

# Movement for Uyghur Mother Language Based Education



February 2014



World Uyghur Congress

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## MAP OF EAST TURKESTAN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA



East Turkestan is known by Chinese authorities as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'Xinjiang' means 'new territory' in Chinese and it is an exonym used by the Chinese authorities. The endonym used by the Uyghurs is 'East Turkestan'. The difference in nomenclature is mirrored by the case of Tibet; 'Tibet' is the endonym used by Tibetans, while 'Xizang' (roughly translated as 'Western treasure vault') is the exonym used by the Chinese authorities.

## I. PURPOSE OF REPORT

*“A person forced to lose her language loses the meaning of her life. A people has a genetic soul. It is transmitted in their own language.”*

- Andres Sütö, Hungarian Author

The purpose of this report is to inform the international community about the oppressive assimilation policies implemented by the People’s Republic of China (PRC), which threaten the existence of the Uyghur language. It aims to invigorate the international community to come together to urge China to uphold its domestic laws and act in accordance with international norms and legal standards. The report intends to raise the issue of false and unfounded imprisonments of Uyghur activists detained for promoting Uyghur language and culture, while acting in line with PRC domestic law.

This report also analyzes the PRC’s language policy commitments under domestic and international law, which protect the inherent and inalienable right of minorities to preserve their language. China can uphold and honor its obligations under domestic and international law only by abandoning its current assimilation policies.

It is important to emphasize that assimilation is a process – rather than a single event – which aims to unify two distinct cultures.<sup>2</sup> In cases of forced assimilation, the dominant cultural group intends to incorporate and annihilate the other cultural group. This report comes at a time when Uyghurs are resorting to desperate measures to preserve their collective identity as China’s assimilationist policies have reached new heights and spurred countless ethnic conflicts inside and outside of East Turkestan. If China’s unjust policies are not addressed immediately, the ethnic cleansing of the Uyghurs is almost inevitable. Therefore, there is a pressing need for the international community to collectively encourage the Chinese Government to take appropriate measures to end the discrimination, oppression and marginalization of Uyghurs in China.

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<sup>2</sup> This concept of assimilation was coined by Milton. M. Gordon. See Milton M. Gordon, *“Assimilation in American life: The role of race, religion, and national origins.”* New York: Oxford University Press. 1964.

## Compilation of the Report

This report has been compiled using a variety of sources that have systematically recorded the consequences of the implementation of China's 'bilingual' education policy. Relevant domestic PRC laws were obtained from translated versions of the PRC's Constitution and other legal documents available to public through Government sponsored websites.<sup>3</sup> The timeline included in this report has been compiled using information collected through BBS forum (hosted by the Baghdax website: 'http://www.baghdax.cn') before the site was shut down by the Chinese Government. BBS posts were created by the leaders of the Movement for Mother Language Based Education (Abduweli Ayup, Dilyar obul and Muhammad Sidiq) and reposted on other Uyghur websites (including 'www.pidaiy.biz' and 'www.anatil.org'). In addition to the BBS posts, this report also contains information obtained, researched published by Radio Free Asia - Uyghur Service and Uyghur Human Rights Project. Where possible, we have included photographs provided to Radio Free Asia and by informants and family members of imprisoned activists.

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<sup>3</sup>The Constitution of the People's Republic of China (adopted by the National People's Congress on December 4, 1982 with further revisions in 1988, 1993, 1999, and 2004). Translation available at <http://english.people.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html>. Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the People's Republic of China (issued by the Second Session of the Sixth National People's Congress on May 31, 1984 with further revision on February 28, 2001). Translation available at <http://www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/regional-ethnic-autonomy-law-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-amended>. Education Law of the People's Republic of China (Adopted at the Third Session of the Eighth National People's Congress on March 18, 1995, promulgated by Order No.45 of the President of the People's Republic of China on March 18, 1995 and effective as of September 1, 1995). Translation available at <http://www.china.org.cn/english/education/184669.htm>

## II. BACKGROUND

### Overview of Language Assimilation Policies in East Turkestan

Uyghurs in East Turkestan are currently facing extreme ethnic oppression enacted by assimilationist policies and heavy-handed policing enforced. The overall goal of the PRC is to systematically eradicate centuries-old Uyghur cultural traditions. One recent form of ethnic suppression has been the marginalization of Uyghur language as the language of instruction in schools in East Turkestan. Under PRC national law, autonomous regions have the power to identify instructional languages at the local level. However, in violation of both domestic laws and international obligations, the PRC has forcefully imposed Mandarin as the language of instruction in all schools across East Turkestan.

According to Chinese census, Uyghur language is the mother tongue of approximately 10.6 million Uyghur people residing in East Turkestan and 1.5 million Uyghur diaspora. Uyghur is a Turkic language that belongs to the southeastern branch of the Turkic language family and is considered the direct descendent of the Old Turkic language used between the 7<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries in Mongolia and present day East Turkestan. In addition to the Uyghur inhabitants of East Turkestan, Uyghur language is spoken by a significant number of individuals in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Mongolia.<sup>4</sup>

The Uyghur population of East Turkestan is roughly 20 million, according to Uyghur sources. According to latest Chinese census from 2010, the current population of East Turkestan is 21.81 million, and Uyghurs number 10.2 million (according to 2000 census), making them the majority ethnicity in the province. As of 2010, approximately 43% of the population is of Uyghur ethnicity.<sup>5</sup> The Han Chinese population in East Turkestan has increased from 6% recorded in 1949 to 41% today.<sup>6</sup> To accommodate the needs of incoming Han Chinese migrants, Uyghur language has been severely restricted and thus marginalized in East Turkestan; from Government offices to emergency response centers, radio shows to television programs, names of archeological sites to common street names.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>4</sup> Arienne Dwyer, "*The Xinjiang Conflict: Uyghur Identity, Language Policy and Political Discourse.*" Washington, D.C.: East-West Center. 2005

<sup>5</sup> Communiqué of the National Bureau of Statistics of People's Republic of China on Major Figures of the 2010 Population Census[1] (No. 2). April 29, 2011. Available at [http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/newsandcomingevents/t20110429\\_402722516.htm](http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/newsandcomingevents/t20110429_402722516.htm)

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> 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 records that archaeological sights in Turpan are all known by their Chinese names.

historically and culturally significant and symbolic Uyghur literary works have been destroyed or burned as part of China's ideological campaign against what Chinese authorities label as "separatism."<sup>8</sup>

## **Marginalization of the Uyghur Language in Education**

The most recent direct attack on the Uyghur language is its exclusion in the education system; a carefully constructed policy by the Chinese Government. Currently, there are 3 types of schools (excluding universities) in East Turkestan: Han schools, 'ethnic schools' and "combined" or "merged" schools. **Han schools** are made up of predominantly Han students, with all subjects taught in Mandarin by Han Chinese teachers. In '**ethnic schools**', only students who are members of minority groups are enrolled and all classes are strictly taught in Mandarin, but pupils have the option to learn their mother tongue as a separate subject. The third type of education is offered in so-called "**combined**" or "**merged**" schools. These schools enroll Han Chinese students as well as minority students, but only if their proficiency in Mandarin allows them to follow all subjects in Mandarin. Although these schools appear to be offering a "bilingual" education, schools across East Turkestan have implemented a monolingual teaching system, which has entirely replaced the Uyghur language with Mandarin as the language of instruction.

