

The Xinjiang Class: Education, Integration, and the Uyghurs

TIMOTHY A. GROSE

Abstract

In 2000, the Chinese Communist Party established the Xinjiang Class (Xinjiang neidi gaozhong ban), a program that funds middle school-aged students from Xinjiang, mostly ethnic Uyghur, to attend school in predominately Han populated cities located throughout eastern China. This paper examines the efficacy of the Xinjiang Class in promoting ethnic unity and Chinese nationalism. By examining the extent to which Uyghur students participating in the Xinjiang Class interact with Han students; speak Chinese outside of the classroom; and by considering if these Uyghur students are returning to Xinjiang, I argue that many Uyghurs are resisting integration, and the Xinjiang Class is largely failing to promote ethnic unity between Han and Uyghurs. Conversely, this program has even strengthened some Uyghur students' sense of ethnic identity.

Introduction

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 the expansion of state-sponsored education has been a priority of the CCP in an attempt to unify China's 56 ethnic groups (*minzu*) into one Chinese nation (*zhonghua minzu*). In this context, Linda Benson argues, "The ultimate goal for the PRC's educational policy for minority peoples has been to integrate all ethnic groups into a single and unified socialist state".¹ Zhu Zhiyong, who has conducted extensive research on education in Tibet, contends, "State education for ethnic minorities has been considered one of the best ways to intensify the identity of the Chinese nation".² State-sponsored education is one of the CCP's most valuable tools for instilling minority students with "pro-Chinese" principles.

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), with its substantial population of sometimes restive Muslim minorities (especially the Uyghurs), has been an ideological battleground in which the CCP has used state-sponsored education to promote ethnic unity (*minzu tuanjie*). Currently in all public schools, the CCP promulgates atheism, selected histories of Xinjiang, and Mandarin Chinese language. In 2000, to accelerate the promotion of ethnic unity, the CCP established the Xinjiang Class (*Xinjiang neidi gaozhong ban*), an education initiative that funds students from Xinjiang to attend high school in China's eastern cities.³ By examining the extent to which Uyghur students participating in the Xinjiang Class interact with Han students; speak Chinese outside of the classroom; and by considering if these Uyghur students are returning to Xinjiang, I argue that many Uyghurs are resisting integration, and the Xinjiang Class is largely failing to promote ethnic unity between Han and Uyghurs. Conversely, this program has even

strengthened some Uyghur students' sense of ethnic identity and has accentuated the tensions existing between Han and Uyghurs.

This essay is divided into four main sections. First, I provide a brief history of the development of education in the PRC. Secondly, after noting the disparities between the education levels of Han and Uyghurs, I offer explanations for this situation. Then in the context of reviewing CCP implemented preferential policies for minority students, I introduce the major constructs of the Xinjiang Class program. Finally, I examine the Xinjiang Class' efficacy in promoting ethnic unity.

Methodology

The data for this essay has been collected from interviews I conducted in China from 2006 to 2008; from Chinese government documents concerning the Xinjiang Class; and from Chinese news reports. Pseudonyms have been given to all informants referred to in this essay. I also refer to Chen Yangbin's recently published book detailing his experiences working at a Xinjiang Class school. Unlike Chen whose informants were enrolled in the Xinjiang Class during the time of his research, however, my informants were all college students who had already graduated from the Xinjiang Class program.

Overview of Education in Xinjiang

During the first 30 years of CCP control in Xinjiang, policies regarding state-sponsored education were inconsistent and contradictory. Initially, CCP policies concerning education expanded enrollment in public schools dramatically. In Xinjiang from 1952 to 1958 when the CCP tolerated, and to an extent even promoted, the use of minority languages, enrollment in primary schools increased from 307,000 students to 718,000, and enrollment in secondary schools surged from 16,162 to 61,000 students.⁴ Then, attitude shifts by some CCP leaders towards the use of minority languages, together with mass socialist campaigns such as the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961) and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), inhibited the development of public education in Xinjiang. From 1956 to 1984, Uyghur script was altered three times from Arabic, to Cyrillic, to Latin, and then to a modified Arabic script, which is used today.⁵ During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) most schools in China were closed, and in Xinjiang, some public schools did not resume operation until 1976.⁶ Xinjiang's universities did not fully reopen until 1978.⁷ Instead of uniting the Uyghurs with the rest of China, the education policies of the first three decades of the CCP created illiteracy, confusion, and ultimately discontent among members of Xinjiang's Uyghur population.⁸

The CCP did not establish policies that improved the long-term development of state-sponsored education for Uyghurs and other minorities until the creation of China's constitution in 1982. Under the constitution all Chinese citizens are guaranteed, "the right and duty to be educated", and the use of minority languages for classroom instruction is protected.⁹ Article 12 of the constitution states:

Schools or other educational institutions which mainly consist of students from minority nationalities may use in education the language of the respective nationality or the native language commonly adopted in that region.¹⁰

Additionally, article five, section six of the Ninth Five-Year Plan for China's Educational Development maintains, "The translation and publication of teaching materials for

ethnic minority education should be ensured”.¹¹ These laws have made public schooling more accessible to Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

