

# UYGHUR STUDIES IN CENTRAL ASIA: A Historical Review

## INTRODUCTION

The Uyghurs, a Turkic people comprising a major part of the population of the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), China, also have sizable communities in the former Soviet Central Asian Republics, especially in Kazakhstan, where they numbered 220,000 in 1999 (altogether the Uyghur population in the newly independent states numbers more than 300,000). The Central Asian Uyghur community played a significant role in the Uyghur nation-building process as well as in Soviet-Chinese relations during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Soviet authorities used the Uyghurs as a tool in their policy toward Xinjiang (Eastern Turkistan) and for that purpose provided special support for the development of Uyghur culture in Central Asia. A significant part of that policy was the development of Uyghur studies in Central Asia, particularly in Kazakhstan, which became a cultural center for the Soviet Uyghurs. Uyghur studies covers mostly the research done in the sphere of language, literature, history, and culture (art, music, etc). This article will examine the history of Uyghur studies in Soviet Central Asia and outline its trends.

## THE MAIN STAGES

### The Initial Stage (1920–1945)

The earliest research on Uyghurs conducted in Central Asia exhibited mostly a practical character. The purpose was to pursue specific goals of Soviet national policy aimed at the creation of new socialist “nations” in the region. The Uyghurs, along with other peoples, were recognized by the Soviet state as a “nation” during the period of national delimitation and demarcation in Central Asia during the early 1920s, just after the establishment of Bolshevik power. Since the Marxist definition of a “nation” included a language as one of its important elements, the Bolsheviks from the very beginning paid attention to the development and standardization of national languages. Due to this theoretical importance of language for the Marxist ideology, as well as the intensive educational activities carried out by the Bolsheviks accompanied by establishing national schools, the linguistic problem took on both practical and theoretical significance. That is why the initial stage of Uyghur studies in Central Asia was mostly connected to satisfying the educational needs of the Uyghur “nation.” The necessity to supply schools with Uyghur textbooks required the standardization of the language and working out of the norms of literary Uyghur based first on a Latin alphabet and then on Cyrillic after 1947. The need for more Uyghur textbooks increased dramatically during the 1930s with the Sovietization of Xinjiang Province under the governorship of Sheng Shi-cai and Central Asian publishing houses responded in kind.

Since this process was strictly controlled from Moscow, the first textbooks and manuals on the Uyghur language in the USSR were composed by the Russian scholars; namely, A. K. Borovkov [1935], N. A. Baskakov [1939], and B. M. Nasilov [1940]. Uyghur specialists were involved mainly in translating Russian information into Uyghur textbooks. It is not surprising that the first professional Uyghur linguist, Aisham Shamieva, was also trained in the field of pedagogy. Though her doctoral dissertation was devoted to the new Uyghur alphabet based on Cyrillic, she is best known as an author of Uyghur school textbooks [Shamieva and Sadvakasov 1976]. It should be also pointed out here that the priority given to linguistic study was dictated by the expansion of Uyghur usage along with the development of the press and the establishment of Uyghur theatre and other cultural institutions.

One example of non-linguistic research during the initial stage is the work on the Ili Taranchi history by Nazarghoja Abdusemiatov (*Uyghur*

*balisi*), published in Alma-Ata in 1922, but the work can hardly be considered as modern academic research. Rather, Abdusematov's work was a continuation of *jadidist* traditions and should be placed somewhere between traditional nineteenth century Muslim historiography and modern historical study.

## Stage Two (1946–1985)

### *Institutionalization and Soviet-Chinese politics*

The founding of the Kazakh Academy of Sciences in 1946 marked the start of training local scholars in Uyghur studies. This was a period of overall rise in Uyghur cultural development within the political environment of neighboring Xinjiang. The establishment of the pro-Soviet independent Eastern Turkistan Republic (ETR) in 1944 in the three westernmost prefectures (Ili, Tarbaghatai, and Altai) intensified Soviet policy towards Xinjiang and the Uyghurs. Kazakhstani Communist leaders even raised the issue of possible autonomy for Soviet Uyghurs in Kazakhstan. Soviet Uyghurs were actively used by the Soviets in the latter's dealings with both rebels and provincial authorities. The Soviets gave the ETR government not only military and economic assistance, but also ideological aid. Research in Uyghur history and culture became an important tool in the ideological war between ETR leaders and the Guomindang government, which stimulated academic study on the subjects both in Moscow and Central Asia. Although the Communist victory in China changed the situation dramatically, the need to develop Uyghur studies in Soviet Central Asia by no means decreased.

It is not by accident that 1949, the year of the founding of the People's Republic of China, marked the beginning of institutional change in Uyghur studies in Central Asia. That year a special section dealing with Uyghur-Dungan culture was set up in the Kazakh Academy of Sciences. It consisted of two divisions, Uyghur and Dungan, which were separated in 1963, with Dungan division being transferred to the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences in Frunze, and the Uyghur division being transformed into a larger, independent unit focusing specifically on Uyghur studies at Alma-Ata. The timing of this "divorce," which marked the further enhancement of academic research in Uyghur studies, was also not accidental. Again it was a response to changing Soviet-Chinese relations, for 1962 marked a peak in tensions between the two countries in Xinjiang, when the Soviet diplomatic mission was withdrawn from the province and a mass migration from Xinjiang to Soviet Central Asia was instigated by both states. The closure of national borders and

aggravation of animosity between the two powers stimulated the above-mentioned institutional change in Uyghur studies the following year.

The newly formed Uyghur studies section embraced the three main fields language, history, and literature and art (music and theatre), and was eventually attached to the Institute of Linguistics. By the mid-1980s, scholars working in the section numbered more than twenty, most of whom were native Uyghurs, under the supervision of G. Sadvakasov. It was the section that hosted the all-Union conferences on Uyghur studies during that time [*Aktual'nye problemy sovetskogo uigurovedeniya* 1983].

