

Uyghur Language Under Attack: The Myth of “Bilingual” Education in the People’s Republic of China

Uyghur Human Rights Project
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I. Overview of the Report

Uyghur language is under attack in East Turkistan¹ (also known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region or XUAR). In the past decade, and with increasing intensity since 2002, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has pursued assimilationist policies aimed at removing Uyghur as a language of instruction in East Turkistan. Employing the term “bilingual” education, the PRC is, in reality, implementing a monolingual Chinese language education system that undermines the linguistic basis of Uyghur culture.² The

new “bilingual” education imperative is designed to transition minority students from education in their mother tongue to education in Chinese. The policy marks a dramatic shift away from more egalitarian past policies that provided choice for Uyghur parents in their children’s languages of instruction. In the PRC “bilingual” education amounts to compulsory Chinese language education.

“Bilingual” education in East Turkistan is responsible for:

- Marginalizing Uyghur in the educational sphere with the goal of eliminating it as a language of instruction in East Turkistan.
- Forcing Uyghur students at levels ranging from preschool to university to study in a second language.
- Removing Uyghur children from their cultural environment and placing them into Chinese language “Xinjiang classes” located in inland China.
- Using Chinese language requirements and school mergers to force veteran Uyghur teachers out of the classroom.
- Taking decisions on language of instruction for Uyghur children out of the hands of parents.
- Increasing tensions between Uyghurs and Han in East Turkistan.

This report begins by reviewing the PRC’s language policy commitments under

¹ Use of the term ‘East Turkistan’ does not define a ‘pro-independence’ position. Instead, it is used by Uyghurs wishing to assert their cultural distinctiveness from China proper. ‘Xinjiang’, meaning ‘new boundary’ or ‘new realm’, was adopted by the Manchus in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) and reflects the perspective of those who gave it this name. This use of terminology, whether ‘Xinjiang’ or ‘East Turkistan’ is often compared by Uyghurs to use of the term ‘Tibet’ by Tibetans. That is, Tibetans use the name they choose, and not a translation of the Chinese ‘Xizang’ meaning ‘western treasure-store’. Uyghurs also choose to use a name other than the one designated by the Chinese authorities.

² Uyghur is a Turkic language spoken by at least 11 million people, mostly located in East Turkistan, with significant populations also located in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Mongolia, Turkey, Australia, Germany and the United States. It belongs to the southeastern branch of the Turkic language family, a family which has about 200 million speakers in the world. Uyghur, seen as the heir to the Chagatai language that once served as a lingua franca of large parts of Central Asia, today serves as a lingua franca among many minority groups in East Turkistan. See Arienne Dwyer, *The Xinjiang Conflict: Uyghur*

Identity, Language Policy, and Political Discourse, Washington: The East-West Center, 2005.

domestic and international law and contrasting these agreements with the reality of East Turkistan's language policy, including the recent push to marginalize Uyghur language education through "bilingual" education. It explores the effects of the Chinese language push on Uyghur students, teachers, and parents, as well as on ethnic relations, placing language policy into the context of other policies of assimilation directed at the Uyghurs. In conclusion, the report recommends that the PRC implement true bilingualism in East Turkistan's schools.

II. China's Language Policy: Theory and Reality

PRC Domestic Law and International Agreements Regarding Language Policy

Before looking closely at the current government policy aimed at removing Uyghur from East Turkistan's schools, it is important to review PRC agreements under domestic and international law with regards to regional autonomy, language policy and education policy. By forcing Uyghur children to study in a language other than their mother tongue, China's government is in clear violation of its own laws and agreements.

When the XUAR was established as an autonomous region of the PRC in 1955, it was given special powers of self-government under the concept of "regional autonomy". This concept appears in Article 4 of the PRC Constitution and specifically mentions the importance of language:

Regional autonomy is practiced in areas where people of minority ethnic groups live in compact communities... All ethnic groups have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written

*languages and to preserve or reform their own folkways and customs.*³

The legal framework of "regional autonomy" is spelled out in the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law. This law establishes the principle that language policy in East Turkistan's schools should be formulated at the local level:

*Autonomous agencies in ethnic autonomous areas decide on educational plans in these areas, on the establishment of various kinds of schools at different levels, and on their educational system, forms, curricula, the language used in instruction and enrollment procedures.*⁴

It goes on to guarantee language rights for minority students in the classroom:

*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.*⁵

The rights of ethnic minorities regarding language of instruction are also spelled out in the PRC's Compulsory Education Law, which reiterates the right of minorities to be educated in their mother tongue:

³ The PRC Constitution (adopted by the National People's Congress on December 4, 1982 with further revisions in 1988, 1993, 1999, and 2004.) Article 4.

