



Ear to Asia podcast

- Title:** The road to Uyghur repression in China
- Description:** China has been cracking down hard on Uyghur and other Muslim groups in its far northwestern region of Xinjiang. But what's the real history of the Uyghur people? How do they view themselves culturally and politically alongside the dominant Han Chinese nation? China watchers Dr David Brophy and Dr Lewis Mayo join host Ali Moore to discuss the long and evolving relations between the Uyghurs and Chinese authorities. An Asia Institute podcast. Produced by profactual.com. Music by audionautix.com.
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- Voiceover:** The Ear to Asia podcast is made available on the Jakarta Post platform under agreement between the Jakarta Post and the University of Melbourne.
- Ali Moore:** Hello, I'm Ali Moore. This is Ear to Asia.
- David Brophy:** Uyghur national identity is something that is been crafted in circumstances not entirely of the Uyghurs' own choosing. It's something that has arisen as a political intervention, something that has been both a source of inspiration for resistance and opposition, but also something that has been codified and institutionalized by the state.
- Lewis Mayo:** The Chinese state and scholars have moved back and forward in their attempt to depict a Uyghur culture which is not primarily Islamic. And this has been in interaction with shifting Uyghur attitudes towards the role of Islamic culture and faith to their identity as an ethnic group.
- Ali Moore:** In this episode, the Road to Uyghur repression in China.
- Ear to Asia is the podcast from Asia Institute, the Asia research specialists at the University of Melbourne.
- For the last two and a half years, China has significantly stepped up its repression of Muslim minorities in its far Northwestern region of Xinjiang. Uyghurs, an indigenous Turkic-speaking people who make up Xinjiang's largest ethnic group, have been subject to intense surveillance, a surging police presence and mass detentions in a series of so-called reeducation centres set up by authorities in Beijing.
- China says it's responding to what it describes as ethnic separatism and violent terrorist criminal activities, while at the same time denying the reported scale of detention. The National Government State Council Information Office recently claimed Uyghurs were not actually descended from the Turks and that Islam was simply a foreign imposition that needs to be opposed.



But what's the real history of the Uyghur people? How connected have they been to China and how do they view themselves culturally and politically alongside the dominant Han Chinese? To discuss how the relationship between the Uyghur people and Chinese authorities got to where it is today, we're joined via Skype by Dr. David Brophy, senior lecturer in Modern Chinese History at the University of Sydney and author of the 2016 book, *Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier*. Also with us in the studio is Asia historian and *Ear to Asia* regular guest, Dr. Lewis Mayo of Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. Welcome, Lewis and welcome, David.

Lewis Mayo: Hello Ali.

David Brophy: Hi Ali. Good to be with you.

Ali Moore: Let's start this conversation in the here-and-now. There are up to a million Uyghurs thought to be detained in so-called reeducation centres, but of course that is an educated guess. David, how much do we actually know about what's happening in Xinjiang?

David Brophy: Well, there's a panoply of policies that have been implemented in the last couple of years that have increased the level of repression towards the Uyghurs and towards other Muslim minorities as well. And there's a lot that's quite visible when you visit Xinjiang that we do know about in terms of the increased surveillance, the new routines of security drills, the requirements to demonstrate loyalty that are being put onto the local population.

We know that there's a huge number of people who've been disappearing into these internment camps. Various estimates have been made on the basis of things like government tender documents, satellite imagery. There's been a small trickle of information come out from people who've been interned in these camps, but there's still a lot of questions surrounding the precise scale of that particular element of these policies or indeed what exactly is going on inside these camps.

We've been presented with a certain narrative that the party state has been entirely in control of regarding the types of education and training that people are going through inside these camps. But I think there's reason to believe that the actual situation for many of these detainees could be quite different to what we're being presented with. So, yes, there's a lot that we do know about the situation, much more than I think Beijing would like the outside world to know, but there's still a lot of questions around which we're in the dark on.

Ali Moore: Lewis, what do you think is happening? And of course we've seen those incredibly sanitised media trips that have been taken through some of these internment camps. How accurate a reflection do you think that is of what's actually happening?



Lewis Mayo: I would defer to David on this count, but I would observe that for a number of large nation states in the world, the question of securing border lands is a critical priority at present and a close parallel, of course, is the situation in India with Kashmir and in Russia with regard to its various dissenting minority groups. And I would say that this is part and parcel of a general anxiety of these kinds of states in relationship to peripheral areas, especially because across the world we now have intense centralising nationalisms in a number of places. Turkey would be another one to add into this picture.