Statistics compiled since 1982 suggest positive trends in the promulgation of state-sponsored education in Xinjiang. Dru Gladney reports that from 1982 to 1990, the percentage of China’s Uyghur population who attended primary school increased from 37 to 43% and who attended undergraduate college increased from 0.1 to 2.1%. During the same eight-year span, illiteracy within the Uyghur population also decreased from 45 to 26.6%.¹² Furthermore, by 2001 97% of all “school-aged” children in Xinjiang were enrolled in school, and 61.8% of total in-school students were minorities.¹³

Despite a general increase in student enrollment, education levels of Uyghurs still lag behind Han Chinese (See Table 1, below). Only 6.9% of the Uyghur population 15 and older (compared to 9.6% of Han living in western China),¹⁴ have graduated from high school. Moreover, the percentage of Uyghurs over the age of 15 who have received a university education has only increased from 2.1% in 1990 to 3.1% in 2006.

TABLE 1. Highest Level of Education (Age 15 +)

Ethnic group	Middle school	High school	College or specialized
Uyghur	33.0%	6.9%	3.1%
Han	30.0%	9.6%	3.8%

Source: Wang Yuan, *Life in Western China (Xibu renmin de shenghuo)*, Beijing: China Statistics Press. (*Zhongguo tongji chubanshe*), 2006, p. 71.

Explaining Low Education Levels among Uyghurs

A number of factors contribute to the low levels of education among China’s Uyghur population. In this section, I list some of the major reasons that prevent Uyghurs from attaining a higher education, and then I introduce some policies that the CCP has enacted to address this situation.

The financial costs of public schooling can partially explain the low percentages of Uyghurs obtaining higher education. Uyghurs are over-represented in farming and generally earn less money than Han.¹⁵ Although new laws have been passed guaranteeing free tuition and the abolishment of “miscellaneous fees” in schools,¹⁶ expenses still exist, and these fees prevent some Uyghur children from continuing education beyond the elementary and middle school level. “Ahat”, a Uyghur principal in *Da lang kan*, a farming village near Turpan explained students must pay 100 RMB (approximately \$12.50) per semester of elementary school, 600 RMB (approximately \$75) per semester of middle school, and 1000 RMB (approximately \$130) per semester of high school.¹⁷ Recent research that examines student drop-out rates in southern Xinjiang report similar findings. An unpublished article investigating middle and high school dropouts in Kashgar’s 51st district indicates financial difficulties are to be blamed for 68% of this region’s dropouts.¹⁸ A study conducted in *Mulaomacun*, a farming village near Kashgar, also reports that the high costs of education force many Uyghur families to withdraw their children from school.¹⁹

Besides the economic difficulties state-sponsored schooling poses for some Uyghur families, policies of “bilingual” education present even more obstacles. Although the use of minority languages for classroom instruction is protected by the Chinese constitution, the CCP promulgates the use of Mandarin in all social realms, and proficiency in Mandarin is a must for all minority students pursuing a college education. In fact

beginning in 2002, Xinjiang University ceased to offer courses taught using Uyghur.²⁰ In addition, schools in Xinjiang are teaching Mandarin to Uyghur students at early ages. According to requirements established by the Ministry of Education (MOE) for elementary schools in minority areas, Mandarin is introduced to third grade students and accounts for 10.4% of their total elementary school curriculum.²¹

Despite the recent emphasis on teaching Chinese, most Uyghurs remain illiterate in Chinese. Recent statistics report that 82% of Uyghurs over 15 are unable to read Chinese and 10.8% can “read Chinese with difficulty”.²² (See Table 2, below.) Some Uyghurs firmly believe Chinese language requirements in schools are unjust. One of my informants, an ethnic Uyghur who graduated from Beijing’s Central University for Nationalities and is now working for a state-run newspaper in Urumqi, elegantly explained that there are nearly 10,000,000 Uyghurs in Xinjiang, but they [Uyghurs] cannot use their own language. He continued, “We are all nationalities, but only in China are we [Uyghurs] a minority”.²³

TABLE 2. Chinese Language Proficiency of Western China’s Population (Age 15 +)

Ethnicity	Can read easily	Can read with difficulty	Unable to read	Total
Uyghur	7.3%	10.8%	81.9%	100%
Han	58.2%	15.8%	26.0%	100%

Source: Wang Yuan, *Life in Western China, (Xibu renmin de shenghuo)*. Beijing: China Statistics Press. (*Zhongguo tongji chubanshe*), 2006, p. 56.

