

The Biography of Anwar Yusuf Turani

Living through 22 Years of Nightmare

Anwar Yusuf Turani was born on August 3, 1962 in Artush prefecture of East Turkistan, the birthplace of Satuq Bughra Khan, the first Muslim ruler of Kara-Khanid Khanate which ruled Central Asia between 840-1212. Also known as “Xinjiang” which means “New Dominion” in Chinese, Turani’s homeland has been under the occupation of Communist China since 1949. After China consolidated its power in the territory, it confiscated the land and all types of private properties of the people of East Turkistan under the pretext of land reform by destroying original documents about the seized land and properties and publicly executing thousands of landlords throughout the region.



Furthermore, China attempted to destroy every aspect of the national identity of the people of East Turkistan by issuing various policies one after another. One of them was classifying the general public mainly into three different categories –such as *Kembighel Tüwen Ottura Dikhqan* (poor peasants), *Halliq Dikhqan* (higher class peasants), and *Pomishchik Zumiger* (landowners) based on their economic background and social status. Turani’s father was classified under the first category while his mother was placed under the third one.

In the meantime, the people were classified and labeled mainly into five different categories – called *Beshkhil Buzuq Unsurlar* (Five Kinds of Harmful Elements) based on their character and political point of views toward Communist Chinese authority in their occupied land. Exceedingly meeting all of the requirements of qualification for all of the above categories, Turani’s parents were labeled with the names of all of the five categories of so called “Harmful Elements” which consisted of *Ongchi Yerlik Milletchi Unsurlar* (Rightest-Pan-Turkic-Nationalist Elements), *Bölgüunchi Unsurlar* (Separatist Elements), *Eksil Inqilapchi Buzuq Unsurlar* (Counter-Revolutionary-Harmful-Elements), *Burjaziye Yoligha Mangghan Jinshaytan Unsurlar* (Pro-Bourgeois Evil Elements) by the Chinese authorities and condemned to harsh labor camp under so called “the leadership of proletariat dictatorship” for lifetime as a punishment for who they were.



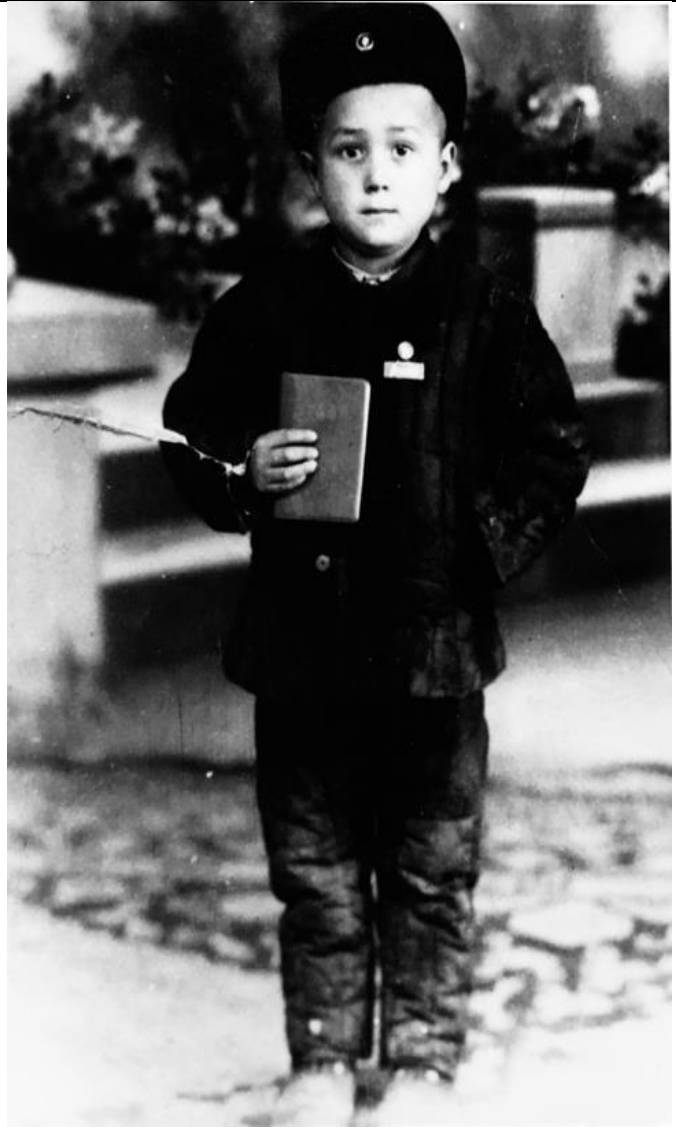
In 1956, their (Turani's father and mother) jobs as the Head of the Department of Agriculture of Artush City and Atush City Sewing Factory respectively were permanently terminated. His parents were sent to a nearby town Tijen labor camp (where Turani who was sitting on her mother's lap in above third picture was born) with their children after they were evicted from their own home located in the center of Artush City, not too far from the camp. All of his family members including his brother and sisters stayed in the camp for over twenty-two years, until 1978, the year the Culture Revolution officially ended, and some degree of political and economic reform were adopted throughout China including Turani's homeland East Turkistan, under the leadership of Deng Xiao-ping, the successor of Chairman Mao.





