnic group, you have your own culture and customs and especially your own language. Can you please use your own mother tongue to introduce your ethnic group’s historical background?’” I let out a gasp, for it was not that simple. I opened my mouth to introduce my mother tongue. What I had not anticipated was that before I even spoke two sentences, suddenly my words had already become incoherent, and even simple words took a long time to figure out. What shocked me most was that I didn’t even know my ethnic group’s history. In our history curriculum, we were only taught that the Uyghurs are known as a Turkic people, and in a few short sentences they summarized the whole of our great people. I suddenly could no longer speak. I didn’t know why, suddenly I felt exceptionally sorrowful. Just as I felt so sad, my father’s next question caused me even

more shame. "Alright, can I at least enjoy your people's writing?" Quivering I picked up a pen. Aside from scrawling my own crooked signature, I could not even write my surname or father's name. The lively dinner atmosphere was suddenly suffocating. I could not even lift my head to look at my father and my younger brother, who had always looked up to me. I began to question myself how I had become this way. I wanted to shift the blame, to defend myself, nevertheless when I tried to open my mouth, I discovered that I was too ashamed to even speak. After all, what could make us become like this? Did we lack diligence? I still remembered back in third grade in order to get into my dream middle school, I was able to stay up all night studying. So that I could study even more, there was not a single weekend I can recall when I was able to sleep easily through the night, without having to get up for cram school. I suddenly understood. The problem is not that we lack diligence, in fact we are extremely diligent. Rather, we are giving our all for our future, and forget to take a part of ourselves along the way. This part is our ethnicity!

Everyone knows that in China, and especially in East Turkestan, the pressure to study is extreme. Asked why they don't know their own mother tongue, many people will reply without hesitation, "Don't you know how intensely our class schedule has been arranged? I can't even manage my studies, how would I have the energy for that?" Once someone has forgotten their own ethnic group's history, culture, and even language, even if they are outstanding, they are scum. Han Chinese have a traditional expression, "People cannot forget their roots." If you do not even know yourself, how will you be able to know this world, or the future?

Through an introduction from my father, I came to the home of a Uyghur language teacher to study. Atop his head he wore a Uyghur hat, and for a long time I was unable to take my eyes from its pattern, which has an important significance to our people and which I had not seen in so long. I rubbed my hands nervously; it felt as if I had not encountered this intense pressure since I had sat in the examination room for my high school entrance exam. I felt ashamed of myself, because I did not even fully know how to express myself, how to greet him, and I especially didn't know how to tell him that I myself was a Uyghur, and that only after I was seventeen had I come to study my mother tongue. But he was a kind older man, and he anticipated my emotions. He stroked his beard, and said, "In the first two lessons I will teach you etiquette, and from the third lesson onward you will perform all of it." After he finished speaking he led me back to the doorway. "When you first enter, you must not stare blankly at me. It is our custom that when you see your elders, you salute and greet them." He raised my hand and put it over my chest, and instructed me to bend slightly and say "Assalamu alaykom."

When, for the first time, I felt my heart beating so strongly, I realized this was the best decision I had ever made. Gradually, under the teacher's guidance, I mastered our written characters, and through Uyghur language books I began to grasp the history of our people. I came to see that our history involved many great figures, figures that had left us a legacy of inspirational compositions. What surprised me was that my other studies were not affected even in the slightest. Instead, I felt as if, facing this challenging foreign language curriculum, my body had straightened. Before I could understand the world, I first had to rediscover myself.



*Participant in World Uyghur Congress youth training in Washington, DC, May 7, 2015. (UHRP)*

At this point, perhaps people will wonder: why did I not go directly to Uyghur school? In fact, in my hometown there were already no more pure Uyghur language schools. Even in what is considered a Uyghur language school, only Uyghur languages classes were taught in Uyghur, and all other classes used Mandarin instruction. I even heard from my nephew that now they do not begin teaching Uyghur until the third grade. The subtle influence of the Chinese government's so-called bilingual education policy has changed children's thinking. From the time they first enter school until the third grade, children have already accepted the language system from their first phase of school as a fixed way of thinking in their growing minds. Because they wait until the third grade for any mother tongue instruction, for them it becomes as challenging as studying a foreign language. Whether on a major street or a public bus, it isn't hard to find a group of Uyghur children laughing and joking together; however the language of conversation in their mouths is almost always Mandarin. This situation of the Hanification of Uyghurs is getting more severe every day. What is happening to us?