### Stage Three (1986–1996)

#### *The Institute of Uyghur Studies*

A peak in Uyghur studies in Soviet Central Asia was reached during the 1980s with the enlargement of the Uyghur Studies Section and setting up of the Institute of Uyghur Studies within the Kazakh Academy of Sciences in 1986. This Institute was established by a Soviet government resolution aimed at intensifying research on Xinjiang following the warming in relations with China. Decades of Soviet-Chinese confrontation and enmity had created a shortage of first-hand information and analysis of the situation in neighboring Xinjiang, and it was hoped that such a gap would be filled by the Institute and its staff of approximately eighty members. The core of the Institute consisted of the “traditional” divisions of language, literature and art, and history and ethnography, but also included national relations, social relations, the economy of Xinjiang, and the study of adjacent countries. The establishment of the Institute created the most favorable conditions for developing all spheres of Uyghur and Xinjiang studies.

This new institutional development in Uyghur studies resulted in a wide range of publications, and the liberalization of the political life on both sides of the Soviet-Chinese border made possible academic exchange between the countries and even the implementation of several joint projects in the field of Uyghur philology. However, historical research remained politicized and contested, and the Chinese government encouraged no international exchange in that field.

The Institute was supported by central academic institutions in Moscow and Leningrad, which provided assistance in training young scholars and collaborated in running of joint academic projects. The Institute hosted two conferences on Uyghur studies in 1987 and 1991 [*Malovskie chteniya* 1990]; but with the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Institute lost its governmental support as did other such cultural institu-

tions as Uyghur TV and radio programming, newspapers and magazines, groups at institutions of higher education, and publishing houses, all of which were either closed down or reduced in size. The Institute itself was closed in 1996. The official reason given for the closure was economic difficulties which the Kazakhstan scholarly community was facing during the first decade of independence, but the main reason was the Chinese pressure being applied on the Kazakh authorities. It was no accident that the closure of the Institute coincided with establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (the Shanghai Five), which instituted a joint struggle against Uyghur separatism within its agenda. It should be mentioned also that from the very beginning, the Institute had been opposed by Kazakh nationalist intellectuals and was continuously threatened by closure. With the closure of the Institute, which was not only an academic institution, but also a cultural center for Uyghur communities across Central Asia, the infrastructure of cultural institutions created during the Soviet period collapsed.

### The Present Stage

After the closure of the Institute, Uyghur studies were restructured into a Center of Uyghur Studies under the new Institute of Oriental Studies. In November 1999, when the Center celebrated the 50th anniversary of Uyghur studies in Kazakhstan, its head, K. Talipov, presented a paper entitled "The tree planted fifty years ago," which expressed optimism about the prospects of the field; but few have joined in such optimism. At present, only a small number of scholars study Uyghur issues at the Institute of Oriental Studies; and since the Kazakhstani government no longer funds special research on Uyghurs, anything done in the field there is examined in connection with Kazakhstani problems. Another change here is that compared to the Soviet period, when Uyghurs and non-Uyghurs alike worked in the field, today only native Uyghur scholars have made any attempt to continue their research. One exception is a topic of Uyghur separatism, the study of which is in high demand due to recent political events in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and is attracting the attention of Russian and Kazakh political scientists. Some Kazakhstani scholars were able to obtain financial support from international sources to pursue their research on the so called "Uyghur question," two such studies being devoted to the analysis of the "myth" of Uyghur extremism in Central Asia [Syroezhkin 2003, Bekturganova 2002].

Another regrettable thing about the present situation in the field is that younger scholars have stopped coming, due mainly to a lack of interest on the part of the state to develop this branch of scholarship. Nevertheless, Uyghur studies in Central Asia have definitely played a significant role in the development of academic knowledge on Uyghur society and culture and have had a strong impact on similar academic research across the border in Xinjiang. It should be also noted that Kazakhstan still remains the main cultural center of Central Asian Uyghurs with the highest concentration of Uyghur intellectuals, including those working in academia. Scholars engaged in the Uyghur studies continue the tradition of convening conferences on the subject, though on a smaller regional scale, and publishing their research [*Aktual'nye problemy sovremennogo uigurovedeniya* 2002, *Pyatye Sadvakasovskie chteniya* 1998].

Given the above historical background to the field, let us now move to the content of the research produced so far. What follows is a review of three main research directions—Uyghur linguistics, literature and art, and history and ethnography—which will be discussed in separated sections. The discussion on the large number of Uyghur scholars and scientists working in Kazakhstan, which remains a major cultural center for Central Asian Uyghurs, while not much emphasis will be put on the work of Russian scholars, whose contribution should be addressed in a separated review.

## REVIEWS OF THE RESEARCH

### Linguistics

As mentioned above, practical educational and cultural needs stimulated the development of research in Central Asia on the Uyghur language. While in the initial periods such studies were exclusively of a practical nature and confined to the problems of standardizing the literary language and teaching it, Central Asian scholars gradually started studying Uyghur more deeply, raising and discussing problems of a more academic nature. As a result, Uyghur linguistics has become the strongest aspect of Uyghur studies to the present day, so much so that Central Asian publications served as a pattern and basis for study in XUAR. The most important works produced by Central Asian scholars were translated into Uyghur and Chinese and disseminated throughout the XUAR.

Central Asian linguists became prominent in such fields as lexicology and lexicography, dialectology, grammar, and phonetics.

### *Lexicology*

The problems of Uyghur morphology and vocabulary had attracted the interest of scholars since the early 1950s. Since the Uyghurs lived over the last centuries within the Chinese state, their language has inevitably been influenced by Chinese. Chinese loanwords in Uyghur is no doubt one of the most distinguishing features of the language compared to other Turkic tongues, which was examined in a work by V. M. Novgorodskii [1951] devoted specially to the subject. I. A. Ismailov, a disciple of the outstanding Russian Turkologist S. Malov, examined another important aspect of Uyghur loanwords from Russian and other European languages through Russian [1954]. Other topics examined at that time included solid nouns [Sadvakasov 1958], pair words [Kaidarov 1958], and set expressions [Seifullina 1953].

Lexicological and morphological themes remained a focus for study during the 1970–1990s. In the 1970s, H. Nassyrova addressed Persian-Tajik loanwords in Uyghur, while Sh. Baratov examined Uyghur professional vocabulary [Baratov 1975]. Most of the linguists working for the Section of Uyghur studies were involved in research on lexicological problems. They included V. U. Makhpirov, who studied Old Turkic and Old Uyghur onomastic systems [Makhpirov 1997]. Later, in the 1990s, several Ph.D. dissertations were written on various aspects of lexicology, such as philological terminology (G. Semyatova), handicrafts terms (Sh. Ayupov), food names (Z. Islamova), botanical names (G. Nazarova), phraseology (R. Avakova), lexical and stylistic particularities of the poem “Kutadghu Bilik” by Yusuf Hass Hajib Balasaghuni [Arziev 1996].