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*The supposedly 'bilingual' educational system is one of the primary examples of embedded cultural and linguistic oppression in China, which has erased the Uyghur language from education as the medium of instruction from kindergarten to university.*

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The State-sponsored process of assimilation commenced in early 1990s and encompasses all the characteristics of cultural genocide described by Skutnabb-Kangas (2000).<sup>9</sup> The supposedly 'bilingual' educational system is one of the primary examples of embedded cultural and linguistic oppression in China, which has erased the Uyghur language from

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Dillon, "Uyghur Language and Culture Under Threat in Xinjiang." *CACI Analyst*; August 14, 2002 issue. Available at <http://old.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/127>

<sup>9</sup> Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2010). Indigenous children's education as linguistic genocide and a crime against humanity? a global view. *Gáldu Čála – Journal of Indigenous Peoples Rights*, 1(2010), 55. Retrieved from <http://www.e-pages.dk/grusweb/55/>

education as the medium of instruction from kindergarten to university. In 1984, the Chinese authorities argued in favor of enforcing compulsory Mandarin-based education stating that there is a general need to increase “minority-Han communicability” by “strengthening /.../ Chinese language education.”<sup>10</sup> Until the mid-1980s, Uyghur parents could theoretically choose<sup>11</sup> between Mandarin-based education and Uyghur-based education for their children.<sup>12</sup>

Subsequently, Uyghur schools began introducing Mandarin as a secondary language starting from the third grade, instead of the first year of middle school. Furthermore, intensive Chinese language courses were imposed on Uyghur teachers and increasingly high quotas were being set for Chinese language degrees at universities.<sup>13</sup> Despite the ambitious and drastic changes in East Turkestan’s educational system, the Chinese Government was not satisfied with the pace of the assimilation process. In December 1987, Xinjiang Education Commission, the Minority National Commission, and the Language Office formed the Autonomous Region Working Group to discuss and implement bilingual education more effectively and efficiently.<sup>14</sup>

The attack on the Uyghur language increased considerably approximately around the time of the founding of Post-Soviet Central Asian States in 1991. This era marks the turning point in PRC’s attitude towards East Turkestan, since the Chinese Government began to stringently focus on the stability and security of the region. During the conference ‘Ethnic Language and Writing’, which took place in 1992, bilingualism was understood as the “only way to raise the education level of minorities.” As a result, Mandarin became the language of instruction from the third grade onward. Previously, it had been taught only as a second language in minority schools.

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<sup>10</sup>Schluessel, E. (2007). 'bilingual' education and discontent in xinjiang. *Central Asian Survey* , 26(2), 1-27.

<sup>11</sup>The word “choose” here is arguable since Uyghur parents only sent their children to Mandarin schools as a result of their concerns about their children’s future. The United Nation’s *2004 Human Development Report* argues that when such a choice is between one’s mother tongue and one’s future, it is not considered free choice. See <http://www.hdr.undp.org/en/reports/>

<sup>12</sup>Arienne Dwyer, “The Xinjiang Conflict: Uyghur Identity, Language Policy, and Political Discourse.” *Political Studies* 15. East-West Center Washington. 2005

<sup>13</sup> 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

<sup>14</sup>Wang Weidong and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Nationalities Language and Script Committee. 1992. “Xinjiang da zhong xiao xue Hanyu jiaoxue qingkuang yu jingyan” (The conditions and experience of Chinese-language primary, secondary and tertiary education in Xinjiang). In *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu yuyan wenzi shiyong he fazhan wenti* (Issues in the Use and Development of Chinese Minority Languages and Scripts), ed. Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Nationalities Institute and National Committee on Nationality Affairs. Beijing: China Tibetan Studies Publishing: 246–51

In 1997, Xinjiang courses were established in 12 Chinese inland cities. These classes recruited top minority students from East Turkestan and enrolled them in distant Chinese/Mandarin schools. This strategy expedited the assimilation process of young Uyghurs by removing them from their geographical and cultural environment. Although the Chinese Government claimed that the Xinjiang courses were not mandatory, parents and teachers of the selected Uyghur students have indicated otherwise. An Uyghur teacher told the Uyghur Human Rights Project that Government officials would “put hidden pressure on the parents of the student by threatening the student’s future.”<sup>15</sup> XUAR Party Secretary, Wang Lequan, further corroborated that the main focus of these Xinjiang courses is on “political thought training”, rather than academic development.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Uyghur students who attended these Xinjiang courses were forbidden from speaking in Uyghur, even in their dormitories, where they are under constant surveillance.<sup>17</sup> By 2006, Xinjiang classes were offered in 26 Chinese cities compared to 12 cities in 1997. During this period, the number of Uyghur students enrolled increased to over 10,000.<sup>18</sup>

The global war on terror, which started in 2001, provided the Chinese Government with an opportunity to expand its plans for bilingual education, while suppressing individuals who expressed any discontent.<sup>19</sup> An Uyghur scholar told the Uyghur Human Rights Project that anyone who refused to conform to the Chinese Government’s alleged bilingual education system would be labeled a “*separatist*” or a “terrorist” and could be detained.<sup>20</sup> In 2002, the Xinjiang Regional Education Bureau introduced a new bilingual education policy that required Mandarin to be used as the main language of instruction in primary, middle and high schools.

In September 2002, it was announced that Xinjiang University, one of the region’s largest and most prestigious universities, would no longer instruct courses in Uyghur.<sup>21</sup> All courses were to be taught solely in Mandarin, with the exception of minority literature classes.<sup>22</sup> After this declaration of monolingual university teaching, the HSK test (a Mandarin proficiency test) became a requirement for both new and veteran Uyghur teachers. Veteran Uyghur

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<sup>15</sup> Uyghur Human Rights Project interview with Uyghur Teacher, May 23, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> The Chief Task of Inland Xinjiang High School Classes is Ideological Political Training, *Online International*, June 24, 2005

<sup>17</sup> Uyghur Human Rights Project interview with Radio Free Asia reporter, May 18, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Xinjiang Will Have 5000 Students Attend Inland High Schools This Year, *Xinjiang Daily Net*, February 14, 2007

<sup>19</sup> Human Rights Watch and Human Rights in China,

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

<sup>20</sup> Uyghur Human Rights Project interview with Uyghur Scholar, May 10, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> 2) Karl Große, “Kein Studium in Muttersprache: Peking schaltet Uigurisch ab.” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, June 4, 2002

<sup>22</sup> “Xinjiang University to Teach Major Subjects in Chinese” *Xinhua News*, Friday June 7, 2002. Translation Available at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2002-06/07/content\\_429952.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2002-06/07/content_429952.htm)

teachers, who do not pass this proficiency test are given a short period of time to improve their Mandarin skills.<sup>23</sup> Uyghur teachers who ultimately fail the proficiency test lose their employment either by retirement or relegation. RFA reported that, between 2010 and 2011, at least 1000 primary school teachers in East Turkestan have lost their jobs, because they didn't meet the required Mandarin proficiency level. The language proficiency test is not the only technique employed by the PRC to purge Uyghur teachers out of the education system. Numerous Uyghur teachers have been demoted, interrogated and imprisoned for expressing their dissatisfaction with PRC's so-called bilingual education system.<sup>24</sup>

The birth of monolingual university teaching set the precedent for "combined" or "merged" schools. The process of merging Uyghur and Mandarin schooling commenced in 2004. The procedure involved Uyghur elementary, middle and high schools merging with their Mandarin counterparts and switching to Mandarin as the language of instruction "as much as possible."<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Uyghur students began to face discrimination and mistreatment from their Han Chinese classmates and teachers. In some cases, Uyghur students were brutally beaten by their teachers, or by Han students with the permission of their teachers.<sup>26</sup>

In March 2004, the *Xinjiang Daily* announced that minority students in the region should all be instructed in Mandarin.<sup>27</sup> Within a year of this announcement, the number of students enrolled in these questionably bilingual schools increased from 35,948 to 145,000. Additionally, China's "strike hard, extreme pressure" aimed at repressing "extremism, separatism and terrorism" intensified the elimination of Uyghur language from schools across East Turkestan.<sup>28</sup>

By 2005, PRC's alleged bilingual education system expanded into all minority preschools in East Turkestan. This sudden growth in the number of Mandarin-based schools means that children have to attain a basic understanding of Mandarin before they enter primary school. This pressure to learn Mandarin at an early age led to the emergence of bilingual preschools and kindergartens. The PRC Government invested 430 million RMB to build 1,009 Chinese preschools within 5 years. By 2010, 258,000 minority children were expected to enroll in these newly established Chinese preschools.<sup>29</sup> In 2006, Xinjiang Regional Education Bureau

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<sup>23</sup> Artush Excited by Chinese Language Studying Fever, *Xinjiang Daily Net*, July 11, 2006

<sup>24</sup> "Teachers Fired Over Mandarin Ability," *Radio Free Asia*, September 23, 2011. Available at <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/teachers-09232011160635.html>

<sup>25</sup> "China Imposes Chinese Language on Uyghur Schools," *Radio Free Asia*, March 16, 2004.