⁴ People's Republic of China Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law, issued by the Second Session of the Sixth National People's Congress on May 31, 1984 (effective October 1, 1984) and amended on February 28, 2001: Article 36. Translation prepared by the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, available at http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/index.phpd?s_howsingle=9507

⁵ *Ibid*, Article 37.

*Schools in which the majority of students are of ethnic minorities may use the spoken and written languages of those ethnic minorities in instruction.*⁶

In the international realm, the PRC is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both of which guarantee minorities protection of their language rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which China signed in 1992, specifically extends language protections to children:

*In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.*⁷

PRC Language Policy in Practice in East Turkistan

This new wave is like a new Cultural Revolution for the Uyghurs. In the first Cultural Revolution the Chinese

⁶ Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China (Adopted at the Fourth Session of the Sixth National People's Congress, promulgated by Order No.38 of the President of the People's Republic of China on April 12, 1986, and effective as of July 1, 1986) Article 6. Translation prepared by UNESCO, available at http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=12456&URL_DO=DO_PRINTPAGE&URL_SECTION=201.html

⁷ Convention on the Rights of the Child, Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989, entry into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 49, Article 30. available at <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm>

*government destroyed the intellectuals. Now they are in the process of destroying the language.*⁸

Despite these laws and agreements, the Uyghur language is being marginalized in East Turkistan. Chinese language names are overtaking long established Uyghur place names.⁹ Officials in East Turkistan whose first language is Chinese almost never learn Uyghur, even to a rudimentary level, though they are directed to do so under the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law.¹⁰ Almost all Uyghur language newspapers, television reports and textbooks are direct translations of Chinese language materials. Uyghur farmers struggle with Chinese language instructions on fertilizer and pesticide labels, and emergency response centers lack operators with Uyghur language skills.¹¹

This marginalization reflects a disparaging view of Uyghur language and culture that exists at the highest levels of the Chinese government and has informed the move towards a monolingual educational system in East Turkistan.¹² Although linguists agree that all languages have the ability to be modern, that is to absorb new

⁸ Uyghur Human Rights Project interview with Uyghur Professional, May 16, 2007.

⁹ Stanley Toops, "Tourism in Turpan: The Power of Place in Inner Asia/Outer China," *Central Asian Survey*; Vol. 18, No. 3 (September 1999): 303-18. Toops notes that archaeological sights in Turfan are all known by their Chinese names and nearly always presented by Han tour guides who know very little about Uyghur history and always emphasize the high water marks of Chinese influence, the Han and Tang dynasties.

¹⁰ Herbert S. Yee, Ethnic Relations in Xinjiang: a survey of Uyghur-Han relations in Urumqi, *Journal of Contemporary China*, 12(36), August 2003, 431-452.

¹¹ Urumqi Will Strengthen Bilingual Education for 120 Switchboard Operators, *Urumqi Evening News*, April 11, 2007 ["乌鲁木齐市要加强120接线员双语教育," 乌鲁木齐晚报 2007-4-11].

¹² See Dwyer, *op. cit.*

words and express new ideas based on societal and technological changes, the leading political figure in the region since 1995, XUAR Party Secretary Wang Lequan, justified “bilingual” education policies in this way:

*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.*¹³

This ingrained belief that Chinese language is more “advanced” and more “modern” than minority languages also pervades government thinking on “bilingual” education. Officials often speak of the need to “raise the ‘quality’ of minority students” using “bilingual” education, so that minorities can begin to receive the benefits of a “modern education”.¹⁴ This Chinese-centered understanding of language leads to many of the problems with the PRC’s “bilingual” education push. In the words of one Uyghur interviewee:

*With the Chinese view of language, it is very hard to have a situation of equality. If there is no equality, then there is no dignity. If there was equality, then there would be no reason to force people to participate in “bilingual education”.*¹⁵

¹³ AFP, March 28, 2002.[FBIS-CHI-2002-0328, March 29, 2002 cited in Nicola Becquelin, *Criminalizing Ethnicity: Political Repression in Xinjiang*, China Rights Forum, No. 1, 2004 p. 7.

