

Interview with Amanzhan Seiituly

Conducted in Russian by Gene A. Bunin and Chris Rickleton for Agence France Presse (Almaty, Kazakhstan in July 2018)

Translated, transcribed, and “smoothed” into English by Gene A. Bunin in June-July 2019

Interviewer: I'd like to ask you to introduce yourself.

Amanzhan: Amanzhan Seiituly. I came to Kazakhstan in 1996. To study. I got my Kazakhstan citizenship in 2002. I worked as a translator for a Chinese company. I worked there for about 2 years. Then I went into business. I would go to China every year on business.

I: Usually once a year...?

A: Once or twice a year, usually. Every year I'd go. Sometimes three times.

I: Would it usually be to Xinjiang?

A: Xinjiang, but also to Beijing. To inner China. I'd go often, and there'd never be any problems.

I: And when did you feel like the problems started?

A: In 2015. In 2014 or 2015, already. It felt like something was not right. Each time at customs they would ask what you were doing, what your reason was for coming to China, what relatives you had in China, what relatives you had in Kazakhstan... Those kinds of questions. They would interrogate you, and the interrogations got longer with each time.

I: How long was it the first time? An hour, two, maybe three?

A: It varied at the start. A half hour. Then it'd be an hour. The last time they interrogated me for 6 hours. And when I went to China in 2017 – in September or October – there was also an interrogation but no detention. They just interrogated me and then let me go. But in 2018, they interrogated me for 6 hours and didn't let me go, taking me back to my hometown...

I: This was in Beijing?

A: Yes, in Beijing. They held me in police custody [in my hometown] for 4-5 days and then sent me straight to the political education center.

I: That was when you returned to Urumqi?

A (slight misunderstanding): Yes, yes. When I returned to my hometown [Tacheng City].

...

I: I know I've asked you already, but just so that we have it on camera, could I ask you to recount in detail what happened that day when you went from Almaty to Beijing. How did that day go? You landed and...

A: We left for Beijing at 11 [at night]. We arrived at 4 in the morning, Beijing time. And they have those customs stands there, right? And so there the police immediately looked at my passport, matched it to what was in the computer, took me to one of their special police rooms, and started interrogating me and asking many questions. They immediately turned on their Wi-Fi, or whatever it was, and had my hometown police question me.

I: Through video?

A: Not through a video camera. Just audio.

I: Sorry, but how many people was it that questioned you? Was it two policemen?

A: Yes, two. The Beijing...

I: One Uyghur and one Han? Or both Han?

A: The Han interrogated, then the Uyghurs interrogated, then they connected to my hometown and the police there interrogated me also. They had a lot of questions. Endless questions. My relatives in China, what I was doing there, age, job, how many relatives in Almaty, Kazakhstan, who my friends were, what they did. Then about my house – how many rooms it had, what it cost, whether I had a car, the car brand, how much. What I did for a living. That stuff... They asked everything.

I: Did they ask each question only once? Or were there questions that they asked multiple times?

A: Multiple times.

I: Did different people ask the same questions, or was it the same people who asked you the same question multiple times?

A: The process was the same. The person might be different, but the question remained the same.

I: And afterwards?

A: They questioned me from 4 in the morning to 11. Then they showed me some police orders, did a full-body search, checked my bags... Didn't find anything. And then they told me that I had to fly back to my hometown in order to do the de-registration. They said it would only take two days and then I'd be free to go. At that point, I already felt like there was a problem. That I wasn't going to be let go. I suspected that they wanted to take me to Urumqi in handcuffs and with a bag over my head. If they were going to pay for it. That's what they wanted to do. I told them that I'd rather buy the ticket and go to Urumqi myself without the handcuffs and bag.

So I bought the ticket myself. Then they took me almost all the way to the plane door, checked that everything looked okay, and left. But I didn't get on that plane, going to the bathroom or something like that and not getting on the plane. The plane took off and I was left there. And then I went to the Kazakhstan embassy in Beijing. I told them about my problems and asked them what I should do. They told me to fly back if I was afraid. I didn't have any other way out, so I returned to the airport. I was planning to buy the ticket there, back to Almaty. At that point I turned on my phone and connected to the airport Wi-Fi.

As soon as I connected, I got a call from my wife in Almaty. It sounded like the Chinese police had called my home number.

I: Your wife called you over WeChat?

A: Yes, WeChat. We had a video call. She said that the police from my hometown had just called. They said for me to not run off and to go back to my hometown. It would just take 2 days for the de-registration to be done, they had told me through my wife. So that I wouldn't run off and would return to my hometown. And then I got a call from my sister, except that when I picked up it wasn't my sister but the police. You could hear that there was a whole group of them in my sister's house. And so they started talking to me, asking me why I was running around. They asked me what I was afraid of and why I hadn't returned – all they needed me to do was de-register. That's what they said – come here, do the de-registration, and you're free to go.