We do not refuse to accept a new language. Language can be said to be the greatest tool of humanity. Our people and the Han live together, so learning Mandarin should be required curriculum for us. But at the same time, to a certain degree the government's so-called preferential policies for Uyghurs who study in Mandarin (*min kao han*) have

created a very negative effect for us. As *min kao han*, after we receive 50 “minority points” (the so-called “preferential minority policy”), the price we must pay is to waste an entire year to go through what is called preparatory instruction. In this preparatory course, we cover only topics that we have already learned in elementary school, like simple Mandarin, English and math, and basically no one takes it seriously. Everyone lazily says, “This has absolutely nothing to do with my major.” What’s more, all of this content is incredibly familiar to us after we have prepared for the *gaokao* college entrance exam, so there is even less need to spend any energy concentrating. Consequently, this entire year is spent burying our heads in sleep, or skipping class to go to the Internet café to play games and pass the time. By the time you enter the realm of a real university in the following year, all your classmates are a year younger than you. What is worse is that you have practically forgotten the feeling of challenge, and worse still you forget all the results of your previous hard work. As a result, we not only lose time, we also lose ourselves.

I clearly remember an incident several days before the exam when the pressure on my classmates was the most intense. A Han classmate casually said, “You guys are inherently weaker, just go ahead and take the 50 extra points.” It was apparent that this way of thinking was deeply rooted, and we would forever be different from them. No matter how standard you can speak Mandarin, no matter how many of your best friends are Han men and women, you are different from them. We will be recognized at once, we have a different appearance, different colored eyes, even different colored hair. I still remember once talking with a minority person working as a government secretary. When we discussed graduation from university, he helplessly shrugged his shoulders and told me that in the four years that he held his post, the agency had not recruited a single Uyghur college graduate, and at times had explicitly made clear, we only need Hans. The government repeats over and over that it values equality, however the reality of the situation is the exact opposite. Thinking recently of many violent incidents that have occurred, because they had to do with Uyghurs, many hotels have clearly stated that they will not rent rooms to “Xinjiang people.” So many people repeat over and over, “We are all Chinese,” but as soon as something happens involving our ethnic group, they are so quick to lock us up. The reality of life reminds us incessantly that we cannot become Han, nor can we have equality with the Han people. But even as that is, under the restrictions of the Chinese government’s system, now we are nevertheless at an inconceivable pace, forgetting our own language, beliefs and even our names.

Right now we face a dilemma. On the one hand, there is so much academic pressure that even breathing is difficult. On the other, we are caught up in an utterly confusing torrent of public opinion. We are so different from the previous generation, and we are like a marionette pulled by its strings. There are times when we want to make our own choices, but it is clear to us that this is not a possibility. Too often, listening carefully to our voices and perhaps drawing comparisons to others, what we want more than anything is to be able to lift our chest and raise our heads and do well for ourselves, to become respectable Uyghur people, and at the same time study our own language, and to have the confidence to manage Mandarin well. The most fearful people are those who abandon their own people. People who lack character do not recognize their own selves. I believe that the most important thing we must do is to first be true to ourselves: only once we stand up

straight can we lift our chests and raise our heads to walk ahead. At the same time, as we move forward, we cannot forget to carry our ethnicity with us: we must not let it lose its luster to spurning or betrayal.

***Essay 2. Uyghur university graduates' difficulties finding employment sends the message that "schooling is worthless"***

Each year, September to October is the peak season for upcoming Uyghur university graduates to seek employment in my hometown in East Turkestan. After that, they face difficulties finding employment, which sends the message that "schooling is worthless."

In our class there was a total of 45 students, and aside from those who went abroad or joined the army, the remainder all tested into university. Because we attended the bilingual education program of a top tier high school, our grades were very good, and we even took the same Mandarin version of the *gaokao* college entrance exam version as the rest of the country. From Fudan University to Shanghai Jiaotong University and more, the students in our class get into all the famous universities throughout interior China as well as "Xinjiang," and even those with the worst scores are admitted into second tier schools. However once the time comes for us to face the employment search, we are confounded. Among us basically about ten could find work, and basically it was temporary employment, and work obtained through relying on connections for hire, and many of us elected to continue and take the graduate exam in hopes that after obtaining a graduate degree it would then be possible to find work. A senior high school 'bilingual' class graduate told me: "I am also a student at a top tier university, however I have not found work. For a young man of my age to stay at home is shameful, so I chose to leave home, and seek migrant work in another city. I really had no choice but to sell clothes in a night market. I'm not afraid of hardship, as long as I don't have to rely on my parents." This is typical of the job-seeking situation for graduates of the Chinese government's so-called "bilingual education" program in East Turkestan.

