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Author(s)	Arai, Rinko; Otani, Junko
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Relations of Language and Identity: Examining the effects of Mandarin education in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China

Rinko ARAI¹ and Junko OTANI¹

Abstract

This paper discusses how, if at all, Mandarin education affects Uyghur students in terms of the potential correlation between language and identity in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Xinjiang is located in the north-west part of China and it has been experiencing violent incidents against government policies recently. The Communist Party of China (CPC) has applied various social policies with the aim of achieving a “harmonious society” through “ethnic unity” under the “Chinese nation” as a response to those incidents. Mandarin education is one of the ways CPC employs to achieve ethnic unity. In Xinjiang, the importance of acquiring Mandarin language is stressed to ethnic minorities, like Uyghur who are mostly Muslim. Through literature reviews, a site visit, and interviews with Uyghur, this paper reveals influence of Mandarin education on Uyghur-Han ethnic group relations and Uyghur identity. It also explores the validity of Mandarin education as means to realize ethnic unity and a so-called harmonious society.

Language and identity are closely related to each other. For instance, language determines ethnic identity and identity encourages its holder to learn language. Mandarin education segregates Uyghur and Han and strengthens Uyghur identity because of this correlation. As this form of education differentiates Uyghur from Han and emphasizes the difference of Uyghur ethnic identity, current education overemphasizing Mandarin is not appropriate as means to achieve CPC’s goal of ethnic unity and a harmonious society. If the CPC wants to realize harmonious society as a multi-ethnic country, it should introduce education which esteems minority language and culture, and should promote mutual understanding from both the minority side and the majority Han side. In harmonious societies and multi-ethnic states, each ethnic group maintains its traditional language and culture. Minorities and Han should seek to understand one another through ongoing interactions and mutual acceptance of their cultural differences.

Key words : Mandarin education, language and identity, Xinjiang, Uyghur

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¹ Graduate School of Human Sciences, Osaka University, 1-2, Yamadaoka, Suita, Osaka 565-0871, Japan

1. Background

Since its founding as the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, China has sought to realize the idea of a “multi-ethnic state,” with 56 ethnic groups seeking to prosper and coexist in a harmonious, stable, and multicultural society (Mitsuhashi, 2011; Leibold and Chen, 2014). The PRC government has been implementing a policy of integration between various ethnic minorities and the majority Han under the slogan of “ethnic unity.” The concept of “harmonious society,” which has been advanced since the end of the Jiang Zemin administration, is the PRC government's view of a unified society for a wide range of issues including China's ethnic relations, proposed for socialist “coexistence” and introduced in 2006 as a “socialist harmonious society” (Caprioni, 2011; Ainaitula, 2013). According to Caprioni (2011:268), in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang), this slogan is often associated with regional development, and various policies have been introduced on the grounds that ethnic integration, especially between Han and minority groups, is essential for the political, economic, and cultural development of the region.

However, there have been intermittent incidents of violence in Xinjiang to date, including the Ürümqi riots of July 5, 2009, in which 156 people were reportedly killed¹⁾. These incidents are believed to have been caused by the conflict between Han and Uyghur. An Amnesty International (2010) report prepared in response to the 2009 riots pointed to cultural differences, political inequality, and economic disparity—in that Han and ethnic minorities receive disproportionate benefits from economic development—as well as dissatisfaction with language education as the cause of the conflict.

According to the concept of harmonious society, uniformity in language plays an important role in achieving ethnic unity in China. In Xinjiang, the importance of Mandarin has often been emphasized, and various forms of language education have been introduced. The introduction of Xinjiang Class in 2000 and strengthening of bilingual education in 2004 are two examples. In both cases, the emphasis is on the acquisition of Mandarin by ethnic minorities. Language education for ethnic minorities in Xinjiang is dominated by Mandarin education to encourage ethnic minorities to learn Mandarin. In this paper, we focus on language education and examine how Mandarin education in Xinjiang, which is often pointed out as a problem, affects Uyghurs.

2. Aim

This paper focuses on Mandarin education in Xinjiang and aims to clarify how Mandarin education as a means to realize ethnic unity and a harmonious society affects Uyghurs in terms of the relationship between language and identity. If ethnic unity is served by language education, then language will have some impact on the identity of the ethnic groups and

individuals who receive such language education. Therefore, this paper examines the relationship between language and identity and clarifies the impact of Mandarin education on identities of Uyghur people in Xinjiang. Furthermore, we summarize the course of Mandarin education in Xinjiang until the 2000s, and the Xinjiang Class and bilingual education introduced after 2000 will be discussed in detail. Based on this, we explore the state of Mandarin education in the PRC as a multi-ethnic state. Taking the above into consideration, this paper sets the following research questions: How does Mandarin education in Xinjiang affect the Uyghurs?

The following four sub-questions are set forth to answer this research question.

- (1) How has Mandarin education in Xinjiang affected the relationship between Uyghurs and Han?
- (2) How does Mandarin education in Xinjiang affect the Uyghur identity?
- (3) Is Mandarin education in Xinjiang an appropriate means to achieve ethnic unity and a harmonious society?
- (4) What method of promoting Mandarin is ideal in a multi-ethnic China?

Based on the above research questions, this paper examines the relationship between language and identity and Mandarin education in Xinjiang based on literature research, field research, and interviews, and explores the state of Mandarin education in multi-ethnic China.

3. Literature Review

3.1 *Definition of identity*

Identity can be classified in a variety of ways; however, ethnic and national identities are most relevant when considering the identity of Uyghurs in Xinjiang. The identity dynamics in Xinjiang can be thought of as Uyghur identity as an ethnic identity versus the Chinese national identity that seeks to incorporate it. The national identity that the PRC government is striving for is very close to that of Han. In various situations, the identity of Han—who have the advantage as the majority ethnic group in the PRC—overlaps with the national identity.

In the PRC, the study of identity and a sense of belonging is often discussed in the context of ethnic unity in multi-ethnic China. Fei Xiaotong (1989) proposed the concept of “the pattern of diversity in unity of the Chinese nation” and argued that throughout China’s long history, the various ethnic groups living in that territory have repeatedly absorbed and separated from each other, naturally forming a single ethno-national entity—the Chinese nation—with Han at its core. The pluralistic and united structure, as Fei states, refers to the idea that each ethnic group constitutes a unified entity called the Chinese nation while retaining its own characteristics, culture, and ethnic identity. Thus, to this day, the notion of “the nation-state of the Chinese nation” plays an important role in China’s nation-building (Wang, 2006).