Even those Uyghurs more accepting of the current Chinese language dominated education system in Xinjiang are not guaranteed employment that provides lucrative salaries and benefits. Officially, Xinjiang’s unemployment rate is 4.4%,²⁴ but the unemployment rate among Uyghurs in urban Xinjiang hovers around 8%.²⁵ In Turpan, Yusuf, a 24-year-old graduate of Xinjiang University expressed his frustrations looking for work. Speaking fluent English he explained that after nearly half a year of looking, he is still unable to find suitable work and is forced to drive tourists illegally around Turpan.²⁶

Some Uyghurs attest that Han Chinese unfairly occupy most well paying jobs in Xinjiang. “Rana” a 20-year-old woman from Kashgar studying in Beijing complained, “The people coming from China proper, who do not recognize one word in Chinese [very uneducated] manage over Uyghurs”.²⁷ Employment disparities between Han and Uyghur in the oil industry and in private enterprises have also been noted by others.²⁸ A professor at a university in Beijing who specializes in Xinjiang studies, however, refutes Uyghurs are victims of discrimination. He explained that even though a Han and a Uyghur graduate from college does not mean they possess similar abilities. He elaborated that employers also consider college entrance examination scores, in which, he claims, Uyghurs generally test lower than Han.²⁹

The CCP’s Response—Improving Minorities’ Chances

The CCP has implemented several policies, which in theory, are aimed at improving minorities’ chances of receiving higher education. First, the CCP has created a number of preferential policies (*youhui zhengce*) for minority students. These policies include lowering the standards on the college entrance exam (*gao kao*) minorities have to meet, adding “bonus points” (*jiafen zhengce*) to minorities’ *gao kao* exams, and

instituting a quota systems at universities in Xinjiang.³⁰ In an example of these preferential policies, Ma Rong explains that Uyghurs who graduate from a *min kao han* school³¹ and have two Uyghur parents will receive 200 bonus points on their college entrance exam; Uyghurs who graduate from a *min kao han* school and have one Uyghur parent will receive 100 bonus points.³² Second, the CCP has allocated several education subsidies to Xinjiang. A 2006 subsidy provided 10 billion RMB (1.3 billion USD) to rural areas in western China in order to build and improve elementary and middle schools.³³ Finally, the CCP is actively encouraging Uyghur parents to send their children to Chinese (*min kao han*) schools and has established boarding schools for Uyghur students to study in China proper (*nei di*)—the Xinjiang Class.³⁴

The Xinjiang Class

Modeled closely after a program created in 1982 that funds Tibetan middle and high school students to study at boarding schools in China proper's eastern cities,³⁵ in 2000, the CCP established the "Xinjiang Class" (*Xinjiang neidi gaozhong ban*). The Xinjiang Class is a four-year boarding school specifically designed to educate poor, Uyghur youth from rural Xinjiang. Initially, the Xinjiang Class program funded 1,000 middle school graduates from Xinjiang to attend high school at one of 12 cities in China proper.³⁶ The CCP has recently expanded the scale of this program, which will be discussed below.

As noted previously, the Xinjiang Class is a four-year program aimed at providing Uyghurs with a more complete education, taught by better qualified teachers than what may be available at schools in Xinjiang. The first year of the Xinjiang Class is composed of preparatory studies that emphasize improving students' Chinese and English. During this year, remedial classes are also offered in math, physics, and chemistry. After successful completion of preparatory studies, students begin their normal coursework, and for all of which Chinese is the language of instruction.

The Xinjiang Class is managed through the cooperation of the Ministry of Education (MOE), the XUAR's government, the Administration Office of the Xinjiang Class, and the local education offices of participating cities. The MOE makes all major decisions concerning the curriculum, enrollment, and allocation of funds. These decisions are then carried out by the Administration Office of the Xinjiang Class and the education bureaus of the Xinjiang Class cities.³⁷

Student Enrollment

The Administration Office of the Xinjiang Class selects students based on several criteria. First, students are chosen according to a quota system that considers ethnicity, residence, and the families' financial background. The Xinjiang Class recruits 80% of its students from poor, rural areas.³⁸ According to the 2008 recruitment plan, Uyghurs are to constitute 3,310 of the 4,850 (68%) vacancies, while Kazaks 506 (10%); Hui 321 (6.6%); and Han will constitute 485 (10%) of the vacancies. Kasghar, with 829 students, 757 of those being Uyghur, is the region in which the largest number of new students will be recruited.³⁹ Second, students are evaluated according to their performance on a test administered specifically for the Xinjiang Class. The test is usually offered in June and students are required to pay a registration fee of 35–42 RMB (approximately \$5–6), depending on their financial situation.⁴⁰ Starting in 2007, applicants who participate in the "Loving my Chinese Nation" (*ai wo zhonghua*) bilingual speech competition

can earn an additional 5–15 points on this exam, and students from families that obey birth-control policies or a student who is an only child will receive five extra points on this exam.⁴¹ Finally, students must undergo a complete physical examination at a county level hospital of higher.