¹⁴ See, for example, Xinjiang Analyzes the Difficult Issue of “Bilingual” Education, *Guangming Daily*, December 19, 2005. [“新疆破解“双语”教育难题,”光明日报, 2005-12-19].

¹⁵ Uyghur Human Rights Project interview with Uyghur Professional, May 16, 2007.

III. The Myth of “Bilingual” Education: Compulsory Chinese Language Education Replacing Uyghur Language Education in East Turkistan

Since the mid-1980’s China’s government has moved in stages towards making Chinese the only language of instruction in East Turkistan’s schools. “Bilingual” education in the PRC is the latest and most extreme example, amounting to compulsory Chinese language education. Over the past five years, government efforts at eliminating Uyghur language schools have accelerated dramatically as compulsory Chinese language education has been expanded at every educational level and every township in East Turkistan.

Students in experimental “bilingual” middle school classes numbered 2,629 in 1999. In 2004, there were 35,948 students and by 2005 the number had increased to 145,000.¹⁶ At first, these schools used both Uyghur and Chinese for instruction. More recently Uyghur has been severely restricted at what are ostensibly “bilingual” schools. The ultimate goal of “bilingual” education appears to be to replace Uyghur language instruction with Chinese language instruction in all areas of East Turkistan.

After the XUAR was established in 1955, Beijing pursued a relatively pluralistic minority policy that included support for Uyghur language schools and a flexible attitude about Chinese language education.¹⁷ Subsequently, the harsh cultural restrictions

¹⁶ Outstanding Results of Xinjiang’s Promotion of “Bilingual Education”, *Xinjiang Tianshan Net*, December 7, 2005. [新疆推进“双语教学”成效显著, 新疆天山网, 2005-12-7].

¹⁷ Zhou Minglang, “The Politics of Bilingual Education in the People’s Republic of China Since 1949”, *Bilingual Research Journal*, 25:1 & 2 Winter & Spring 2001.

and intense political campaigns throughout China in the late 1950's and 1960's also destroyed the educational system in East Turkistan. After 1978, as China emerged from a period of cultural isolation and turmoil, ethnic groups experienced a period of relative tolerance that resulted in a rediscovery of many cultural practices.¹⁸ In this environment, the education system also recovered and education was available in both Uyghur and Chinese, giving parents the choice of educating their children in either language.¹⁹

The foundations for compulsory Chinese education were laid in 1984, when the government set the goal of achieving full "minority-Han communicability" in a decade by "strengthening work on Chinese language education".²⁰ In support of this goal, Uyghur language schools began to teach Chinese in grade three instead of the first year of middle school, intensive teacher training was

¹⁸ See Stevan Harrell, "The Anthropology of Reform and the Reform of Anthropology: Anthropological Narratives of Recovery and Progress in China," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, No. 30 (October 2001): 139-61.

¹⁹ Uyghur parents adopted different strategies as they sought to preserve the linguistic base of Uyghur culture, while also giving their children the opportunities afforded by Chinese language proficiency. Some parents sent sons to Chinese schools and daughters to Uyghur schools. Another strategy was to send the child to a Chinese school for the first few years to solidify a knowledge of Chinese and then switch him or her to a Uyghur language school in late elementary school. William C. Clark, "Convergence or Divergence: Uyghur Family Change in Urumqi" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, Seattle, 1999) and interviews with Uyghur parents.