However, Nishizawa (2008) argued that, although Fei Xiaotong discusses the concept of “pattern of diversity” structure “with great care to maintain equal relations among ethnic groups,” it is undeniably drawn from the perspective of Han. In Fei Xiaotong’s concept, “the Chinese nation is the highest and most significant identity and the 56 subordinate ethnic groups are equal, but the Han, who have played a central role in ‘agglomeration,’ are still treated as special.” In other words, Chinese national identity, or the Chinese nation, is cohesive with the Han and Han culture, and can be considered very close to Han identity. Thus, the structure of identity dynamics in Xinjiang is Uyghur ethnic identity versus Chinese national identity, which is sometimes equated with that of the Han.

3.2 Relationship between language and identity

Language and identity are inextricably linked. Especially for ethnic identity, the relationship with language is more pronounced because language itself is one of the elements that define an ethnic group (Marui, 2012). This becomes more apparent when one ethnic group comes into contact with another and feels that their culture and language are threatened.

Minkaohan is a Mandarin term that refers to ethnic minorities educated in Mandarin in Mandarin schools, as opposed to *minkaomin*, who are educated in ethnic schools where classes are taught in the language of the ethnic group. Therefore, according to Sakamoto and Masut (2007), many Uyghur *minkaohan* have lower Uyghur language competence than *minkaomin* Uyghurs, and face criticism from *minkaomin* for being influenced by Han culture in their behavior in addition to their language. However, Han also regard *minkaohan* as a different group because they are Uyghur, even though they are fluent in Mandarin. Thus, in Xinjiang, which is officially considered to have 13 ethnic groups, *minkaohan* have emerged as the “14th ethnic group,” between Uyghur and Han (Sakamoto and Masut, 2007).

Ablimit and Otani (2014), in discussing the status of *minkaohan* since the 1990s, stated that “many ‘minkaohan’ voluntarily regained their Uyghur language reading and writing skills while working, because their awareness as Uyghurs motivated them to learn their own language and culture” (2014:165). This phenomenon shows that ethnic identity affects language learning. In contrast, the increase in the number of incoming Han and the emergence of *minkaohan* led to an increase in enrollment in ethnic schools due to a heightened sense of crisis over the loss of the ethnic language (Ablimit and Otani, 2014). This is thought to be a conscious attempt by Uyghurs, to preserve their ethnic language for the purpose of maintaining their ethnic identity. As discussed thus far, ethnic identity influences the way its holder relates to the ethnic language, as the retention of ethnic identity motivates the acquisition of the ethnic language or arouses the need to preserve the ethnic language.

Ethnic language may influence the formation of ethnic identity. Language is a defining element of an ethnic group, and ethnic language marks the boundaries between one’s own group and others. Groups that share the same ethnic identity are inside the boundaries.

However, the emergence of *minkaohan*, who were Uyghurs but speak Mandarin, blurred the lines of these boundaries. This has led to a movement among Uyghurs to redefine the boundaries of their identity (Sakamoto and Masut, 2007). In other words, ethnic identity is partly defined by language, and when the language within a group changes, ethnic identity—which is the criterion for who is considered to be inside the boundary that separates one group from another—itself is forced to change. The identity of the ethnic group itself may be further strengthened in the movement to preserve the ethnic language out of a heightened sense of danger of language loss due to contact with other ethnic groups that speak different languages. Thus, language can influence the nature of identity, and the way an ethnic group relates to its ethnic language can strengthen its ethnic identity (Figure 1). This interaction is also evident in the relationship between Han and Uyghur in Ürümqi.

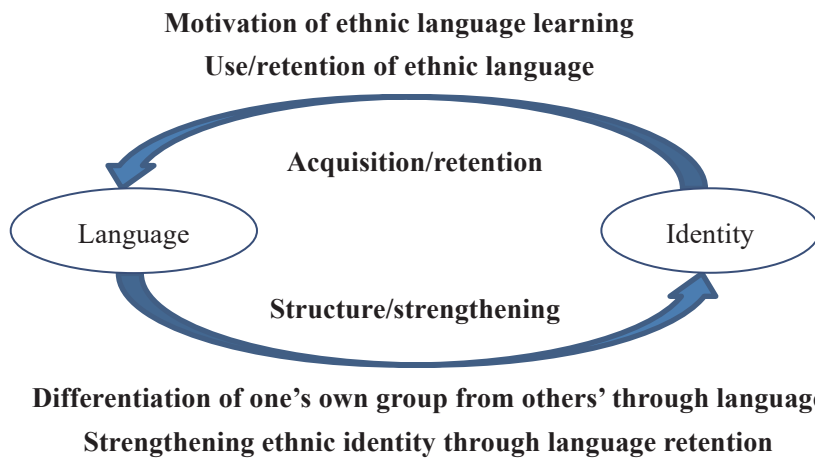


Figure 1: Relationship between language and identity (prepared by Arai Rinko)

Caprioni (2011) highlighted the segregation between Uyghurs and Han in Ürümqi, the largest city in Xinjiang. According to Caprioni, although Uyghurs and Han live in separate areas of Ürümqi, they come into contact in public places such as schools and workplaces. The language used in such situations is Mandarin. However, the conversation between the groups remains at a practical level, and Uyghurs speak in Uyghur when they speak with other Uyghurs, except when they speak with Han people. They read newspapers, listen to radio, and watch television in Uyghur. While Uyghurs consider Mandarin very useful for their social and economic success, they also consider it important to maintain the Uyghur language. For example, Caprioni recounted that during a Uyghur party that was held at a university in Ürümqi, she and *minkaohan* who were conversing in Mandarin were warned by an Uyghur student to speak only Uyghur at the party.

According to Caprioni, cultural and social differences and mutual prejudice in Ürümqi inhibit interaction between Uyghurs and Han, and this division between the two is further

confirmed by language differences. Uyghurs in Ürümqi differentiate their own people from other ethnic groups by emphasizing language differences and using them to draw boundaries of ethnic identity. At the same time, they are trying to protect their language from the influence of other languages. Although language plays a role in shaping the identity of an ethnic group, ethnic identity is further solidified in the process of trying to preserve the ethnic language. Thus, Uyghurs seek to preserve their ethnic language for their ethnic identity, and they also solidify their ethnic identity in their attempts to protect their language by emphasizing linguistic differences.