The Xinjiang Class as a Political Mechanism

The implicit goals of the Xinjiang Class, namely to educate students with a pro-Chinese government curriculum and to instill ideals of ethnic unity, are clearly defined in the “Administration Regulations for the Xinjiang Class (Trial)” document.⁴² Article 1 of this document states:

In order for Xinjiang to train qualified high school graduates who support the Chinese Communist Party’s leaders, love China, love socialism, defend the unity of China, maintain unity of the people . . . and will bring forth new a spirit, realize ability, and are determined to offer one’s self for socialist modernization construction, the Xinjiang Class must fully carry out the national education and ethnic group policies [and] carry out quality education.⁴³

Furthermore, article 10 expounds:

Xinjiang Class schools will adhere to socialist principles; emphasize moral education work, Marxism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiao Ping Theory and the Party’s theory on ethnic problems as a guide . . . [and] special attention [will be] placed on strengthening support for the Chinese Communist Party, love for the socialist motherland, upholding the unity of China’s Nationalist education, to strengthen education of the unity of peoples—i.e. Han are inseparable from ethnic minorities, ethnic minorities are inseparable from Han, and every ethnic minority is inseparable from each other.⁴⁴

The political goals of the Xinjiang Class seem to be emphasized over educational goals. Chen argues, “The goal of the Xinjiang Classes is distinctly concerned with politics and current social issues in China”, and continues, “the explicit academic goal of the Xinjiang Classes is subordinate to political concerns that are left implicit”.⁴⁵ Wang Dan an Ethnic Han history teacher employed by Jiangsu Province’s Xinjiang Class school confirms that one of his most important responsibilities is to cultivate nationalism among students. He uses the curious phrase *qianyi mohua*, which can be loosely translated as influencing someone without their knowing, to describe his teaching objectives.⁴⁶

Imperative to the success of the Xinjiang Class is respect towards Uyghur (Muslim) culture. Schools participating in the Xinjiang Class program are required to provide Uyghur students with *halal* cafeterias and hire local Hui (Chinese Muslim) or Uyghur chefs. These cafeterias are very popular among Uyghur students. In a letter written to Nur Bakaeli, the deputy secretary of XUAR, Uyghur students rejoiced that they ate very well at the school.⁴⁷ One of my informants, who is now a university student in Beijing, complained that the *halal* cafeteria at his university does not compare to the delicious food he ate while studying at the Xinjiang Class.⁴⁸ Certain Uyghur festivals are also celebrated. In order to celebrate the Kurban and Noruz festivals, the Beijing Luhe Xinjiang Class roasted four lambs and organized a variety show featuring hosts who spoke Chinese, Uyghur, Kazak, and English.⁴⁹

The observance and sensitivity towards Muslim food restrictions and certain Muslim festivals in a Han-dominated environment create an impression that Han and Uyghur

can and do co-exist peacefully in modern China. As Chen has pointed out, however, this program suggests a continuity of the ideology that Han are culturally superior to minorities and Uyghurs can only succeed with “eastern support”.⁵⁰

Success of the Xinjiang Class as defined by Chinese State Media

The Chinese media publicizes the “successes” of the Xinjiang Class but offers little evidence that the Xinjiang Class contributes directly to the strengthening of ethnic unity. Instead, state-run newspapers (especially those circulated in Xinjiang) mainly report about enrollment numbers and “official” testimonials by Xinjiang Class students. A 2002 report from the State Ethnic Affairs Commission of the PRC referred to as “The Xinjiang Class Program Gains Initial Progress” indicates that during the 2002 recruitment cycle, 20,000 more students than spots available applied to the Xinjiang Class, and in certain areas applicants exceeded allotment numbers 50 to 1.⁵¹ In 2005 during the “Expanding the Xinjiang Ban’s Enrollment Meeting”, officials decided that the number of schools participating in the Xinjiang Class schools would expand from 12 to 24, yearly enrollment numbers would increase from 1,540 to 3,075 students, and in 2007, enrollment would again increase to 5,000 students.⁵² Although these numbers are significant and cannot be ignored, they should be scrutinized.

The Xinjiang Class often creates opportunities for struggling Uyghur families to both provide an education for their children and save money. A Uyghur professor of history at the Chinese Institute of Social Sciences in Urumqi contends that Uyghur parents are often hesitant about sending their children to China proper for high school, though they nonetheless wish to provide their children with the best opportunities available.⁵³ Expenses for the Xinjiang Class are calculated according to families’ annual income and are placed in one of three scales of annual fees; 900 RMB (approximately U.S. \$125), 450 RMB, (approximately U.S. \$63) or free. These expenses include tuition, living expenses (room and board), insurance, and one round-trip train ticket from Xinjiang to their host school in China proper. “Tursun”, a Uyghur from Turpan who studied at the Shenzhen Xinjiang Class, explained that his father finally agreed to allow him to enroll in the Xinjiang Class because that would allow the family to save money. He explained that his required fees for the Xinjiang Class were only 900 RMB per year, but if he remained in Turpan to attend high school, he would have paid 2,200 RMB (approximately U.S. \$315) per year.⁵⁴

Providing Uyghurs with an inexpensive education has been portrayed in the Chinese media as the CCP acting as a kind parent. A Xinjiang Class student interviewed by CCTV 4, one of China’s national television stations, states, “Mother and Father, please do not worry. Things here are better than home, and the teachers care about us more than our parents”.⁵⁵ In the letter to Nur Baikeli, the Xinjiang Class students write, “Our hearts are gushing with thousands of words, but we do not know what to say first . . . We want to tell you everything here is very good, please do not worry”.⁵⁶

Resisting Integration

Students’ descriptions of the Xinjiang Class expressed outside the realm of Chinese state media are quite different than those from official government mediums. In this section, I explore how Uyghur Xinjiang Class students resist integration into Han Chinese society.

