

Research on the Education Policy for the Uyghur Group in Xinjiang

Jiayun Liao

School of Education and Human Development, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, 22904, USA

**Corresponding author. Email: Lydiaaaa0113@outlook.com*

ABSTRACT

Xinjiang, a Chinese province, is home to the largest number of Uyghurs, a minority community in the country. Due to the language differences with the major Han group, it is hard for the Uyghurs in Xinjiang to receive the advanced education system. Such lack of knowledge makes it hard for Uyghurs to trade with Mainland China, which strongly affects the local economy. In an attempt to change the region's minority education systems, the Chinese government is adopting bilingual education on both Uyghur and Mandarin for Uyghur populations. However, this education system neglects to preserve the unique cultural and religious traditions of Uyghur people, causing great social conflicts in Xinjiang. Therefore, this paper explores how the Uyghur group in Xinjiang can overcome problems in bilingual education and obtain their own cultural identity. Meanwhile, the author also examines the efficacy of bilingual education in improving the economical, social and political situation in Xinjiang. Through the reading of documents and analysis of data, the author obtains the conclusion that bilingual education helps improve the literacy level and the living standards of local people, but great efforts are still needed to solve potential problems such as the unity of ethnicity and nationalism.

Keywords: *Xinjiang; Uyghur; Education; Bilingual Education; Vocational education and training center*

1. INTRODUCTION

For years, the Chinese government works hard to improve the education level, and the nine-year compulsory education has been successfully implemented in major of the country [1]. However, one of the exceptions is Xinjiang, and the reason behind this is complicated. From the political perspective, during the 20th century, Xinjiang fought several times to isolate itself from the Chinese government, so its relationship with the Chinese government is strained; from the religious perspective, over 40% of people in Xinjiang are Uyghurs, and they are Muslims who believe in Islam, whereas Han groups believe in Buddhism. The religious differences lead to threats in traditions and livings. Most importantly, from the language perspective, Uyghurs' unique dialect and characters make it difficult for the Chinese government to communicate with them. Based on such situations, Uyghurs are unwilling to accept the prevailing culture and education.

To cater to the regional situations, the Chinese government designs a specialized education system for Uyghurs. The system contains lots of policies and will be

further discussed in this essay, but the main goal is implementing bilingual education [2]. By utilizing new policies, the Chinese government aims to improve the education level, and make Uyghurs better integrate with major Chinese culture while preserving their own traditions. Therefore, the main theme for this article is to examine the effectiveness of the education system for Uyghurs, and how it changes people's lives in Xinjiang. The author elaborates the research through the following sessions: the educational history in Xinjiang, the current education policy, challenges faced, and solutions to improve education. The essay also explores the current living situations of Uyghurs as well as some related plots about this group through books, websites, and documents. This essay adopts plenty of online sources as it is believed that electronic documents including news releases, databases, presentations are all effective ways to record and show reality.

By conducting this research, the author hopes to improve public awareness about minority groups, assist China in maintaining cultural diversity, and provide a mature and equitable education for Uyghurs. At the same time, the investigation aids governments in determining

the benefits and drawbacks of current policies, allowing them to change educational materials, facilities, and processes.

2. THE HISTORY OF THE EDUCATION POLICY IN XINJIANG

In history, there were several significant political and social changes in Xinjiang, which gave strong impacts on its education. The evolution of education experiences a series of twists and turns. Fortunately, despite some obstacles along the way, Xinjiang is gradually absorbing the mainstream culture and maturing its literary level.

The earliest integration of Uyghur and Chinese education appeared in the 1870s, led by Zuo Zongtang [3]. When he reconquered and administrated Xinjiang, he constructed agencies named “public schools”, which were based on ancient Chinese Confucian rituals. The Neo-Confucian curriculum was taught for mandatory education. Zuo’s stated goal was to establish a class of bilingual and culturally communicative intermediaries between the Qing state and the Xinjiang people. This was the first time to utilize a bilingual system as well as Confucian curriculum for minority groups, which was a milestone for acculturation between the minor Uyghur group and mainstream culture. The attempt was a huge success and greatly helped the unity of Qing.

Unfortunately, at the beginning of the 1900s, Russians led an cultural colonization, namely Jadids Movement [4], to the Uyghur group in Xinjiang. It was a huge smash on the education and religion of Uyghur: the movement reformed Islamic education from the aspects of language, teaching method, curriculum and textbook compilation, forcing Uyghurs to adopt the modern lifestyle and religions in Russia. The cultural integration with the Confucian system collapsed, even Uyghur’s own cultural identity faced severe threaten during this colonization.