²⁰ Eric T. Schluessel. 2007. "'Bilingual' education and discontent in Xinjiang", *Central Asian Survey* (June 2007) 26(2), 1-27 and Wang A'shu, Meng Fanli, "A Summary of the Development of Bilingual Education Policy for Ethnic Minorities in Xinjiang", *Journal of Research on Education for Ethnic Minorities*, No. 2, Vol. 17, General No. 73, 2006. [望阿舒, 孟凡丽, "新疆少数民族双语教育政策发展综述" 民族教育研究, 2:17:73, 2006].

implemented, and quotas were set for Chinese-language majors at East Turkistan's universities.²¹

With this program moving more slowly than the government wished, "bilingual" education emerged with the formation of a committee to investigate the concept in 1987.²² The policy began to gain serious momentum after a 1992 "Work Conference on Ethnic Language and Writing" named "bilingualism" as the only way to raise the educational level of minority people.²³ "Bilingual" education was mandated in large technical schools and universities and experimental "bilingual" language classes for minority students were established in Urumchi, Chuguchak (Tacheng), and Turfan.²⁴ At this time, "bilingual" education used both Uyghur and Chinese, though preference for Chinese can be seen in the fact that the "modern" subjects of math and the sciences were taught in this language with all other subjects taught in Uyghur.

The establishment of "Xinjiang classes" in 12 Chinese cities in 1997, provided a new model for compulsory Chinese language education and the marginalization of Uyghur language. "Xinjiang classes" remove top minority students in East Turkistan from their cultural environment and enroll them in classes with Chinese language instruction in high schools in large inland Chinese cities.²⁵ Participation in "Xinjiang classes" is not

²¹ Wang and Meng, *op. cit.*

²² Schluessel, *op. cit.*

²³ "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Language and Script Work Regulations, The Second Session Minority Language and Script Work Conference", see Wang and Meng, *op. cit.*

²⁴ Wang and Meng, *op. cit.*

²⁵ Su Jiaoji, Circular on the 'Summary of the Meeting on Provincial Inland Xinjiang High School Classes', *Jiangsu Department of Education*, June 6, 2006. [苏教基, 《全省内地新疆高中班教育工作座谈会会议纪要》的通知, 江苏省教育厅文件, 2006-6-6].

entirely voluntary as one Uyghur parent explained:

*Officials will put on hidden pressure. They say, "Your child has been chosen to be sent to a Xinjiang class. If he does not go there maybe you will have some trouble, maybe your child will have a bad future".*²⁶

XUAR Party Secretary, Wang Lequan, confirmed that "political thought training", not academic preparation, was the chief goal of these "Xinjiang classes".²⁷ Officials view training in Chinese as a way to "deepen national feelings" and "strengthen correct political attitudes" as part of a "long term important strategic policy decision... to protect the unity of the motherland and safeguard the nation's long and peaceful order".²⁸

In some of these schools speaking Uyghur is prohibited, even in student dormitories, where pupils are watched by an on site monitor.²⁹ Children from one "Xinjiang class" in Qingdao were forbidden to communicate in Uyghur, even when visited by an officially approved ethnic Uyghur journalist.³⁰ By 2006, "Xinjiang classes" had been expanded from 12 to 26

Chinese cities and had a total enrollment of over ten thousand students.³¹

The "Xinjiang class" method of instruction, in which minority students are taught almost exclusively in Chinese, has become a model for classes in East Turkistan as opportunities for Uyghur language education are forced out of existence at all levels from university to preschool. Since 2002, with the exception of minority languages and literature, classes at Xinjiang University have been taught solely in Chinese, virtually removing Uyghur as a language of instruction at the region's most prestigious university.³² Local governments have committed to eliminating Uyghur language instruction, even in areas with large majority Uyghur populations. A document released by the Regional Bureau of Education in Khotan, where more than 90% of the population is Uyghur, announced that all classes under its jurisdiction would be taught in Chinese within five years.³³ In Artush, a city in which 80% of the population is Uyghur, all classes will be taught in Chinese by 2012.³⁴ In 2005, the "bilingual" education push was expanded into East Turkistan's preschools.³⁵

"Bilingual" education has been supported through heavy government investment. Authorities have committed 430 million RMB to establish 1,009 Chinese

²⁶ Uyghur Human Rights Project interview with Uyghur Teacher, May 23, 2007.

²⁷ The Chief Task of Inland Xinjiang High School Classes is Ideological Political Training, *Online International*, June 24, 2005 [思想政治教育是内地新疆高中班的首要任务, 国际在线 2005-6-24].