Han–Uyghur Interactions

The Xinjiang Class, at least in theory, promotes interactions between Han and Uyghur students. Article 3.3 of the “Xinjiang Class Work Meeting Notes” states the Xinjiang Class, “promotes Xinjiang minority students and Han students to be friends, to study with each other and to progress together”.⁵⁷ In reality, however, interactions between Han and Uyghur students are limited. Chen indicates that the Xinjiang Notes article merely encourages minority students to befriend Han students, but the document, “does not specifically require the integrated classes”.⁵⁸ Article five of the “Administration” document only vaguely stipulates, “when conditions are ripe, the Xinjiang Class students will be mixed with local students in class”.⁵⁹ Chen even contends that “school authorities even set rules to officially discourage such interactions [between Han and Uyghur students] in order to avoid potential conflicts”.⁶⁰

Interactions between Han and Uyghur students are monitored and controlled closely. During preparatory studies, Xinjiang Class students attend class only with other Xinjiang Class students. Students are then slowly integrated into the same class with Han students. This integration process seems to vary from school to school. “Tursun”, explained that the first year after his preparatory studies, he attended some classes with Han students, and by his second year, all of his classes were with Han students.⁶¹ “Sakir”, a graduate from the Shanghai Xinjiang Class in 2005, explained that during his four years as a Xinjiang Class student, he never shared classes with Han students.⁶² Based on my informants’ descriptions, Han–Uyghur interactions outside the classroom occur less often. Some Uyghur students seemed to even avoid Han students. “Sakir” recalled that he ate and played with only students from the Xinjiang Class and could not recall having any Han friends.⁶³ “Tursun”, who attended class with Han students, admitted that after class he would usually associate with other Uyghurs or Kazakhs.⁶⁴

My informants often recalled instances of uncomfortable interactions with Han students and teachers. “Aygul”, who graduated from Beijing’s Xinjiang Class in 2000, described instances Han students asked her and her Xinjiang Class classmates insulting questions. She was asked if she had ever watched television or seen concrete floors. Aygul’s Kazakh classmate, who grew-up near *Nanshan* in Urumqi, was asked if she lived with animals.⁶⁵ “Raziya”, who began the Xinjiang Class program in 2000 in Guangdong, vividly remembered an incident her and her classmates were scolded by their Han teacher. The school had a small store in which students could purchase snacks. Shortly after arriving to Guangdong, “Raziya” and her friends were eager to try the variety of candy the store sold. “Raziya’s” teacher noticed many of the Xinjiang Class students bought candy with their subsidy money. The teacher pointed to another Uyghur girl known to be very poor, who had not bought any candy and said that the students should look to the poor girl as a model student because even though she had probably never eaten a cracker before, she was not spending her money foolishly.⁶⁶

Language

Although classes in the Xinjiang Class are instructed in Chinese, outside the classroom many Uyghurs continue to communicate using only Uyghur language. Chen notes that most Uyghur students he encountered used Uyghur for the majority of time spent outside the classroom. He explains, “The use of Uyghur is so prevalent among students that even non-Uyghur students in Xinjiang Classes use it in daily life”.⁶⁷ He even

witnessed several instances of Uyghur students cursing Han students to their faces in Uyghur because the Han students could not understand what was being said.⁶⁸ My own informants “Sakir” and “Tursun”, also recalled primarily speaking Uyghur outside of class.⁶⁹

Return to Xinjiang or Remain in Neidi?

The year 2008 marks a fascinating moment in the short history of the Xinjiang Class because the students of the first Xinjiang Class, many of whom remained in China proper, will graduate from the university. Upon graduating, Xinjiang Class Uyghurs must decide whether to return to Xinjiang or remain in China proper. To complicate an already difficult decision, documents outlining any obligations Xinjiang Class students must fulfill after graduation are vague.

After receiving high school and university degrees and obtaining proficiency in Mandarin and English, some Uyghurs wish to pursue employment in the large, developed cities of China proper. “Raziya”, who majored in business English, complained that she will not be able to find suitable employment in Xinjiang. At best, she said, she could become a school teacher.⁷⁰ Batur explained that he wanted to first work in Beijing and then after earning enough money, return to Xinjiang and start his own business.