Lewis Mayo: So it's quite consistent with practises in a number of other places with the additional factor of course that China's preoccupations with its Central Asian territories have a particular intensity for geopolitical reasons. China's geography is one in which two thirds of the country are essentially unpopulated but strategically important and the bulk of the population is in the other third. So this creates a sort of geopolitical environment of some complexity, and we can say that concern with securing these regions has been intensifying on the part of the Chinese state for several decades.

Ali Moore: And that of course goes to the issue of why, and why now, that we're seeing this wave of repression. David, do you think it is about border security? Do you think that it's about counter terrorism? Is it about party control? How much do we know about internal party deliberations?

David Brophy: It's unfortunately the case that we don't really know the discussions that are going on behind closed doors. I think that security is very much part of this issue though not necessarily in the way that it's being presented as. So publicly from China we've heard a lot about quite outlandish claims that the Xinjiang is on the brink of descending into a sort of a violent civil war-type situation. It was going to be the next Syria. And those types of claims are very far from the observations that certainly I myself, and many of my colleagues would make about the actual level of instability there.

But a lot of Chinese officialdom tends to look at the Chinese party state in quite organic terms. I think there's a sense of frustration looking at the map of China and seeing a large region. This is almost 20% of the Chinese landmass that has a population that is relatively disaffected politically in comparison with the mainstream Han Chinese population, and alienated culturally.

I think that China can imagine that the next 10 to 20 years could become a bumpy ride in terms of China transitioning to a great power status. It's certainly very ambitious in relation to the various countries that the Xinjiang neighbours on. It borders on eight different countries. So it's very important from that point of view as a staging point for China's outward move economically and so on. And I think that in the party's thinking that there has been a sense that this is a liability for us.

Ali Moore: And more of a liability than it has been in the past?



David Brophy: Yeah. Well, I think that there was a long period under which, thanks to the influence of official policy, which was, on paper, relatively tolerant towards ethnic difference and the creation of an autonomous region in this region, but there was all along an expectation that there would be a gradual process of assimilation towards the cultural mainstream in China. And now that China's internationalising, I think that there may be an anxiety that there's going to be tendencies pulling Uyghurs and other peoples on the periphery in all sorts of other directions that China considers subversive. China's very nervous about any cultural or historical ties that people on the periphery have with peoples and cultures on the other side of the frontier and that's very much the case in a place like Xinjiang.

Ali Moore: And, Lewis, do you agree very much the case now at a time when China has extensive economic ambitions that that lack of political and cultural uniformity becomes a particular liability?

Lewis Mayo: I would and one factor, of course, to emphasise here is that the cultural policies of the Chinese state towards the Han population have focused intensively in the last few decades on a sense of Chinese cultural pride and Han Chinese cultural pride. Now the Chinese Communist Party came to power in part criticising Chinese Guomindang, Chinese Nationalist Party Han-centric narrative of Chinese identity by insisting on the plurality of cultures that made up the People's Republic of China.

And I would say that as narratives of liberation and revolution gave way in the 1980s and '90s to narratives of economic development, what was done to, in a sense, fill the cultural and ideological gap was to emphasise pride in being Han Chinese. Now this naturally is something that makes it more difficult for members of any non-Han group to identify with this particular project. And I would say that this is something that needs to be understood in terms of the kinds of symbolic pressures that Uyghur people and other minority groups in the Inner Asian areas of China face in the present.

Ali Moore: David, is there also a connection between this latest, and it has to be said, most significant wave of repression, and the rise of Xi Jinping? Xi Jinping did handpick the man who now runs Xinjiang.

David Brophy: This is an interesting question. It's difficult to say for sure, but one proximate factor that people have pointed to for these policies is the fact that Xi Jinping actually paid a visit to Xinjiang in 2014, which is quite a rare thing for the paramount leader of China to do and there was a small attack on the Urumqi train station in the course of his visit, which we never really know how these things play out, but some have suggested that this caused Xi Jinping to take notice of the situation in Xinjiang in a way that he hadn't previously.

It can't entirely be a coincidence that all this is ramping up at the same time as Xi Jinping is centralising power in his own hands. I was actually in Xinjiang at the time when the change was enacted to allow Xi Jinping to remain in office



indefinitely and there was obviously intense propaganda around that and, as Lewis has pointed to, Xi Jinping is cut from the same cloth as many strongmen leaders around the world who are increasingly turning to more virulent ethnic nationalism as the basis for their claims to authority. And that is clearly having a pronounced effect in Xinjiang, but it's something that is being experienced in a variety of ways all throughout China at the moment.