"Bilingual education" in "Xinjiang" primarily refers to one kind of bilingual education model. In the initial stages, class is taught as follows: from first grade to graduation from high school, math, physics, chemistry and English are taught in Mandarin, and other courses are taught in the students' mother tongue. When students take the *zhongkao* middle school and *gaokao* college entrance exams, the Math, physics, chemistry and English portions use the same version as the nation-wide Mandarin one, whereas the minority language literature and Mandarin tests use a minority version and have Xinjiang-related question topics. The purpose is to increase ethnic education quality for minorities in "Xinjiang" through this model, and nurture technological talent and the ability to "communicate between Hans and minorities." So far in its development, the scale has increased continuously, and the number of bilingual classrooms has already surpassed 4,000. Some districts' minority school bilingual education classes have already changed from starting in the first year of middle school and have begun to start in the first year of elementary school, and each county, city and village throughout the area have basically all implemented two years of bilingual education in preschools; additionally, the classes that are taught in Mandarin in districts with sufficient conditions not only include math, physics, chemistry and English, but the latest development is for nearly all other subjects to be taught in Mandarin aside from minority language literature.



*Uyghur third-graders in Urumchi study in Chinese, 2009. (China News Service)*

Since its purpose is to increase ethnic education quality and nurture technological talent and the ability to “communicate between Hans and minorities,” then this bilingual talent should have employment opportunities, allowing these university students to realize their potential. So how has it happened that Uyghur students have such difficulty finding employment, which sends the message that “schooling is worthless”?

One graduate told me: “After bilingual education is carried out, our burden increases. We overcome linguistic obstacles, and on our test, use the same version as Han students on all parts other than our native language and Mandarin. In addition we have to take the English testing portion of the *gaokao*, which is one additional test subject that Mandarin language students do not take. To complete the answers when we take the *gaokao*, we first overcome the language obstacles of Mandarin language, then we must take part in the English subject exam. But all this does not overwhelm us, and we hope we will test into a good university and be able to find a good job so that we can contribute to our hometowns. All the Mandarin language students know we are exceptional, since on the *gaokao* we have to use three languages. Skilled, fearless and resolute, if we want it, we can easily test into our ideal university, but upon graduating and returning to ‘Xinjiang,’ I nevertheless immediately found myself unemployed.”

In East Turkestan why is it so difficult for Uyghur university students to find employment? The reason is very simple. Brought up in the bilingual education program, I am one of many Uyghur university graduate victims. In East Turkestan, the conditions of recruitment by government work units as well as private employers blatantly discriminate

against Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities creating limits for Uyghur university students seeking employment, and this is the principle cause.

China's "Labor Law" has regulations ensuring the general principle of employment equality and prohibiting hiring discrimination. Article 4 of the "Labor Law" specifies that in all aspects of hiring, workers enjoy the right to equality. It clearly regulates that workers enjoy the right to hiring equality, and establishes the principle that hiring discrimination based on factors such as ethnicity, race, and gender is prohibited. Aside from this, China's constitution strictly prohibits ethnic oppression and discrimination. China's Law on Regional Autonomy also safeguards hiring equality and hiring rights for minorities. "Xinjiang" as a "Uyghur Autonomous Region" should have extra protection for employment opportunities for Uyghurs and should also respect employment equality.

In East Turkestan, however, many work units still discriminate against Uyghurs during the hiring process. Take for example China's national civil service. In China, civil service positions' stability makes them especially attractive to graduates. Civil service employees have good benefits and social status, and overall the level of protection is almost a situation of guaranteed job security ("iron rice bowl"). The civil service has become the most enviable place to work, and the positions are the most sought after. Although the positions are highly sought and no small number of people participates in the civil service exam, "Xinjiang" Uyghur students do not even want to take part in the exam, because even reporting their names will bring limitations.