²⁸ Su Jiaoji, Circular on the 'Summary of the Meeting on Provincial Inland Xinjiang High School Classes', *Jiangsu Department of Education*, June 6, 2006. [苏教基, 《全省内地新疆高中班教育工作座谈会会议纪要》的通知, 江苏省教育厅文件, 2006-6-6].

²⁹ Uyghur Human Rights Project interview with Radio Free Asia reporter, May 18, 2007.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Xinjiang Will Have 5000 Students Attend Inland High Schools This Year, *Xinjiang Daily Net*, February 14, 2007 [新疆今年将有5000学生赴内地高中就学, 新疆日报网, 2007-2-14].

³² PRC Official: Xinjiang University to Teach Major Subjects in Chinese, *Xinhua*, Friday June 7, 2002.

³³ Eric Schluessel, *op. cit.*

³⁴ Artush Excited by Chinese Language Studying Fever, *Xinjiang Daily Net*, July 11, 2006. [阿图什兴起学汉语热, 新疆日报网, 2006-7-11].

³⁵ Xinjiang Implementing Bilingual Education for Preschool Next Year, *Guangming Daily*, December 12, 2005 [新疆明年全面实施学前双语教育, 光明日报, 2005-12-9].

language preschools within the next five years, with the goal of having 258,000 minority preschoolers enrolled in these types of schools by 2010.³⁶ Parents of Uyghur preschool students in Southern East Turkistan's rural prefectures who send their children to Chinese language schools receive a per diem subsidy.³⁷ This subsidy is not available for the parents of children in Uyghur language schools. Maralbeshi (Bachu) county has allotted 150,000 RMB for every township to establish bilingual preschools.³⁸ Bashkeram, where 95 per cent of the population is Uyghur, recently spent 430,000 yuan to establish a school in which Chinese is the only mode of instruction and speaking Uyghur on school grounds is forbidden.³⁹

School mergers have also resulted in greatly reduced availability of Uyghur language education. This process began in 2004 with the announced merger of 50 Uyghur and Chinese language schools and the directive that in these schools "teaching should be conducted in Chinese language as much as possible".⁴⁰ As a result, Uyghur schools are being merged out of existence all over East Turkistan. For example, in the industrial city of Maytagh (Dushanzi), out of five Uyghur language elementary schools and one secondary school in the 1980's only one Uyghur language elementary school

remains.⁴¹ In Shihezi, East Turkistan's second largest city, school mergers have resulted in the elimination of Uyghur language instruction entirely.⁴²

In support of the language education push, the government has instituted an intense recruitment campaign and provided monetary incentives to attract teachers whose first language is Chinese, and who are almost always Han Chinese, to teach in East Turkistan's schools.⁴³ This is despite the fact that many qualified Uyghur teachers are being laid off due to Chinese language requirements. Though the teacher recruitment drive has been carried out in the name of "bilingual" education, none of the new teachers are required to speak Uyghur.

IV. Effects of "Bilingual" Education in East Turkistan on Uyghur Children

"Bilingual" education in East Turkistan has had devastating effects on Uyghur children. By forcing Uyghur children to study in Chinese, the PRC government is harming their educational development. The method of language immersion as currently practiced in East Turkistan has been shown to result in a poor education for minority students.⁴⁴ Well-developed skills in the mother tongue are linked with high levels of academic achievement and a consensus has

³⁶ Xinjiang's Bilingual Education Starts with Children, *People's Daily Overseas Edition*, October 10, 2006 [新疆"双语"教育从娃娃抓起, 人民日报海外版, 2006-10-12].

³⁷ China: Mandarin Introduced in Uygur Nursery Schools, *South China Morning Post*, February 2, 2006.

³⁸ Bachu Popularizes Rural Bilingual Education Preschools, *Xinjiang Daily*, April 13, 2007 [巴楚普及农村学前"双语"教育 新疆日报 2007-04-13].

³⁹ Kazuto Tsukamoto, Bilingual Education Spreads Chinese to Ethnic Minorities, *The Asahi Shinbun*, March 2, 2006.