### *Lexicography*

Compilation of different Uyghur dictionaries was another contribution by local scholars. The publication of bilingual dictionaries was stimulated by close Soviet-Chinese cooperation in Xinjiang and was done actually to facilitate the work of numerous Soviet specialists in Xinjiang during the early 1950s. Following the publication of several of these dictionaries in Moscow and other countries (Turkey and China), the Kazakhstani scholars Yu. Tsunvazo and A. Shamieva published the first Russian-Uyghur dictionary designed especially for Xinjiang Uyghur users [1955], which was followed by a similar dictionary by T. Rakhimov in Moscow [1956], which was more complete and included 30,000 words. A bilingual

Uyghur-Russian dictionary appeared in 1961, published in Alma-Ata by Sh. Kibirov and Yu. Tsunvazo and containing 16,000 words [Kibirov and Tsunvazo 1961], and in 1968 a similar dictionary of 33,000 words was published in Moscow by E. N. Najip [1968]. At the peak of the Cultural Revolution in China, when the authorities forcibly injected Chinese words into the Uyghur vocabulary, T. Rakhimov compiled a dictionary entitled *Chinese Elements in the Modern Uyghur Language* [1970], which was based on source materials found in the Xinjiang press during that period.

Of extreme practical importance were the Uyghur orthographic dictionary compiled by A. Iliev and G. Sadvakasov [1963] and the dictionary of synonyms by Z. Ivullaeva [1997]. For a long time Uyghur linguists had worked on an etymological dictionary, but did not finish the work. Fortunately, it was taken up by XUAR scholars leading to publication.

### *Dialectology*

The necessity to create a common literary language for all Uyghurs living in the Soviet Union required the study of the Uyghur dialects of Central Asia. The main contribution to this subject was the fundamental work by A. T. Kaidarov [1969], who identified two main dialects among the Soviet Uyghurs; namely Semirech'e and Ferghana, corresponding to the Ili and Kashgar dialects in the XUAR. Kaidarov concluded that the Semirech'e dialect was the dominant one. The Uyghur Studies Section at the Institute of Linguistics organized numerous expeditions to the places with concentrated Uyghur populations in order to examine their dialects. One result of such fieldwork was two-volume work by G. S. Sadvakasov on the Ferghana Valley Uyghurs in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan [1970, 1976], which concluded that the language there was then under the strong influence of Uzbek, to the point of turning into an Uzbek dialect, although during the expeditions of the 1960s the language of the Uyghur population in Ferghana Valley could still be identified as a Uyghur dialect. By the time of the fieldwork organized by the Institute of Uyghur Studies in the late 1980s, the process of "Uzbekization" had been fully accomplished.

### *Phonetics and grammar*

The phonetic and phonological system of modern Uyghur is another theme well studied by Central Asian linguists. Several books on the subject were published by T. Talipov, who also looked at it in comparison with the Kazakh language [Talipov 1968, 1984]. Phonetic processes in Uyghur were also examined by M. I. Trofimov, a scholar from Osh (Kyrgyzstan) [Trofimov 1978].



Problems of Uyghur grammar have been addressed only sporadically, never becoming the subject of a full study. What is available is a series of articles devoted to certain grammar categories, such as aspect, affixation, word-formation, particles, syntactic functions of the participle, and complex verbs. Grammar was described in the collective monograph *Hazirqi zaman Uyghur tili* (Modern Uyghur language), the first part of which was devoted to vocabulary and phonetics and the second to morphology and syntax [*Hazirqi zaman uyghur tili* 1963, 1966].

The results and findings of the Uyghur linguistics in Central Asia were publicized not only through local academic journals and other publications, but also in special volumes called *Issledovaniya po uigurskomu yazyku*, two of which came out in 1965 and 1970, and the last one in 1988 [*Issledovaniya po uigurskomu yazyku* 1965, 1970, 1988]. The main achievement of Uyghur linguistics in the 1990s was a collective book entitled *Stroi uigurskogo yazyka* [1989], which has been translated into Uyghur and published in China. Some other fields addressed by Kazakhstani scholars include socio-linguistics; however, the only research on the functioning of Uyghur in Kazakhstan was conducted by D. Kasymova [1995].

In sum, the study of Uyghur linguistics in Soviet Central Asia was not only the most advanced field in Uyghur studies, but also the one less bound to ideology. That is why its achievements were well received and disseminated in the neighboring XUAR, where linguistic studies started to develop intensively from the early 1990s on.

## Literature and Art

Although a genre of “Soviet literature” came into being quite during the first decades of the Soviet regime, the study of Uyghur literature began to develop in earnest only from the 1960s on, with focus on the analysis of “Soviet” Uyghur literature, which was one of the main subjects taught in Uyghur schools in Kazakhstan. The need for school textbooks was again a major stimulus for academic study in the field, as most scholars combined their research with textbook compilation for the Ministry of Education. Noteworthy here is the analysis of the novels by the well-known Kazakhstan people’s author, Ziya Samadi [Sabitova 1989].

In the area of Uyghur classical literature, the research was mostly concentrated on introducing Uyghur poets and publishing their poetry, resulting in the anthology entitled *Äsärlär sadasi* (Voice of the era), which covers eighteen poets [*Äsärlär sadasi* 1963]. One pre-modern Uyghur poet whose life and work were especially well studied in Central

Asia is Bilal Nazym, born in Kulja, but died in Semirech'e. His poetry was analyzed in a series of studies by S. Mollaoudov [1976] and U. Mamatakhunov [1963], to mention a few. In 1990 S. Mollaoudov published a collection of samples of eighteenth-century poetry, dealing mostly with the work of Zalilii, Naubatii, Arshii, Futuhii, Harabatii, Mashhurii, Sha'irahun, M. S. Qashqarii, Qalandar, and Ghumnam [Mollaoudov 1990].

