

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Name
2020		94	China	Rahile Dawut, historical anthropologist

Dear colleagues,

Rahile Dawut is a historical anthropologist. She studies the traditions of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, Northwest China. On 12 December 2017, she disappeared.

*What can you do?*

- Sign a petition on her behalf: [here](#).
- Visit her website: [here](#).
- Consult a list of 325 Uyghur intellectuals imprisoned since 2016: [here](#).
- See for an incomplete list of imprisoned Uyghur historians: [NCH Annual Report 2019](#).

*Please find below:*

- A NCH summary of Rahile Dawut's case.
- The text of the petition on her behalf.

With best wishes, stay safe,

Antoon De Baets

(Network of Concerned Historians)

## NCH SUMMARY FOR RAHILE DAWUT

On or around 12 December 2017, **Rahile Dawut** ([1966]–), an anthropologist and ethnographer who studied Uighur traditions at Xinjiang University in Urumqi, and **Gheyretjan Osman**, a history and literature professor at the same university, were secretly detained together with three other academics after they had been called “the leading figures in Uighur ideology” at Xinjiang University. They disappeared and were possibly interned in a so-called re-education camp. Uighur academics with foreign links and specializing in Uighur Muslim culture, language, or religion were particularly targeted in the crackdown on the Uighur Muslim population of Xinjiang, which began in April 2017 as a campaign to clamp down on religious extremism, separatism, and terrorism, but had since broadened in scope to include anyone who was critical. The government purged so-called “two-faced” Uighur teachers in particular, those who paid lip service to the Chinese Communist Party line but were suspected of secretly resisting the hardline policies. Until recently, Dawut’s work was welcomed by Chinese officials: she had received grants and support from the Ministry of Culture. She had earned an international reputation as an expert on Uighur shrines, folklore, music and crafts neglected by previous generations of scholars.

*Sources:* Yojana Sharma, “[Scholars Targeted as Uighur Purge Engulfs Universities](#),” *World University News* (28 September 2018); Chris Buckley & Austin Ramzy, “[Star Scholar Disappears as Crackdown Engulfs Western China](#),” *New York Times* (10 August 2018); Uyghur Human Rights Project, [The Persecution of the Intellectuals in the Uyghur Region: Disappeared Forever?](#) (Washington: UHRP, October 2018), 5–6; Uyghur Human Rights Project, [Detained and Disappeared: Intellectuals Under Assault in the Uyghur Homeland](#) (Washington: UHRP, October 2019), 5; PEN International, *Case List 2018* (London: PEN, 2019), 64; Scholars at Risk, *Free to Think: Report of the Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project* (New York: Scholars at Risk, 2019), 17; Darren Byler, “[‘Heaviness in the Stomach’: A Uyghur Daughter Alone in America on Her Birthday during a Pandemic](#),” *Supchina* (1 April 2020); “[Free Rahile Dawut](#).”; Abduweli Ayup, “[List of Uyghur Intellectuals Imprisoned in China from 2016 to the Present](#) (15 June 2019); “[Petition for the Immediate Release of Professor Rahile Dawut and other Uyghur scholars](#)” (no date); [Uyghur Victims website](#).

## **TEXT OF PETITION ON BEHALF OF RAHILE DAWUT**

<https://www.change.org/p/xi-jinping-petition-for-the-immediate-release-of-professor-rahile-dawut-and-other-uyghur-scholars>

### **Petition for the Immediate Release of Professor Rahile Dawut and other Uyghur scholars.**



**[Concerned Scholars of Xinjiang](#)** started this petition to General Secretary of the Communist Party, Xi Jinping, and Communist Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Uyghur region, Chen Quanguo

**Petition for the Immediate Release of Professor Rahile Dawut (alt. spellings: Reyila Dawuti, Rahilä Dawut) and other Uyghur scholars.**

Rahile Dawut, an internationally renowned scholar of Uyghur culture, has disappeared in China. So have an untold number of other Uyghur professors, intellectuals, students, artists, farmers, and members of ethnic minority groups from all walks of life. Hundreds of thousands of ethnic Uyghurs, Kazakhs and others have been interned in extra-legal re-education camps across the Xinjiang region of China's northwest.

We the undersigned call upon President Xi Jinping and Xinjiang Party Secretary Chen Quanguo to immediately release Professor Rahile Dawut and other Uyghur intellectuals from internment in prison, “educational transformation centers,” “vocational training” or other confinement under any name.

In December 2017, Prof. Dawut was to travel from Urumqi to Beijing, but she never arrived at her destination. She has been either imprisoned or sent to re-education camp.

Prof. Dawut is one of the foremost Uyghur scholars of her generation. A folklorist, anthropologist of religion, curator, and videographer, Dawut served as founder and Director of the Centre for Anthropology and Folklore at Xinjiang University. She has conducted pioneering fieldwork on the oral and visual culture of Uyghurs, including Sufi practices. Her research on Uyghur shrines (mazars) is pathbreaking. As a leader in applied anthropology, Prof. Dawut has made key contributions in cultural heritage protection, both material and immaterial, advocating for the preservation of Uyghur architectural and folk literary heritage.

Prof. Dawut has trained a generation of young Uyghur scholars in ethnographic fieldwork and videography. These students currently study in Australia, Europe, North America and elsewhere around the world. As a visiting scholar at the University of Pennsylvania, Indiana University, University of California-Berkeley, University of Washington, and the University of Kent, Canterbury she helped explain Uyghur culture to colleagues worldwide. She has delivered invited lectures at Harvard, Cornell and the University of British Columbia, among other universities. She has received grants from the Firebrand Foundation for Anthropological Research and the Royal Anthropological Institute.

As noted by the American Anthropological Association in an open letter to U.S. Ambassador to China, Terry Branstad: “While Uighurs’ unique culture has been under scrutiny by China recently, Dr. Dawut, who wrote and lectured widely on Uighur folklore and traditions, is far from being a threat of any kind. In fact, until recently, her work had been supported with grants and awards from China’s Ministry of Culture.” Indeed, Prof. Dawut embodies the best values of anthropology: the promotion of inter-cultural understanding and empathy.

At the 10th Chinese Communist Party Congress in October 2017, President Xi Jinping made “Chinese wisdom” a centerpiece of the Chinese approach to solving humankind’s problems. We, the undersigned, also believe in Chinese wisdom, and ask that that wisdom be exercised in this and similar cases.

***Please release Prof. Dawut and allow her to either a) continue her position at Xinjiang University or b) assume a post outside of China. Please also release all other extra-judicially interned Uyghurs, including professors, intellectuals, teachers, and students.***