The turning point occurred soon. Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has controlled the apparatus of education, and expanding state-sponsored education has been a priority of the CCP in an endeavor to unite 56 ethnic groups into one nation [5]. Therefore, the CCP continued the bilingual education and employed Mandarin Chinese into Uyghur education. What is more, the government provocatively funded students from Xinjiang to attend high schools in China’s eastern cities, further promoting cultural diffusion. Even though the Cultural Revolution during 1966-1976 stroke hard on Uyghur’s education with many high schools and

universities suspending normal operations and recruitment for a lengthy time, the Chinese government reacted quickly.

During recent years, the Chinese government continues to provide opportunities to improve minorities’ chances of receiving higher education. Uyghur students enjoy privileges, such as lower standard requirements on the college entrance exam (Gao Kao), and discounts on University tuition fees. There were only 525 college graduates and 593 high school graduates in 1957 [6]. However, college enrollment in Xinjiang peaked at 59000 in 2005, demonstrating that, given the enormous number of school-age minorities and the challenges of producing new courses in minority languages, education in the region has advanced at an incredible rate. The rate of primary and junior schools also skyrockets, indicating a leap in basic education.

As a result, from Qing Dynasty to the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), several political changes have not stopped the progress of education system in the Uyghur group. The Chinese government insists on a bilingual system and cultural integration. From the statistics one can see that such improvement is enormous, marking a success in such an education system.

3. EXISTING EDUCATION POLICY IN XINJIANG

The persistent attempts and revolution in Xinjiang’s education system have finally formed such current system, which is mainly composes of 3 parts: 12-year-mandatory education, vocational education and training centers, and continued construction of modern universities.

Since 2006, the Chinese government has been providing 12 years of mandatory education for the Uyghur group, starting from Secondary school (6 years), to Junior high school (3 years), and to Senior high school (3 years) [7]. Statistical data have proved that the mandatory education is a great success. As shown in Table 1, starting from 2006, there is a gradual and continued increase in the number of Newly Enrolled, Total Enrolled, and Graduate Senior High Student. The number of Full-time teachers also increases from 26800 in 2006 to 42400 in 2020. The number of entry for the secondary school and junior high school also shows a similar improvement pattern. The increase in the Senior High school education marks progress in the basic education, which raises the literacy rate and makes the Uyghur group more competitive in the job market.

Table 1 Basic statistics on Regular Senior Secondary Schools in Xinjiang (Unit: 10000 person; National Bureau Statistics of China).

Indicator s	New Enrollment of Students of Regular Senior Secondary Schools	Total Enrollment of Students of Regular Senior Secondary Schools	Graduates of Regular Senior Secondary Schools	Full-time Teachers of Regular Senior Secondary Schools
2020	16.57	49.81	19.36	4.24
2019	17.01	52.84	18.69	4.43
2018	16.52	54.97	17.79	4.47
2017	19.73	56.71	16.19	4.45
2016	19.30	53.77	14.43	4.11
2015	18.77	49.79	13.91	3.89
2014	17.39	46.30	14.13	3.78
2013	16.36	44.75	13.98	3.50
2012	15.53	44.07	13.51	3.24
2011	15.65	43.27	12.95	3.13
2010	15.32	41.91	13.57	3.02
2009	14.89	41.71	13.73	2.94
2008	14.79	41.87	13.52	2.87
2007	14.64	41.35	12.71	2.80
2006	14.29	40.23	11.54	2.68

Meanwhile, Chinese has never stopped the bilingual language. Being announced in 2014, vocational education and training centers are internment organizations operated by the government of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and its Chinese Communist Party (CCP) provincial committee [8]. Its goal is to educate Uyghurs Mandarins, laws, and offer employment opportunities by applying the acquired techniques. The vocational education is effective in stabilizing their livings. "I learned basic computer knowledge first, then I began to learn how to operate one. Through the training, I learned how to use Word and Excel, how to edit documents as well as other software, design visiting cards and advertisements, which have enabled me to earn a good living," said Alimjan, a former trainee at the center [9].

However, a controversial voice about the center also occurs. "This was no school. It was a re-education camp, with military rules, and a clear desire to break us. Silence was enforced, but, physically taxed to the limit, we no longer felt like talking anyway... It was against the rules to turn down food, for fear of being called an 'Islamist terrorist' ", Haitiwaji said when reflecting on her days in the center [10].