3.3 Mandarin education until the 2000s

The key words in considering language education in the PRC are “ethnic unity” and “harmonious society.” A “harmonious society” is a “harmonious and equal society,” and the goal of the Communist Party of China (CPC) is the realization of “comfortable life and a beautiful home characterized by equality, unity, mutual assistance and harmony” (Caprioni, 2011:275). Essential to the realization of this harmonious society is “ethnic unity.” The PRC government’s goal of “ethnic unity” is not simply 56 ethnic groups supporting each other but rather to achieve national unity of the Han and 55 ethnic minorities as one fused entity, the Chinese nation.

Based on this idea, the CPC’s treatment of ethnic minorities has worked in two directions, protecting the diversity of each of 56 ethnic groups and attempting to unify them into one. While recognizing and tolerating diversity in principle, in reality, the actual policy being enforced was aimed at ethnic integration. This trend is also seen in language education. According to He (2014), the PRC government is strengthening language unification as a basis for national integration, that is, language unification with Mandarin as the common language.

The history of ethnic minority education in the PRC can be divided into three stages (Zhou, 2003; Tsung et al., 2009): early pluralism (1949–1957), during which minority language education was supported; Chinese monopolism (1958-1977), which coincided with the Cultural Revolution; and second pluralism, from 1978 to the present. In the early pluralist stage, there was a Soviet-influenced attitude that reinforced language diversity and multilingualism (He, 2014:55). After 1958, the Constitution guaranteed the rights of ethnic minorities; simultaneously, an ethnic language writing system based on Pinyin, the Mandarin alphabet, was introduced, based on the premise of ethnic unity and contribution to the country’s development. Thus, an attempt was made in Xinjiang to introduce pinyin as a writing system for the Uyghur language (Zhou, 2003). After the Cultural Revolution came the second stage of pluralism. According to Zhou (2003), this second stage of pluralism was characterized by the bottom-up revival of ethnic languages and scripts driven by the minority groups, with the exception of Xinjiang, where a top-down reintroduction of the Arabic writing system took place. During this overall trend in the PRC, the Mandarin education of the

Uyghurs in Xinjiang has also probably changed from the country's founding to the present day (Table 1).

Table 1: The Course of Minority Education in the PRC and Mandarin Education in Xinjiang

Year	Minority Education in the PRC	Mandarin Education in Xinjiang
1949–57	Early pluralism phase Support for minority language education	Take over existing school systems from before the founding of the PRC. ⇒ ethnic schools Introduction of Mandarin education, Mandarin as an elective subject
1958–77	The era of Chinese monopolism and the Cultural Revolution Unification of writing system with pinyin	Introduction of Mandarin as a required subject Introduction of Uyghur writing system in pinyin Emergence and increase in the number of <i>minkaohan</i>
1978–Present	Second stage of pluralism Constitution Act 1982 Bottom-up revival of ethnic education	Top-down introduction of Arabic writing system Lowering the starting grade for Mandarin education Promoting “fluency in both Mandarin and minority languages” and “bilingual teaching” ⇒ “bilingual education” (2004-) Xinjiang Class (2000-)

Source: Prepared by Arai Rinko based on information from Zhou (2003), Tsung and Cruickshank (2009), Ablimit (2009), and Ainaitula (2013)

After the founding of the PRC in 1949, the new government took over and reorganized school education in Uyghur and other Turkic languages that had been developed in Xinjiang until then, and positioned this as a form of new national education (Ablimit, 2009). Education in ethnic languages continued in schools, which were later positioned as “ethnic schools” (Ablimit, 2009). According to Ablimit (2009), the teaching of Mandarin was introduced in these ethnic schools in the early 1950s, but only as an elective subject, and it was possible for students to choose Russian instead of Mandarin. In other words, in the early 1950s, Mandarin education was optional in Xinjiang, and ethnic minorities themselves could choose whether or not to receive it (2009). This is consistent with the pluralist stance of the early PRC government. In the 1950s, Mandarin-medium schools, or Mandarin schools, began to appear where students could choose Russian or Uyghur as elective courses (Ablimit, 2009).

In the 1960s, education in Mandarin gradually became more important. According to Ablimit (2009), during this period, Mandarin, which had been an elective subject, became a required subject in ethnic schools, while Uyghur was eliminated as an elective subject in Mandarin schools. Another characteristic of the 1960s was the gradual increase in the number of ethnic minorities enrolled in Mandarin schools, and the gradual increase in the number of *minkaohan* (Masut and Otani, 2011). Masut and Otani (2011) pointed out that this policy induced an increase in the number of ethnic minorities educated in Mandarin between the 1960s and early 1970s.

After 1977, in the second phase of pluralism, the duality of the PRC's ethnic minority policy—the protection of diversity in principle and ethnic integration in practice—became

more strongly visible. Since 1977, the government of Xinjiang has further emphasized strengthening Mandarin education for ethnic minorities as an important policy issue (Ablimit, 2009; Mamtimyn et al., 2015). The Constitution of the People's Republic of China, enacted in 1982, protected education in minority languages (Grose, 2010), but in practice, the centralization of education to Mandarin was promoted in the field of education. In addition, according to Masut and Otani (2011), since the 1980s, an increasing number of ethnic minority students have enrolled in Mandarin schools to promote the development of human resources of ethnic minorities. The preferential policy²⁾, which was implemented in 1977 to give preferential treatment to ethnic minority students who take university entrance exams in Mandarin, encouraged ethnic minorities to attend Mandarin schools, and the distinction between *minkaohan* and *minkaomin* became even more pronounced (Ablimit and Otani, 2014). Another important policy, introduced in the 1980s, is “bilingual teaching” (双语教学), based on the idea of “fluency in both Mandarin and minority languages” (民汉兼通), which was proposed in 1982. The goal of “fluency in both Mandarin and minority languages” was to achieve the same level of proficiency in ethnic languages and Mandarin, and “bilingual teaching” was attempted to strengthen Mandarin as a subject in ethnic schools (Ainaitula, 2013). Since the end of the 1990s, various ethnic minority-related policy changes and institutional arrangements have strongly encouraged ethnic minorities as “nationals” rather than “ethnic groups” to learn Mandarin and absorb mainstream culture (Wang, 2006).