The picture at the middle of the top row belongs to Turani's family (where Turani is standing behind his parents with his two sister) was taken when they were released from the labor camp after China introduced its political reform throughout China with the end of the Culture Revolution. Still not totally free due to their obligation of fulfilling their mandatory labor assignment under the pretext of exercising through labor in farm, Turani's three elder siblings were unable able to join the family picture, even after the very beginning of the political reform. The rest of the surrounding five pictures reflects the daily life of Turani's family which lasted for 22 years. His parents along their six children were the target of lengthy harsh labor, torture, physical and verbal abuses, various forms of public humiliation and self-criticism because of their social background and different political views as described above.

Unavailable to protect their own children from the types of mistreatments and all other potential abuses they were going through due to their isolation from the mainstream public who were classified as *Kembeghel Dikhqanlar* (poor peasants) by the regime, Turani's parents decided to dress him in such a unique way of desirable fashion which was perfectly matching the prevailing political environment as shown created by Communist China throughout the nation. He was raised pretty much in same style of appearance of carrying Chairman Mao's Red Book with him and wearing Mao's stickers and picture pins on his chest so that he would hypothetically be protected or exempt from any types of abuses or harassments. However, most of the time his appearance was not immune to all types of expected external harm -- he was still the target of all types of abuses.



Anwar Yusuf Turani @ Tijen Labor Camp |
Artush, East Turkistan, 1966

Schooling: Education

Turani went to *Tijen Bashlanghus Mektep* (where the camp was located) for his elementary education (1967-72), went to *Takhtuyun Ottura* in a nearby town, for his secondary education (1972-78), and went to *Kashgar Daril Mu'allimin* (Kashgar Teacher's College) not far from his hometown, for his undergraduate studies (1978-83) and received his B.S. in physics. In the first picture on the left below Turani is located at the middle in the last row. Second one he is the 3rd from right first row.



Going Abroad

Taking advantage of the more relaxed political atmosphere created in the aftermath of the reform movement happened first time over the past thirty years and gradual opening of China to outside, Turani joined his parents in summer, 1983 just after his graduation of his college to go abroad to visit their relatives and perform pilgrim hajj in Mekkah via Istanbul. For Turani's mother, this was her first time of seeing her two brothers Mohammed Qurban (who left East Turkistan with his mother 35 years ago, just before the Chinese took over his homeland) and Abdulrahim Qurban (who was born in Saudi Arabia from her stepmother in 1945). Unfortunately, unable to return to their homeland, Turani's maternal grandparents had already passed away long time ago in Makkah, Saudi Arabia.

Almost all of the relatives of Turani's mother side ended up living in Saudi Arabia due to his grandfather Mohammad Qurban's early departure from Atush to Mekkah and his unable to return to his homeland because of his fear of execution by the Communist China. Actually, he was sent to exile by the authorities during the Republican era of China, before the Communist Chinese took over of East Turkista in 1949. As a patriotic *jadidist* and one of the wealthiest businessmen and landowner with thousands of livestock in Artush, Qurban Haji donated most of his wealth in sport of opening new schools in his hometown Tijen where her daughter (Turani's mother) was later sent with her family members including Mr. Turani for incarceration.



This was because of his patriotic charisma as mentioned above in support of the national awakening movement in the form of *jadidism* (an educational reform movement) prevailed throughout East Turkistan in 1930s under the leadership of *Memtili Ependi Tewpiq* who was educated in Istanbul but was martyred in *Qeshqer Yarbagh Turmisi* (a prison located in Yarbagh district of Kashgar prefecture) with his more than 500 followers by the Chinese authorities. Qurban Haji passed away in Mekkah at the age of 95 in 1956.



Above: Turani with his uncle Mohammad Qurban at Sultan Ahmad Square, Istanbul, Summer 1983.

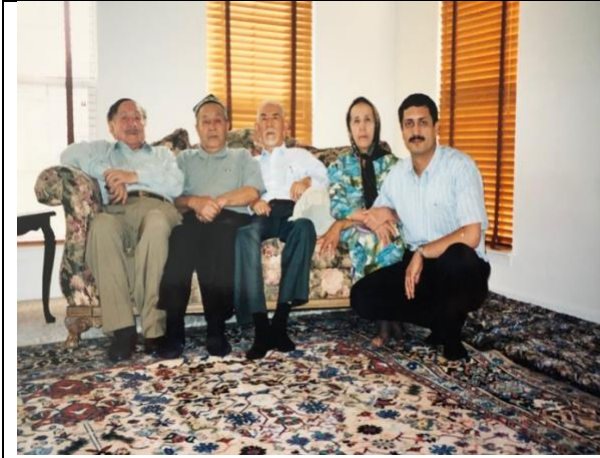
Above: Turani's mother Sharwanihan Qurban, his uncle Mohammad Qurban, Turani and his father Yusuf Hasan. Istanbul, Summer 1983.

