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Author(s): Minglang Zhou

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Language policy and reforms of Uyghur and Kazak writing systems in China *

MINGLANG ZHOU
University of Colorado, Boulder

1. Introduction

China officially has fifty-five ethnic minority nationalities (EMN's) with a combined population of about 91 million (1990 census). Members of this population speak more than eighty languages, most of which do not have written forms. In the last forty-plus years, under the auspices of the Chinese government and the guidance of its EMN language policy, thirty versions of writing systems have been created for some oral languages, and nineteen existing writing systems have been reformed or revised (Zhou 1999a). These new and revised writing systems have had profound impacts on the education, literary traditions, culture, and daily life of the 91 million EMN people in China.

Among the nineteen reformed and/or revised writing forms are the writing systems of Uyghur and Kazak, two Turkic languages, that underwent a major reform from the Arabic script to the Latin alphabet in the 1960s, and a second major reform from the Latin Alphabet back to the revised Arabic script in the early 1980s, in addition to minor revisions of the Arabic alphabet carried out during the early 1950s and the abortive introduction of a Cyrillic writing system in the middle of the 1950s. Detailed information on these reforms does not seem to be available to linguists and writing system specialists outside China (cf. Coulmas 1989, Coulmas 1996, Daniels and Bright 1996, Johnson and Csatoz 1998).

This paper briefly reviews the Chinese government's EMN policies, which dictate its language policy; describes the processes by which the old writing systems were revised and new ones were introduced; investigates the impact that these reforms have had on more than seven million Uyghur speakers and over one million Kazak speakers (1990 census) in China; and examines the significance of the Chinese government's language policy for language policy makers and researchers in China and worldwide.

2. EMN policies and language policy in China

Since 1949, the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) EMN policies have been theoretically guided by Marxist-Leninist views of nation and nationality, and practically modeled after those of the former Soviet Union (cf. Dreyer 1976, Dreyer 1997, Mackerras 1994). In nationality classification, for example, the Chinese government adopts Stalin's definition of nationality as being based on common language, common territory, common economic life, and common culture (see AOPROSNAC 1996), but it has never applied this definition dogmatically, as Zhou Enlai, premier of China 1949-1976, pointed out (cf. Liu and Zhang). In China, nationality (minzu) is instead defined by one or more of those common features in either contemporary or historical terms. Particularly influential has been that nationalities rise in the development to capitalism and converge in the development to communism (cf. Stalin 1975). The key issue for the CCP is the pace of the development between capitalism and communism. Is it a long-term development, as has been the official view since 1979, or a short-term development, as was believed at the time of the Great Leap Forward and throughout the Cultural Revolution? Both views consider nationalism a stage to be transcended in the international unification

of the proletariat; the question is whether, in the immediate present, it should be tolerated, discouraged, or opposed. The struggle between these two views has influenced the CCP's EMN policies, which in turn have swayed the Chinese government's language policy for EMN languages and resulted in the frequent reforms of Uygur and Kazak writing systems.

The right for EMN peoples to use and develop their native languages and writing systems has been guaranteed constitutionally in China, since the provisional of 1949, with reaffirmations in 1954, 1975, 1978, 1982, and 1999. However, there has been a gap between the constitutional guarantee and Chinese practice.

In the early 1950s, the long-term development view was dominant within the CCP and the Chinese government. In 1951, the State Council established an EMN language and writing system research and guidance committee within the Ministry of Education (cf. EBCCNW 1989). In the following years, this committee sent teams of linguists to EMN communities to study EMN languages and to work with local EMN autonomous governments on creating writing systems for oral languages and on reforming existing writing systems.

The first sign of change came at the beginning of 1956. First, in January of that year, the Central Committee of the CCP set a two-to-three year timetable for creating and reforming EMN writing systems (cf. EBCCNW 1989). Second, in March of the same year, the State Council centralized authority over EMN writing systems, making the EMN Language Institute of the Chinese Science Academy responsible for creating writing systems, the State Nationality Affairs Commission responsible for checking and approving them, the Ministry of Education responsible for experimentation and implementation, the Ministry of Culture responsible for translation and publication in EMN languages, and the Central Institute for Nationalities responsible for training EMN linguists and language educators. These regulations deprived local EMN autonomous governments of authority in EMN language affairs.