There were even more significant changes in the 2000s. The first is the Xinjiang Class (内地新疆高中班), which began in 2000. The Xinjiang Class is “a policy of elite education for ethnic minority children that is intended to cultivate human resources for ethnic minority regions and at the same time familiarize them with Han culture” (Ainaitula, 2013:17), whereby students from Xinjiang spend their high school years in a predominantly Han city. Furthermore, according to the Xinjiang government's decision on the promotion of “bilingual teaching” in 2004, the previous bilingual language education—in which ethnic languages were used as the language of instruction and Mandarin was taught as one subject—was replaced by “bilingual education” (双语教育) in which only Uyghur language classes are taught in Uyghur and all other subjects are taught in Mandarin (Ainaitula, 2013; Ablimit and Otani, 2014).

In this way, Mandarin education in Xinjiang has also undergone a transition in the course of the PRC's history, from the stage of early pluralism, to the stage of Chinese monopolism, to the stage of second-generation pluralism. Particularly characteristic of the second phase of pluralism is the trend of recognizing the rights of ethnic minorities and protecting minority languages in the Constitution and other policies, but in reality, emphasizing education in Mandarin as a means of ethnic unity. Next, we will more closely review the Xinjiang Class and bilingual education, and its characteristics and impact on the Uyghurs.

3.4 Xinjiang Class

The Xinjiang Class is a residential educational program established in 2000 that sends students from Xinjiang to study in schools in the eastern part of the country, where the majority of the population is Han. The students live in dormitories for four years while taking classes in Mandarin.

The expectation of the Xinjiang Class is to achieve ethnic harmony through education. Li (2012) states that although the Xinjiang Class is a program for ethnic minorities, “the reason for recruiting a certain number of Han students is likely due to the idea that it is advantageous for ethnic unity,” and because it imposes political screening, such as whether applicants come from families that follow the one-child policy, the Xinjiang Class is “more political than the general high school, as the political nature of education in the Xinjiang Class is stronger than that of ordinary high schools.” According to Grose (2010), a teacher of the Xinjiang Class said his role was to cultivate Chinese nationalism in the students, and he described the process as *qianyi mohua* – “the change in one’s thinking and personality without knowing due to some influence.”³⁾ Furthermore, according to Grose (2015), the purpose of the Xinjiang Class is to give students “four identifications,” which are “motherland,” “Chinese nation,” “Chinese culture,” and “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Thus, the Xinjiang Class has a strong political objective of ethnic harmony through Mandarin education. This raises the question of whether Uyghur students in the Xinjiang Class actually acquire a national identity as part of the Chinese nation, as per this objective.

According to Chen (2010), in the Xinjiang Class, the emphasis is on learning Mandarin and largely ignores learning ethnic languages, and schools even encourage students to practice it outside of class. However, while Uyghur students recognize the usefulness of Mandarin for social success and accept the Xinjiang Class system, they also counter the Xinjiang Class structure in terms of culture by speaking Uyghur outside of class and strengthening Uyghur ties with other Uyghurs. By making it normative to speak Uyghur outside of class, Uyghur students are said to be fostering ethnic identity, creating ethnic boundaries and further uniting the group of Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Class.

Furthermore, Chen (2014) found that those from the Xinjiang Class have a peculiar elitist attitude. Xinjiang Class graduates from inner-city universities claim that, unlike *minkaohan* who graduated from Mandarin schools in Xinjiang who are often not fluent in Uyghur, Xinjiang Class graduates can speak Uyghur and use the language more flexibly, such as Uyghur with Uyghurs and Mandarin with Han. They also feel that they are superior to other Uyghurs, a civilized people, because they are highly educated. According to Chen (2014), they position themselves as the “13.5th ethnic group” between the 13 indigenous Xinjiang ethnic groups and the “14th ethnic group,” *minkaohan*. Thus, people from the Xinjiang Class have an elite consciousness that they represent the Uyghur people and actively try to practice Uyghur culture and Uyghur language. Chen (2014) suggested that this is because they are

torn between aiming for a higher social stratum within Han society and maintaining their “legitimate” Uyghur identity, and therefore must constantly redefine their “Uyghur-ness” and confirm their position in both the Uyghur and Han communities. In other words, they are forced to continue to act Uyghur-like in order to claim themselves as Uyghurs while living in Han society.

Grose (2010) noted that Uyghur and Han students do not interact much outside the classroom, and some Uyghur students even avoid contact with Han students. Further, as indicated by Chen (2010), outside of class, Uyghur students mostly speak only in Uyghur. Grose noted that many Uyghurs who graduated from the Xinjiang Class are resistant to integration with the Han. Grose (2014) noted that Uyghur youth are seeking ways to preserve their ethnic identity in light of the current situation and are asserting their Uyghur identity in their own way. According to Grose (2015), Beijing college students graduating from the Xinjiang Class show Islamic practices such as ordering Arabic Qur’ans and observing prayer times. He pointed out that despite graduating from the Xinjiang Class, where religious behavior is rigidly forbidden and integration into Han culture is encouraged, they still assert their Uyghur identity through the practice of Islam.

Although the Xinjiang Class aims to achieve ethnic unity under the Chinese nation through education in Mandarin, its students and graduates maintain the Uyghur language and assert their Uyghur identity by practicing Islam. Thus, despite its intentions, the Xinjiang Class is thought to be strengthening the ethnic identity of the Uyghurs.

3.5 Bilingual Education

Regarding bilingual education, Zuliyati (2014) argued that although the purpose of ethnic minority education in Xinjiang is to foster a shared national identity, Han and ethnic minorities are ultimately educated in different educational systems. She pointed out that ethnic minority students are identified and classified by their ethnicity and differentiated from the Han. Citing the example of the preferential policies for ethnic minorities who take university entrance exams in Mandarin, she argued that education based on ethnicity only reinforces ethnic identity.