To give a typical example: according to the "2013 Table of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Public Testing to Recruit Civil Servant and Staff Positions," published by the "Xinjiang" Personnel Testing Center, ethnicity for the majority of positions was limited to Hans, and the proportion that recruited Uyghurs was low. In "Xinjiang," a total of 7,757 people were hired for civil servants and staff positions. Among them only 916 positions were distinguishably Uyghur recruits, and 2,507 were distinguishably Han recruits, and the ethnicity of 2,771 was unclear. Thus, Uyghurs made up only 11.8% of the total hires, even though minorities make up 59.9% of Xinjiang's population, and among them Uyghurs make up 45.84%.

The civil service exam jobs table demonstrates the nature of ethnic discrimination. For many years, authorities in "Xinjiang" have established these limitations, causing dissatisfaction for many Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities, and we as college graduates in particular are angriest. One-by-one on online social media platforms including Weibo, Renren, and WeChat, we have expressed these views, that the civil service exam jobs table reflects serious ethnic bias and gender discrimination and the lack of equality in job seeking opportunity. But to this day this phenomenon has not changed.

It is depressing for us as students who attempted so desperately to get into university, because what then is the purpose? Is it just, as some government officials have said, to make a contribution to improving the quality of "Xinjiang" people? What can we do as students who are unemployed upon graduation, when as the traditional Chinese expression states, "A person whose needs are met will be civil, a bountiful country's citizens will be scrupulous." If we don't have enough food to eat, how will we improve our quality? A government official said, "The primary reason why 'Xinjiang' Uyghur



university graduates have difficulty seeking employment is because of Xinjiang Uyghur university graduates' low level of Mandarin." Well I'd like to ask, why do even the students raised in the so-called "bilingual" education program also not find work? Is their Mandarin level also insufficient? Even after they capably use Mandarin to take the *gaokao* and compete equally with Han students from interior China, still their Mandarin levels are too low? And if you feel the students coming out of the bilingual program have a low level of Mandarin, then what about Uyghurs students who were taken to interior China at the start of middle school, is their level of Mandarin also insufficient? If so, then the Mandarin levels of regular Uyghur school graduates' is definitely insufficient, and finding employment is out of the question. People might say the problem is that the students' work requirements are too high and that they won't perform difficult, strenuous work or work with low wages. But I want to ask, would you only be satisfied if these university graduates used their labor to pull rickshaw? Are Uyghur university graduates selling clothes in the night market because their requirements are too high?

A Uyghur university graduate told me: "Now, I do not have high expectation of high wages, just enough for ample food and warm clothes. I spent nearly 60,000 yuan to go to college and after there was no work, and I do not have the nerve to return home and be idle, so I have left for migrant work. That's why I'm doing this work, but how will I make up my original investment and go back? When will I no longer force my parents to worry about my employment? When will I be able to buy a house? Even if I don't eat or drink it will be decades." After he spoke, he fell silent for some time.

China's Ministry of Education boasts that for ethnic minorities in "Xinjiang," the employment rate for higher education graduates reached 88.4% in 2013. In the previous year, the employment rate for ethnic minority graduates reached 80.36%, which was the first time it broke 80%. In reality this is essentially nonsense. It can be noted that in order to promote employment of graduates of higher education in "Xinjiang," special activities have been successively organized and implemented including "employment service month for higher education graduates," private enterprise recruitment week," "on-campus recruitment series," "on-campus public employment service," in addition to providing about 10,000 positions, and to improving employment for graduates through grassroots-level programs like the "rural teacher special position" plan, "three forms of assistance" plan, and "university students Western service volunteer" program. These programs have indeed been established, but Chinese authorities have also set up all kinds of restrictions, which have forced Uyghur job applicants to deal with a hostile environment that has gotten worse every day. In reality, work units only hire Han university graduates rather than Uyghur university graduates. The so-called ethnic minority graduate employment rate that reached 80.36% is nothing more than a mere deception propagated by the Chinese government.

Currently in "Xinjiang" hiring discrimination against Uyghurs is extremely serious, and it is a common occurrence for work units to restrict hiring to Hans. So what should "Xinjiang" Uyghur graduates do? How can they find employment? How can we survive as Uyghurs? At the very least, there should be some path for us to meet our basic living needs. In this situation where all outstanding Uyghur students who graduate from top tier Chinese university are unable to find employment opportunities and a path to meet basic

living needs, then how can the majority of other Uyghurs have a future and a path to meet basic living needs and to survive?