⁴⁰ China Imposes Chinese Language on Uyghur Schools, *Radio Free Asia*, March 16, 2004.

⁴¹ Uyghur Human Rights Project interview with Uyghur Teacher, May 23, 2007.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Xinjiang Analyzes the Difficult Issue of "Bilingual" Education, *Guangming Daily*, December 19, 2005 ["新疆破解"双语"教育难题,"光明日报, 2005-12-19].

⁴⁴ See Kang Jian, 'If Xinjiang will develop, Chinese-language education must be distributed', *Language and Translation*, No 2, February 2006, pp 63-6 and Arianne Dwyer, 'The texture of tongues: Languages and power in China' in William Safran, ed., *Nationalism and Ethno-Regional Identities in China*, London: Frank Cass, 1998.

formed rejecting the idea that children will “pick up” a foreign language through total immersion. In fact, the added pressure of learning in a second language has repeatedly been shown to have negative effects on a child’s development and motivation, which in turn leads to frustration and higher drop out rates.⁴⁵

An ethnically Uyghur former teacher who taught in Chinese in a “bilingual” school for several years noticed the negative effects on his students:

In class the students must speak in Chinese, then when they go home, they must speak in Uyghur. This gives them a lot of stress. Also, their parents can not help them with their homework. This gives the children more and more stress. In the end, this disturbs their mental development and their educational development. After a while the stress of speaking Uyghur at home and then speaking Chinese at school means that the student loses interest in studying.⁴⁶

Students also suffer the loss of both qualified teachers and quality instruction. Under the Chinese language push, Uyghur language teachers must pass a standardized Chinese proficiency test in order to continue teaching. Those teachers who are unable to do so, are given a short period of time to

⁴⁵ For research on bilingual education and language learning see James Crawford, *Bilingual Education: History, Politics, Theory, and Practice*, Bilingual Educational Services, 4th ed., 1999; Stephen D. Krashen *Under Attack: The Case Against Bilingual Education*. Culver City, Calif.: Language Education Associates, 1996.; Kenji Hakuta, and Snow, Catherine. 1986. "The Role of Research in Policy Decisions about Bilingual Education." *NABE News* 9, no. 3 (Spring): 1, 18-21.

⁴⁶ Uyghur Human Rights Project interview with Uyghur Teacher, May 23, 2007.

improve their Chinese to passing levels.⁴⁷ Some teachers who cannot ultimately pass the test are forced out of the classroom through retirement while others are shifted into non-teaching roles. One Uyghur teacher talked about the situation at his school:

We had seven Uyghur teachers, but after the change there are only two. All the others are gone. Some are forced to leave. Others are humiliated. One teacher was shifted to be a cleaner at the student dormitory. Another was moved to the application department to do menial tasks like getting water and filing. I do not want to say that these are not important jobs, but after a decade as a teacher, when you become a cleaner, this is a humiliation. These were good teachers!⁴⁸

Uyghur teachers who do pass a proficiency test are often forced into a situation in which both students and teachers are using a second language:

These teachers come into a class and must speak Chinese. A whole class full of Uyghur children and a Uyghur teacher. But because the teacher does not speak Chinese well, the students laugh and ask to be transferred out of the class.⁴⁹

The result is the loss of dedicated teachers. One Uyghur teacher who passed the Chinese proficiency test eventually gave up teaching out of frustration with PRC policy:

⁴⁷ Artush Excited by Chinese Language Studying Fever, Xinjiang Daily Net, July 11, 2006 [阿图什兴起学汉语热,新疆日报网, 2006-7-11].

⁴⁸ Uyghur Human Rights Project interview with Uyghur Teacher, May 23, 2007.

⁴⁹ Uyghur Human Rights Project interview with Uyghur Reporter, May 18, 2007.