It should be noted that discussion of classic literature inevitably raised the problem of a common classic heritage shared by modern Uyghurs and Uzbeks, as many of those considered to be Uyghur poets are described in Uzbekistan as Uzbek poets. This "contest" began with the ethnic attribution of Alisher Navoi, who according to the available sources was of Uyghur origin. Alisher Navoi's poetry was very popular among the Uyghurs, and many of his poems were used in the text of Uyghur musical composition *muqam*. The influence of Alisher Navoi on Uyghur literature in Eastern Turkistan was studied by D. Raikhanov, who in his Ph.D. dissertation discussed the Uyghur versions of Alisher Navoi's work and also studied the Uyghur version of the historical work *Tarixhi Rashidi* by Mirza Muhammad Haidar, a historian from Eastern Turkistan [2004]. Some theoretical problems of classic and modern poetry were studied by Uyghur scholars M. Khamraev, who looked at the theory of Turkic versification [1967], and A. Khamraev, who dealt with ancient Turkic verse [2002].

Other literary topics studied in Kazakhstan include Uyghur folklore (fairy tales, popular songs, proverbs, sayings) [Alieva 1975, 1989], Uyghur historical songs [Molotova 1994], modern historical novels [Yusupov 2004], Uyghur *dastan* [Arshidinov 2003], and Uyghur people songs (*qoshaq*) [Alakhunov 1977].

Regarding art, the history of Uyghur theatre in Kazakhstan and Uyghur dramatic writing were studied by A. Kadyrov [1984], while traditional Uyghur music, especially twelve Uyghur *muqam*, and the work of contemporary Soviet Uyghur composers were also discussed [Alibakieva 1988, Kirina 1980].

Due to the absence of relations with China for decades, Central Asian scholars were not given the opportunity to evaluate the literary works of authors from the XUAR prior to the 1990s and did not become the object of comprehensive study afterwards, except for scholars from the Institute of Oriental Studies who are interested in the history of Uyghur literature from ancient times to the present.

Of the numerous publications on literature that have come out in Central Asia, there is the important three-volume work done during the

1980s by a group of Uyghur scholars on oral creative works (literature) [*Uyghur häliq eghiz ijadiyiti* 1983], the history of Uyghur classical literature [*Uyghur ädäbiyitining qisqichä tarihi* 1983], and the history of Soviet Uyghur literature [*Uyghur Sovet ädäbiyitining tarihi* 1986]. This work was preceded by another general survey on Uyghur literature focused on tradition and innovation issues produced by local Kazakhstani scholars in 1970 [*Uyghur ädäbiyitidiki traditsiyä vä novatorluq mäsililirigä dair* 1970].

## Uyghur History and Ethnography

### *Uyghur-Chinese contests on the Uyghur history*

Modern studies on Uyghur history began in the 1940s and were stimulated by the political situation in Xinjiang. The establishment of the Eastern Turkistan Republic (ETR) in the three western prefectures of Xinjiang bordering Kazakhstan in 1944–49 played a crucial role in Uyghur historical writing, as vigorous discussion on the independence of Eastern Turkistan between ETR separatist leaders and Chinese provincial administrators made a history an essential point for the substantiation of Chinese political authority in this part of Central Asia. In his speeches, the provincial governor General Zhang Zhi-zhong frequently cited historical facts to show that the Uyghurs were not the only people indigenous to Xinjiang, but that Han people had also settled here from ancient times. Thus the history of the Uyghurs became an urgent point of the then political agenda. These discussions forced the Soviets to pay special attention to the study of Uyghur history in order to provide support to the ETR leadership in their ideological war against the Chinese Nationalists. Such support came from a part of the leading Soviet Turkologists and experts in Central Asian studies, such as S. E. Malov and A. N. Bernshtam. S. Malov, who made an outstanding contribution to the study of ancient Turkic inscriptions and texts, evacuated during World War II to Alma-Ata, where he was able to advise the Soviet authorities there on Uyghur issues and assist in training specialists in Uyghur studies. In his *Pamyatniki drevnetyurkskoi pis'mennosti* Malov highlighted the great contribution made by the Uyghurs to Central Asian civilization [1951].

Many articles on Uyghur history and culture written by other leading Soviet scholars were introduced in the Uyghur language magazine *Sharq haqiqati* published in Tashkent during the 1940–50s. The most important contribution to the historical study of the Uyghurs was made by A. N. Bernshtam. In 1947 the central journal *Vestnik Drevnei istorii*

(Herald of ancient history) published his article, “On problems of Eastern Turkistan history,” which gave an outline of the ancient history of Eastern Turkistan and the origins of the Uyghurs focusing on their indigenouslyness to Eastern Turkistan [Bernshtam 1947]. The article contained basic arguments and points which were to be elaborated later on by other scholars, especially the question of Uyghur origins. It is worth noting here that Bernshtam was, alongside with the Uyghur historian Muhammad Imin Bughra [Bughra 1940], the founder of modern Uyghur nationalistic history that arose in both Central Asia and Xinjiang. Even more important for the Uyghur nationalist historical view was Bernshtam’s book *Uyghur hālqining qādimi vā ottura āsir tarihi qissiliri* (Essays on the ancient and medieval history of the Uyghurs) [1951], which was published in Uyghur Arabic script for special distribution in Xinjiang. The book was written during the existence of the ETR, but it was completed and published in 1951 after the Chinese Communist takeover. However, since the new Communist regime was no longer interested in such a nationalist version of Uyghur history amicable to the Soviets, the book did not reach its readers in Xinjiang, and most of the copies were destroyed. Today only a few copies exist in public and personal libraries of the former Soviet Union. Nevertheless, all Uyghur historians were and are familiar with this work, and its role in the evolution of the Uyghur nationalist vision of their history cannot be underestimated. For example, the concept of Uyghur history formulated recently by Uyghur historian Turgun Almas in his book *Uygurlar* [1993] can be traced back to Bernshtam’s views, as well as those of other Soviet historians.

#### *Emphasis on national liberation movement*

National liberation movements have been an essential conceptual element in the communist perception of the modern historical process, and this was certainly true for the field of Uyghur Studies in the Soviet Union. During the 1940s the concept of national liberation was applied to the anti-Guomindang uprisings in Xinjiang which resulted in the founding of the ETR. With the communist takeover in China this line continued in Soviet scholarship, though without special emphasis, but it was especially strengthened with the culture revolution in China and the deterioration of Soviet-Chinese relations. The first Soviet Uyghur historian A. Idayatov, who edited the journal *Shariq haqiqiti* and then headed the first group of researchers on Uyghur history at the Kazakhstan Academy of Sciences, devoted his own work to the topic of national liberation. In 1944 he published a book on Sadyr Palvan, a Uyghur hero

who fought against Qing rule and was one of the leaders of the Muslim uprisings at the end of the nineteenth century [Idayatov 1944]. Another work, published posthumously, discusses the history of the national movement of the Ili Uyghurs [Idayatov 1978].