<sup>26</sup> "Uyghur Pupils Face Beatings," *Radio Free Asia*, January 31, 2013.

<sup>27</sup> "China Imposes Chinese Language on Uyghur Schools," *Radio Free Asia*, March 16, 2004.

<sup>28</sup> Human Rights Watch and Human Rights in China, *Devastating Blows: Religious Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang*, Human Rights Watch, Vol. 17, No. 2, April 2005.

<sup>29</sup> Xinjiang's Bilingual Education Starts with Children, *People's Daily Overseas Edition*, October 10, 2006

announced its plan to have over 85% of minority preschool children enroll in these newly established bilingual schools. In September 2011, Xinhua News Agency reported that the Xinjiang Government built 1,470 bilingual kindergartens from 2009-2011. All of these “bilingual” kindergartens were to teach classes in Mandarin.

By employing the term *‘bilingual education’*, the Chinese Government has been able to effectively implement a monolingual Mandarin-based education system; it allows the Chinese Government to disguise the unjust, unfair and unbalanced education system. It appears to aim to promote cultural diversity, but conceals the underlying process of eliminating the Uyghur language and culture from the region.

Uyghur students, parents and teachers have continuously expressed anger and dissatisfaction over the implementation of this education policy. However, Chinese authorities have exploited the *‘war on terror’* and ‘war on separatism’ to suppress any Uyghur dissent.<sup>30</sup> An Uyghur scholar told the Uyghur Human Rights project that “people who believe in a ‘bilingual system’ that does not exactly conform to the Chinese view of things are in danger of being thrown into prison and labeled a separatist or a terrorist”.<sup>31</sup> Despite these oppressive measures, many Uyghur scholars, parents, teachers and students - in and outside of East Turkestan - continue to oppose China’s so-called ‘bilingual education’ system and call for a more effective education policy, which protects and promotes the Uyghur language.

### **PRC Domestic Law Regarding Minority Languages and Cultures**

When examining the marginalization of the Uyghur language in East Turkestan under China’s deceptive “bilingual education system,” it is important to review the PRC agreements regarding East Turkestan’s (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region) regional autonomy, language policy and education policy. By forcing Uyghur children to receive education in a language other than their native language, the Chinese Government is violating its own domestic laws.

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<sup>30</sup> Human Rights Watch and Human Rights in China, *Devastating Blows: Religious Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang*, Human Rights Watch, Vol. 17, No. 2, April 2005.

<sup>31</sup> Uyghur Human Rights Project interview with Uyghur Scholar, May 10, 2007.

East Turkestan was established as an autonomous region of the People's Republic of China in 1955. East Turkestan was granted special powers to govern itself as an "autonomous region." The concept of regional autonomy is spelled out in Article 4 of the Constitution of the PRC, as well as Article 10 of the PRC's Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law. Both of these articles guarantee the freedom of all nationalities to practice and preserve their own spoken language and customs. Article 37 of the PRC's Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law and Article 12 of PRC's Education Law both guarantee the rights of minority students to be educated in their native tongue.

Article 4 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China

*"All nationalities in the People's Republic of China are equal...Discrimination against and oppression of any nationality are prohibited...Regional autonomy is practised in areas where people of minority nationalities live in compact communities; in these areas organs of self- government are established for the exercise of the right of autonomy. All the national autonomous areas are inalienable parts of the People's Republic of China. **The people of all nationalities have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages, and to preserve or reform their own ways and customs.**"<sup>32</sup>*

Article 10 of the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the People's Republic of China

*"Autonomous agencies in ethnic autonomous areas guarantee the freedom of the nationalities in these areas to use and develop their own spoken and written languages and their freedom to preserve or reform their own folkways and customs."<sup>33</sup>*

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<sup>32</sup> The Constitution of the People's Republic of China (adopted by the National People's Congress on December 4, 1982 with further revisions in 1988, 1993, 1999, and 2004.) Article 4. Translation available at <http://english.people.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html>

<sup>33</sup> Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the People's Republic of China (issued by the Second Session of the Sixth National People's Congress on May 31, 1984 with further revision on February 28, 2001) Article 10. Translation available at <http://www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/regional-ethnic-autonomy-law-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-amended>

Article 37 of the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the People's Republic of China

***“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. Beginning in the lower or senior grades of primary school, Han language and literature courses should be taught to popularize the common language used throughout the country and the use of Han Chinese characters.”***<sup>34</sup>

Article 12 of Education Law of the People's Republic of China

***“The Chinese language, both oral and written, shall be the basic oral and written language for education in schools and other educational institutions. 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.”***<sup>35</sup>

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*By forcing Uyghur children to receive education in a language other than their native language, the Chinese Government is violating its own domestic laws.*

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## **International Agreements Regarding Minority Languages and Culture**

International agreements provide provisions and clarifications for the protection of minority language and cultural rights. The following international documents are the fundamental international treaties, which China has signed with regards to the rights of minorities. These treaties also provide a legal framework that China must follow and implement. In addition, China is also bound by the 1960 UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, which states that it is “essential to recognize the right of members of national minorities to carry on their own educational activities.”

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<sup>34</sup> Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the People's Republic of China (issued by the Second Session of the Sixth National People's Congress on May 31, 1984 with further revision on February 28, 2001) Article 37. Translation available at <http://www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/regional-ethnic-autonomy-law-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-amended>

<sup>35</sup> Education Law of the People's Republic of China (Adopted at the Third Session of the Eighth National People's Congress on March 18, 1995, promulgated by Order No.45 of the President of the People's Republic of China on March 18, 1995 and effective as of September 1, 1995) Article 12. Translation available at <http://www.china.org.cn/english/education/184669.htm>

## Article 27 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

(China has signed the ICCPR in 1998, but has not ratified the treaty)

*“In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.”<sup>36</sup>*

Although this article merely guarantees minorities’ right to ‘use’ their own language, it has implications for language rights in education, since the right to use a language depends on the ability to learn the language.<sup>37</sup> The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) further guarantees the rights stated in Article 27 of the ICCPR by extending these rights to children who are members of minority groups.

## Article 30 of Convention on the Rights of the Child

(China has signed the CRC and is a party to the convention)

*“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 practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.”*

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<sup>36</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966 entry into force 23 March 1976, in accordance with Article 49. Article 27. Available at <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx> China has signed but not ratified this agreement.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Dunbar sites the explanation as stated in OSCE (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe) in 1999 citing the Foundation for Inter-Ethnic Relations from 1996. Robert Dunbar, “Minority Language Rights in International Law.” *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 109. 2001

### III. MOVEMENT FOR MOTHER LANGAUGE BASED EDUCATION

#### Overview of the Movement for Mother Language Based Education

The Movement for Mother Language Based Education was a group action advocating for the restoration of the Uyghur language as the medium of instruction in Uyghur schools in East Turkestan. The group consisted of a large number of Uyghur minority intellectuals and educators in East Turkestan. The movement was born on September 07, 2012, when three determined Uyghur intellectuals, Abduweli Ayup, Muhammad Sidiq and Dilyar Obal, came together to open the *ATBB Kindergarten*,<sup>38</sup> which would have Uyghur as the main language of instruction.