As late as the beginning of 1956, the Chinese government's language policy for EMN languages was still independent of its language policy for Chinese. An instruction by the CCP Central Committee in January 1956 clearly stated that Putonghua (PTH, the official national language based on Mandarin) was to be promoted among the Hans only (see PROSCLS 1996). And an instruction issued by the State Council in February 1956 stated that in EMN autonomous regions PTH was to be promoted only within Han communities and in Chinese language classes for EMN students (see PROSCLS 1996). But in April 1956, Mao Zedong, in a speech "On Ten Relationships", expressed the short-term development view that both Han chauvinistic nationalism and EMN nationalism should be fought against as obstacles to the unity of nationalities under socialism. In July 1957, Zhou Enlai echoed this adjuration. A further turning point came in September of the same year, when at a CCP Central Committee meeting, Deng Xiaoping, then general secretary of the CCP, emphasized that in the Antirightist Struggle the focus was on the struggle against local nationalism in EMN regions (EBCCNW 1989:80). Finally, in 1964, *Red Flag*, the journal of the CCP, published an article "On current nation/nationality issues and class struggle in our country", which asserts that nation/nationality issues are class issues. This assertion had great implications: anyone who raises any issue not in favor of the rapid assimilation into the majority Han could be considered a class enemy.

When the short-term development view became dominant in 1958, implementation of language policy changed radically, though the constitutionally guaranteed EMN language right was still there. The change was first seen in the

convergence of the language policy for EMN languages and that for Chinese. After the Plan for the Phonetic Spelling of Chinese (in the Latin alphabet) was officially published in November 1957, the State Council made it clear that the Plan would play a significant role in the creation of writing systems for EMN languages and in EMN peoples' learning of PTH (see PROSCLS 1996). This role was spelled out by Zhou Enlai in January 1958: the Plan would serve as the common base for creating and reforming EMN writing systems which would use the Latin alphabet with pronunciations and usage similar to those in the Plan (Liu and Zhang 1994:190-1, Seybolt and Chiang 1979:236-7). From then on, the Chinese government's language policy for EMN languages became part of its language policy for Chinese. During the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government's language policy was mostly ignored because of weakened governments at various levels or occasionally carried out radically in some regions because of some radicals in power.

At the end of 1978, during the third session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CCP, the long-term development view finally began to win over the short-term development view. A day after the meeting, the State Nationality Affairs Commission and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences held an academic forum focusing on two key issues in nation/nationality affairs: the timetable of nation/nationality convergence and the nature of nation/nationality issues. Consensus was reached that nation/nationality would exist for a long time, and that nation/nationality issues were essentially not class issues. This forum paved the way for a more pluralistic approach in the CCP's EMN policies and in the Chinese government's language policy for EMN languages. On July 15, 1980, *The People's Daily* carried an article, criticizing the 1964 *Red Flag* article and stating in public, for the first time in more than twenty years, that nation/nationality issues are not class issues. In the same year, the third national conference on EMN languages called for more respect of constitutionality in EMN language use and writing system reforms, and made long-term plans for EMN language research. Many ideas put forward during the 1979 and 1980 conferences were adopted in the revision of the PRC constitution in 1982 and in the drafting of the 1984 legislation on regional EMN autonomous governing, which specifically states that local EMN autonomous governments guarantee their people the right to use their native languages and develop their writing systems, and decide what EMN language(s) shall be adopted in regional government business.