Ali Moore: If we can just sort of take this conversation back a bit to well pre-Xi Jinping and just look at how we got here. When did this part of the world first come into China's official orbit? Lewis?

Lewis Mayo: It depends how you define China, but I suppose what you call sinetic cultural influences were implanted in Xinjiang during the Han dynasty, that's in the second century BCE, and perhaps a pointed comparison to think about the expansion of the Roman Empire into areas like Syria and Palestine in approximately the same period. But those military colonies were an important presence, comparable perhaps to sort of Roman influence in the peripheries of its imperial territory.

And these receded and expanded at different stages up until the 18th century when in fact the Qing Dynasty which, and I think it needs to be emphasised, was not in fact a Han Chinese-dominated dynasty, but one whose ruling family was from the Northeastern part of Central Asia, conquered its last nomadic rival, the Mongolian Dzungar State and set up, in a sense, an integration between Central China and Xinjiang and in fact gave us the Chinese name Xinjiang-

Ali Moore: Which means new frontiers, doesn't it?

Lewis Mayo: New frontiers, yes. And of course this is an important period of demographic transition in the Chinese world, a massive expansion of the number of Han Chinese people in the total population of the Qing empire. And so territorial integration of the state, which was fragmenting at some levels as it became less under central control in the 19th century, led, I suppose, to a longterm tendency for people of Han ethnicity to move into some of these border regions. But I suppose the decisive change is really the period after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 when the system of autonomous region government was established in Xinjiang with a view to realising a socialist vision of Chinese republican state.

Ali Moore: Also, in 1949, was there not a very brief declaration of independence in East Turkestan State, which didn't last very long?

Lewis Mayo: There were two East Turkestan Republics in the pre-1949 period, with quite different orientations. These projects were different in terms of their conception of what that area meant as a space, if you like, because they were ethnically plural. The second East Turkestan Republic was socialist in its orientations and there was a complex relationship between those projects



which were not friendly to the power of the United States, for example, to the Chinese communist project led by Mao Zedong.

Ali Moore: David, is that complexity partly to blame for these independent states being relatively brief in existence?

David Brophy: I think in terms of the 20th century history, the dominant actor in the region outside of China itself, of course, has been Russia and the Soviet Union and that's played out in a variety of different ways, both in sort of pro-Soviet political tendencies that have sought to enlist the support of the Soviet union, but also in Xinjiang becoming a refuge for anticommunist refugees from the rest of central Asia.

I guess that's one way to think about the various bids for independence that have been made in the 1930s and 1940s. I mean, as early as the 1920s Muslims from Xinjiang were travelling across into the Soviet Union hoping to enlist support for activity in Xinjiang as part of an anti-colonial revolution in Asia. They ran up against the same difficulty that Uyghur activists today come up against. The fact that large states, as sympathetic as they may be for the Uyghur cause, also have other interests in their relationship with China including economic and other geopolitical interests and ultimately for the Soviet state, those trumped whatever desire they had to help the Uyghurs.

The first bid for independence in the 1930s was the outcome of very a complicated state of affairs. Xinjiang for most of the first half of the 20th century was basically cut off politically from the rest of China. It existed under a quasi-independent provincial Chinese regime, but there was also intervention from neighbouring provinces such as Gansu. The Chinese speaking Muslim warlords of that region had an interest in Xinjiang and then you had various groups of intellectuals and activists inside Xinjiang who were trying to weigh up the situation and find out what would be the best way to gain support for these things.

But, to cut a long story short, the first East Turkestan Republic was largely oriented towards an Islamic republican tradition that took inspiration from places like Afghanistan, which was modernising at the time, Turkey and so on, and in some ways can be thought of as a precursor to some of the ideas that went into the foundation of a place like Pakistan as well. It was extremely short-lived and only occupied a small corner of the province.

The second East Turkestan Republic in the 1940s was more the delayed fulfilment of certain expectations that some Uyghurs had that the Soviet Union would support some kind of bid for independence. And this occurred in the north of the province, which was always the part of Xinjiang that was most influenced by Russia and the Soviets. It was also home to a longstanding diaspora of Muslims from inside Russia.

This declared its independence in 1944, exercised a claim to independent rule



for a short period, and then entered into a coalition with the Chinese nationalist government in the provincial capital of Urumqi. Although it received a lot of support from the Soviet Union, that meant ultimately it was beholden to Soviet interests, which were not necessarily to support a kind of independent Uyghur republic but to use the threat of doing so to gain leverage against other political factions inside China, both the Guomindang and the Chinese communists. And it was ultimately thanks to Stalin's encouragement that this republican experiment was curtailed and the Uyghurs there threw in their lot with the Chinese Communist Party.