Xinjiang Class students choosing not to return to Xinjiang have met obstacles that, in some cases, have prevented them from working in China proper. Although the primary documents of the Xinjiang Class do not stipulate students’ obligation after graduation, an article posted on “Xinjiang Class Students Online” states students must return to their home.⁷¹ After “Raziya” received a job offer from an international firm in Beijing, the Xinjiang Education Bureau (*Xinjiang jiaoyubu*) initially did not permit her to accept the offer. After pleading her case to her university and the *Xinjiang jiaoyubu*, the *Xinjiang jiaoyubu* granted her permission to work in Beijing, however, she is not allowed to have her residency permit (*hukou*) transferred to Beijing.⁷² “Aylia”, another recent graduate from a Beijing university, who studied in Shenzhen as part of the Xinjiang Class program, was denied permission to accept her employment offer for reasons unknown to her.⁷³

Some Uyghurs from the Xinjiang Class are more willing to return to Xinjiang, though their decisions are often based on a desire to improve their “home” (Xinjiang) themselves as opposed to developing Xinjiang for China. A blog devoted to the question of Xinjiang Class students returning to Xinjiang has been created on Baidu, one of China’s most popular search engines. One student writes:

No matter what, after I graduate I am returning home! For the service of my home town! Because I love my home! My family and friends are there [Xinjiang].

我毕业之后无论怎么样我要回家!为家乡服务!因为我爱家乡!在那里有我的亲人,有我的朋友。⁷⁴

Another student urges:

Since the country [China] and Xinjiang has trained us, we should develop the west Xinjiang, if not there are the *Khitay* [derogatory expression for Han Chinese] . . . I would like to ask you, haven’t you stayed in China proper long enough? You don’t want your home to catch up to the interior [China proper]?

既然国家、新疆培养了我们，我们最适合开发西部，而不是那些 *kara hitai*...我想问诸位，内地你没有呆够吗？你不想让自己的故土也快一点赶上内地吗？⁷⁵

These responses are remarkably different from those expressed in an “official” letter written to Nur Bakeli by Xinjiang Class students who urged Hu JinTao and the Chinese nation not to worry because they would build Xinjiang and their “mother country”.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Educational development in Xinjiang has brought about dramatic changes since the initial years of PRC control in China. Changing political attitudes influenced the policies of the CCP during the majority of the Communist Era and often impeded progress. This can especially be noticed in the implementation of language policies for minorities such as the Uyghurs. Since the economic opening of China in the early 1980s, however, education in Xinjiang has expanded. Policies guaranteeing the use of minority languages and preferential policies that help minority students attend high school and college, have increased the number of Uyghur students attending all levels of schooling.

Despite these advancements, though, many Uyghurs remain dissatisfied with the current state of educational development in Xinjiang. Many Uyghurs complain tuition is too high, language policies are unfair, and pursuing higher education does not guarantee job placement. Furthermore, the Han–Uyghur relations remain tense.

Indeed the CCP established the Xinjiang Class in 2000 in order to improve the levels of education among the Uyghurs and to promote Chinese nationalism and ethnic unity. Yet, although the Xinjiang Class is providing Uyghurs with the type of modern education that may not be accessible in Xinjiang, the Xinjiang Class is falling short of its political aims. After examining instances of Han–Uyghur interactions, the minimal use of Mandarin by Uyghurs outside of the classroom, and the degree in which Uyghurs are willing to return to Xinjiang, suggest many Uyghurs are resisting integration. The CCP must continue to actively address the problems plaguing the Xinjiang’s education system or the Uyghurs will likely become a dislocated minority instead of contributing members of Chinese society.

NOTES

1. L. Benson, “Education and Social Mobility among Minority Populations”, in *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, ed. Frederick Starr, Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2004, p. 190.
2. Z.Y. Zhu, *State Schooling and Ethnic Identity: The Politics of a Tibetan Neidai School in China*, New York: Lexington Books, 2007, p. 55.
3. As the Uyghurs constitute the majority of the Xinjiang Class’ enrollment, I will focus on them throughout this essay.
4. L. Benson, “Education”, *op. cit.*, p. 196. Although these figures suggest a remarkable increase, these statistics do not indicate what percentage of these students were minorities. Han in-migration to Xinjiang during this period, also increased.
5. For a detailed discussion on language policies during this period see: J. Dreyer, “Language Planning for China’s Ethnic Minorities”, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 51, 1978, pp. 353–369; and M.L. Zhou, *Multilingualism in China: The Politics of Writing Reforms for Minority Languages 1949–2002*, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2003.
6. L. Benson, “Education”, *op. cit.*, p. 196–197.
7. J. Rudelson, *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism Along China’s Silk Road*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, p. 104.