3. Uygur and Kazak writing system reforms

Historically, Uygur and Kazak speakers have used several scripts for their respective languages, but by 1949 both had settled on slightly different Arabic scripts (cf. Benson and Svanberg 1998, Niu 1997). In the early 1950s, when the EMN language policy basically focused on improving existing writing systems and eradicating mass illiteracy, reform efforts were devoted to technical details and to matching between oral languages and written forms so that it would be easy for people to learn to read in the mass campaign against illiteracy. In 1952, revisions were made in the Arabic alphabet for Uygur. In the then current Arabic alphabet, the letter ع was used to represent two vowels ([e], [i]) and one consonant ([j]), while the letter و was used to represent four vowels ([u],[y],[o], [ø]) and one consonant ([v/w]). To simplify the relationship between letters and phonemes, the letter ع was replaced with ع for [e], ي for [i], and ج for [j]. At the same time, the letter و was replaced with 'و' for [u] and [y], 'و' for [o] and [ø], and 'و' for [v/w]. In 1954, minor

revisions were made in the Arabic alphabet where the letter ئ was changed to ئ for [e] and the letter ي to ئ for [i] (see Hu 1979, SOCWSRXUAR 1962). These revisions led to what is known as the old Uygur writing system, as shown in (1) below.

The revision of the Kazak writing system did not take place until 1954. There was a discussion among Kazak linguists, educators and publishers about the letter ۇ for [w] and the letter ج for [j]. Before the revision, the letter ۇ represented the consonant [w], while the letter cluster ۇۋ represented the glide [uw], and the cluster ۇۋۋ stood for [yw], and the letter ج represented the consonant [j], whereas the letter cluster جج stood for [aj], and the cluster ئجج represented [ij]. After the revision, the letter ۇ represented [w] before or after vowel letters, while it stood for [uw] and [yw] after consonant letters. Similarly, the ج represented [j], when it appeared before or after vowel letters, but [aj] and [ij] after consonant letters (Geng 1989:32-37, SOCWSRXUAR 1962). These revisions ended in what is usually called the old Kazak writing system, as in (2) below.

Debates about the best scripts for Uygur and Kazak, however, continued in Xinjiang. Given what appeared to be a close relationship between China and the former Soviet Union at that time, the Cyrillic alphabet became a good candidate. The Uygur and Kazak communities had very different attitudes toward the Cyrillic alphabet. The Uygur communities used to have closer ties with the idea of a Pan-Turkestan and Pan-Turkism than the Kazak communities did (cf. XLJBZ 1993). For example, the Turkish-Islamic Eastern Turkestan Republic was established, with British and Islamic support, in south Xinjiang in 1933, but crashed by the Xinjiang government with Soviet assistance in about a year. The idea of the Eastern Turkestan continues to influence Uygur communities in some ways (cf. Mackerras 1994, XLJBZ 1993). On the other hand, the Kazak communities used to have closer ties with the Kazaks in the former Soviet Union, where eighty percent of all Kazaks live. There was relatively free movement of Kazaks across the border. Soviet publications in Kazak (in the Cyrillic Alphabet) were imported and used in Chinese Kazak schools in the early and middle 1950s (cf. Wang 1990). Given the two contrasting situations, the Uygur communities appeared to be much less enthusiastic about, if not hostile to, the Cyrillic alphabet than the Kazak communities were. In 1956, during the first Xinjiang Conference on EMN languages, a decision was made to adopt Cyrillic alphabets to replace the existing Arabic alphabets for Uygur, Kazak, and several other EMN languages in the next ten years. The ten-year plan might have been halfhearted, as the leadership of the CCP was suspicious of the intentions of the leadership of the former Soviet Union (cf. Benson and Svanberg 1998). It was, of course, later interrupted by the worsening relationship between China and the former Soviet Union. Most important of all, by late 1957, the short-term development view had become dominant and the Plan for the Phonetic Spelling of Chinese had been adopted by the central government. Therefore, the scheme to replace Arabic alphabets with Cyrillic ones for Uygur and Kazak was fortunately abandoned before it was put into practice in Uygur and Kazak communities in Xinjiang.