Tsung and Cruickshank (2009), who review a selection of Mandarin textbooks, noted that the textbooks are heavily oriented toward imparting political ideology rather than practical content. They also presented examples of some of the Mandarin lessons by Chinese teachers and pointed out that Mandarin is associated with images of smartness, cultural, and economic development in these lessons, while speaking only Uyghur is associated with an image of lack of intelligence and backwardness. They argued that by doing so, Chinese teachers have created a hierarchical relationship between Han identity and Uyghur identity, and have created a hierarchical relationship between the two languages. The authors also pointed out that in schools, there is no interaction between Han teachers and students on the

one hand and Uyghur teachers and students on the other hand, and that the division between the communities is being maintained or worsened. Thus, they concluded that the integration policies are nothing more than an extension of segregation by ethnicity.

Tsung (2014) noted that the Han and Uyghurs do not interact much and are linguistically divided, and argued that the current education system exhibits “integration in policy, segregation in reality” which could negatively affect the PRC government’s goal of achieving ethnic unity and a harmonious society. She also pointed out that bilingual education encourages a one-way street of integration, in which Han do not need to learn minority languages such as Uyghur, while the acquisition of Mandarin by ethnic minorities is emphasized, which hinders mutual understanding between Han and ethnic minorities.

Mamtimyn, Feng, and Adamson (2015) found that many Uyghur students recognize the importance of Mandarin, while moves to limit the frequency of its use or weaken its socio-political importance are perceived as a threat to Uyghur culture and identity, which lead to repelling against Mandarin education. They also pointed out that insufficient proficiency in Mandarin can lead to a lack of understanding of each subject in bilingual education and sometimes discourage students from learning not only these subjects, but also Mandarin itself. According to the authors, the Uyghur language is considered an essential element in the formation of Uyghur ethnic identity, while mastery of Mandarin is seen as providing opportunities for educational, economic, and social success.

In this way, the superiority of Mandarin over the Uyghur language is emphasized in bilingual education, and it is thought that the way Mandarin education encourages integration into the “superior” Han identity conversely forces the Uyghurs to reaffirm their own ethnic identity. In addition, although the usefulness of Mandarin itself is accepted by the Uyghurs, Mandarin education that leaves the Uyghur language behind has created a crisis for the survival of the Uyghur language and Uyghur culture, and has consequently induced the strengthening of Uyghur identity rather than integration into the Chinese nation.

3.6 Insights from the Literature Review

Several similarities can be seen between the two types of Mandarin education: the Xinjiang Class and bilingual education. Both have the political intention of improving the ability of ethnic minorities to use Mandarin and promoting ethnic integration through Mandarin education. This ethnic integration appears to be based on the idea that Mandarin and Han culture is superior to minority languages and cultures such as Uyghur, and encourages integration into the Han identity. In other words, identities of the Chinese nation and the Han sometimes tend to be equated. Contrary to this speculation, however, there are many research reports showing that Uyghur students use Uyghur language outside the classroom and have little interaction with Han students, and that in fact ethnic divisions are maintained and Uyghur ethnic identity tends to be strengthened rather than weakened. In bilingual education

and in the Xinjiang Class, we see a situation similar to the segregation of Han and Uyghur in Ürümqi, as noted by Caprioni (2011). In these educational situations where the focus is on teaching (in) Mandarin, Uyghur students use the Uyghur language outside class, further reinforcing their ethnic identity as Uyghurs, despite an environment that emphasizes the importance of Mandarin.

This phenomenon can be viewed in terms of the relationship between language and identity, with language use reinforcing ethnic identity and learning an ethnic language being driven by ethnic identity. Uyghur students distance themselves from Han students to maintain their ethnic identity and continue to use their ethnic language. They seem to believe that by maintaining their ethnic language, they draw a boundary between their own group and other groups and continue to maintain their ethnic identity. Furthermore, the existence of external stimuli such as the policy emphasis on the importance of Mandarin and the superiority of Han identity and the encouragement to integrate into the Chinese nation have made the correlation between language and identity even more pronounced among the Uyghurs, making it difficult to achieve the Xinjiang Class and bilingual education's goal of ethnic unity, and a harmonious society.

4. Field Visit

In September 2015, we spent three days in Ürümqi and two days in Beijing, visiting local universities and interacting with Uyghurs and Han for participant observation. No overt conflict between Han and Uyghurs was observed during our stay in Ürümqi. For example, when we asked students majored in Uyghur language (mostly Han) at Xinjiang Normal University if they have any interaction with ethnic minorities, they said they do in the university dormitory and have ethnic minority friends. However, we did not see many cases of Han mingling with ethnic minorities who were visually distinguishable from Han, such as the Uyghurs, on the university campus or in downtown Ürümqi. Additionally, in the university cafeteria, Uyghurs and Han were not seen eating together. This is thought to be due to the food restrictions (halal) of the Uyghurs. In fact, the cafeterias that serve halal food and those that do not, for Han and other students, are separated, so there may not be many opportunities to eat together. We had the opportunity to have lunch with a Uyghur teacher and Han teachers, at a Chinese restaurant where the Uyghur teacher ate the same food as Han teachers, which was not halal. However, nothing on the menu that day used pork.

At Xinjiang University, we observed a class of ethnic minorities who were *minkaomin*. Although the class was taught by a Uyghur teacher, it was conducted in Mandarin. However, the language spoken among students when they chatted among themselves and during breaks was Uyghur, and the only time students spoke Mandarin was when they were called on by the teacher to make a presentation in class. According to the Uyghur teacher, the conversation

between the teacher and students outside of class is also in Uyghur. Conversations between Uyghur teachers outside of class were also in Uyghur. In contrast, all conversations between Han and Uyghurs were conducted in Mandarin, and we never encountered a scene where Han and Uyghurs were conversing in Uyghur, except during the Uyghur language class of students majoring in Uyghur language at Xinjiang Normal University.

At Xinjiang Normal University, we observed a class of Uyghur language majors and we spoke with the students. The majority of the class was Han. Many of them majored in Uyghur because it was advantageous to gain employment in “stable professions” such as civil services, the police force, and the military, and they seemed to be more interested in the government and management jobs rather than in deepening their understanding of ethnic minorities. However, some of the students said that although they initially majored in Uyghur because it was advantageous for them to get a job in the military, as they studied, they became interested in the Uyghur language and Uyghur culture.