*Twentieth-century Uyghur history: The Eastern Turkistan Republic (1944–49)*

The twentieth-century history of Xinjiang was a fairly sensitive topic in Soviet historiography due to the USSR's active involvement in the political events occurring in Chinese Central Asia during the 1930s and 1940s. It was the Soviet Union that helped the Chinese authorities suppress the Muslim rebellion in Xinjiang and liquidate the Turkic Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkistan (TIRET) in Kashgaria during 1932–33, and also provided support for the regime of Sheng Shi-cai during the same decade. During the 1940s in new Xinjiang, Soviet interests prompted support of the uprisings staged by local peoples against the Guomindang administration and the founding of the Eastern Turkistan Republic (ETR). The Soviets always concealed their role in these events, which is why the circumstance surrounding TIRET were at first never discussed and then later interpreted as a national-liberation movement against the Guomindang regime, which by the way coincided with the Chinese communist interpretation. As for the ETR, Soviet historiography also followed the mainland Chinese line describing it as part of the Chinese democratic movement and calling it the “rebellion of three prefectures.” This line was followed in the Ph.D. dissertation work and article by M. Kutlukov [1962] and the work of N. Mingulov [1962].

During the period of deterioration in Soviet-Chinese relations, the interpretation of these events tended to change. They were still described as part of a democratic movement, but at the same time were also highlighted as an anti-Chinese national liberation movement. During that time the Soviet authorities encouraged anti-Chinese publications, which in Central Asia included the memoirs of Zunun Teipov, one of the ETR's military and government leaders. His book was at first published in Russian in Moscow under the title *V bor'be za svobodu* (Struggling for freedom) [Teipov 1974], then its Uyghur version came out in Alma-Ata under the title *Shärqi Turkistan yerida* (On the land of Eastern Turkistan) [Teipov 1977]. This was the only memoir literature published in Soviet Central Asia, despite a significant number of participants and eye-witnesses regarding the ETR, who during the 1950–60s had to flee the country from Chinese persecution and settle in Soviet Central Asia. Teipov's memoirs were written within the ideological frame of that

period and are valuable in providing details of the initial period of uprisings in the Ili region. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, numerous publications of a memoir character came out in local Uyghur newsletters. They revised the role of the Soviet Union, especially its negative role during the 1930s, and discussed the aspects of history that had been banned previously. It should be noted that Soviet archival materials pertaining to twentieth-century Xinjiang history still remain unstudied, despite some recent publications in Russia describing the situation subjectively and justifying the Soviet role [Barmin 1999].

### *History of Uyghur statehood*

As L. Benson and other scholars have shown, the history of the Uyghurs and their homeland has always been contested between Uyghur and Chinese historians. The Chinese official, nationalist view of that history, as well as on the history of other national minorities of China, embraces assertions that the territory of contemporary Xinjiang has been an integral part of China since antiquity, that the Uyghurs as well as other nationalities living in China belong to the Chinese nation (*zhonghua minzu*), hence they and their ancestors have never been independent from China and never formed their own state. In this contest the subjects of independent statehood and relationships with China have been very important. The main elements of the Uyghur nationalist view of history expressed by Turgun Almas in the XUAR in 1989 were first formulated in Soviet academic historiography, which looked at the homeland of the Uyghurs as an integral part of Central Asia and at the Uyghur people as a part of Central Asian and Turkic commonality. The alternative name of the Uyghur homeland, “Eastern Turkistan,” also emerged from Russian scholarship.

The version of Uyghur history first formulated during the 1940s was later elaborated by Central Asian scholars, for whom the issue of the Uyghur statehood was always essential, which is why attempts were made to reconstruct the history of medieval Uyghur states in Eastern Turkistan. Russian scholars and travelers found and took home a good deal of texts written by Uyghurs of the Turfan kingdom (9–11th centuries), including those collected by Russian explorers of Eastern Turkistan and now kept in the St. Petersburg (former Leningrad) Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, which were to become a basis for much Turkological research. One of the main contributions to reconstructing the history of medieval Uyghur states is a book by D. I. Tikhonov devoted to the economic structure of the Uyghur Turfan state [1966]. The social and economic structure of Uyghurstan during the

thirteenth-fourteenth centuries was discussed in the Ph.D. dissertation written by Uyghur archeologist A. K. Kibirov [1949] which still remains unpublished. The history of the Turfan kingdom was also studied in Germany by the well-known Turkologist A. von Gabain [1961, 1973].

Uyghur history acquired more political significance during the decades of Soviet-Chinese enmity and ideological war during the 1970–80s, in which both sides criticized one another by distorting and falsifying what really happened. Special focus on how Chinese were falsifying Uyghur history was done in two small books by Tursun Rakhimov, a Uyghur historian working at the Institute of Far East Studies in Moscow, in which he provided counter arguments to the Chinese interpretation and argued that the Uyghurs have a long time history of their own statehood, which was interrupted by the Chinese invasion and occupation of their homeland [Rakhimov 1968, 1981].

Also controversial was the Soviet interpretation of the short lived Muslim polities that had come into being at the end of the nineteenth century in Xinjiang as the result of Muslim revolts against the Qing Dynasty. During the early 1950s Soviet historians followed the Chinese interpretation, according to which the Kashgaria Emirate established by Yakub-bek was considered as a foreign invasion. However, with deterioration of Soviet-Chinese relations, the Soviet interpretation began to look at it as part of a national liberation movement, in which the Kashgaria Emirate was described as a Uyghur state by such scholars as D. Isiev, whose book *Uigurskoe gosudarstvo Yattishar* came out in 1981 and constituted a serious contribution to the subject, introducing for the first time Russian archival materials on the relations between Yakub-bek and the Russian Empire.

For a long time the history of Uyghur statehood was a priority theme in the Section of Uyghur History and Ethnography at the Institute of Linguistics and then Institute of Uyghur Studies, where projects included “The political history of the Uyghur states,” “The economic and social structure of the Uyghur states,” and “The political history of Eastern Turkistan during the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries,” in which the history of all the polities established by the Uyghurs and their ancestors were covered.