The three Uyghur intellectuals all strongly valued education and at the same time recognized the importance of preserving Uyghur language and ethnic identity. Their passion for both education and culture not only inspired other intellectuals to join the movement, but also encouraged ordinary citizens to take a stand on this issue.

The ultimate goal of the Movement for Mother Language Based Education was to enable minority students all across East Turkestan to be educated primarily in their native tongue, while also learning Chinese as a second language. In addition to the ATBB Kindergarten, new plans emerged for private Uyghur elementary, secondary and professional schools. These schools would counteract the efforts of the PRC Government to marginalize minority languages in the education system in East Turkestan.

The three Uyghur intellectuals were well-informed about the legality of opening an Uyghur kindergarten under China's domestic laws. Abduweli Ayup, Muhammad Sidiq and Dilyar Obul strongly advocated for supporters of the movement to act in line with domestic laws of PRC in their efforts to support and contribute to the cause. Furthermore, the three leaders of the movement effectively followed and utilized PRC national laws to arrange meetings, establish associations, raise funds, and mobilize supporters.

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<sup>38</sup> ATBB Kindergarten- the name of the kindergarten Abduweli Ayup, Muhammad Sidiq and Dilyar Obul worked towards opening. ATBB stands for Ana Til Balilar Baghchisi. Direct Translation for Ana Til Balilar Baghchisi: Mother Tongue Children's Garden.

Unfortunately, seeking to redress or remedy the marginalization of Uyghur language via domestic avenues has proven fruitless in a state with well-documented lack of due process and a legal tradition that nurtures the political ambitions of the *Chinese Communist Party*. Despite their efforts to abide by PRC's domestic laws, Abduweli Ayup, Muhammad Sidiq and Dilyar Obul were arrested on August 20, 2012 on the grounds of “illegally accepting donations”.

### **Leaders of the Movement for Mother Language Based Education**

*Abduweli Ayup* is a writer, intellectual and activist known by the pseudonym “*Gulen*.” Born to an Uyghur family in Kashgar, he has accomplished significant academic achievements; Ayup obtained his bachelor's degree from the Central University for Nationalities in Beijing in late 1990s and his master's degree from Xinjiang University in early 2000s. After working as a lecturer at the Northwestern University for Nationalities in Gansu, provincial capital of Lanzhou, Ayup studied as a visiting scholar at Ankara University in Turkey. From 2009 to 2011, Ayup enrolled in a two-year advanced study program in linguistics at the University of Kansas with a scholarship from the Ford Foundation. Despite his colleagues' effort to convince him to remain in the United States to advance his career, Ayup returned to East Turkestan to pursue his long-term passion and educate Uyghur youth.



Abduweli Ayup, Image by Radio Free Asia<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Image available here: [http://www.rfa.org/uyghur/xewerler/mulahize/ana-til-12202013233838.html/story\\_main?encoding=latin](http://www.rfa.org/uyghur/xewerler/mulahize/ana-til-12202013233838.html/story_main?encoding=latin)

In the summer of 2012 and upon his return to East Turkestan, Ayup established the first and only Uyghur language-based kindergarten in Kashgar. Unfortunately, the kindergarten was forcefully shut down by the Chinese Government in March 2013, because of “incomplete documentation.” In the meantime, Ayup and his two colleagues, Muhammad Sidiq and Dilyar Obul worked towards opening an Uyghur kindergarten in Urumqi, the ATBB Kindergarten.<sup>40</sup>

In February 2013, the trio also founded Mother Language International Trading Co. Ltd., a small start-up company that manufactures clothes and everyday goods. The primary purpose of the start-up was to fund the operational costs related to ATBB Kindergarten. The three activists published articles on various Uyghur websites and kept a detailed BBS forum site to solicit public opinion in support for their school plans. According to information provided by the websites, some 500,000 visitors read their articles generating public-wide backing.

What started out as one man’s undying passion to educate Uyghur youth turned into a powerful social movement demanding education for Uyghurs in their mother tongue. Scholars and intellectuals joined Ayup and his colleagues in their calls for a fairer education system, which would cater to the needs of all minorities in East Turkestan. Young Uyghurs tirelessly volunteered to distribute pamphlets to raise awareness of the importance of preserving their mother tongue. Parents of Uyghur, Kazak and Uzbek children showed their support by actively voicing their opinions and suggestions through various websites.

The efforts of the three activists to abide by PRC’s laws are evident. They reached out to numerous government officials in order to take appropriate steps in establishing ATBB Kindergarten in Urumqi. The activists used the BBS forums to give the project *transparency*, as well as to encourage supporters to stay within the boundaries of the law. Investors and donors of Mother Language International Trading Co. Ltd. were continuously briefed with the company’s progress in detail. Despite these careful measures taken by the activists to stay within the bounds of PRC domestic law, they were arrested on August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013 under the alleged charges of *“illegally accepting donations”*.

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<sup>40</sup> ATBB stands for ‘*Ana Til Balilar Baghchisi*’ (the direct translation is ‘Mother Tongue Children’s Garden’).



Abduweli Ayup, Muhammad Sidiq and Dilyar Obul were taken by *undercover police* officers from Urumqi. According to Ayup's family, he is currently extremely ill in prison and his whereabouts have not been disclosed by the Chinese Government. Since his arrest, the Chinese authorities have refuted visitation requests and medicine sent by his family. Relatives of the three men have received no official information about their arrest, except the reason for the arrest; the alleged illegal accepting of donations.

According to 'uighurbiz.net', the three activists were scheduled to go on *trial* in January 2014. Since the announcement, there has been a growing concern regarding the legitimacy of the trial due to the lack of transparency within the Chinese legal system. Worldwide, Uyghur communities have expressed their unease with the situation through various websites. Foreign-based Uyghur organizations initiated multiple petitions demanding that the Chinese Government release of imprisoned activists.

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Information about Abduweli Ayup included in this report was gathered through intense investigations carried out by Radio Free Asia- Uyghur service as well as articles he had published before his arrest. Information about Muhammad Sidiq and Dilyar Obul has been difficult to obtain due to the unwillingness of their family members to communicate with foreign based media organizations. The families are unwilling to communicate due to fears of possible political repercussions. See Below for news articles published by Radio Free Asia- Uyghur Service about Abduweli Ayup, Muhammad Sidiq and Dilyar Obul:

Méhriban. (2013, 12 20). Ana til teshebbuschisi abduweli ayup qatarliqlarning sotlinidighanliqi heqqidiki xewer ghulghula qozghidi. *Radio Free Asia* . Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/uyghur/xewerler/mulahize/ana-til-12202013233838.html>

Méhriban. (2013, 12 23). Uyghur ziyaliyliri ana til teshebbuschisi abduweli ayup qatarliqlargha köngül bölmekte. *Radio Free Asia* . Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/uyghur/xewerler/kishilik-hoquq/ana-til-12232013164734.html>

Qultan. (2013, 12 25). Abduweli ayupning jiyeni: «akam wetenge qaytip kelginige hergizmu pushayman qilghan emes!». *Radio Free Asia* . Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/uyghur/xewerler/kishilik-hoquq/abduweli-ayup-12252013130842.html>