I loved my students. They were young with fresh ideas. Even when I was upset, I could go and teach and then one hour later I would feel refreshed. I had lots of students who came from the countryside. Using Uyghur I was able to teach these kids... But, because of the situation, I had to give it up and go do a job that I do not like.⁵⁰

V. “Bilingual” Education in Context

“Bilingual” education in East Turkistan has evolved in an increasingly repressive political environment, as one aspect of a government driven project to assimilate Uyghurs by attacking and diluting their culture. It was conceived around the time of the founding of the post-Soviet Central Asian states in 1991, a turning point in the PRC’s view of East Turkistan, when the government began to become obsessed with “security” and “stability” in the region.⁵¹ Since 1996, around the time “bilingual” education policies were first being tested on a wide scale, there have been at least nine “anti-crime” campaigns in the XUAR that have targeted the Uyghur population.⁵² Since 2001, when “bilingual” education was dramatically expanded, China has used the “war on terror” to suppress any measure of displeasure with the government.⁵³ One interviewee observed:

⁵⁰ Uyghur Human Rights Project interview with Uyghur Teacher, May 23, 2007.

⁵¹ Nicolas Becquelin, “Xinjiang in the Nineties”, *The China Journal* 44: 2000, 65-90.

⁵² Human Rights Watch and Human Rights in China, *Devastating Blows: Religious Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang*, Human Rights Watch, Vol. 17, No. 2, April 2005.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

People who believe in a bilingualism that does not conform to the Chinese view of things are in danger of being thrown into prison and labeled separatist, or terrorist.⁵⁴

In 2004, the year in which a particularly harsh “strike hard, extreme pressure” campaign aimed at repressing “the three evils” of “separatism, extremism, and terrorism” resulted in the arrest of hundreds of Uyghurs, the rate at which “bilingual” education was eliminating Uyghur from East Turkistan’s schools increased dramatically.⁵⁵

Uyghur religion, a moderate form of Sunni Islam that is crucial to their ethnic identity, has been fiercely suppressed.⁵⁶ The legal system is used as a tool of repression, with arbitrary detentions and torture commonly used against any Uyghur who voices discontent with the government.⁵⁷ Charges of “political crimes” and the death penalty have been shown to be disproportionately applied to Uyghurs.⁵⁸ Uyghur women suffer from sterilizations and forced abortions, corvée labor is still used in rural areas, and the transfer of Uyghurs, especially young women, from East Turkistan to inland China is common.⁵⁹

While “bilingual” education has been pushing Uyghur language out of East Turkistan’s schools and human rights abuses against Uyghurs have increased, Uyghurs

⁵⁴ Uyghur Human Rights Project interview with Uyghur Scholar, May 10, 2007.

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch and Human Rights in China, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Amnesty International, *Gross Violations of Human Rights in the Uighur Autonomous Region*, London: Amnesty International, 1999.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Uyghur Human Rights Project, *Uyghurs and Human Rights: The 50th Anniversary of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region*, September 29, 2005.

have also experienced severe demographic and economic pressures. Han Chinese immigration, aided by government policies, has been responsible for dramatic changes that threaten Uyghur culture. In 1955, Uyghurs made up 74.7 percent of the total population of East Turkistan and Han Chinese accounted for 6.1 percent.⁶⁰ Today Uyghurs make up 45 percent and Han 41 percent of the population, a number that excludes PLA soldiers, Chinese security forces, and much of the migrant population.⁶¹

As the Han population has increased, they have also received a greater share of the economic benefits from East Turkistan's growth, including economic and employment opportunities not available to Uyghurs.⁶² An ethnic Uyghur teacher of Chinese speaking Uyghur students remembers:

*At job fairs in schools I would go with my students to look for jobs but the signs will say 'we don't want minority people'. I felt ashamed, humiliated. My students, they study hard, but they still have no opportunities, no jobs. So I felt like I was teaching a lie.*⁶³

A study of the 2000 census lends support to the Uyghur claim of economic discrimination, finding that "there is a very strong correlation between areas of Han majority and high per capita income" and that this finding "is not just a correlative

⁶⁰ Stanely Toops, *The Demography of Xinjiang*, in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* ed. S. Fredrick Starr (M.E. Sharpe: Amrmonk, NY, 2004).

⁶¹ *Ibid.* and Department of Population, Social, Science and Technology Statistics of the National Bureau of Statistics of China [国家统计局人口和社会科技统计司].

⁶² See Bruce Gilley, *Uighurs Need Not Apply*. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 23, 2001.