Ali Moore: And then if you move forward again, in light of that, how significant was the collapse of the Soviet Union for the Uyghurs?

David Brophy: Well, the dynamics that I've described actually continued after the Chinese revolution. Listeners might be familiar, there was a period of around a decade of quite close Sino-Soviet friendship, but that then began to break down and lead into the Sino-soviet split, which crystallised around about 1962. And so then again the prospect that the Soviet Union might be supporting the national aspirations of national minorities inside China became a source of anxiety for the Chinese Communist Party. And indeed to some extent there was in the '60s and '70s some propagandist support given to those aspirations. The lid was put on that for a time.

Then with the fall of the Soviet Union, some of the networks and organisations that had been established in Soviet Central Asia, what was now the Independent Republics of Central Asia that were heirs to this discourse of a sort of a national liberation struggle, Soviet-style approach to Xinjiang, they then reactivated in a situation in which China's relations with these new republics was still yet to settle. There were a variety of territorial disputes and so on that were standing in the way of establishing good relations.

So there was a window of opportunity there for a time for these groups to reactivate. The other important factor is that a lot of Chinese officials drew the conclusion from the collapse of the Soviet Union that it was actually nationalism that pulled apart the Soviet Union. I wouldn't necessarily say it's widely endorsed, but nonetheless, this was an idea that took hold inside China and that also had the effect of making people more nervous. It was really in the 1990s that we started to see sort of stepped-up campaigns of periodic repression against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

Lewis Mayo: There's an interesting background and questions to sort of shape of narratives of Uyghur culture all through the period from the death of Mao Zedong to the fall of the Soviet Union, really, through to the present, which is of course that Uyghur cultural history is relatively long. The name of the Turkic group from which the modern name Uyghur derives was an 8th-century empire actually based in Mongolia, which supported a number of different religious commitments including Christianity, the dead religion of Manichaeism, and significantly when this Turkic population migrated from Mongolia into the area that we now call Xinjiang, Buddhism.



And so the Chinese state and scholars have moved back and forward in their attempt to depict a Uyghur culture that is not primarily Islamic. And this has been in complex interaction with shifting Uyghur attitudes towards the role of Islamic culture and faith to their identity as an ethnic group. We need of course to also remember that the most significant challenge to the ideological authority of the Chinese Communist Party in the post-Tiananmen period was the Falun Gong religious movement.

There's an interesting kind of layering here of central government anxieties not only about nationalist splitism, as they call it, and attributing the fall of the Soviet Union to ethno-nationalist division, which is often seen as being sponsored by the United States under the cover of religious freedom and other commitments with a broader anxiety about the religious alternatives to what used to be a highly scientific communist ideology. And these factors have, I suppose, played out with a special intensity in the Xinjiang region. And I think that's really come to a head particularly after the rise of sort of global Islamic militancy in the post-September 11th period.

Ali Moore: You're listening to Ear to Asia from Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. I'm Ali Moore and I'm joined via Skype by Dr. David Brophy, senior lecturer in Modern Chinese History at the University of Sydney and Asia historian, Dr. Lewis Mayo of Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. We're talking about the Road to Uyghur Repression in China. What we haven't talked about is the viewpoint of the Uyghur. How do Uyghurs see themselves in the context of China's claim to the region? Historically and today? David?

David Brophy: It is hard to generalise but Uyghur national identity is something that has been crafted in circumstances, not entirely of the Uyghurs' own choosing. They've never been free to shape entirely their own cultural institutions, their education system and so on. So it's something that has arisen as a political intervention into situations that have largely been beyond their control. It's something that has been both a source of inspiration for resistance and opposition, but also something that has been codified and institutionalised by the states in which people have been living.

And primarily I'm talking here about the Soviet Union, of course, which had a very expansive sort of project to classify and organise its population along national lines and then of course many elements of that were transferred into China, so that's created opportunities. There have been moments where Uyghurs have enjoyed relative freedom inside China to explore issues of history and cultural identity, but it's also set limits on what you're allowed say. Uyghurness is today, it's both an ethnonational identity that highlights what are regarded as specific cultural features of the Uyghurs themselves, be it language, history, dress and so on, but it also very much partakes in a much wider discourse about Turkic identity and history and of course Islam being very significant.