Central Asian scholars have revised some of the epochs in the history of the Uyghurs, including the earliest Uyghur polity established in Inner Asia called the Uyghur Empire (744–840). The history of this Empire, which was a predecessor of the Uyghur Turfan Kingdom in Eastern Turkistan, was a very important subject for studying the history of Uyghur statehood. The main stages of political and military history of

the nomadic Uyghurs and their Empire (Khaghanate) have been discussed by many scholars, including Russian historians L. Gumilev, L. Kyzlasov, and S. Klyashtorny. One main contributor to this theme is Australian historian C. Mackerras, who thoroughly examined related Chinese accounts of the Tang period. However, the discovery of new runic inscriptions of the Uyghur epoch from Mongolia during the 1970s and 80s made it possible to revise the Uyghur Empire's history. A comparative analysis of the Chinese and Old Uyghur runic inscriptions have enabled the present reviewer to address many problems posed by the Uyghur Khaghanate of the eighth-ninth centuries from new perspectives [Kamalov 2001, 2002]. Another aspect of medieval Uyghur history studied in Kazakhstan is the Uyghurs' role in the Yuan Empire as discussed in the work of A. Kadyrbaev [1993]. The period of Mongol domination in Eastern Turkistan is also described by M. Kutlukov [1977]; while more recent research on medieval history include a contribution by N. Tursun, a Uyghur scholar from the XUAR who lived and worked for a while in Central Asia. His book gives a thorough analysis of the Chinese historiography on the medieval Uyghurs and presents a full review of Uyghur history done by Chinese scholars [Tursun 1998]. In another publication Tursun focuses on the Chinese views of Uyghur origins [Tursun 1997].

*The Uyghurs in Semirech'e: Indigenous people or immigrants?*

During the period of the ETR, Communists leaders of Kazakhstan raised the problem of establishing Uyghur autonomy in the Semirech'e region (southeastern Kazakhstan), where the Uyghurs comprised the majority of the population. Autonomy was seen as a measure to support the ETR regime; however, it was not realized due to the later Communist takeover in China. With the establishment of the PRC in 1949, there was no longer a need for the ETR in China, and the Soviets terminated their support to the Eastern Turkistan secessionist movement. Nevertheless, the possibility of Uyghur autonomy in Kazakhstan was well reflected in academic writing and stimulated research on the role of the Uyghurs in Semirech'e's past. Such work aimed at preparing a basis for setting up an administrative autonomous unit for the Uyghurs includes studies on the Uyghur epigraphic monuments in Semirech'e by A. N. Bernshtam [1947b, 1948].

The discourse on the Uyghur autonomy within Kazakhstan raised by the Communist party played a part in fostering Uyghur nationalism in Central Asia; and it is coincidental that the idea of being indigenous to Semirech'e has become one of the core elements of contemporary Uyghur



nationalism in Central Asia. Surely, the claims for autonomy, real or imagined, have affected Uyghur-Kazakh relations in Central Asia, which is another topic in the existing scholarship.

To cope with Uyghur nationalism in Central Asia after 1949, the Soviet authorities especially encouraged academic research on Uyghur migration to Semirech'e and all related topics, such as the history of the Qing occupation of Eastern Turkistan and the Muslim uprisings which resulted in the occupation of the Ili valley by the Russian Empire in 1871. The Uyghur migration to Russian Semirech'e was a topic of numerous works by such scholars as M. Turgunov, G. Nikolskaya, L. Auezova, P. Galuzo, and Yu. Baranova [Turgunov 1950]. In 1951 a book entitled *Pereselenie Iliiskikh Uigurov v Semirech'e* (The migration of the Ili Uyghurs to Semirech'e), Malik Kabirov thoroughly examined the migration that occurred at the end of the nineteenth century based on an analysis of Russian archival materials [Kabirov 1951]. This and other similar research demonstrated the progressive development of the Uyghur migration into the territory of the Russian Empire, on the one hand, while proving that the Uyghurs were immigrants to the region and thus do not have the right to autonomy in Kazakhstan. The history of the Uyghur migration to Semirech'e still remains important for Kazakhstani historiography and is a subject included in all the textbooks on the history of Kazakhstan.

Ironically, Uyghur historian Malik Kabirov, who made the largest contribution to the study of the Uyghur migration to Semirech'e during the late 1980s, was a main proponent of the idea of Uyghur autonomy in the region and submitted to the Central Committee of the CPSU a manuscript entitled "Uigury—avtokhtony Semirech'ya" (Uyghurs are the autochthons of Semirech'e), for which he was criticized by the Communist leaders of Kazakhstan for being a Uyghur nationalist. Other themes scrutinized throughout the 1970s and 80s relating to the Uyghur migration to Semirech'e included the history of the Qing occupation of Eastern Turkistan and anti-Qing Muslim uprisings, as well as the history of the Uyghurs after settling in the Russian Empire. Russian and Qing government policy in Central Asia was usually handled by scholars from central institutions of Moscow and Leningrad, while local Central Asian scholars merely elaborated on their ideas. The conquest of Central Asia by the Qing Empire was elucidated in the research of L. Duman, B. Gurevich, D. Tikhonov, V. Kuznetsov, then discussed by local scholars, like Kh. Ziyaev, who studied the 1826 rebellion in Eastern Turkistan [1952], and D. Isiev, who examined the other anti-Qing Uyghur rebellions [1978].