Uyghurs in Ürümqi seem to have many opportunities to use both Mandarin and Uyghur in their daily lives. For example, store clerks were seen several times using different languages, Mandarin for Han customers and Uyghur for Uyghur customers. In contrast, there seems to be almost no opportunity for Han to speak Uyghur or other minority languages in their daily lives. According to students majoring in Uyghur at Xinjiang Normal University, Mandarin of ethnic minorities is better than the Han speaking minority languages, so conversations between ethnic minorities and Han are naturally in Mandarin.

In Beijing, I worked with Ahmet (pseudonym), a *minkaohan* man from Ürümqi attending university in Beijing and had the opportunity to eat at a restaurant with Ahmet and his high school classmates (Han from Xinjiang). As the restaurant was frequented by many foreigners, the menu given to Ahmet by the Han waiter was in English. In other words, he was mistaken for a foreign tourist because of his Uyghur appearance. This happens frequently in Beijing, he said. Ahmet said that it is strange that although there are ethnic minorities in the country, they are thought of as foreign tourists first. He also criticized Beijing students for being too ignorant about Xinjiang and ethnic minorities, asking if they even knew about their own country. Thus, he feels that Han people have little awareness of ethnic minorities. In addition, Ahmet says that he makes it a rule not to eat pork, because it is difficult to eat only halal food in Beijing, where he has many Han friends and there are few Muslims.

Based on the above field visit, we would like to emphasize the following three observations. First, regarding the relationship between Han and Uyghurs in Ürümqi, although there is no overt conflict, ethnic minorities and Han are not seen walking together or eating together, and some degree of division exists between the two groups due to language and culture, as pointed out by Caprioni (2011). In Ürümqi, however, this division was not as visibly violent as one might imagine from the violence reported elsewhere but was rather a gradual division of living space due to cultural differences. Second, the fusion between Han and Uyghurs is a

one-way street, based on the language use between Uyghurs and Han and on Ahmet’s story. Communication between Han and Uyghurs in Ürümqi is based on the Uyghurs speaking Mandarin. The motives of Han who learn Uyghur language are also political and cannot be said to be to promote mutual understanding with the Uyghurs. Ahmet also feels that Han lack an understanding of the minorities living in Beijing. Thus, ethnic unity in China today is unidirectional, with ethnic minorities speaking and understanding Mandarin, with little movement from Han side. The third observation concerns the practice of Islam, which is an important part of Uyghur culture. Uyghur teachers in Ürümqi and Ahmet’s example of not eating pork instead of eating halal food, for example, show some concessions in an environment surrounded by Han. As Grose (2014; 2015) points out, this is an example of Uyghurs devising ways to and coming to terms with how to practice Islam and maintain Uyghur identity in their own way within the limits of their environment.

5. Interview

This section looks at the Uyghur individual's experience with Mandarin education from interviews conducted in late October and November 2015. Semi-structured interviews of 40-50 minutes were conducted individually with five Uyghurs during the period (Table 2).

Table 2: List of Informants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Hometown	Method	Language	Other
Ahmet	22	Male	Ürümqi	Skype	Japanese	<i>Minkaohan</i> , lives in Beijing
Alim	29	Female	Ghulja, (Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture)	Skype	English	Xinjiang Class, lives in Canada
Yasen	22	Male	Ürümqi	In person	Japanese	<i>Minkaohan</i> , moved to Japan in junior high school, has lived here since
Arzgür	28	Female	Korla (Bayingolin Mongol Autonomous Prefecture)	In person	Japanese	<i>Minkaomin</i> , lives in Japan
Erkin	32	Male	Ürümqi	In person	Japanese	<i>Minkaohan</i> , lives in Japan

Problems with this interview include the small sample size, the bias in the subjects, the fact that the language used for the interview was not the informant's native language, and the fact that the means of the interview were not the same (via Skype / in person). First of all, the number of people interviewed was only five, which is not representative of the Uyghurs as a whole. In addition, four of the five students are *minkaohan*, only one is a *minkaomin*, one is from the Xinjiang Class, and none come from a bilingual education background. Furthermore, the informants are men and women between the ages of 22 and 32 and thus, Mandarin

education they received in Xinjiang varied from year to year, and there are differences in Mandarin education they received. Therefore, the influence received from Mandarin education is also considered to be different. In addition, all informants are from northern Xinjiang (*Beijiāng*), which has a relatively large Han population and is highly developed, and none are from southern Xinjiang (*Nānjiāng*), which has a Uyghur majority and a large rural population. The fact that the interviews were conducted via Skype may have had a different impact than those conducted in person, as there were times when the interviews were temporarily interrupted or the audio was disturbed due to the internet connection. For these reasons, it is difficult to identify universal phenomena in the interview; therefore, we will examine the commonalities among the five interviewees to see how aspects such as those identified in the literature review are manifested in the experiences of individual Uyghurs. All informants' names in this article are pseudonyms.

In terms of informants' language skills, *minkaohan* tended to be less proficient in reading and writing Uyghur. All four *minkaohan* respondents indicated that they were not good at reading or writing Uyghur, or could not read at all. However, three of them think it is better to be able to read and write Uyghur and so learned to read and write on their own. Ahmet said he cannot read or write Uyghur, but is likely to study it when he has more time. He said that this was because reading and writing Uyghur is “definitely something to be studied as a native language.” Since entering university, Alim has had more opportunities to meet Uyghurs, and as a result, she began to feel embarrassed that her Uyghur language skills were not as good as that of the other Uyghurs, and so she began to learn to read and write on her own. She also said, “my identity pushed me to study my own language (Uyghur).” When he was in junior high school, Yaseen began to feel embarrassed that he could not even write his own name in Uyghur and started to learn how to read and write Uyghur on his own. What Alim and Yaseen have in common is that they were motivated to learn Uyghur because they felt embarrassed that their Uyghur language skills were not very good due to some external factors such as environmental changes or triggering events. This is consistent with Ablimit and Otani's (2014) point that *minkaohan's* awareness as Uyghurs motivated their desire to learn the Uyghur language on their own.