Behind the education and training is the loss of culture, no celebration for festivals, and no liberty. From this perspective, the vocational center is kept in isolation

from family members, teaching useless living skills, and implementing compulsory language learning. Uyghurs are gradually assimilated into one of the Han ethnic, and this assimilation is irrevocable. Though the Vocational Training Center's basic purpose is admirable, the strategy and training method should be tweaked to win the social acceptance.

In conclusion, the education policies have brought changes for Uyghurs' lives. The most significant impact is increased wages. Table 2 shows twice the increase in total wage from 2010 to 2020. Also, the Wage Bill indices are over 100 every year, indicating a continued increase in the real wage. With increased wages and education, Uyghurs can trade products with other areas and promote the GDP. For instance, the geographical advantage enables Uyghurs to develop the fruit industry and tourism. The education and trade further promote cultural assimilation, and intermarriages between Uyghurs and Han are on the rise, indicating a harmonious connection between the two groups.

Table 2 Total Wage Rate of employed person in Xinjiang (National Bureau Statistics of China).

Indicator s	Total Wage Bill of Employed Persons in Urban Units (100 million yuan)	Total Wage Bill Indices of Employed Persons in Urban Units (preceding year=100)
2020	2833.84	109.1
2019	2596.80	108.9
2018	2383.64	101.6
2017	2345.87	107.7
2016	2178.46	104.2
2015	2091.56	112.1
2014	1865.05	111.4
2013	1674.73	120.6
2012	1388.14	123.4
2011	1124.58	132.2

4. MAIN PROBLEMS FACED BY XINJIANG PROVINCE WHEN IMPLEMENTING THE EDUCATION POLICY

4.1 Stereotypes towards gender and lack of education awareness

Firstly, due to the long-term lack of education, Uyghur people fail to realize the importance of education.

When Multi-National Companies (MNCs) working there intended to donate money to help construct a local primary school, Xinjiang citizens preferred money than a primary school; they saw the short-term benefit but failed to consider the long-term development. At the same time, the stereotype from ancestors still exists. They consider males as the main component of productivity, while ignoring the potentials of females for society. Therefore, the Uyghur group prefers to send boys into schools, while they ask girls to help finish housework and agriculture at home. The rooted belief leads to unfair education, which is hard to solve even with policies. With mandatory education, the average education level has improved, and the disproportion between genders also reduces, but there is still a long way to eliminate inequality.

4.2 Language barriers and the lack of funds

Another major issue is the lack of funds and education resources. Because they are a minority population, most families can only afford a limited amount of money for schooling. Furthermore, the local government lacks adequate financial resources to provide mandatory education to all. The school facilities and teachers are also scarce. There are not so many qualified teachers in Xinjiang, so the Chinese government dispatches elite teachers from other regions to help. The problem is that all those teachers only understand Chinese. However, barely 40% of Uyghurs comprehend Mandarin, indicating that students and teachers can hardly understand each other, which leads to ineffective teaching.

Table 3 Basic Statistics on educational funds in Xinjiang (Unit: 10000 yuan; National Bureau Statistics of China).

Region	2019	2018	2017	2016
Beijing	14794780	13525400	12512746	11934724
Tianjin	6270839	6351712	5850624	5365129
Hebei	19921191	17389625	15938479	14203834
Shanxi	9857999	9134205	8533662	7942196
Inner Mongolia	8105720	7759014	7601337	7624806
Liaoning	10593957	9759379	9651893	9206907
Jilin	6777422	6866495	6586685	6439837
Heilongjiang	8115856	7612173	7545432	7336607
Shanghai	14125408	13412840	12104556	11218946
Jiangsu	31093313	28276374	25960645	24020855
Zhejiang	27343770	24009012	21327866	18908104
Anhui	16375812	15011779	13751567	12357931
Fujian	13429131	12547951	11390975	10473975
Jiangxi	14535470	13152969	11717849	10468837
Shandong	29001760	26349273	23946021	22422970
Henan	26685217	24293502	21546749	18902582