*Medieval history: Continuity between the Old and Modern Uyghurs*

The study of medieval Turkic history in Central Asia has both strengthened nationalist sentiment among the nations of the region and raised controversial issues among its different ethnic groups. The history of the Uyghurs is no exception. The two main topics in this context is the relationship between the Old Uyghurs, who established an empire in 744, the sedentary states existing in Eastern Turkistan and Gansu at that time and the modern Uyghur people. The dynamic involved was stimulated by the publication of the book *Uigurskie gosudarstva v IX-XII vv* (Uyghur states from the 9th to 12th century) by A. G. Malyavkin [1983], who first worked in Alma-Ata before moving to Novosibirsk and was known as an expert on the Tang sources related to the Old Uyghurs specializing in historical geography. The book attempts to substantiate the idea that the Turkic tribes migrated to Eastern Turkistan after the collapse of the Uyghur Kaghanate in 840 were not Uyghurs; rather, the Old Uyghur element was the smallest in the formation of the modern Uyghur people. Such a notion became popular among the Turkic peoples, especially the Kazakh historians, for whom Old Uyghur history is of great importance for the traces they left behind in Semirech'e and the Uyghur nationalist argument claiming their indigenous origins in the region. Consequently, the interest of Kazakh intellectuals in the history of the Old Uyghurs and their connection with the modern Uyghur people is bound to territorial nationalism, which is frequently demonstrated in the Kazakh literature on the medieval history of Central Asia. Some Kazakh scholars even reject the argument that there was a Uyghur Kaghanate and attempt to show that what has been considered such polity was in fact only a "united kaghanate of Turks" [Karjaubai 2002]. For this reason, while the academic research on the history of Kazakhstan does cover the Uyghur Kaghanate as a part of the Old Turkic period (*drevnetyurkskii* period), the modern history textbooks avoid mentioning it, but never fail to include a description of the Uyghur migration to Semirech'e at the end of the nineteenth century.

Another controversial point concerns the ethnic attributes of the Karakhanids, the first Muslim Turkic dynasty (9–12th centuries) that has no clear history, resulting in numerous hypotheses that include Uyghur origins as accepted in China. Such a notion is based on the Muslim sources that say a Turkic tribe, the Yaghma, which might have been a royal clan, was of Tokuz-Oghuz (Uyghur) origin. Every Central Asian Turkic people has its own claim to the Karakhanids, since the dynasty's territory covered all of Eastern Turkistan, Semirech'e, and Mavarannahr, which today includes all the Central Asian Republics and

the XUAR. This contest over Karakhanid history is most often waged around two well-known Turkic celebrities of the time, the poet Yusuf Khass Khajib (Balasaguni) and linguist Makhmud Kashgari (both of the 11th century). Karakhanid history is an even more sensitive topic for Kyrgyz history, since Yusuf Hass Hajib (Balasaguni) is believed to have been born near Issyk-kul (a lake in Kyrgyzstan). It is also noteworthy that the identification of the Old and Modern Uyghurs is not objected to in the Kyrgyz historiography, due to the fact that the Old Uyghurs were defeated and their state destroyed by the Enissey Kyrgyz, an event strongly symbolizing Kyrgyz nationalist ideology.

### *The blossoming of Soviet Uyghur culture*

Institutional support for the development of Uyghur culture was provided by the Soviet governments for the ideological purpose of demonstrating the triumph of national Communist policy. Similar task was imposed upon the field of Uyghur studies, which was given the mandate to make Uyghur culture flourish under the Soviet regime. Quite symbolic in such a context is the title of a book written by Mashur Roziyev, the former Soviet advisor to Xinjiang during the 1930s and 1940s, which reads *Yanglivashstin tughulghan uyghur hālqi* (The Uyghur people revived) [1968]. It was published in Uyghur, then in Russian in 1982. Such books as M. Khamraev's *Rastsvet uigurskoi kul'tury* (The blossoming of Uyghur culture) [1967a] were written to demonstrate that only in the Soviet Union were the Uyghurs able to revive their culture and make it flourish. The Soviets also promoted scholarship on the social and cultural achievements of the Uyghurs in the USSR, which produced M. Kabirov's *Ocherki istorii uigurov Sovetskogo Kazakhstana* (Essays on the history of the Uyghurs of Soviet Kazakhstan) [1975]. Other research related to the Soviet Uyghurs includes the history of the Uyghur press by M. Erzin [1980] and the socioeconomic structure of the Semirech'e Uyghurs by G. Baratova [1994].

### *Uyghur ethnography*

Ethnographic research on the Uyghurs in Central Asia has been usually confined to either historical ethnography (i.e., an analysis of the ethnographic accounts appearing in the historical sources) or the material culture and traditions of the Soviet Uyghurs. Such focuses are only natural due to the impossibility of conducting fieldwork in Xinjiang at the present time. However, the first complex expedition to Uyghur villages in Kazakhstan was organized in 1947 by scholars from Moscow and Leningrad, and further expeditions examined social and family life

among Uyghur women, the material culture of Uyghurs in Semirech'e and Ferghana Valley, resulting in the sections on the Uyghur ethnic history, material culture, family relations, culture and art that appeared in *Narody Vostochnoi Azii* (Nations of East Asia) in 1965 and *Narody Tsentral'noi Azii i Kazakstana* (Nations of Central Asia and Kazakhstan) in 1968. Similar expeditions were made by the Section of Uyghur Studies to Alma-Ata and Taldy-Kurgan Oblast' (both making up present-day Almaty oblast') in Kazakhstan, and Osh Oblast' in Kyrgyzstan, and Andijan Oblast' in Uzbekistan during the 1960s–70s. The fieldwork produced both a series of articles on the Uyghurs and an important source for the book by R. Karimova on traditional Uyghur art crafts [2005].

Accounts of Russian travelers to Eastern Turkistan during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries contain voluminous and valuable on ethnographic information about the Uyghurs and have been used extensively by Soviet scholars, such as G. Iskhakov [1975]. A history of the Russian exploration of Eastern Turkistan is traced in the book by S. Klyashtorny and A. Kolesnikov published in a later form by the Institute of Uyghur Studies [1988]; and the same duo were joined by M. Baskhanov in a similar study of European explorers in the region [Klyashtorny, Kolesnikov, and Baskhanov 1991]. In both cases the most important contribution was made by Klyashtorny on ancient and medieval Eastern Turkistan. International relations in Central Asia with a focus on Eastern Turkistan was a topic of a volume prepared by a group of scholars of the Institute of Uyghur Studies in 1990 [*Iz istorii mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii v Tsentral'noi Azii* 1990].

### *General histories*

The group of Uyghur historians at the mentioned institution has released several important collections on the history and culture of the Uyghurs, including *Materialy po istorii i kul'ture uigurskogo naroda* (Materials on the history and culture of the Uyghur people) [1978] and *Voprosy istorii i kul'tury uigurov* (Problems of the history and culture of the Uyghurs) [1987], in which scholars present the results of their own research.