Soon after the Plan and Zhou Enlai's speech were published in 1958, Uygur and Kazak linguists and educators dutifully began discussing Latin alphabets for Uygur and Kazak. However, this time the atmosphere of the discussions was completely different. In the middle of December 1957, an expanded conference of the Xinjiang CCP Committee convened, which lasted over four months. At the conference, Seypidin Azizi, then governor of Xinjiang and secretary of the Xinjiang

CCP Committee (under the first secretary, Wang Enmou) made a speech opposing local (EMN) nationalism. A fierce struggle was seen at the four-month conference--so fierce--that Seypidin was accused of being soft on local nationalism, and had to make self-criticisms during the conference to keep his position. Many EMN CCP officials, together with some Han CCP officials, were removed or demoted from their posts for their local nationalism or tolerance of local nationalism. Four months later, the conference of the Xinjiang CCP concluded, on April 28 1958, with a resolution on opposing and overcoming local (EMN) nationalism in Xinjiang.

How the short-term development view influenced discussions on writing system reforms for Uygur, Kazak, and other EMN languages is best seen in Seypidin Azizi's speech at the second conference on Xinjiang's EMN languages, held in December 1959 (cf. Azizi 1960). In his speech concerning nation/nationality and language, Seypidin Azizi first elaborated on Stalin's notion on the rise and convergence of nation/nationality, talked about the necessity of national convergence or assimilation under socialism, clarified the role of language as a tool for class and social struggle, and stressed the importance of fighting against bourgeois nationalism in language and script reforms, as he concluded:

To oppose the adoption of the new writing systems based on the Plan for the Phonetic Spelling of Chinese and to oppose the development of EMN languages along with Chinese is to oppose socialism and communism of the Chinese peoples, and to oppose the creation or reform of writing systems for EMN languages based on the Plan is to oppose the unity of all Chinese nationalities and the unification of the motherland. (Azizi 1960:15)

Clearly any discussion on writing system reforms beyond the Plan was very risky in that situation at that time. Not surprisingly, the language conference, which was claimed to have overcome reactionary nationalist thoughts on EMN language and writing system development in Xinjiang, adopted Latin alphabets as the new writing systems for Uygur and Kazak and planned to utilize the new writing systems exclusively within three to five years.

To justify the adoption of the new writing systems, three major technical reasons were given in addition to a number of political and social justifications (SOCWSRXUAR 1962). First, it was claimed that the old writing systems could not fully represent the oral languages. For example, in Uygur, even after the revisions, the letter و stood for both [o] and [ø], and the letter ئو stood for both [u] and [y], resulting in one form for different meanings. A similar situation was also found in Kazak where the letter ў represented [w], [uw], and [yw], and the letter й represented [j], [əj], and [ij]. Second, it was said that the old writing systems could not fully represent loan words from Chinese in the distinction between letters and letter combinations j [tç] and zh [tʂ], q [tç'] and ch [tʂ'], x [ç] and sh [ʂ], etc. Third, it was believed that the old writing systems were difficult for mass education. In the existing Arabic alphabets, each letter had two to six forms depending on its position in a word, which created difficulty in reading and writing, and there were too many diacritics, which created different meanings if missed or misplaced.

The scheme of the Latin alphabet for Uygur consisted of the twenty-six regular letters from the Plan and seven letters specially created to meet the needs of Uygur, allowed letter combinations ng , zh , ch , and sh intended for loan words from Chinese, and utilized the diacritic “,” to represent syllable separation, as in (1).

(1) Comparison of the Old and New Writing Systems for Uygur with IPA

Latin:	Aa	Bb	Cc	Dd	Ee	Ff	Gg	Hh	Ii	Jj	Kk	Ll
Arabic:	ئا	ب	د (تس)	ئې	و	گ	خ	ئى	ج	ك	ل	
IPA:	a	b	(ts)	d	e	f	g	χ	i	dʒ	k'	l
Latin:	Mm	Nn	Oo	Pp	Qq	Rr	Ss	Tt	Uu	Vv	Ww	
Arabic:	م	ن	ئو	پ	چ	ر	س	ت	ئۇ (ؤ)	ۋ		
IPA:	m	n	o	p'	tʃ'	r	s	t'	u	v	w	
Latin:	Xx	Yy	Zz	ŌŌoŋ	Hh	Kk	Əə	Өө	Üü	Zz		
Arabic:	ش	ي	ز	غ	ھ	ق	ئە	ئو	ئۇ	ژ		
IPA:	ʃ	j	z	ɣ	h	q'	ɛ	ø	y	ʒ		