Sulaiman, E. (2013, 12 27). Uyghur activist 'very weak' in prison, denied family visits. *Radio Free Asia* . Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/activist-12272013153041.html>

Qultan. (2014, 01 06). Abduweli ayup tutqun qilinishning aldi-keynide (1). *Radio Free Asia* . Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/uyghur/xewerler/kishilik-hoquq/abduweli-ayup-01062014135653.html>

Qultan. (2014, 01 08). Abduweli ayup tutqun qilinishning aldi-keynide (2). *Radio Free Asia* . Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/uyghur/xewerler/kishilik-hoquq/abduweli-ayup-01082014132734.html>

## Timeline of the Movement for Mother Language Based Education

The purpose of the timeline is to document the essential steps taken by Abduweli Ayup, Muhammad Sidiq and Dilyar Obul towards opening the ATBB Kindergarten. ATBB Kindergarten was intended to open in Tengirtagh district of Urumqi.<sup>41</sup> Tangirtagh district is heavily populated with Uyghurs who hoped to be able to send their children to schools where they would be taught in their native language, Uyghur. The timeline included in this section was created by analysing and compiling BBS posts created by the movement leaders, primarily Ayup and Obul. These BBS posts were posted on BBS forum<sup>42</sup> (hosted by 'www.baghdax.cn') before the site was shut down by the Chinese Government. The BBS posts were later recovered and reposted on other Uyghur websites (including 'www.pidaiy.biz'<sup>43</sup> and 'www.anatil.org'<sup>44</sup>).

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<sup>41</sup> Tengirtagh district is a district within East Turkestan and is under the administrative jurisdiction of the Urumqi City. It contains an area of 171 km<sup>2</sup>. According to the 2002 census, it has a population of 450,000.

<sup>42</sup> Original name of the BBS forum before translation: Anatil Yeslisi Kurush Yoli.

<sup>43</sup> The specific web address containing reposted posts from the BBS forum can be found here:  
<http://pidaiy.biz/readpost.php?id=1501>

<sup>44</sup> The specific web address containing reposted posts from the BBS forum can be found here:  
<http://anatil.org/bbs/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=24>

## Timeline of the Movement for Mother Language Based Education

**September 07, 2012**

The movement for ATBB Kindergarten was launched and announced on the BBS forum.

**September 11, 2012**

Dilyar Obul visited Tengirtagh District Office of Education (TDOE) requesting for permission to open ATBB Kindergarten in the district. Ms. Liu with TDOE denied

Dilyar's request after just a few minutes of conversation. Ms. Liu claimed that it was in violation of the PRC national law to build a school that uses the Uyghur language as the medium of instruction.

**September 12, 2012**

Obul revisited TDOE to appeal the rejection. He met with Mr. Rustem, one of the high-level officials at the office, who asked Obdul to re-submit the application for the kindergarten. Mr. Rustem indicated that there was no PRC law that forbade the existence of a school that uses Uyghur as the medium of instruction.

**September 17, 2012**

Obul completed the proposal for Ana Til Balilar Basgchisi and submitted the application along with the necessary documents to Mr. Rustem of TDOE. Mr. Rustem accepted Obdul's proposal. He stated that he will receive an answer regarding the application within 4 days.

**September 19, 2012**

Obul and his colleagues visited Xinjiang Children's Pedagogical Center to meet with Mr. Zamanidin Pakizat, a prominent Uyghur writer of children's books to discuss future plans of ATBB Kindergarten. Mr. Pakizat applauded their plans. He stressed the importance of this type of schooling and said "children are most inclined to learn their first language between the ages of 2 and 6. Therefore it is extremely important that they are educated [in their mother tongue] during this window of time."



### **September 21, 2012**

Abduweli Ayup and Dilyar Obul visited several law firms (including Adil Law Firm and Subi Law Firm) in Urumqi to seek legal support in their efforts to open ATBB Kindergarten. Unfortunately, all of the law firms they visited expressed their unwillingness to support their efforts due to the political sensitivity of the Chinese Government on the issue. Several lawyers also discouraged the movement leaders from carrying on their work and warned them: “your efforts will prove worthless at the end, you are wasting your time.”

### **September 22, 2012**

Dilyar Obul returned to the TDOE as previously advised by Mr. Rustem to check on the status of his application for ATBB Kindergarten. To his surprise, Mr. Rustem was unable to provide him with the status of his application and advised Mr. Obul to speak with the head of TDOE due to the “political sensitivity” of this issue.

Dilyar Obul and the other movement leaders met with a social worker who works for an England-based charity organization - Save the Children - to discuss their plans for the ATBB Kindergarten. The social worker expressed her support, but stressed the possible difficulty that may arise in negotiating with the Chinese Government on the issue of mother language-based education.

### **October 04, 2012**

Dilyar Obul met with Mr. Tursun Ibrahim Nazir, an official of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Regional Office of Education. Mr. Nazir rejected the idea of building the ATBB Kindergarten, explaining “the future of our education system is looking brighter than ever. Of course there are some sacrifices we have to make for the overall improvement of our education system, there is no harm in instructing Uyghur children in Mandarin.”

### **October 12, 2012**

As advised by Mr. Rustem of TDOE, Dilyar Obul met with Mr. Wang Chiang Jun, the head of TDOE. During their meeting, Mr. Wang Chiang Jun argued that it would be in violation of the Xinjiang Autonomous Regional Laws to operate a school/kindergarten that teaches in a minority language.

### **October 15, 2012**

Frustrated with the responses they have received so far, the movement leaders decided to take their case regarding ATBB Kindergarten to higher Government offices. Mr. Obul met with Mr. Dilshat, an official with The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Regional Office of Education. Mr. Dilshat admitted that although teaching in minority languages is currently prohibited throughout East Turkestan, there lacks any domestic law supporting this prohibition.

### **November 02, 2012**

Despite being rejected and ridiculed by Government officials, the movement leaders persistently sought other avenues to open ATBB Kindergarten. They made their way to Urumqi Municipal Office of Education (Urumqi Education Bureau) and requested a meeting with the secretary of the bureau. Mr. Sidiq Kasim, the Secretary of the Bureau declined to meet with the movement leaders and claimed that he is “very busy preparing for a business trip to Korla”. Mr. Kasim agreed to have a meeting with the leaders upon his return from the trip.

### **November 22, 2012**

The movement leaders returned to Urumqi Municipal Office of Education (Urumqi Education Bureau) to meet with Mr. Kasim as he had previously agreed to the meeting. Within minutes into the meeting, Mr. Kasim quickly scorned the idea of a Uyghur kindergarten and said: “it would be much easier for you to open a kindergarten that’s “bilingual” where children are instructed in Mandarin”.

### **December 05, 2012**

Refusing to give up on ATBB Kindergarten, Mr. Obul returned to the Urumqi Municipal Office of Education and asked for a justifiable explanation as to why they were not permitted to open a Uyghur kindergarten. Mr. Jiang, an official for the Municipal Office of Education stated that in order to open a kindergarten that instructs in a minority language, one must obtain Government approval. However, Mr. Jiang did not disclose how such an approval could be obtained.

### **December 07, 2012**

Mr. Sidiq Kasim, the secretary of the Municipal Education Bureau admitted to Mr. Obul that there is no law prohibiting minority language based schools. Mr. Kasim explained "I am not entirely against your efforts to open a kindergarten that teaches in Uyghur." Furthermore, Mr. Kasim permitted the leaders of the movement to continue with their effort and advised them to go to the Urumqi City Government for any legal or political issues.

### **December 20, 2012**

In their tireless efforts to open an Uyghur kindergarten, Mr. Obul and fellow leaders of the movement went to the Seybagh District Education Office to request for permission to open such a kindergarten in Seybagh district. Ms. Gulbahar, the head of the Seybagh District Education Office briefly spoke with Mr. Obul, but quickly asserted that she has no authority to advise on this matter and suggested for him to speak with TDOE .