There have of course always been dissident currents around these questions, critiques of the concept of Uyghur identity, people who felt that this lent too



much weight to the specificities of Uyghurness and not enough to the common Turkic identity that some would prefer to emphasise and so on. It's something that is very difficult for Uyghurs today to reflect on publicly, but it is discussion that's taking place certainly in the diaspora, generational change taking place and where people are influenced by all sorts of new trends.

Lewis Mayo:

It's also interesting to note in addition to the questions of Uyghur identity, there is what might be called a Xinjiang identity, acknowledging that Uyghurs, while the most significant ethnic group in the Xinjiang region, are not in fact a majority there, that you have of course a Han settler population, which has a cultural, if you like, provincial identity different from the Han cultures of Central China. You have a plurality of other Central Asian ethnic groups, Mongolians, members of the Cyber group, which is a descendant of the Manchu occupying forces. You have plurality of Turkic groups in there and so these are also a significant factor in the way that identities are constructed in that area.

Ali Moore:

But how does the state respond to those other minorities?

Lewis Mayo:

Well, the state is doing what centralising forces always do and applying a divide-and-rule game. It's interested in disaffection on the part of the non-Uyghur populations with Uyghur-centric account of Xinjiang culture and identity. It's historically exploited – the Qing state, exploited these tensions in its own rule and then by its successors, the Republic of China and then the People's Republic of China.

And one can see this in two ways. It is like the way in which inter-ethnic competitions and tensions in the United States, say, between Hispanics and black people might be used by certain white forces, if you like, to divide those populations, or it might be seen as the why that colonial governments such as the British government in India or the Dutch government in the East Indies exploited lines of cleavage within the governed populations.

Ali Moore:

But they didn't necessarily intern one part of that governed population as is currently happening.

David Brophy:

It is the case that there are other ethnic groups from Xinjiang who've been impacted by these policies. It is true that Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and probably in smaller quantities, some members of other ethnic groups, have been in the camps. We know this in part because there are actually Kazakhstani citizens who ended up in the camps, and they are part of a very small group of people who had been able to get out of the camps and get outside China and actually talk about what's going on.

A lot of what we're hearing about the camps is actually coming from Kazaks who've been interned in the north of Xinjiang. So in the reporting around Xinjiang today, you do sometimes hear people talking about Turkic-speaking minorities. That's a catchall to take in both the Uyghurs and the Kazaks and the



Kyrgyz as well. And, strictly speaking, that is the group that is being affected by these policies. It's just that the Uyghurs really predominate and it's the Uyghurs to whom the greatest anxieties – political, religious, cultural anxieties attach on the part of the state.

Ali Moore: Where does Islam come into all of this? We're discussing a lack of political and cultural uniformity, but is there also a fear that Islam is a threat to total allegiance to the party? If you look at actions taken in Xinjiang, some mosques have been shut down, others have got massive pictures of Xi Jinping. There's a campaign against certain halal products. Face veils are banned. Fasting during Ramadan is restricted. How much of this is about Islam and the party's fear of Islam?

Lewis Mayo: I would say the level of repression of Islamic practice in China is such that on an everyday basis would be never tolerated in a society like the United States and that rights to pray and things like that on a very kind of mundane level are actually severely curtailed by the state. This is, I think, reflective of broader anxieties about the danger of superstition or religious enthusiasm of any kind within the Chinese national imaginary, as the scholars refer to it.

This has the paradoxical effect perhaps of driving some people into greater engagement with the Islamic faith and practise than they might otherwise have had. But much of the longterm memory of the Beijing authorities running back to the Qing dynasty and, as I say, have shifted from a Central Asian dynastic empire in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries to Han Chinese republics in the 20th and 21st centuries, is about the danger of religiously-motivated violence.

Ali Moore: And yet right now, David, isn't there somewhat, as you've discussed, something of a revival in other religions in China?

David Brophy: There is. For the last 20 or 30 years there has been a religious revival taking place. In some communities people are enjoying a level of religious freedom that is unprecedented in the history of the PRC. Various schools of Buddhism, local religious practises that we classify as Taoism. People are investing their new-found wealth in patronising these religions. Even, to some extent it's been taking place in the case of Tibetan Buddhism, although that is something that is still more heavily monitored and restricted.

So clearly the picture is mixed. There is, though, a push at the moment to ensure that these religions remain consistent with what the party defines as Chinese culture and Chinese values. The sinosization of religion is one of the slogans that's in the air at the moment that implies a sort of normative vision of certain religions that are more proximate to Chinese culture and certain religions that have a greater distance to travel.