The scheme for the Latin alphabet for Kazak had the same twenty-six letters from the Plan and was complemented with six special letters to represent phonetic features in Kazak, as in (2). The alphabet also allowed the letter combinations *ng*, *zh*, *ch*, and *sh* for loans from Chinese.

(2) Comparison of the Old and New Writing Systems for Kazak with IPA

Latin:	Aa	Bb	Cc	Dd	Ee	Ff	Gg	Hh	Ii	Jj	Kk	Ll
Arabic:	ا	ب	د (تس)	ى	ق	گ	ح	ج	ئى	ك	ل	
IPA:	a	b	(ts)	d	e	f	g	χ	i	dʒ	k'	l
Latin:	Mm	Nn	Oo	Pp	Qq	Rr	Ss	Tt	Uu	Vv	Ww	Xx
Arabic:	م	ن	و	پ	چ	ر	س	ت	ۇ	ۆ	ۋ	ش
IPA:	m	n	o	p'	tʃ'	r	s	t'	u	v	w	ʃ
Latin:	Yy	Zz	ŌŌoŋ	Hh	Kk	Əə	Өө	Üü	Êê			
Arabic:	ي	ز	ع	ھ	ق	ا	و	ۇ	ە			
IPA:	j	z	ɣ	h	q'	ɛ	ø	y	e			

After several months' preparation, the new writing systems were exclusively used in the first grade in elementary schools, and experimentally used in some other grades in elementary and secondary schools in the fall of 1960. The new writing systems were more and more extensively used in schools in the following years. In 1962, newspapers began to be published in the new script for Uygur. In 1964, the People's Congress of Xinjiang passed a resolution to exclusively utilize the new writing systems in the whole Xinjiang beginning on New Year's Day 1965. However, the implementation of the new writing systems was interrupted by the

Great Culture Revolution, which swept the whole country in 1966 and did not end until 1976. During the Cultural Revolution, all levels of government within Xinjiang were sometimes paralyzed, and most of the times occupied with more urgent "revolutionary tasks". The progress for exclusive utilization of the new writing systems was very slow in society at large. For example, the Kazak edition of *The Xinjiang Daily* did not appear in the Latin script until 1974. In private situations, older people still used the Arabic scripts in writing. However, the new writing systems were exclusively utilized from elementary schools to colleges in Xinjiang as well as in government business.

After the Culture Revolution ended in 1976, discussions on the different scripts and the disaster of two different writing systems being used simultaneously for one language were resumed in Xinjiang. Three years later, in November 1979, the second session of the Fifth People's Congress of Xinjiang took a bold unprecedented step toward reversing the reform: the new writing systems should continue to be fully implemented, but the old writing systems should be used alongside the new ones. Of course, this decision did not satisfy the Uygur and Kazak communities, nor did it stop discussions on the topic. Instead, it encouraged citizen discussions on the issue in Xinjiang, discussions that eventually led to a more complete reversal.

After the CCP's EMN policies became more and more clearly pluralistic, and the State Council set a precedent by approving a standardized Yi writing system in a Siniform script instead of the Latin script, the seventeenth session of the Fifth People's Congress of Xinjiang passed a resolution, on September 13, 1982, that called for exclusive utilization of the old Arabic writing systems at the beginning of 1983, reserved the new Latin writing systems as pronunciation assistance systems, and encouraged further research on the new writing systems. The rationales for this decision, as the resolution stated (see *The Xinjiang Daily*, first edition, September 15, 1982), were that the practice (the use of the new systems) in the past few years had shown that the time was not ripe for promoting the new writing systems, and that the simultaneous use of both the old one and the new one was not productive for the development of sciences, education and culture among the Uygur and Kazak peoples. The lack of a total rejection of the Latin alphabets in the decision might have been a political strategy that is intended to save face for the central government.