### **January 02, 2013**

Since visiting multiple education bureaus and offices has proven fruitless, leaders of the movement decided to take their case to the Tengirtagh District Government Office. Unfortunately, Mr. Eysajan, the Government official who oversees matters of education, declined to meet with Mr. Obul and other leaders of the campaign.

### **January 09, 2013**

As of this date, the number of followers on BBS forum (“The journey of building a mother language kindergarten”) exceeded 30,000 with the number of ‘clicks’ exceeding 500,000. The BBS forum was launched to inform supporters and activists with the progress of ATBB Kindergarten.

The “commenting” function of BBS forum was disabled, most likely due to Government interference.

### **January 10, 2013**

A new BBS forum (“For the Children, We March”)<sup>45</sup> was launched in order to continue updating supporters with news regarding the Movement for Mother Language Based Education as well as the progress of ATBB Kindergarten.

### **February 04, 2013**

The Grand opening of the Mother Language International Trading Co. Ltd.. The primary purpose of Mother Language International Trading Co. Ltd. is to fund the operational costs related to ATBB Kindergarten and other expenses of the Movement for Mother Language Based Education.

### **February 08, 2013**

Upon completion of a comprehensive business plan for ATBB Kindergarten, movement leaders met with officials of TDOE once more to appeal for the opening of ATBB Kindergarten. During the meeting, officials indicated that the usage of Uyghur language as the medium of instruction in schools within the borders of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region is legally permitted. The TDOE verbally approved the opening of ATBB, as well as an affiliated elementary school that also uses Uyghur as the medium of instruction.

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<sup>45</sup> Direct Translation of the title of new BBS forum. Original name of the BBS form before translation: “Balilarni Dep Yolgha Alduk”.

### **February 21, 2013**

A dinner party was hosted to celebrate the International Mother Tongue Day at Kashgar Meptun Restaurant in Kashgar. During the dinner party, Mr. Abduweli Ayup spoke about the importance of preserving their mother tongue and his vision of an education system that utilizes Uyghur language as the language of instruction. Abduweli Ayup's speech was broadcasted live on the internet which resulted in an increase in the number of supporters for the Movement for Mother Language Based Education.

### **March 1, 2013**

BBS forum and the new BBS forum were both shut down. The cause of the shutdown was most likely due to interference by the Chinese Government.

### **March 12, 2013**

Xinjiang Customs and Arts Institute agreed to lease a portion of its campus for ATBB Kindergarten and the affiliated elementary school. The institute also indicated its openness to the idea of leasing additional space for affiliated middle and high schools that will be instructing classes in Uyghur.

### **March 13, 2013**

Mother Language International Trading Co. Ltd. hosted a Nowrooz party at Babahan Restaurant in Urumqi. Intellectuals and society leaders of Uyghur, Kazakh and Kyrgyz ethnic backgrounds joined together to discuss the future of an education system that embraces minority languages. A follow-up meeting was scheduled for March 19, 2013 at Uysun Kazakh Restaurant.

### **March 19, 2013**

Police raided Uysun Kazakh Restaurant in Urumqi to prohibit a meeting that was to be hosted by Mother Language International Trading Co. Ltd.. The purpose of the meeting was to gather Uyghur, Kazakh and Kyrgyz intellectuals and society leaders to discuss matters related to the Movement for Mother Language Based Education. Police Officer Mr. Ekber, head of the Public Security Bureau of Urumqi, phoned the attendees of the meeting and forbade them from attending the meeting. Coordinators of the meeting, including Mr. Abduweli Ayup and Mr. Muhammed Sidiq, were

questioned and received threats from the Public Security Bureau and Kashgar City Police Department. The Public Security Bureau in Urumqi had previously given permission for this meeting.

### March 19, 2013

Although Xinjiang Customs and Arts Institute previously agreed to lease a portion of its campus for ATBB Kindergarten and affiliated elementary school, it expressed that it can no longer lease out any of its campus space for ATBB Kindergarten. The institute admitted that their decision to break the agreement was influenced by “some phone calls” from the Government.

### March 19, 2013

Nurhan Language Training Center, a private children’s language training facility opened by Mr. Abduweli Ayup was forced to close due to “licensing issues.” Nurhan Language Training Center used Uyghur as its language of instruction to teach Uyghur Children about Uyghur language, culture and traditions. The language training facility was opened in mid-2012 in Kashgar as a sole proprietor.

### March 19, 2013

Mr. Abduweli Ayup, Mr. Dilyar Obul and Mr. Muhammad Sidiq held a private meeting at the Ahsaray Mihmanhana (The White House Inn) in Urumqi. During the meeting, they discussed the next steps towards creating an education system that embraces the mother tongues of ethnic minorities, while fully complying with the laws of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, as well as PRC legislation.



### **March 19, 2013**

A BBS post by MR. Abduweli Ayup:

*“I have answered all of their questions. I have told them everything they wanted to know. What else do they want from me? What is wrong with the desire to raise your children to speak the language of your ancestors? What is wrong with the desire to instil a cultural and ethnic identity in your children? What is wrong with wanting to educate our youth? Would they have given me this much trouble if I opened a casino instead of a school?”*

### **March 28, 2013**

A live web-based discussion was held for the supporters by Abduweli Ayup and leaders of the movement. The discussion served to inform and encourage supporters of the Movement for Mother Language Based Education and to advise them to fully abide by the law in their efforts to support the cause. The web-based discussion was also held to provide supporters with an opportunity to express their opinions and comment on the issue at hand.

### **April 07, 2013**

Mr. Dilyar Obul, Mr. Abduweli Ayup and other movement leaders signed a leasing contract for a house located in Urumqi’s Tengirtagh District for ATBB Kindergarten. The house was rented through Da Wen Property Management Company.

### **April 25, 2013**

Ms. Jin, an official with The Tengirtagh District Office of Education refused to accept the application for ATBB Kindergarten, because they were written in Uyghur.

### **April 27, 2013**

Since 25 April 2013, numerous phone calls were made to the TDOE from supporters of the Movement for Mother Language Based Education. Callers expressed their dissatisfaction with Ms. Jin for rejecting the ATBB Kindergarten application. Ms. Jin agreed to reconsider her decision.

**April 28, 2013**

The movement leaders had a meeting with officials of TDOE to discuss the future of ATBB Kindergarten. Participants included Chairman of the office Mr. Wang Chiang Jun, Secretary Jin Yong, Vice Chairman Mr. Rustem and Ms. Jin. The TDOE officials upheld Ms. Jin's decision to reject the application for ATBB Kindergarten. The officials claimed that it was "in violation" of the law to submit applications written in Uyghur.

**Note:**

In addition to the Uyghur language being the official language of the "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region," PRC law also guarantees the right of minorities to use their native language in dealing with government proceedings. See below:

**Article 21 of The Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the People's Republic of China**

*"While performing its functions, the autonomous agencies of an ethnic autonomous area, in accordance with the regulations on the exercise of autonomy of the area, use the language or languages commonly used in the locality."<sup>46</sup>*

**Article 133 of The Constitution of the People's Republic of China**

*"...In an area where people of a minority nationality live in a compact community or where a number of nationalities live together, hearings should be conducted in the language or languages in common use in the locality; indictments, judgments, notices and other documents should be written, according to actual needs, in the language or languages in common use in the locality."<sup>47</sup>*

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<sup>46</sup> Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the People's Republic of China (issued by the Second Session of the Sixth National People's Congress on May 31, 1984 with further revision on February 28, 2001) Article 21. Translation available at: <http://www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/regional-ethnic-autonomy-law-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-amended>

<sup>47</sup> The Constitution of the People's Republic of China (adopted by the National People's Congress on December 4, 1982 with further revisions in 1988, 1993, 1999, and 2004.) Article 133. Translation available at: <http://english.people.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html>

### **May 03, 2013**

In an effort to raise public awareness on the issue, movement leaders asked Channel 7 of XJTV (Xinjiang Television Station) to report about the rejection of their application for ATBB Kindergarten. Xinjiang Television Station is the official regional television station in East Turkestan, sponsored by and under the supervision of PRC Government. Reporters of Channel 7 rejected the movement leaders' proposal, claiming that the story was too insignificant. "It's absolutely normal for TDOE to reject applications in Uyghur," the reporters explained.