Research materials on the political history of the Uyghurs done in the 1980s were used in the compilation of a general history of the Uyghurs, the first part of which was published in 1991 as a collaborative project of local historians and a group of scholars from Moscow and Leningrad [*Kratkaya istoriya uigurov* 1991]. It covers the period from ancient times through the Mongol epoch and follows a traditional line in reconstructing Uyghur history, tracing their origins back to the Turkic nomadic peoples of Inner Asia. Unfortunately, the second part of the

book never appeared after the closure of the Institute of Uyghur Studies. An individual attempt to compile a general history of the Uyghurs was undertaken by D. Isiev in his *Uyghur tarihi* [1995], which was initially intended as a textbook for Uyghur schools.

*Rewriting Uyghur history in post-Soviet Central Asia*

The emergence of new nation-states in Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet Union has been accompanied by the revision and the rewriting of national histories promoted by the various governments, which are mainly interested in legitimizing their right to rule. At the same time, history is being rewritten by individuals to meet the needs of growing nationalism. Although academic work was strictly controlled by the state during the Soviet period, under the post-Soviet regime, at least in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, relative freedom to write and publish has prompted the emergence of popular histories authored by non-professionals mainly of a nationalist historical bent with much distortion and falsification of the past, as indicated by Paul Gilbert, who sees perceiving history incorrectly is a requirement of nationalism appearing in all the post-Soviet countries, Uyghur writings being no exception. Among those mythologizing national histories in Central Asia are the three books written by Kasim Masimi on Uyghur “history,” in which one finds the re-animation of all the legends and myths that arose among the Uyghurs in the history of Eurasia, including the idea of G. Churchward that an ancient Uyghur Empire existed 17,000 years ago [Masimi 2002]. Such an unscientific view of Uyghur history has been criticized by many scholars, though general readers seem willing to accept it at face value. Another aspect of the revision of Uyghur history in Central Asia concerns how to address those topics which were banned during the Soviet era, which include (1) the mass shooting of Uyghurs in Semirech’e by Bolsheviks under the command of Muraev in 1918; (2) the Soviet repression of Uyghur intellectuals; and (3) the USSR’s role in the suppression of local uprisings in Xinjiang during the 1930s and its involvement in the rise and fall of the ETR during the 1940s. This last topic has been examined by K. Talipov [2002], but there are also books for the general reader on the history of the twentieth-century Uyghurs, such as *Uigury v rakurse istorii* by K. Khodzhamberdi [2001].

## UYGHUR STUDIES IN UZBEKISTAN AND KYRGYZSTAN

Though Kazakhstan has always been the main center of Uyghur studies, scholars from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have also contributed to the field, as seen in the previous sections. The participation of scholars from these republics in the field was first stipulated by the Uyghur Section at the Oriental Faculty of Tashkent State University during the 1940s and 50s, when it was educational needs that stimulated academic research, first of all in the fields of Linguistics, Literature and Art. Some of the already mentioned scholars, such as O. Mamatakhunov, I. Ismailov, K. Meliev, and S. Rozybakiev worked in the Section. Similarly, in the Republican Academies, special groups dealing with the history of relations among these republics focused their attention on the historical links among Central Asia, Eastern Turkistan, and China. One such group at the Institute of Oriental Studies of Uzbekistan made a study of relations among the Kokand Khanate, Eastern Turkistan, and the Qing Empire, which are discussed in the work of A. Khodzhaev [1979]. Several aspects of Eastern Turkistan history have been emphasized by such Uzbekistani scholars as I. Tukhtiev, A. Aitbayev, E. Ismalilova, and O. Jalilov [Jalilov 2001]. In Kyrgyzstan a group of scholars has been formed to study problems related to Uyghur philosophy [Narynbaev 1988].

Cooperation between scholars of Kazakhstan and those of other republics flourished during the existence of the Institute of Uyghur Studies, which could sponsor joint projects with institutions in other republics. One example is the publication of Chinese materials on the history of Eastern Turkistan and Central Asia [*Kitaiskie dokumenty i materialy po istorii Vostochnogo Turkestana, Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana XIV-XIX vv.* 1994]. As for the Uyghur community in Turkmenistan (Bairam-Ali), while it is too small to contribute to Uyghur studies, one of its representatives, M. R. Mamatov, co-authored a brochure together with D. A. Isiev on the history and contemporary life of the Bairam-Ali Uyghurs [Isiev and Mamatov 1976].

## CONCLUSION

The Soviet authorities stimulated Uyghur studies in Central Asia for both practical and ideological purposes; and since the cultural center of the Soviet Uyghurs was Kazakhstan and its capital city of Alma-Ata, the institutional development of Uyghur studies also occurred in Kazakhstan, though research was also being conducted in Russia and the

other Central Asian republics. Intensive Uyghur studies began in the 1940s and covered different aspects of history and culture. The peak of Uyghur studies was reached during the era of the Research Institute of Uyghur Studies at the Academy of Sciences of Kazakh SSR between 1986 and 1995, which was subsequently closed down rather effortlessly, since it had been established by the Soviet government against the will of Kazakh nationalist intellectuals. Another important reason for its closure was the pressure being applied by China, which had become extremely influential in Central Asia after the formation of the Shanghai Organization of Cooperation.

The field of Uyghur studies achieved appreciable successes in linguistics, literature, and history, as academic research being done in Soviet Central Asia influenced the development of the field in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China. For example, linguistic research in the XUAR was strongly affected by the work published by Kazakhstani scholars. The historical studies conducted in Soviet Central Asia played a major role in shaping Uyghur nationalistic ideology and Uyghur historical study in the XUAR.

As for the present situation in this once highly developed field of scholarship in Central Asia, one might characterize it as having lost governmental support in Kazakhstan; and despite the state-initiated de-emphasis on the field, Uyghur studies still persists in changing its previous institutional aspect of functioning into individual projects conducted mainly by scholars of Uyghur origin working at the Center of Uyghur Studies and at various institutions of higher education in Kazakhstan. The outcomes of their work are also being published [*Uyghurshunasliq boyichä tätqiqatlar* 1999, 2000, 2001]. It should also be noted that while during the Soviet era Soviet research in Uyghur studies influenced Xinjiang scholarship, in the post-Soviet era Uyghur research done in Xinjiang has significantly influenced the ideas and approaches of Central Asian scholars. The best example of this is the popularity of the historical work done by Turgun Almas, *Uigury* (The Uyghurs), which has been published in Almaty in Cyrillic Uyghur and translated into Russian [Almas 1993].

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