



Interviews on English Education in Xinjiang

Modern Xinjiang and English learners

ياخشىمۇسىز 你们好

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Overview:

- Background: Why?
 - Xinjiang history to present
 - Tensions & Human Rights
 - Xinjiang Education
- Interview Methodology/Participants
- Interviewee Responses Compared
- Conclusion/Future Questions/References/Appendix



Background: Why?

- Personal curiosity about the region
 - Studied Chinese and Uyghur in Beijing
 - Interest in Xinjiang, Chinese history & ethnic minorities
- “Frontier” province; diverse, rapidly changing society
- What are experiences of English learners in Xinjiang?
 - Chinese minorities socioeconomically trail Han; lack of comparison in sociology (Wu and Song, 2014; Zang, 2008)
- Can teachers elsewhere learn from Xinjiang English learners’ perspectives and experiences? Does the situation in Xinjiang affect English education?



Background: Xinjiang



- Population:

- ≈ 24 million, half+ are Han Chinese (XJTJN, 2018)
- Uyghur, Kazak, Hui, Mongol, other minorities

- Was majority-Muslim
- Han majority in past decade
 - Government development programs until 1960s
 - Major destination for internal Han migration (Becquelin, 2000; Howell & Fan, 2011)
 - “Settler culture” (Cliff, 2016)



Background: Xinjiang



- 2019: 70th anniversary of “Peaceful Liberation of Xinjiang”
 - 1955: Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region
 - “Autonomy” is nominal (Bovingdon, 2004; Clarke 2008)
 - State and military-led urbanization & development: oil, gas, infrastructure (Wiemer, 2004).



Background: Xinjiang



- PRC: Xinjiang is an integral but ethnically distinct part of China (Bovingdon and Tursun, 2004)
- Early PRC: Suspicion of minorities & diminishment of promised CCP minority autonomy (Dillon, 2014; Mullaney, 2011)
 - Islam, Pan-Turkism, Soviets, “splittism”(分裂主义), backwardness
 - Mosques had to re-register with CCP’s Islamic Association of China
 - Early Uyghur communists considered too pro-Soviet (Jacobs, 2016)
 - Wang Zhen, first PRC Xinjiang military governor, regarded minorities as “troublemaking” (Cliff, 2016)
 - Ethnic-based bullying reported in Xinjiang factories in ‘50s (Jacobs, 2016)
- Is Xinjiang an internal colony? (Bovingdon, 2010; Clarke, 2008; Cliff, 2016; Sautman, 2000)

Background: Xinjiang



- Tensions/Human Rights:
 - Han migration, economic disparities, discrimination, lack of autonomy (Bovingdon, 2010; Clarke, 2008; Hasmath & Ho, 2015; Wu & Song, 2014)
 - Repression as anti-terrorism & crime-control; “7/5 Incident” of 2009 (China 2017/2018, 2018; Cliff, 2016)
 - High-tech mass-surveillance, “Re-education centers” and “kindergartens,” disappearances (Amnesty International, 2018; Charbonneau, 2019; China: Big data fuels crackdown in minority region, 2018; Ramzy & Buckley, 2019; Sudworth, 2019)
 - The “largest mass-internment of an ethnic-religious minority since World War II” (Allen-Ebrahimian, 2019)

Xinjiang Education:



- Education pre-20th century:
 - Madrassas for Muslims, Confucian education for Han; not universal
- Education early 20th century:
 - Turkic merchants returned from abroad; founded secular, western-style schools for science, math and foreign languages
 - Influenced by *jadidist* (reformist; progressive) education of Russian Tatars; pan-Turkist ideology
- Education from 1920s to 1940s:
 - Soviet-influenced curriculum & organization

(Millward and Tursun, 2004)

Xinjiang Education:



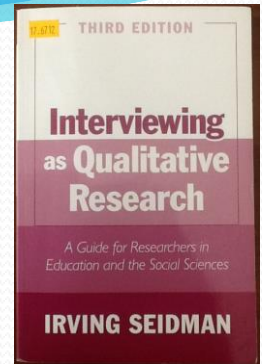
- Post-1949 Xinjiang:
 - 6 yrs primary, 3 yrs lower secondary, 3 yrs upper secondary
 - 15 years of free education, 47 universities & colleges
 - English education begins age 10; oriented to test-taking
 - Significant gaps between north & south (Gao, 2017)
 - Some Han resentment about minority college admissions (Wu & Song, 2014)
 - “In practice, “bilingual education” in Xinjiang ... produces a large number of students who are proficient in neither their mother tongues nor in Mandarin...” (Tohti, 2015)

Sakharov Prize (2019)



Interview Methodology:

- Planned with *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* (Seidman, 2006)
- Project goals, interview questions shown beforehand (Appendix 1)
- Audio-only recordings performed as privately as possible, after getting participant consent.
- Finding interviewees was difficult
 - Hard to find willing participants; one suddenly withdrew
 - Access to university campuses restricted
 - Han interviewee specifically wanted to avoid “political” topics
 - Other researchers reported similar difficulties (Cliff, 2016)