After twenty years of official use of the Latin writing systems and unofficial use of the old Arabic ones, there was a lot of confusion in orthography. A mixture of the previous versions was sometimes used, and nonstandard letters were also used. In 1983, the Language and Script Reform Commission of Xinjiang published further revised Arabic writing systems for Uygur and Kazak and required them to be used in publications, documents, and public signs beginning on January 1, 1984. In Uygur, the 1954 Arabic writing system used the letter و for both [o] and [ø], and the letter و for both [u] and [y]; in the newly revised Arabic writing system the letter ئو was added to represent [ø], and the letter ئو was added for [y] (cf. Niu 1997). In Kazak, the 1954 Arabic writing system did not have a letter for the nasal [ŋ]; the newly revised writing system added the letter ڭ to represent [ŋ] (Geng 1989). These revisions of the Arabic writing systems may have brought them closer to the ideal of a one-to-one match between letters and phonemes in these two languages. Such a match was one of the motivations for the revisions and believed to facilitate mass education and literacy. The last revision appears to have put an end to the chaos of over thirty years of script reforms for Uygur and Kazak.

4. The impact of writing system reforms in Xinjiang

These radical reforms of the Uygur and Kazak writing systems, using completely different scripts, should have had serious consequences on Uygur and Kazak speakers, though the information is not readily available. Most sources published in China just mention that there was a chaos in which older Uygur and Kazak speakers used the old Arabic writing systems while middle-aged and young speakers used the new Latin ones (Niu 1997:155). Specifics of the chaos have not been published, since this is still a politically sensitive issue in China. However, for the sake of language policy makers in China and all over the world, it is worthwhile to explore what impact China's EMN language policy and the writing system reforms may have had on the Uygur and Kazak communities in Xinjiang.

First, we must ask how many Uygur and Kazak people have learned to read in the Latin scripts and have difficulty in reading the Arabic scripts. From their first use in schools in the fall of 1960 to their last use in schools in the spring of 1983, the Latin alphabets dominated Uygur and Kazak schools for twenty-three years. It is known that reading is learned through instruction in elementary schools (cf. Chomsky 1991, Snow 1991). The Uygurs and Kazaks who had their entire elementary education in the Latin scripts are those who were born between 1951, when people started to go to school a little bit late, and 1970, when people began schooling at about six or seven. Judging from the 1990 census (DPSSSB & EDSNAC 1994), this population is about two million among the Uygurs and 320,000 among the Kazaks. Of the two million Uygurs, 85 percent (1.7 million) have elementary education or more, while the rest (0.28 million) are illiterate or semi-literate (DPSSSB & EDSNAC 1994). Of the 320,000 Kazaks, about 95 percent (305,410) have elementary education or above, while the remaining 5 percent (15,480) are illiterate or semi-literate (DPSSSB & EDSNAC 1994). In addition, about 700,000 Uygurs and 135,000 Kazaks (born between 1971 and 1975) have their first two or more years' education in Latin scripts (DPSSSB & EDSNAC 1994). Thus, out of 7.2 million Uygurs, 2.4 million (33%) have been directly and significantly affected by the script reforms in their education, while out of 1.1 million Kazaks, around 400,000 (39%) have been directly and significantly influenced by the script reforms in their education.

The impact may be seen in Uygur and Kazak literacy, education, literary tradition, culture, and relationship with the majority Han. Regarding literacy, 33 percent of Uygurs and 39 percent Kazaks have some degree of difficulties in reading in the current Arabic script. For example, during research on this topic, the author contacted a few college Kazak language teachers, some of whom were not able to read fluently in the Arabic script. To make matters worse, older and younger Uygur and Kazak speakers also have great difficulty in reading works in the Latin scripts published between 1960 and 1982. These literacy problems especially affect education in Uygur and Kazak communities. One of the most serious problem in education in EMN regions is the lack of qualified teachers, who have the appropriate degree from college or, if without a college degree, can pass state qualifying examinations in general education and in the subjects that they have been teaching. The State Nationality Affairs Commission's documents show that, in many EMN regions, 40 to 50 percent, in some cases even 80 percent, of teachers are not qualified (see AOPROSNAC 1996). In Xinjiang, during 1984-1987, 50 percent of elementary school teachers, 79 percent of middle school teachers, and 77 percent of high school teachers were not qualified (Jia and Cai 1996). In Zhaoou County of Xinjiang where the Kazaks are the dominant nationality, for instance, only 83 out of