Regarding the importance of each language, Uyghur was considered important as the language of their ethnic group and mother tongue, while Mandarin tended to be emphasized for its social utility. Ahmet believes that his motivation to study Uyghur reading and writing is that his mother tongue is definitely to be studied and Uyghur is important as his mother tongue. However, he also stated that the ability to speak Mandarin is advantageous for social success. Like Ahmet, Alim also believes that the Uyghur language is important as a mother tongue. For example, she said, “as they are Uyghur, they at least have to self-learn their mother tongue.” However, when asked whether Uyghur or Mandarin was more important, she said that Uyghur was more important for her personally, but that Mandarin was more

important in general. The reason for this is that Mandarin is now becoming a global language like English, and is more important considering further development of Mandarin in the future. However, Arzgül expressed her opinion on the importance of Uyghur and Mandarin, saying that Mandarin is important as the national language of the PRC, but personally, her mother tongue, Uyghur, is her priority. Erkin also stated that the importance of Mandarin and Uyghur language differs depending on the occupation. He himself is a research scientist at a scientific institute and said that Mandarin is by far more important to him personally.

In relation to the importance of Mandarin and Uyghur, when asked whether they would prefer their children to attend an ethnic school or a Mandarin school if they had children, three of the respondents except Erkin and Yasen answered ethnic school and Erkin answered Mandarin school. Yasen responded that he would like his children to be educated abroad, not in China. The reasons that the four students other than Yasen chose ethnic schools and that Yasen chose Mandarin language schools also show the scheme of Uyghur language as mother tongue and Mandarin as socially useful.

Ahmet, who chose the ethnic school, stated that he wanted his children to first learn Uyghur, his native language, based on his own experience as a *minkaohan* who was not very good at Uyghur. He then said that he hoped that they would become bilingual, fluent in both Uyghur and Mandarin. Arzgül, like Ahmet, also chose an ethnic school. She said that she would teach her children Uyghur first and then teach them Mandarin, a “foreign language,” after they “learn to speak their mother tongue properly,” and that she would teach them her mother tongue, Uyghur, first and foremost, not Mandarin.

Alim said that she did not want her child to be a *minkaohan* and would prefer that they be “*minkao* English” if possible, but that if she were to raise her child in China, she would want them to go to an ethnic school. She explained that this was because she wanted her children to learn Uyghur socializing skills at ethnic schools because even if they are *minkaohan*, they will live in the Uyghur community once they graduate from school and enter society. Erkin, in contrast, responded that he would like his own children to go to a Mandarin school. The reason for this, he said, is that a graduate of a Mandarin school will be in a better position in society as long as they live in China.

Thus, the three who chose ethnic schools said this would help them acquire Uyghur language, their mother tongue, and Uyghur culture, whereas Erkin, who chose a Mandarin school, said he preferred a Mandarin school in view of future social success. The three students who chose ethnic schools also acknowledged the importance of Mandarin, as they did not think it was unnecessary to be able to speak Mandarin, but to first learn the Uyghur language and culture, and then study Mandarin.

When asked if they considered themselves Chinese, all said they did. Legal status, such as nationality and passport, were cited as reasons for this. Erkin said he had to assume he was Chinese because of his nationality and passport. Yasen also said that as long as he was born

in Xinjiang, he is Chinese, but that he does not see any kind of common identity as a Chinese person in himself. Alim replied that she could say that she is Chinese, but said that she is a typical Uyghur in terms of culture and customs, except for language. Ahmet, Yasen, and Arzgür also stated that they often feel they are Uyghurs in terms of etiquette and other aspects of Uyghur culture, customs, and language. Thus, the five seem to feel Chinese because of their acceptance of legal facts based on nationality and place of origin, and not because they have a sense of cultural belonging to China. Rather, there seems to be a stronger sense of belonging to the Uyghur people in terms of culture and customs.

From the above interview, we present the following three observations. First, just as Ablimit and Otani (2014) point out, although *minkaohan* informants do not read and write Uyghur well, the identity-driven idea that they should study Uyghur, their native language, because they are Uyghurs, is seen as a motivation for learning Uyghur. Second, among the five, Uyghur tends to be considered more important as a mother tongue, whereas Mandarin is perceived as advantageous for social success. This is also evident in the reasons for school choice between sending one's children to an ethnic or a Mandarin school. This is consistent with Mamtimyn, Feng, and Adamson's (2015) findings that the Uyghur language is an essential component of ethnic identity, while Mandarin is important for educational, economic, and social success opportunities. The third observation is that all five interviewees felt that they are Chinese, but this is based on their nationality and place of birth, and does not necessarily mean that they have a sense of cultural belonging to China, but rather a stronger sense of being Uyghur. □

6. Conclusion

In this section, we will answer each of the research questions in this paper one by one, leading to the conclusions of this paper.

(1) How has Mandarin education in Xinjiang affected the relationship between Uyghurs and Han?

While the goal of Mandarin education in Xinjiang is to realize ethnic unity and a harmonious society, Mandarin education undeniably creates a contrast between ethnic minorities and Han and makes the differences between the two clearer. This may have resulted in the creation of an ongoing division between Uyghurs and Han. As Tsung and Cruickshank (2009) pointed out, the emphasis on Mandarin backed by the idea that Mandarin is superior to Uyghur and other ethnic languages has resulted in a segregation between Uyghur and Mandarin in schools. Also, as Zuliyati (2014) points out, current Mandarin education divides ethnic minorities and Han by separating them on the basis of ethnicity and keeping them within separate educational systems. Furthermore, as Tsung (2014) pointed out, Uyghurs are provided with a Mandarin education that strongly emphasizes the importance of Mandarin,

whereas Han have very limited opportunities to learn a minority language in school; thus, a one-way understanding remains between the two groups. As a result, mutual understanding between Han and Uyghur has been hampered and the segregation between the two has been maintained. Thus, Mandarin education in Xinjiang may have emphasized the differences between Uyghurs and Han, preventing mutual understanding and maintaining the division between the two groups.

(2) How does Mandarin education in Xinjiang affect the Uyghur identity?