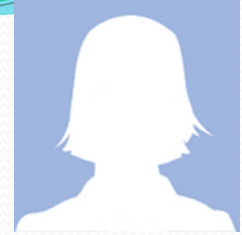
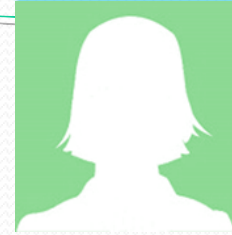


Interview Methodology:

- Interviewees chose names they wished to use
- Followed by listening, transcription and analysis of recordings
- Responses analyzed and compared
- Experience from West Bank interviews in March, 2017
(Gondree, 2017)



Interview Participants



- Interviews took place in Turpan city in August, 2019.
- Two former English majors: one Han, one Uyghur
 - “Anna” (Han, from Urumqi, daughter of Han settlers from 1960s; interpreter; early 50s)
 - “Gulkiz” (Uyghur, from Turpan, hotel worker; late 20s)
- Studied English in and outside Xinjiang in late 1990s
- Both use English in current employment; both interface with foreign visitors

Q 5: What do you think is the most difficult thing about studying English?

Anna:



- *I think there are many grammars ... and you have to recite many new words*

Gulkiz:



- *I think I can't speak English and I can't describe my think but I think it's not very real sentence. It's a wrong sentence... so I think English grammar is so difficult for me*

Q 8: Where do you practice speaking English?
What is the best way to practice?

Anna: Morning Review



- *A: Actually, every day I spend some time reading. In the morning. I think that's very important for me, in my experience, you know.*
- *E: What?*
- *A: I read aloud, you know, and try to recite the new words.*
- *E: Okay.*
- *A: So in the morning, at least half an hour reading-*
- *E: Really.*
- *A: -reading all the things we have learned....*
- *E: So this is, this is a morning review?*
- *A: Morning review, yes.*
- *E: So you learned something the day before?*
- *A: Yes, that's right.*

Q 8: Where do you practice speaking English?
What is the best way to practice?

Gulkiz: “normal environment”



- *G: I think I am normal- normal type to practice English because I have never ever have- have a foreigner teacher and I never have a foreigner friend, so I think I don't have... hmm, normal environment to practice English.*

Q 8: Where do you practice speaking English?
What is the best way to practice?

Gulkiz: Movies & TV



- *G: Watching movie*
- *E: Watching movies?*
- *G: Yes*
- *E: Oh, okay. All right. All right-*
- *G: Best way- I think- I think watching TV is best way to me*
- *E: Watching TV. Okay, what do you watch?*
- *G: ...Gossip Girl. Do you heard that?*
- *E: Gossip Girl?*
- *G: Yeah*
- *E: Yes, I've heard of that. Okay.*

Q10: What kinds of problems do you have studying English outside of school?

Anna: Talking a lot is important



- *A: Practice is very, very important, yeah. But as long as you open your mouth and speak-*
- *E: Mhm*
- *A: -you -because some students they- they- you know, they didn't want to- to talk with people. But language is- is important to- to- it's a way for communication so that's very important for you to talk. Then, even though you made a mistake, you are not afraid of talking. This will help a lot, I think.*
- *E: All right.*
- *A: Yeah.*

Q10: What kinds of problems do you have studying English outside of school?

Gulkiz: Finding regular study time



- *G: You- just you want to spend the time to learn. I think it's the- you can learn it. But, how many time is not so lazy.*
- *E: How many time is not so lazy. What do you mean?*
- *G: It's not to study and not to hold on and study ... -*
- *E: So-*
- *G: -put it down-*
- *E: -so studying time. Studying enough-*
- *G: -always in the time to-*
- *E: So regular studying.*
- *G: Yes.*

Q11: What kind of help would be good for your study of English?

Anna: “Try to listen”



- *A: You know, it's very important that we... listen... listen (to) English radios*
- *E: Mhm.*
- *A: Uh, yeah... every morning when we go- when we get up, the first thing is that we turn on the- the recorder*
- *E: Mhm.*
- *A: And then you can have some English-*
- *E: Mm.*
- *A: programs for you to listen to.*
- *E: Mm.*
- *A: And then you brush your teeth, you wash your face, but at- at the same time you have the English radio over there-*
- *E: Mhm.*
- *A: so this- this helps a lot.*

Q11: What kind of help would be good for your study of English?

Gulkiz: Friends and environment



- *G: I think, uh, just make a friend and, uh, makes- you make a- environment, language environment, to practice. Practice your English.*
- *E: Okay. That's a good answer.*

Q13: Do you think English education is important for people in Xinjiang? Why?

Anna: “it’s a kind of ability”

- *A: ...still it's important for all the students to study English.*
- *E: Hm*
- *A: I think maybe this will teach them, uh, more abilities. So that although, you know, that when they study English, maybe, uh, it's a kind of ability for them. Yeah.*
- *E: Hm*
- *A: ...it's not really that you can- will use English in your future but, uh, maybe this will teach you a kind of ability to- to study languages.*
- *E: Hm*
- *A: Yeah. So, I think it's- it's as important as when you study mathematics-*
- *E: Hm*
- *A: -Chinese. So it's not that maybe you'll use math- mathematics in future life but, anyway, this will teach you ability...*



Q13: Do you think English education is important for people in Xinjiang? Why?