### **May 06, 2013**

Movement leaders consulted members of the Urumqi City Linguistics Committee. All members of the committee agreed that it was illegal for TDOE to reject the application for ATBB Kindergarten on the basis that it was written in Uyghur.

### **May 08, 2013**

Mr. Dilyar Obul filed a law suit against TDOE for rejecting the application for ATBB Kindergarten on the basis that it was written in Uyghur. The Tengirtagh District Court refused to proceed with the case claiming that "the matter was negligible and not worthy of being a case of the district court."

### **May 13, 2013**

"Anatil Apparels", a clothing line, designed by and manufactured by Mother Language International Trading Co. Ltd., was introduced to the market with the intention of promoting the cause. All profit made from the sale were to be used towards ATBB Kindergarten.

### **May 14, 2013**

Manufacturing of "Anatil Apparels" was discontinued due to "unknown" reasons.

#### **May 16, 2013**

Mr. Dilayr Obul asked TDOE to reconsider their decision to reject the application for ATBB Kindergarten. He pointed out that the office was violating the PRC law by rejecting an application on the basis that it was written in Uyghur. Officials of TDOE claimed that they will raise the issue to “higher” government officials.

#### **May 21, 2013**

The Tengirtagh District Fire Department refused to issue Fire Safety License for the housed intended for ATBB Kindergarten. The house was rented by Mr. Dilyar Obul and other movement leaders starting April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Ms. Yu, an official at the fire department requested additional documents before issuing the fire safety license.

#### **May 22, 2013**

Mr. Dilyar Obul submitted required application “Change of Usage Permit” to the Urumqi City Urban Planning Department in order to use the rented house as a kindergarten.

#### **May 24, 2013**

Da Wen Property Management Company, the company subletting the house for the ATBB Kindergarten, refused to release documents requested by Tengirtagh District Fire Department. Da Wen Property Management stated that the house could not be used for ATBB Kindergarten.

This incident was announced on the BBS forum. Angry supporters of the movement protested to the event by carrying out cyber-attacks on Da Wen Property Management Company’s website. Mr. Dilyar Obul criticized responsible cyber attackers and demanded for the restoration of the website, advising supporters to express any dissatisfaction lawfully.

#### **June 04, 2013**

The Urumqi City Urban-Country Management Group (different from Urumqi Urban Planning Department) notified Mr. Dilyar Obul that the house rented for ATBB did not meet the size requirements to operate as a kindergarten.

### **June 05, 2013**

Three weeks earlier, Mr. Dilayr Obul had asked TDOE to reconsider their decision to reject the application for ATBB Kindergarten on the basis that it was written in Uyghur. Officials from TDOE claimed to have raised the issue to higher Government officials. However, there were still no updates with regards to the appeal.

### **June 06, 2013**

Bagdax website, the host site of the BBS forum, was shut down for “illegally” reporting news and information. The news was announced on other Uyghur websites.

### **June 07, 2013**

Mr. Abduweli Ayup and other movement leaders contacted a number of Uyghur websites for permission to post about the progress of ATBB Kindergarten. Contacted website owners indicated that any information about the movement or the kindergarten was too politically sensitive to be posted on their sites.

### **June 08, 2013**

Mother Language International Trading Co. Ltd. expressed their dissatisfaction towards the Chinese government for shutting down the Bagdax website via WeChat.<sup>48</sup> Mother Language International Trading Co. Ltd. argued that the shutdown contradicted some of Xi Jing Ping’s main reforms, which aimed to eliminate PRC’S intrusive interruptions of the internet.

### **June 10, 2013**

After the shutdown of the previous BBS forum, new BBS forum (hosted by [www.qutad.com](http://www.qutad.com)) was launched to provide news and updates for supporters of the movement. Mother Language International Trading Co. Ltd. announced its plans to launch its own website in the near future.

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<sup>48</sup> WeChat is a mobile text and voice messaging communication service developed by Tencent in China. See: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WeChat>

**June 20, 2013**

Mother Language International Trading Co. Ltd. announced that it will host a public shareholders meeting on June 27, 2013. During this meeting, the company will answer all questions from the public. Mother Language International Trading Co. Ltd. also vowed that it will fully abide the PRC laws on all levels of operation in the most transparent manner.

**June 21, 2013**

Mr. Dilyar Obul contacted TDOE for updates regarding his previous appeal. No updates were provided at this time.

**June 27, 2013**

Mother Language International Trading Co. Ltd. hosted its public shareholders meeting. This meeting was broadcasted live on the internet and live updates were provided using WeChat app for mobile users. Mother Language International Trading Co. Ltd. received tremendous support from audience with regards to its future plans for the ATBB Kindergarten.

**July 02, 2013**

Three months after signing the lease for the house intended for ATBB Kindergarten, the leasing agreement was annulled by Da Wen Property Management Company.

**July 04, 2013**

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Regional Government - News and Media Division threatened to shut down another website ([www.qutad.com](http://www.qutad.com)) for providing news and updates on the movement for mother tongue education. The new BBS site hosted by this website received more than 1,500,000 clicks and more than 10,000 comments.

**August 02, 2013**

Mr. Abduweli Ayup received warnings from the Chinese government to shut down the BBS forum. The Chinese Government reasoned with Abduweli Ayup, saying “You may be a law abiding intellectual, but the people who make up the supporters of your movement are incompetent.”

He informed his supporters about the warning he received from the Chinese Government. He also made an online announcement encouraging people to continue to support the movement as well as ATBB Kindergarten.

BBS forum was shut down in accordance with orders from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Regional Government.

Abduweli Ayup, Muhammad Sidiq and Dilyar Obul were *arrested* on August 20, 2013 with the alleged charges of “illegally accepting donations.”



Protest sign calling for the release of Abduweli Ayup and Ilham Tohti<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Available at: <http://www.uyghurnorwegian.org/2013/11/10/gjovik-shehride-jumhuriyet-kuni-xatirlendi-2/>

## IV. IMPORTANCE OF MOTHER LANGUAGE BASED EDUCATION

### Results of Current “bilingual education” system

China’s current “bilingual” education system is having a devastating effect on the development of Uyghur children both culturally and academically. By forcing Uyghur children to study in Mandarin, the Chinese Government is harming their educational development. The current method of language immersion under the so-called ‘bilingual’ education system has been shown to worsen the education attainment of minority students.<sup>50</sup> Students often struggle with their inability to understand school lessons, because all course materials are published in Mandarin. Furthermore, studies suggest that the pressure of learning a second language has negative effects on a child’s motivation and interest in learning, leading to further frustration and higher dropout rates.<sup>51</sup> Uyghur teachers have reported to the Uyghur Human Rights Project their personal experiences with Uyghur students, who were stressed and discouraged by PRC’s ‘bilingual’ education system.