After spending a month in Turkey with his uncle Mohammed Qurban who came to Istanbul all the way from Saudi Arabia to meet his sister first time in 35 years along with her two accompanied family members including Mr. Turani and his father, and to help them getting their visa for Hajj, Turani went to Mekkah to perform pilgrim Hajj with his parents in September 1983.



During his visit to Mekkah, he visited several other historical cities which includes Medina, Jeddah, and Taif with his parents and had the chance to meet hundreds of fellow East Turkistani Uyghurs including many of his own relatives – nephews and nieces who live in Saudi Arabia.



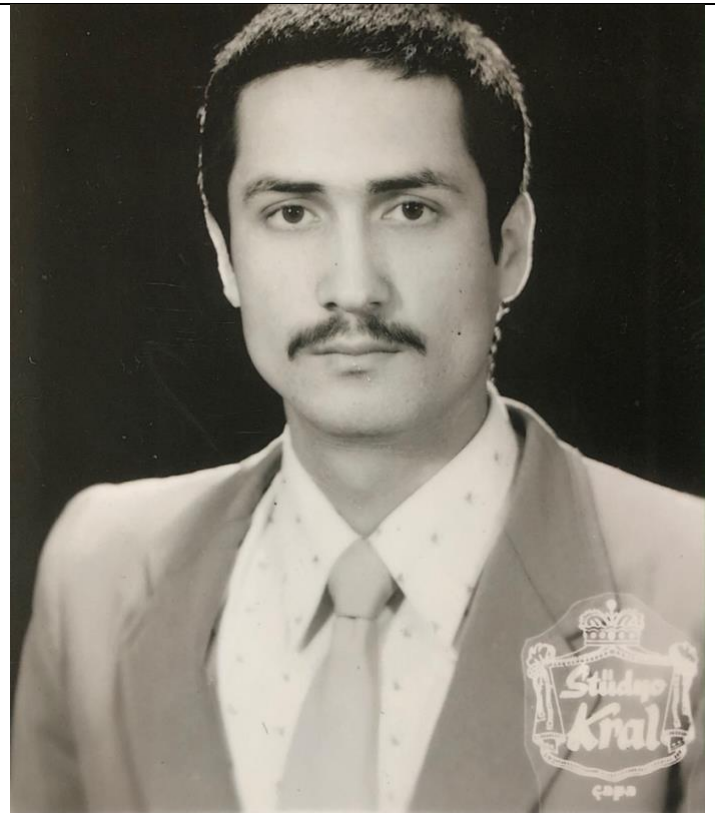


Turani, his mother, Abdulqadir Ahmad Turkistani, Turani's father, and Hussain Qari Islami, Fall, 2001, Virginia, USA.



Turani's mother Sharwanihan Qurban Haji and his uncle Abdulrahim Qurban Kashgari. Spring, 2011, Virginia, USA.

He returned to Istanbul, Turkey in October with his parents after staying forty days in Saudi Arabia and traveled to Bursa, Yalova and Ankara with his parents. His parents left Turkey to return to their homeland East Turkistan leaving his son Turani in Istanbul to explore more about the free world, and he stayed there until the end of 1985. As a young adventurer, Turani went to Pakistan by bus and train via Iran in summer 1984 and stayed in Islamabad for about three months and came back Istanbul by plane in November to resume his research on East Turkistan.



Turani's Brief Return to His Homeland and His Journey to the U.S.

Anxious to try to do something for the sake of his oppressed people of yearning for freedom, Turani left Turkey in early October of 1985 for East Turkistan by plane via Beijing and arrives his hometown Artush in early Spring of 1986 after spending several months in Beijing and

Urumchi. After spending nearly two years in both Artush and Urumchi Turani decides to leave his homeland East Turkistan for abroad due to intense political pressure applied by the Chinese authority and went into exile in early November 1987. He came back to Istanbul by train via Beijing - Moscow - Budapest - Sofia by the end November. After completion of six months of intensive English language course at Turco-British Language Academy in Istanbul, Turani came to the United States of America as an ESL student in August 1988. Thinking of his future safety in terms of challenging the Chinese authority in his occupied homeland, Turani filed political asylum in San Francisco upon his completion of the Language Academy, an ESL school in Berkeley, California. Turani became a U.S citizen in 1998 and he is the father of four children.



Anwar Yusuf Turani and his family members. Front: Turani and his wife Gulzighra Abdushukur (East Turkistan Medical College, 1985) and his four children. Right to left Aydin Anwar (Duke University, 2019), Turkel Anwar (Cornell University, 2016), Oghuz Anwar (Cornell University, 2017), and Ephar Anwar (University of Southern California, 2022). | January 2016, Virginia, USA.