Hubei	16067052	14578340	13821834	13009264
Hunan	17753672	16300603	15165690	13781959
Guangdong	49187551	42684258	38610331	33675376
Guangxi	14367736	12836618	11891781	10914241
Hainan	4243935	3777479	3390271	3068767
Chongqing	11442967	10216274	9483526	8863208
Sichuan	22547121	20767987	19274514	17620946
Guizhou	13622935	12732768	12488005	10335342
Yunnan	14833632	14543783	13292088	11886446
Tibet	2881230	2562958	2387658	1857714
Shaanxi	12490355	11375081	10545862	10049114
Gansu	7998741	7404892	7087547	6706137
Qinghai	2894894	2640309	2343469	2162973
Ningxia	2532754	2346978	2288400	2072544
Xinjiang	10214911	9522617	8462090	7823914

As shown in Table 3, Xinjiang has raised education funds from 78 billion yuan to 100 billion yuan, and ranks in the median of all the provinces. However, it is still far less than some highly advanced regions such as Beijing and Jiangsu. Besides, these data are the overall number. When considering its large geographical location, the educational funds are not enough for the Uyghur group.

4.3 Conflicts in cultural identity

Lastly, the main conflict is the cultural paradox. The bilingual language education and outer teachers fail to balance between Uyghur and Han culture, leading to the ignorance of festivals, traditions, and cultural identity. The increased focus on Mandarin has already had grave consequences for ethnic relations, especially in urban Uyghur schools. This invokes cultural conflicts and creates great backfires. According to Chinese official news, Xinjiang, especially where the Uyghur people inhabit compactly, suffered from severe terrorism attacks before 2016. During recent years, strikes and demonstrations of Uyghur people in cities like Beijing are frequently heard. The increased social instability might be interrelated with the cultural conflicts. Hence, higher awareness of Uyghur traditions is necessary to continue a sustainable education in Xinjiang.

5. SUGGESTIONS FOR XINJIANG EDUCATION POLICY

Considering obstacles faced in Uyghur Education, several suggestions are given to the local government. One thing that needs to be pointed out is that all the solutions are paper-based, and the effectiveness can only be tested according to authentic situations.

For the problems regarding stereotypes, it is better to give advertisements and promotions on the importance of

education. One act is to film social videos about the advantages of education and show them in public as advertisements. Another act is to invite successful Uyghurs to make speeches about their stories behind, and tell people the benefits of education through personal experiences.

Considering the language barriers, instead of inviting teachers from other regions, local teachers are better since they are familiar with the traditions and habits. Expert teachers can record videos in Mandarin, translate all the materials into Uyghur, and then send them to local teachers. Such teaching strategies help Uyghur teachers absorb advanced teaching strategies, and at the same time, train their Mandarin skills. Local teachers can combine Uyghur traditions and modern teaching together, so that students can integrate into the cultural assimilation, while keeping their Uyghur identity.

At last, the author encourages a fair and protective examination system for Minorities. The Chinese government provides privileges for Uyghur minor group on the entrance exam, hoping to increase their passion for knowledge. However, the policy now has serious backfire effects. Some Han students utilize such advantages by excusing them as Uyghurs on Gao Kao. The result is that they enjoy advanced modern education, and exploit Uyghur people's opportunities. Their selfish actions make it harder for Uyghurs to get entrance to a higher level of education. The government should pay high attention to such phenomena and give harsh punishments to those violating the laws.

6. CONCLUSION

The Chinese government has always been working hard towards equal access to education. Huge progress have been made in improving the education level and

living standards of minority groups, especially the Uyghur group in Xinjiang.

Through exploring the history of education in Xinjiang, the existing education policy in Xinjiang, problems faced in implementing education policy, and providing suggestions for Xinjiang education, the author has a thorough understanding towards the education of the Uyghur group. Overall, the implementation of Bilingual Education in the Uyghur group has shown its advantages from the statistics, as well as social and political viewpoints, though some problems like limited resources or funds still need to be solved. With Bilingual Education, Xinjiang group integrates with prevailing Han culture. As a result, the education policy helps cultural assimilation, but reservations and respects for the unique minority Uyghur culture are also worth more efforts.

However, some improvements can be made to this paper. For one thing, the paper is based merely on second-hand data from the internet instead of primarily collected by the author herself, so all the assumptions and data are paper based. The paper can become more convincing if including interviews with the Uyghur groups and their real responses and attitudes towards education. For another, the paper can be more persuasive if the writer can consider the education issues of Xinjiang from more perspectives. Finally, future efforts should be concentrated on how the public can raise awareness of minorities and learn more about Uyghur culture, making it easier for minorities to assimilate into society.

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