8. L. Benson, "Education", *op. cit.*, p. 197.
9. Ministry of Education of the PRC, "Education Law of the People's Republic of China", available online at: http://www.moe.edu.cn/english/laws_e.htm, accessed September 2008.
10. The Education Law of the People's Republic of China (Article 12).
11. MOE of the PRC, "The 9th 5-Year Plan", available online at: http://www.moe.edu.cn/english/planning_n.htm.
12. D. Gladney, *Dislocating China: Muslims Minorities, and Other Subaltern Subjects*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004, pp. 271–272. Illiteracy here is defined as individuals six years and older who cannot read or write. It must be noted though, that the language of literacy (i.e. Uyghur or Chinese) was not specified.
13. X. Li, "Regional Ethnic Autonomy", in *Xinjiang of China: Its Past and Present*, ed. Li Sheng, Urumqi: Xinjiang People's Publishing House, 2005, p. 191.
14. Western China as classified in Y. Wang, ed., *Life in Western China (Xibu renmin de shenghuo)*, (Beijing: China Statistics Press, 2006) (Zhongguo tongji chubanshe) includes Xinan, Xibei, Guangxi, Chongqing, Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, Inner Mongolia, Jiangxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, and Xinjiang. Data referring to western China throughout this essay includes the above provinces.
15. E. Hannum and Yu Xie, "Ethnic Stratification in Northwest China: Occupational Differences between Han Chinese and National Minorities in Xinjiang, 1982–1990", *Demography*, Vol. 35, 1998, p. 327.
16. In 2006, a law was passed promising all "miscellaneous" fees (stationery, school uniforms, insurance, regular physical examinations, quarantine, drinking water, and other school service charges) would be free, and only fees for textbooks, workbooks, and lodging (when required) would be collected. *Xinhua*, "China abolishes tuition fees in all rural schools", January 17, 2007, available online at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/chinagate/doc/2007-01/17/content_785767.htm.
17. Fieldnotes, June 21, 2006, *Da lang kan*.
18. Rehangu, *An Investigative Report of the Student Drop Out Situation in Kashgar's 51st District (Wushi-yituan shixue ertong xiangkuang diaochaogaogao)* (unpublished report), 2006, p. 6.
19. Beihetiyaer, *The Uyghurs (Weiwuerzu)*, (Yunnan University Press, 2004) (*Yunnan daxue chubanshe*), p. 321.
20. A. Dwyer, *The Xinjiang Conflict: Uyghur Identity, Language Policy, and Political Discourse*, Washington, DC: East-West Center Washington, 2005, pp. 39–40.
21. Beihetiyaer, *The Uyghurs, op. cit.*, p. 300. Uyghur language courses account for 27.2% of total classroom time in elementary schools.
22. Y. Wang, *Life in Western China, op. cit.*, p. 56.
23. Fieldnotes, October 4, 2006, Urumqi. "请父母不要担心。我们这里比家里还好，老师比父母还要关心我们".
24. *Xinhua*, March 13, 2007. "Minister: Tough Employment Task Ahead", available online at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-03/13/content_826616.htm. Unemployment is based on those in urban areas actively seeking employment.
25. Y. Wang, *Life in Western China, op. cit.*, p. 105. Unemployment statistics are based on urban Uyghurs 16 and over who are currently in the job market.
26. Fieldnotes, August 10, 2006, Turpan. This man drove a private taxi, "black car", (Chinese *hei che*). These taxis are for private hire, and although common throughout China they are technically illegal as they do not pay taxes and administrative fees.
27. Fieldnotes, May 24, 2006, Beijing. "条件成熟后再过渡到与当地学生混合编班".
28. See E. Hannum and Yu (1998) and G. Bovingdon, *Autonomy in Xinjiang: Han Nationalists Imperatives and Uyghur Discontent*, China East West Center, 2004, p. 37.
29. Fieldnotes, August 21, 2006, Beijing.
30. B. Sautman, "Expanding Access to Higher Education for China's National Minorities: Policies of Preferential Admissions", in *China's National Minority Education: Culture, Schooling and Development*, ed. Gerard Postiglione, London and New York: Falmer Press, 1999, p. 185.
31. Currently in China, ethnic minorities can choose to send their children to either schools that teach most classes in their native language (*min kao min schools*) or schools that teach classes in Chinese (*min kao han schools*). If a student is educated in a *min kao han* school, he/she will take the college entrance exam in Chinese.
32. R. Ma, "Population Distribution and Relations among Ethnic Groups in the Kashgar Region, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region", in *Chinese Minorities on the Move*, eds Robyn Iredale and Naran Bilik, Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003, p. 120.