The teaching of Mandarin education in Xinjiang has consequently tended to reinforce the ethnic identity of Uyghurs. Language and identity have a close, mutually influencing relationship, and as a result, we may see a phenomenon in which Uyghur identity is strengthened in Mandarin education where Mandarin is strongly emphasized. For example, as pointed out by Mamtimyn, Feng, and Adamson (2014), restricting the use of the Uyghur language or trying to downgrade its social status by overemphasizing the importance of Mandarin makes the survival of the Uyghur language and Uyghur identity feel threatened, thus reinforcing Uyghur identity. Further, as Chen (2014) pointed out for the Xinjiang Class, Uyghurs who left Xinjiang and graduated from the Xinjiang Class, where Mandarin is strongly emphasized in a Han-dominated environment, still retain a strong Uyghur identity and a sense of being the elite representing the Uyghur people. Furthermore, as Chen (2014) and Grose (2014; 2015) noted, they are practicing their own Uyghur identity, adapting to the surrounding environment. This is because those in the Xinjiang Class were placed in an environment that was separated from the Uyghur culture, language, and Uyghur identity, and thus they have always had to assert their “legitimacy” as Uyghurs through the use of language and religion to maintain their Uyghur identity, to use Chen’s (2014) words. If this is the case, the Xinjiang Class has conversely emphasized the Uyghur language and Uyghur identity of Uyghur people.

Thus, it can be said that Mandarin education in Xinjiang has rather strengthened the ethnic identity of Uyghur people by emphasizing Mandarin against the Uyghur language.

(3) Is Mandarin education a reasonable means of achieving ethnic unity and a harmonious society in Xinjiang?

Based on the results of the literature review, it cannot be said that current Mandarin education has achieved at least the realization of ethnic unity and harmonious society under the Chinese nation. Although the intention of “unity” in ethnic unity is the fusion of each ethnic minority as the Chinese nation, which is a high-level identity centering on the Han, but as seen in the literature review and interviews, the sense of belonging to “China” is not necessarily of a higher order than ethnic identity, and among individual Uyghurs, the feeling of being Chinese is at the same or lower level than being Uyghur. Also, as seen in the answers

to the two research questions above, Mandarin education tends to emphasize the differences between ethnic minorities and Han, keeping them divided and reinforcing ethnic identity. From the above, we believe that the current Mandarin education system is not appropriate as a means to realize the ethnic unity and harmonious society that the PRC government aims for.

(4) What method of promoting Mandarin is ideal in a multi-ethnic China?

In the context of a multi-ethnic China, Mandarin education can exist in a form that is more respectful of ethnic languages and cultures. Current Mandarin education places a heavy emphasis on Mandarin, limiting the practice of ethnic languages and cultures. For instance, in the Xinjiang Class, the practice of Islam is strictly prohibited, and the practice of ethnic cultures and languages is greatly restricted. However, as we have discussed in this paper thus far, the more Mandarin is emphasized and the more ethnic language and culture are restricted, the stronger the ethnic identity becomes. In light of this, it might be better to consider seeking ways to make education more respectful of ethnic cultures and languages.

Furthermore, as this study has shown, the social utility of Mandarin among Uyghurs has already been recognized to some extent. Therefore, even without restricting ethnic languages and strongly emphasizing the importance of Mandarin, ethnic minorities may naturally try to learn Mandarin due to the current state of Chinese society. If the PRC is to truly realize ethnic unity and a harmonious society, ethnic minorities should not only learn the language and culture of Han, but steps should also be made toward this goal from the Han side. Han should likewise be provided opportunities to learn minority languages and cultures in the same way that ethnic minorities learn Mandarin. Just as ethnic minorities have the right to learn both their languages and Mandarin, Han people have the right to understand ethnic minorities. Further, like the Uyghur majors at Xinjiang Normal University, they may develop an interest in the language and culture of an ethnic group by learning its language, regardless of their motivation. This could lead to a natural flow of mutual understanding. If both sides learn and understand each other's language to promote mutual understanding, ethnic unity and a harmonious society will naturally be realized.

Finally, we would like to make the following three observations. First of all, Mandarin education in Xinjiang tends to reinforce ethnic identity and hinder mutual understanding between Uyghurs and Han due to its overemphasis on the importance of Mandarin. Second, language and identity have an interactive relationship, and since the current Mandarin education makes students retain and reinforce their ethnic language and ethnic identity, it is difficult to achieve the kind of ethnic unity and harmonious society that the PRC government is aiming for. Third, if we are to realize true ethnic unity and a harmonious society as a multi-ethnic China, it is necessary to treat ethnic languages and Mandarin as equal in ethnic minority education, and to provide opportunities for Han to understand ethnic minorities and respect their languages. Even if it is necessary to learn Mandarin as a common language, a

society in which each ethnic minority maintains its own culture and language, and in which ethnic minorities and Han can mutually understand each other, would be a harmonious society as a multi-ethnic state.

7. Limitations of this paper and future issues

The purpose of this paper is to clarify the impact of Mandarin education in Xinjiang on Uyghurs, focusing on the relationship between language and identity, and exploring the nature of Mandarin education in the PRC as a multi-ethnic state through literature review, field research, and interviews. However, there are limitations to what we were able to identify in this study, and several issues remain to be addressed.

For example, the question of whether education that treats ethnic languages and Mandarin equally and whether minority language education for Han is realistically feasible remains to be explored. One of the current challenges in bilingual education is the shortage of ethnic minority teachers who can teach in Mandarin. It is not difficult to imagine that bilingual teachers in Mandarin and minority languages would be needed if the kind of education proposed in this article were to be realized, and many issues remain, including the recruitment of teachers and the funding and infrastructure needed for such teachers. Another example is the possibility of trilingual education in Xinjiang. In this era of remarkable globalization, the importance of English as a world language is also felt in Xinjiang. Currently, ethnic schools do not offer opportunities to learn English in class, and many ethnic minorities have expressed a desire for English education. It is necessary to consider language education in Xinjiang by adding the element of English as well as Mandarin and ethnic languages. However, a specific examination of these issues will be left to future research.

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Appendices

- 1) Xinhua News Agency announcement. The World Uyghur Congress states that nearly 1000 people were killed, based on eyewitness accounts. Xinhua News Agency article http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2009-07/07/content_11669861.htm (last accessed January 2, 2016), World Uyghur Congress “The Urumqi Massacre” <http://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/?cat=255> (last accessed January 4, 2016)
- 2) This preferential policy, which allows minority students to pass the university entrance exam in Mandarin by lowering the passing line or adding a set number of points to their score (Grose, 2010), is still in place to this day.
- 3) From “Chinese-Japanese Dictionary, Second Edition,” 2003, Shogakukan/The Commercial Press, Beijing.

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