And certainly the Islam that is practised by Turkic-speaking Muslims out in Xinjiang would be sort of one of those religions. This has been building up for a



long time. In the 1990s there was a lot of focus on what was defined as illegal religious activity and that was really an attempt to start to close the space that existed for a time for the possibility of unregistered religious activities that were not necessarily endorsed by the state, but the state tended to turn a blind eye to in terms of private religious education, small group Koranic instruction and that kind of stuff.

And that that all built up through the 1990s and then obviously the turn to the global war on terror had a huge impact on the ability of the Chinese state to redefine the enemy in religious terms. So then along with separatism you had added to that religious extremism as one of the three evil forces, and the third one was terrorism. And terrorism, the way it's become coded internationally, as in China, is essentially associated with Islam in people's minds as well.

Ali Moore: So that brings me to one of my final questions, which is where does the international community stand in this? The West is very preoccupied with the perceived threat from extremists. We said earlier that China is able to tap into that global war. So, David, where does that leave the Uyghurs themselves?

David Brophy: It leaves the Uyghurs in a very difficult situation and I think the harsh realities of Xinjiang require a strictly sort of realist perspective on the situation. I think Uyghurs are mobilising around the world in ways that we haven't seen for a very long time. In Australia, too, there's been a lot that's done to improve public awareness of this issue. There is, I think, possibly more that could be done in terms of meeting certain welfare needs, ensuring we're providing refugee protection, advocating against refoulement of Uyghur refugees.

Australia's being part of a collective of nations that have raised the issue at the United Nations, various forums, have requested access to the region for fact-finding missions and so on. Obviously a lot of this discussion internationally ultimately leads to questions about US-China relations. What is America's intentions in relation to this issue? The trade war has given some Uyghurs the sense that there may be an opening here for them. Previously, if we think about the Tibet issue, one of the great problems there was that activists would always find, as much as they tried to get the issue onto Washington's agenda and its relationship with China, the issue could then easily become a bargaining chip that Washington would sort of bargain away for other objectives.

Now that there's this sort of talk of decoupling these economies, it's given people a sense that Washington may be willing to take an issue like Xinjiang further than they have in the past. And now I have to emphasise at this point there's very little concretely that should encourage people on that score. I think that there are lessons that we can probably learn from looking at the Tibet example, and a very clear focus in every discussion on this issue that the objective here is to do things that will improve the situation for people in Xinjiang and not to exploit this issue for other purposes.



Ali Moore: At the same time, though, you say we have lessons to learn from Tibet, but the world has been very vocal on Tibet to no end. If this is cultural genocide, as many would say in Xinjiang, in 20, 30 years, will there be a definable Uyghur population? Lewis, the future of Uyghurs?

Lewis Mayo: Well, this is a complex question that we can pair with a number of other situations for ethnocultural minorities in China. If we look at the situation in Inner Mongolia, you have people who are ethnically Mongolian but whose language is primarily Mandarin Chinese but a residual and not insignificant population of people who continue to speak that language amongst the Zhuang people with the largest minority group in China, 13 million of them who live near the Vietnam Lao Thai Burma border region. You have significant shift away from the Zhuang language and I suppose a process of what we'd call cultural assimilation. I guess the difficult choice for Uyghur parents is, "Okay, well, if I want my child to be properly Uyghur, I'll send them to a Uyghur school. But if I want my child to be able to earn a good living, I want them to be able to speak standard Chinese as well as they possibly can."

Ali Moore: But that presumes they have a choice.

Lewis Mayo: Well, the picture, as I say, is a complex one and of course many nationalisms around the world are articulated in the language of what you would call the dominant groups. Irish nationalism was an English-language force in which regretful loss of the Gaelic language was a central part of the nationalist platform. So just because someone has shifted to speaking in Mandarin Chinese doesn't mean that their sense of ethnocultural identity has shifted or that their potential ethnocultural militancy has been in any way diminished.

Ali Moore: Lewis and David, thank you so much for being so generous with your thoughts. This is a conversation that is by no means finished so I hope that we can restart it another day. But thank you so much for joining Ear to Asia.

David Brophy: Thank you very much, Ali.

Lewis Mayo: Thanks, Ali. And thanks, David.

David Brophy: Thank you, Lewis.

Ali Moore: Our guests have been Dr. David Brophy senior lecturer in Modern Chinese History at the University of Sydney and author of the 2016 book, *Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier*, and Asia historian and Ear to Asia regular guest, Dr. Lewis Mayo of Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne.

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