Often, some Han classmates will ask with surprise, “Why is Xinjiang always so unstable?” I tell them, “As a ethnic group that is harshly cracked down upon by the government, in conditions of systematic repression and ethnic discrimination, when a group cannot see its own means to live and work happily and to survive in the future, this people will naturally oppose their inhumane treatment. So the reason for instability in “Xinjiang” is not that Uyghurs don’t love peace and stability, rather that the Chinese government cannot improve so-called ethnic solidarity, establish social stability and create a harmonious society by means of high pressure crackdown, systematic repression and ethnic discrimination.

### *Essay 3. Views on the bilingual education system in East Turkestan*

How does the Chinese Communist Part execute a system of bilingual education in East Turkestan. In the initial stages, math, physics, chemistry and English are taught in Mandarin, and other courses are taught in the students' mother tongue. For those five classes, students use the unified national testing version for the *zhongkao* middle school graduation exam and *gaokao* college entrance exam, whereas the minority language literature and Mandarin tests use a minority version and have Xinjiang-related question topics. Is this education model adjusted to the needs of the people in East Turkestan, and does it fit the complex political situation in East Turkestan?

Uyghur scholar Ilham Tohti conducted a survey about the situation of bilingual education. The survey asked Uyghur university students and young adults in Beijing about their attitudes toward bilingual education in East Turkestan. Although the scope of the survey was limited and did not contain a wide range of Uyghurs, it reflects their true impression of the bilingual education model. In general, the Uyghurs in Beijing expressed one fact indisputably, that the CCP uses its bilingual education program as a pretense to assimilate Uyghurs, and to gradually weaken the influence of Uyghur language which represents Uyghur culture and gives a sense of Uyghur self-identity. Without our language, we will become Chinese, which has taken place in Inner Mongolia. The following is my detailed analysis:

I am a "*min kao han*," meaning a Uyghur student who attended a Mandarin school. When I was in middle school, the Chinese authorities reformed the education system for political reasons, during which they combined Uyghur schools with Chinese ones. Ethnic integration is not a bad thing per se, but randomly mixing two schools with different languages is absolutely nonsense no matter how we look at it. Uyghur schools teach most classes in Uyghur language while Chinese teach everything in Chinese. Language was a major barrier.

With regard to integration, the school authorities told us, "We are going to help the Uyghur school to improve education and we expect our students to be on the same page with the officials, we expect everyone to help the Uyghur students on their subjects." There were two problems with this statement from a school principal. First, it was racist! As the head of the institute, he told us that we were so much better than the students in Uyghur schools that we would serve as their tutors. Second, he told us to help "Uyghur students," even though our own class was 4-5 percent Uyghur, either implying that our Chinese classmates needed to help us or that he assumed we were Han Chinese ourselves.

With barely any interference, integration was completed within a year in the city of Ghulja. On my first day at my new school, I realized I had come from a school with complete facilities to a "broke" school, and there was absolutely nothing I could do about it. I came from a school that had all kinds of educational facilities, athletic facilities like imported turf, a synthetic track, and a polymer basketball court. I went from that technological campus to a school with tiny classrooms, insufficient computers, a soccer field that was worse off than a cornfield, and a basketball court which looked like an ancient historic relic, at least older than me. The computer lab in my old school was well-equipped with flat screen computers while the new one did not even have enough

“grandpa computers” (that is the nickname we gave to those computers). Whereas the first school had been a Mandarin school, the second school was previously a Uyghur language school.



*A teacher leads a group of Uyghur children exercising on a school in Kashgar, Nov. 8, 2013 (Radio Free Asia)*

Based on several years of observation and personal experience, I noticed many interesting things about our so-called integration. The school put all the Uyghur classes on the same floor because teachers said they were interfering with Chinese students study. Officials promised ethnically mixed study groups but never set them up. School activities were segregated, and sometimes Uyghur classes were given days off for no reason or they would be the only ones to get days off on Uyghur traditional holidays. The Mandarin language students led minority language students to actively study Mandarin, even in new subjects that the CCP introduced in my last 2 years, which I had not seen in middle school, aiming to eliminate Uyghur language.

The CCP mandates a proportion of political education in China that is unseen in the world, in order to coerce students to put “the party above all.” The Chinese Communist Party puts itself in a higher position than the country and brainwashes students with enforcing large amounts of political courses. The aim is to consolidate and strengthen the ruling status of the Han people, and to continue to suppress other groups’ ethnic cultures and beliefs.