33. *Xinhua*, “China Tightens up Security on Education Fund”, December 16, 2006, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-12/16/content_760611.htm
34. A. Rahman, *Sinicization Beyond the Great Wall: China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region*, Leicester, UK: Matador, 2006, p. 113.
35. For more on this program see Z.Y. Zhi, 2007.
36. The original 12 cities that participated in the Xinjiang Class are Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Dalian, Qingdao, Ningbo, Suzhou, and Wuhan.
37. For a thorough description of the relationship between these three administrative bodies, see Chen Yangbin, *Muslim Uyghur Students in a Chinese Boarding School: Social Recapitalization as a Response to Ethnic Integration*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008, p. 49.
38. See article 11 in the “Administration Regulations for the Xinjiang Class” (Neidi Xinjiang gaozhong ban guanli banfa shixing), November 26, 2004, available online at: http://www.edu.cn/xie_zuo_826/20060323/t20060323_110910.shtml.
39. The Xinjiang Class Online, “About the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region’s 2008 Xinjiang Class Recruitment Plan” (*guanyu xiada Xinjiang 2008nian neidi gaozhongban zhaosheng jihua*), available online at: <http://www.xjban.com/ReadNews.asp?NewsID=682>.
40. Urumqi’s Bureau of Education, “Notice about the 2006 Xinjiang Class student recruitment registration work” (*guanyu zuohao 2006nian neidi xinjiang gaozhongban zhaosheng booming gongzuode tongzhi*), available online at: <http://www.wlmqedu.gov.cn/www/wsbs/bszn/rxzsk/1638.htm>
41. TianShan Net, “Xinjiang Class enrollment institutes bonus point policy” (*neigaoban zhaosheng shoushe jiafen zhengce*), June 24, 2007, available online at www.tianshannet.com.cn/news/content/2007-06/24/content_2013760.htm.
42. In his study on the Xinjiang Class, Yangbin Chen also identifies this document as one of the most important concerning the Xinjiang Class.
43. “Administration Regulations for the Xinjiang Class” (Neidi Xinjiang gaozhong ban guanli banfa shixing), November 26, 2004, available online at: http://www.edu.cn/xie_zuo_826/20060323/t20060323_110910.shtml.
44. “Administration Regulations” (Neidi Xinjiang gaozhong ban guanli banfa shixing), November 26, 2004, available online at: http://www.edu.cn/xie_zuo_826/20060323/t20060323_110910.shtml
45. Y.B. Chen, *Muslim Uyghur Students in a Chinese Boarding School: Social Recapitalization as a Response to Ethnic Integration*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008, pp. 46–47.
46. D. Wang, “A Discussion of the Xinjiang Class’ Feelings and Value towards History”, (Qiantan neidi Xinjiang gaozhong lishi qinggantai yu jiazhiguan jiaoyu) *Popular Science* (Kexue dazhong), Vol. 5, 2007, p. 65.
47. Xinjiang Daily, “Xinjiang Class Students: Determined to Become Successful and Repay their Country” (Nuer Baikeli jiyu fumen Xinjiangban xuesheng: lizhi chengcai, baoxiao zуго), January 1, 2008. <http://www.xjdaily.com.cn/news/xinjiang/218352.shtml>
48. Fieldnotes, February 23, 2008.
49. TianShan Net, “Xinjiang Class Student’s Happy Lives” (*neibaoban xuesheng de xingfu shenghuo*), July 5, 2007, available online at: http://www.xjts.cn/big5/news/content/2007-07/05/content_2038686.htm
50. Y.B. Chen, *Muslim Uyghur Students*, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
51. The State Ethnic Affairs Commission of the PRC, “The Xinjiang Class Program Gains Initial Progress”, (Neidi Xinjiang gaozhongban banxue gongzuo qude chubu chengxiao), <http://www.seac.gov.cn/gjmw/mzjykj/2004-07-16/1168823944808305.htm>.
52. CRIOnline, “Xinjiang Class to Double Enrollment”, (Neidi Xinjiang Gaozhongban zhaosheng guimo fan yi fan) June 6, 2005, available online at: <http://gb1.chinabroadcast.cn/3821/2005/06/24/1385@596753.htm>.
53. Fieldnotes, March 6, 2008.
54. Fieldnotes, February 23, 2008.
55. “请父母不要担心。我们这里比家里还好，老师比父母还要关心我们”。 http://vsearch.cctv.com/plgs_play_cctv4news_20080904_6628785_0html
56. “Xinjiang Class Students: Determined”.
57. The Ministry of Education, “The Xinjiang Class Work Meeting” (Neidi xinjiang gaozhongban gongzuo huiyi jiyao), <http://www.seac.gov.cn/gjmw/mzjykj/2004-07-16/1168823944808305.htm>.
58. Y.B. Chen, *Uyghur Muslim Students*, *op. cit.* pp. 47–48.
59. “Administration Procedures”, “条件成熟后再过渡到与当地学生混合编班”.
60. Y.B. Chen, *Uyghur Muslim Students*, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
61. Fieldnotes, April 8, 2008.

62. Fieldnotes, May 8, 2008.
63. Fieldnotes, May 8, 2008.
64. Fieldnotes, April 8, 2008.
65. Fieldnotes, February 21, 2008.
66. Fieldnotes, March 3, 2008.
67. Y.B. Chen, *Uyghur Muslim Students*, *op. cit.*, p. 125.
68. Y.B. Chen, *Uyghur Muslims Students*, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
69. Fieldnotes, April 8 and May 8, 2008.
70. Fieldnotes, December 12, 2007.
71. Xinjiang Class Students Online (Neidi Xinjiang xuesheng zaixian), "Information about minority students employment policies" (minzuban xuesheng wei dingxiang zhaosheng, biyehou yilu huidao, yuanji gongzuo), December 12, 2007, <http://www.dewir.cn/Article/ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=542>
72. A *hukou* is required to receive benefits such as access to a particular city's schools, taxes, and having a Beijing *hukou* makes receiving a passport easier.
73. Fieldnotes, December 14, 2007.
74. Baidu Posts (tieba)"Are Xinjiang Class Students Required to Return to Xinjiang to Serve?" (*Neidi Xinjiangban jüdu de xuesheng biye hou xuyao hui Xinjiang fuwu ma?*) December 14, 2005, <http://tieba.baidu.com/f?kz=40547488>
75. Baidu Posts, January 1, 2006.
76. Xinjiang Class Students: Determined.

Copyright of Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.