292 Kazak elementary school teachers, 8 out of Kazak 117 middle school teachers and 10 out of 45 Kazak high school teachers were qualified in the 1980s (Wang 1990). Though factors other than scripts also contribute to the quality of teachers, the low quality of teachers definitely results in low quality in teaching. In Kashi Prefecture's Yingjiesha County, out of 230 Uygur elementary school students, only five passed the entrance examination to middle school (Wang 1990). The reverse may be seen in the majority Han communities, where the majority of elementary school students can pass the entrance examination to middle schools. The script reforms' direct impact on the quality of education may be seen in the lack of teacher reference books and student supplementary reading materials in Uygur and Kazak communities (Wang 1990:487). The situation becomes worse when the existing materials are in different scripts. For example, in Kazak, materials published before the early 1950s are in the old Arabic alphabet, those imported from the former Soviet Union during the middle of the 1950s are in the Cyrillic alphabet, those published during the 1960s and 1970s are in the Latin alphabet, and the most recent publications are in the revised Arabic script. Most of these publications seem like a foreign language to many teachers and all students.

The script reforms may also have a negative impact on cultural, intraethnic, and interethnic relationships. A third of the Uygur and Kazak population have trouble in reading publications in the Arabic scripts, a handicap that severs their ties with their ethnic heritage or at least erects some barriers between these generations and their ethnic heritage. This may not be the intention of the Chinese government, but the Kazaks might so perceive it, because quick assimilation into the Hans certainly was a government goal during the late 1950s, the 1960s, and the early 1970s. This perception has an adversarial impact on the Uygur and Kazaks' relationship with the majority Han, as was evidenced in 1962, when 100,000 to 200,000 Kazaks and Uygurs sought refuge in the former Soviet Union (cf. Benson and Svanberg). At least, it is now clear that the script reforms did not bring the Uygurs and Kazaks closer to the Hans, as the Chinese government intended, but rather alienated them. After so many years, this wound is still being healed (cf. Zhou in press a).

5. Conclusion

At a time of globalization, when ethnic minority languages and writing systems face critical challenges in their maintenance and survival, at least two lessons may be learned from the Chinese experience. First, the Chinese case seems to suggest that language policy should not be directly bundled with political and economic policies, though these policies will interact with each other on their own (cf. Zhou in press b). Simply put, in making political and economic policies, a government can afford to look into the future for only a few years, whereas in making language policy it has to look into the future for several decades or more. In China, the direct dictation of EMN language policy by the CCP's political and economic policies created negative impacts, while the relative independence of the language policy for Chinese (to promote PTH over dialects) appears to have had more positive results, perhaps because the latter has not been linked to any timetable in the CCP's agenda in the last forty-plus years (cf. Zhou 1999b, Zhou in press b).

Second, the Chinese case also suggests that great caution needs to be used and research has to be done on the individual speech community's needs and support for script reform. Even if the Chinese EMN language policy is considered a failure in the cases of the Uygur and Kazak script reforms, the same policy may be considered more successful in the reforms of the Thai, Yi, and Miao writing systems and in the creation of writing systems for oral languages (Dai, Bi, and Wang 1990,

Shamajajia 1989). These different results produced by the same EMN language policy are due more to the differences in linguistic and script situations than to the differences in the cultural, social, and political situations in those communities. But, a comparison of situations leading to the failure or success of the Chinese government's EMN language policy is beyond the scope of the current paper.

Note

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