⁶³ Uyghur Human Rights Project interview with Uyghur Teacher, May 23, 2007.

relationship, but a causal one."⁶⁴ The 1995 industrial census showed that just 2 of 191 managers of large and medium sized businesses in Xinjiang were minorities and that only around 11 per cent of these businesses were located in areas with a majority of ethnic minorities.⁶⁵ Civil service hiring has been shown to be biased against Uyghurs, with the majority of opportunities reserved for Han Chinese.⁶⁶ In other employment areas, such as "professional and technical" jobs, minority employment figures have shown only modest increases, despite East Turkistan's high rate of economic growth.⁶⁷ For these reasons many of the most vocal opponents of "bilingual" education are Uyghurs who are fluent in Chinese.

VI. Recommendations: Protect and Support Uyghur Language in East Turkistan

*I am not against Uyghurs learning Chinese. Language is an instrument for life. But giving people a choice and pushing people to learn Chinese is different. Teach Uyghur and teach Chinese.*⁶⁸

⁶⁴ David Bachman, "Making Xinjiang Safe for the Han?: Contradictions and Ironies of Chinese Governance in China's Northwest," in *Governing China's Multiethnic Frontiers*, ed. Morris Rossabi (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Congressional-Executive Commission on China, *Xinjiang Government Says Ethnic Han Chinese Will Get 500 of 700 New Civil Service Appointments*, April 7, 2005.

⁶⁷ Linda Benson, "Education and Social Mobility," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* ed. S. Fredrick Starr (M.E. Sharpe: Amrmonk, NY, 2004): 190-215.

⁶⁸ Uyghur Human Rights Project interview with Uyghur Scholar, May 10, 2007.

The PRC should immediately end the current policy of eliminating Uyghur language education from East Turkistan and, at a minimum, return to the policy of allowing for both Uyghur and Chinese language education systems. Bilingual education will work only if authorities support schools in which both Uyghur and Chinese are recognized as important regional languages and serious academic classes are offered in both languages.

Government support of Uyghur language would both improve ethnic relations and contribute to economic growth in East Turkistan. Many observers have noted that language issues play a large role in the ethnic tensions of the region.⁶⁹ A commitment to Uyghur language on the part of the government would ultimately contribute to the goal of stability by easing an area of serious Uyghur discontent.

A commitment to Uyghur language would also allow China to take even greater advantage of its trade relations with Central Asia. Uyghur is very closely related to Uzbek and mutually intelligible with the other Turkic languages of Central Asia. In 2005, trade between East Turkistan and Central Asia comprised 40 percent of China's overall trade with the region.⁷⁰ In 2006, this trade amounted to nearly 11 billion dollars and is expected to continue to grow substantially in the future.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Joanne N. Smith, "Making Culture Matter": Symbolic, Spatial and Social Boundaries between Uyghurs and Han Chinese' *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol 3, No 2, September 2002; Gardner Bovington, "The Not-so-silent Majority: Uyghur Resistance to Han Rule in Xinjiang," *Modern China* 28.1 (January 2002): 39-78. See also Dwyer, *op. cit.* and Eric Schluessel, *op. cit.*

⁷⁰ "Xinjiang steps up trade ties with central Asian countries." *People's Daily Online*, October 18, 2005.

⁷¹ Dr Vladimir Paramonov & Dr Aleksey Stokov, "Economic Involvement of Russia and China in Central Asia", *Conflict Studies Research Centre*, Central Asian Series, May 2007.

Many countries have instituted language policies that accommodate two or more languages within one geographic area. Multiple languages are protected under the law and in practice in South Africa, India and Switzerland, for example. In Quebec, the native French-speaking population enjoys special linguistic rights based on their history in the region.

While Uyghur language rights are protected in PRC law and under its international agreements, this is not reflected in reality. China should address the serious problems that exist in the implementation of its "bilingual" education policy.

The Uyghur Human Rights Project recommends that the PRC:

- Stop forcing Uyghur children to be educated in a second language.
- Respect its own laws and international agreements by allowing for the use of and committing to the protection of Uyghur language.
- Engage local Uyghur leaders in the formulation of a humane and dignified language policy.
- Support the development of the Uyghur language and Uyghur language materials.
- Work to end economic discrimination based on ethnic identity.