*An educational model that does not help nurture minority talent, and that breaks down minorities' identities*

If the bilingual education model were as it stated, Uyghur students in elementary school would be wholly educated in their mother tongue, Mandarin would only be one subject, and the relative proportion would not be great. Upon entering middle school, in the curriculum of Uyghur and bilingual classes, all subjects except for Uyghur language are taught in Mandarin. On the one hand many Uyghur teachers cannot speak Chinese or understand Chinese as well as Han Chinese do, so how would she or he be able to teach well? On the other hand, students previously only studied Mandarin as a foreign language course and are used to learning things in Uyghur. When they are asked to learn everything in a completely different language and to perform well, as young teenagers they lose hope of studying well due to constant bad academic performance. Giving up on school is unavoidable at this point for any human being.

The problem is not only for the students. At the same time, Uyghur instructors at every level face various forms of “harassment.” Teachers in Uyghur language schools frequently worry about their own Mandarin, as they could be fired at any time, in all cases because “Mandarin is not sufficient.” Only the shameless CCP could possibly imagine this kind of situation, intentionally creating huge obstacles for a group of outstanding teachers who have virtually no need to possess a remarkable Mandarin level, then implementing administrative punishment for teachers of all levels whose Mandarin is not sufficient from firing them to stopping their classes so they can be trained. Even accomplished professors are subjected to this deliberately insulting policy, and a large number of instructors have either been fired or forced into early retirement, without exception they are replaced by Han.

In my twelve years as a student in East Turkestan, I cannot count the number of times I encountered, heard, saw, and felt discriminated against myself. After the school merger, the minority language and bilingual classes were clear targets of criticism. Because young people are restless and naturally love freedom, all students in their student careers, no matter if they are Uyghur, Kazakh, Hui or Han, will misbehave, are noisy between classes, or manage study time poorly outside of class. But both the Mandarin classes and the Han teachers had some sort of agreement to “place the blame” for all behaviors on the Uyghur class. Harassment would begin as irresponsible talk and ultimately escalates to physical conflict, and in most of the examples I witnessed personally, Han students took things right up until the point of explosion, then shamelessly went and reported to the teacher, who completely disregarded the cause, and the Uyghur students were punished.

Education is actually used for the important work of morally teaching children, nurturing the talent of the nation and forging students' character. For the “beloved” Chinese Communist Party, however, what they call nurturing talent is really the subjection of students; strengthens the ruling dictatorship in the name of developing ethnic minority areas; and using the pretext of fostering mutual support between Han and minorities to eliminate Uyghurs' ethnic culture and sense of ethnic identity. This is the “great” People's Republic of China, and the “great” Chinese Communist Party.

***Essay 4. My beloved school's name will be wiped out from East Turkestan history***

By Zubayra Shamseden, Uyghur Human Rights Project, Chinese Outreach Coordinator



*Gate of Ghulja City No. 2 High school (Ghulja City No. 2 High School Website)*

I felt terrible when I heard the news that the Ghulja city No. 2 High School would be amalgamated with a Chinese school – Ghulja No. 6 High School. The amalgamation means that one of the historic milestones of Uyghur education will be wiped from East Turkestan history in this high tech, education-oriented century. As a former student of the school, it is very difficult for me to imagine that when I visit East Turkestan one day, I won't be able to see any trace of my beloved school in my home town Ghulja city. The school has over 100 years of history and embodies the great legacy of Uyghur education. Since its establishment, although it faced many challenges and obstacles (especially since the beginning of Chinese communist rule), it still produced countless influential figures in the areas of politics, academia, governance and other areas. It is not difficult to find living examples of all the success of Uyghur education in East Turkestan as well as abroad. As a former student of the school, I still remember the wonderful classrooms, friends, class discussions, and great teachers' insightful teachings that shaped my life's destiny and my views about the world. To me, losing such a great source of inspiration for my people is similar to losing my own brother and sisters on the battlefield. It hurts and leaves unforgettable scars in my heart.

What sort of paranoid mentality does the Chinese government have? Why do you have to diminish a source of great education that in fact even brings benefit to your 'occupation'? One of the loyal governors in your 'Xinjiang' government, Mr. Ablet Abdirishit- isn't he

the product of that school as well? Mahinur Kasim one of the great actors in the establishment of your communist 'Xinjiang government' in East Turkestan- isn't she also the product of that school?

What is behind the so- called 'bilingual education' slogan?