The required *Mandarin proficiency test* for Uyghur teachers is responsible for the removal of many qualified and dedicated Uyghur teachers from the education system. Many qualified veteran Uyghur teachers, who did not meet the Mandarin proficiency requirement, were replaced with recent graduates from Mandarin institutions, who had no experience or skills in teaching.<sup>52</sup> As a consequence, Uyghur students are deprived of qualified teachers, who can properly educate and motivate them in their mother tongue.

Language is an essential part of how a culture identifies with its surrounding environment. The *Convention of Biological Diversity*, a treaty signed by 150 States at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, includes language as an important feature of ecological awareness and conservation of biological diversity.<sup>53</sup> Minority and indigenous cultures throughout the world utilize language to effectively encode labels for key ecological and biological features of their

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<sup>50</sup> See Kang Jian, ‘If Xinjiang will develop, Chinese- language education must be distributed’, *Language and Translation*, No 2, February 2006, pp 63-6 and Arienne 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.

<sup>51</sup> 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.

<sup>52</sup> David Strawbridge, “The Challenges of Bilingual Education in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, people’s Republic of China.” *Save the Children*. 2008

<sup>53</sup> See <http://www.cbd.int/doc/legal/cbd-en.pdf> for the English version of Convention of Biological Diversity.

local habitat. Research has shown that when local communities are forced to learn secondary languages at the expense of their mother language, they lose the ability to characterize the features of their local environment. This is because secondary languages often do not have appropriate vocabulary needed to describe unique features of local habitats. Thus, erosion of mother languages increases the chance of alienating locals from their surrounding environment, and therefore also the probability of *environmental degradation* and loss of biodiversity. Historical records show that Uyghurs have inhabited East Turkestan for the past 2000 years. During this time period, Uyghur language has evolved to describe key features of East Turkestan's ecologically diverse landscape. The undermining of Uyghur language, in favour of Mandarin, could have devastating consequences on the preservation of biodiversity and stability of the ecosystem. Furthermore, Uyghur cultural norms that have developed in relation to the local East Turkestan ecosystem are also under risk.

China's language reforms, along with its other assimilation policies, have further increased inequalities and exacerbated frustration and anger within minority communities. The firing of Uyghur teachers and their subsequent replacement with ethnic Chinese teachers have caused resentment among many Uyghurs. Furthermore, many Uyghur parents feel hopeless with regards to sustaining their children's ethnic identity, because of China's 'bilingual' education system. Studies have further confirmed that schools are one of the strongest forces of integration of Uyghur children into Han culture.<sup>54</sup> Uyghurs have constantly expressed their dissatisfaction with PRC's assimilation policies, as well as the 'bilingual' education system. However, China's persistent denial of any compromise continues to encourage resentment and unrest across East Turkestan.

### **Benefits of Mother Language Based Education**

The mother tongue is critical to a child's personal, social and cultural identity. It helps the child value his or her culture and heritage, contributes to a strong sense of self-awareness and strong links to family and other community members. A large number of children, who study in a language other than their mother tongue, often fail to fully grasp the two languages. Research also suggests that children who learn in a language other than their mother tongue often fail to learn the required concepts and skills of other disciplines taught

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<sup>54</sup> Nathan Light, "Imagining the Uyghur Literary Tradition." 1998

at school. Children who begin their education in their mother language have a greater chance of success in academics, and even in acquiring proficiency of a second or a third language.<sup>55</sup> Some of the problems that may arise for children who are not taught in their mother tongue include barriers to learning, lack of communication with the teacher, low participation in class and a lack of parents' involvement in the child's education. These obstacles produce greater levels of frustration and low self-confidence in students, making them more likely to be disengaged in academics and to drop-out of school. In conclusion, children who are not taught in their mother tongue are far less likely to succeed both academically and in their personal life.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Pamela Mackenzie, "Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education as a Key to Access and Quality." *English Language Teacher Education in a Diverse Environment*. British Council. 2013.

<sup>56</sup> British Council India, "TEC13 Day 03: Pamela Mackenzie – Importance of Mother Tongue Education for Quality and Access" *Youtube*. Online video clip, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6aeVt0mp34> (November 15, 2013).

## V. CONCLUSION

In the recent years, China has rapidly implemented '*Chinese monoculturalism*' in East Turkestan through a variety of assimilation techniques. PRC's assimilation policies, combined with population transfers, greatly threaten the survival of Uyghur culture. The linguistic aspect of Uyghur culture is severely marginalized by the Chinese Government through its minority-language policy, and more specifically through its 'bilingual' education policy. This has fuelled discontent among Uyghurs contributing greatly to the destabilization of the region. Language is critical to ethnic identity; any solution addressing the destabilization of the region must take in consideration the impact of China's language policy. An effective solution to the ethnic conflicts in East Turkestan would include linguistic and cultural autonomy for the Uyghurs and all other ethnic minorities within the region.

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It must be emphasized that Uyghurs are not opposed to learning Mandarin. Learning an additional language is beneficial for all individuals, since they can provide new employment and economic opportunities. However, coercive tactics forcing Uyghurs to learn Mandarin without a strong mother tongue foundation can interfere with both the personal development and academic achievements of the child. Furthermore, the current implementation of 'bilingual' education policy reduces the status of Uyghur language, further raising concerns about how this will effect the conservation of Uyghur language and culture. A true bilingual education system is one that instructs in and promotes both languages equally.

The PRC claims that the Uyghur language is incapable of keeping up with modern linguistic standards of science and technology. This view is reflective of the prejudice of the PRC towards Uyghurs as being culturally inferior. Economic development could be a factor influencing the formation of PRC's language policy. Chinese economic ambitions have led to

Mandarin becoming the *lingua franca*. China's ideologically driven language policies could be based on the assumption that minority languages hold little *economic promise*.

In addition to the misleading title of the “bilingual” education policy, the Chinese Government has also deceptively justified their intentions as wanting to provide Uyghurs with economic opportunities. In reality, economic and employment opportunities created in recent years have only been available to Han migrants who moved to East Turkestan.<sup>57</sup> Han Chinese migrants have been the sole beneficiaries of East Turkestan's recent economic growth, while Uyghurs have experienced severe demographic and economic pressure as a result. A study of the 2000 census showed a strong correlation between the areas of East Turkestan with Han majority and high per capita income. Civil service institutions are openly discriminating against Uyghurs by reserving the majority of their employment opportunities for Han Chinese migrants.<sup>58</sup> Uneducated Chinese migrants are positioned to manage Uyghur workers, while many Uyghur graduates, fluent in Mandarin, face employment challenges. The continued disenfranchisement of Uyghurs, both culturally and economically, calls into question the legitimacy of the PRC's intentions to empower Uyghurs through its monolingual Mandarin-based education system.

## Concluding remarks

This report included a general overview of China's minority-language policy currently enforced in East Turkestan. Following the overview of the situation, a timeline was presented to explain the steps taken by three Uyghur intellectuals, Abduweli Ayup, Dilyar Obul and Muhammad Sidiq, in their attempts to establish an Uyghur kindergarten in the Tengirtagh district of Urumqi City. Their plans gradually transformed into East Turkestan's first, but short-lived Movement for Mother Language Based Education. Although unsuccessful with their goal of opening the ATBB Kindergarten, the three activists have raised tremendous awareness about the insurmountable hurdles in establishing lawful Uyghur-based education. Additionally, their struggles have garnered the support of Uyghurs all over East Turkestan as well as Uyghurs abroad. The three movement leaders and other intellectuals involved in the Movement for Mother Language Based Education were arrested on 20 August 2013 by the Chinese Government and currently no further news is available.

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<sup>57</sup> 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).

<sup>58</sup> Congressional-Executive Commission on China, *Xinjiang Government Says Ethnic Han Chinese Will Get 500 of 700 New Civil Service Appointments*, April 7, 2005.