Gulkiz: “know more the world”



- *G: If you want more language, you can travel and you can speak other people is come from...*
- *E: Okay.*
- *G: ...and you can know more language and you can know more the world.*
- *E: Mhm.*

Off script question: Not a lot of Uyghurs speaking English?

Gulkiz: “Possibly it’s not developed”



- *E: I have a question. So I have been going around Xinjiang for a few days. I haven't met very many, like, Uyghur people who speak English... Right? Why do you think that is?*
- *G: 嗯— 可能是没发展吧. (Hm. Possibly it's not developed.)*
- *E: 没发展. 是吗? (Not developed. That's so?)*

Conclusion:

- Interviews of two Xinjiang-based former English majors
 - Agreement on the need for practice and learner agency
 - Ambiguity about significance of English in Xinjiang

Commonalities: Implications of learner agency, needing to do work	
Q 5: Difficulties? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grammar & practice	Q 10: Problems? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time for practice & study
Differences: Reflections of individual preferences and goals	
Q 8: Best ways to practice English? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Morning review• Movies & TV Q 11: What kind of help? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listening practice• Friends and “normal environment”	Q 13: English in Xinjiang important? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Language study as a skill• Knowing more about the world

Future Questions:



- Questions for further research about English education in Xinjiang:
 - What role does English education play in Xinjiang?
 - How do learners feel about it?
 - Is English relevant to people in Xinjiang? To whom? Why?
 - Would it be more or less relevant to Han than to Uyghurs?
 - If not, would other foreign languages be considered more relevant and to whom? Which ones? Why?
 - Central Asian languages? Russian? Others?
 - Is English education “not developed” in Xinjiang? If so, for whom and how?
 - Analogous to other inland provinces? Implications for teaching opportunities and teaching materials?

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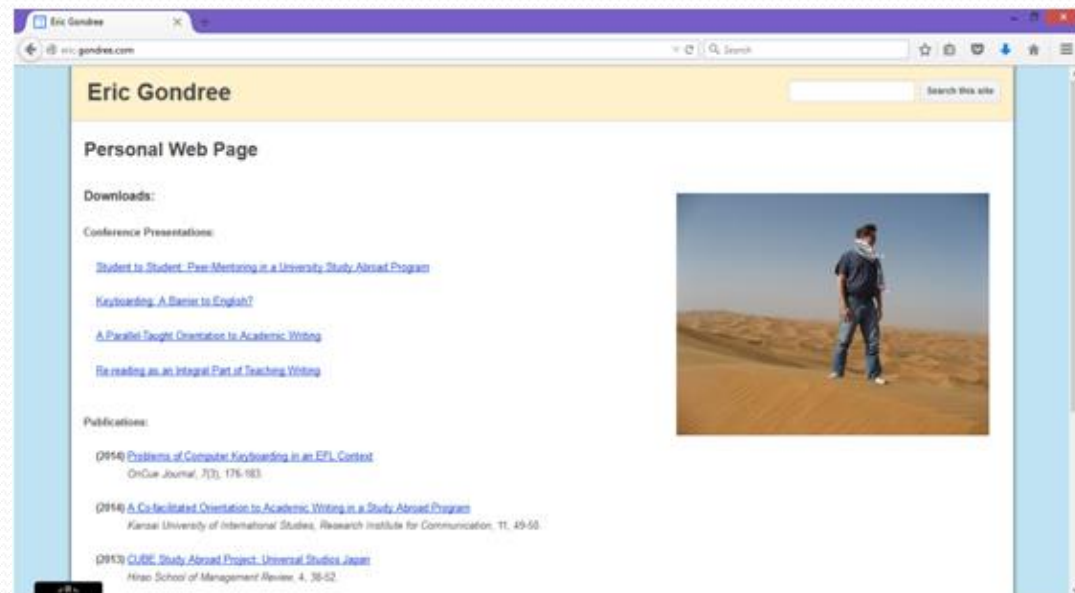
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Thank you for attending

- Questions/Comments?
- This PPT (without audio) available for download at:
<http://eric.gondree.com>



Appendix 1: Question List

- 1. Please tell me your preferred name and where you are from?
- 2. Can you tell me about your education and work experience?
- 3. When and why did you start learning English?
- 4. Where did you study English? Can you tell me about this place?
- 5. What do you think is the most difficult thing about studying English?
- 6. What kinds of materials or books did you use in your classes?
- 7. How much time did you spend on homework for English class each week?
- 8. Where do you practice speaking English? What do you think is the best way to practice English?
- 9. Did you enjoy your English classes? Why or why not?
- 10. What kinds of problems did you have studying English outside of school?
- 11. What kind of help would be good for your study of English?
- 12. How do you hope to use English in the future?
- 13. Do you think English education is important for people in Xinjiang? Why or why not?
- 14. Tell me about an interesting or an important experience that you had in English? Why was it interesting to you.