How is the implementation of 'bilingual education' policies related to the destruction of an historic school and its removal from school lists? Hasn't Ghulja No. 2 High School adhered to the rules of education? Isn't the school fulfilling the duties of giving knowledge to all human beings? In fact, the school was doing a great job, but the Chinese government didn't want this to continue. The government didn't want Uyghurs to obtain an education in a way that is suitable to the Uyghur character and makes Uyghurs successful. Chinese authorities wish to educate people who look like Uyghurs, but who are actually brainwashed followers of their Chinese communist masters. From what has happened to my school and what's happening to Uyghur education within East Turkestan right now, the truth of implementing 'bilingual education' means the formalized, systematic assimilation of Uyghurs to make them Han Chinese.

### **III. Recommendations for the Government of the People's Republic of China**

- Protect the Uyghur language by reinstating Uyghur language instruction from the preschool through to the university level and expanding Uyghur language instruction to additional educational institutions. Ensure strong foundational instruction in Uyghur language before beginning bilingual education, particularly at the kindergarten and early elementary school level.
- Promote the importance of the Uyghur language among the population in East Turkestan, including government officials and government employees. Mandate Uyghur language proficiency among cadres working in Uyghur communities and improve Uyghur language training programs. Address the lack of state employees with Uyghur language proficiency.
- Encourage independent Uyghur-language print and broadcast media. Ensure funding allocated for media and arts programming in Uyghur language is equivalent to Mandarin. Encourage the development of Uyghur language websites, reinstate websites deleted after the 2009 Internet shutdown, and release from prison all Uyghur webmasters.
- Encourage the hiring of Uyghur teachers offering pedagogical training that permits a high quality education in the Uyghur language. Offer to rehire all Uyghur teachers who have suffered unemployment due to insufficient Mandarin. Institute high quality bilingual training for both Uyghur and Mandarin languages, so that teachers of all ethnicities are able to achieve bilingual fluency and cease bans on Uyghur language usage on bilingual campuses.
- End incentives that make enrolling in mainland classes more affordable to Uyghur families than instruction in East Turkestan and encourage Uyghurs to remain in East Turkestan to receive an education in satisfactory conditions.
- Cease school mergers and permit Uyghur parents a genuine and meaningful voice in electing the language of instruction for their children. Guarantee equal funding and school conditions for schools that serve Uyghur and Han students.
- Cease harassment of independent language schools and offer support to Uyghurs working in the education sector. Grant permission to Abduweli Ayup's request to open a Uyghur school in Urumchi, and release from prison his associates Dilyar Obul and Muhemmet Sidik.
- End hiring practices in the private and public sector that discriminates against Uyghurs, particularly those who only speak Uyghur. Cease incentives for Han workers to immigrate to East Turkestan and extend equivalent incentives to indigenous workers.
- Abide by Article 37 of the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law, particularly:



*Schools (classes) and other educational organizations recruiting mostly ethnic minority students should, whenever possible, use textbooks in their own languages and use these languages as the media of instruction.*

*Every local government should provide financial support for the production of teaching materials in the minority scripts and for publication and translation work.*

- Respect Article 4 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China:

*The people of all nationalities have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages, and to preserve or reform their own ways and customs.*

- Realize Article 6 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 19 and 20

*Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.*

- Ratify the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights and implement the provisions protected in Article 27:

*In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.*

- Realize Article 4 of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities:

*States should, where appropriate, take measures in the field of education, in order to encourage knowledge of the history, traditions, language and culture of the minorities existing within their territory.*

- Meet obligations set out in Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

*States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:*

*The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values...*

#### **IV. Acknowledgments**

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The Uyghur American Association (UAA) works to promote the preservation and flourishing of a rich, humanistic and diverse Uyghur culture, and to support the right of the Uyghur people to use peaceful, democratic means to determine their own political future in East Turkestan.



The UAA launched the UHRP in 2004 to promote improved human rights conditions for Uyghurs and other indigenous groups in East Turkestan, on the premise that the assurance of basic human rights will facilitate the realization of the community's democratic aspirations.

UHRP also works to raise the profile of the Uyghur people and the plight of all “minority” peoples in East Turkestan by:

Researching, writing and publishing news stories and longer reports covering a broad range human rights issues involving civil and political rights, through to social cultural and economic rights;

Preparing briefings – either written or in person – for journalists, academics, diplomats and politicians on the human rights situation faced by the Uyghur people and others in East Turkestan.

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