I: One question. When they called you, had the plane to Urumqi already landed? The one you bought the ticket for.

A: Yes, yes. They had looked for me and I wasn't there. They had already started looking for me. And if I didn't accept their offer, it seemed like they could have jailed my sister.

I: Did they say that?

A: No, but it was more or less implied.

I: That was the understanding.

A: Yes, yes. It was understood. So I had to decide whether to fly back or to stay. And since my sister was now in danger, I decided that okay, I could go and see what they wanted. They asked me where I was. I said I was in the Beijing airport, sitting in the corner in Terminal 3. I showed them my location and the surroundings through WeChat. In half an hour, there were already 4 police officers there.

I: And then?

A: And then they questioned me. They asked me where I had gone. I said I had gone to the Kazakhstan embassy. They asked me why. I said because I had been afraid. I had gone there to ask about these problems I had encountered. Nothing more. So then I bought another ticket, with my own money. That one for the morning of the second day.

I: Did they question you for long, those four?

A: No, not long. They detained me and just asked why I had gone to the embassy, why I hadn't gotten on the plane.

I: Did they handcuff you?

A: In Beijing, no.

I: So they let you get on the plane and fly out yourself?

A: Yes. Because I paid for the ticket. Right? Because I realized that if they paid it'd be with handcuffs and a bag. And with police officers accompanying me. I told them that I hadn't slept in two days and so I had fallen asleep while the first plane was taking off. That night, two policemen would stay with me to make sure that I didn't run off. On the morning of the second day, they'd see me all the way to the plane and wouldn't leave like they had the first time. They'd just stay there and would only leave after the door closed and the plane took off. In Urumqi, 3 police officers would meet me and then handcuff me in the bathroom, after which they put me straight into the police car.

I: That was in Urumqi Terminal 2 or Terminal 3?

A: When I was leaving, Terminal 3 [in Beijing]... In Urumqi, Terminal 2.

I: And they got you on the first floor?

A: Yes, yes.

I: And what happened the next day?

A: They took me to the police station and started interrogating me there. I would spend 4 days there. They didn't have beds there, just iron – what do you call them? – stools [he may mean benches, but probably not]. We'd sleep there.

I: So when did you arrive in Urumqi? On the second day.

A: At 11 in the morning, or 1.

I: And you were immediately taken to... where? To a *kanshousuo* (pre-trial detention center)?

A: Yes, a *kanshousuo* [strictly speaking, this was probably just a *paichusuo*, or a regular police station with its own detention cells]. And there it'd be 4 days of the same questions again. And on the fourth day – or the fifth day, it was night – I and two local Uyghurs were put in a car and first taken to a hospital. We went there, had everything checked – they took our blood – and were at the education center at 1 or 2 at night.

We were shocked. We had imagined a nice building, but it was a jail the second you walked in. All metal doors...

I: Hold on, there's something I want to understand first. Do you know where it was that they took you straight from the airport? Where exactly? Was it in the city, in downtown Urumqi?

A: From Urumqi, they took me straight to my hometown and to the *kanshousuo*.

I: Oh, you mean they took you straight to Tacheng?

A: Yes, Tacheng.

I: And how did they take you to Tacheng?

A: By car.

I: By car?

A: Yes, by police car.

I: So that was what... 10 hours or so?

A: It was already 1 in the morning.

I: So you only arrived at 1 in the morning?

A: We left Beijing in the morning. We arrived in Urumqi at 11 or 12. And there the 3 policemen met me and immediately put me in the car to Tacheng.

I: And so when did you get to Tacheng?

A: At night.

I: Late at night?

A: Yes.

I: And that's where you were in the *kanshousuo*. For 4 days, you said?

A: Yes, 4 days.

I: And do you know the name of that *kanshousuo* or where it was located?

A: In the city center.

I: But are there many of those *kanshousuos*?

A: Yes.

I: But might you know the specific address?

A: *Xincheng paichusuo* [probably 新城派出所].

I: How big was the building?

A: It was about 30 square meters when you entered [the cell], then there'd be other rooms – the police rooms, the basement. There were floors above us too. There were guards. There were the metal doors after you entered, and they just wouldn't let you go. The guard would watch you. All we did there was sit. They didn't even give us lunch there. My sister would bring me something and I'd have my dinner and water delivered through the door. For four days, I'd sit and sleep on those iron stools that we had there. It was very cold there.

I: There were no beds?

A: No beds at all.

I: And there were how many of you there? You said there were two Uyghurs with you?

A: No, there were very many people there. Every day we'd get new people who were intended to be sent to the camps. Every day there'd be 5, 6...

I: So, in that room where you spent 4 days – how many square meters was that, about?

A: About 30 square meters. Then you had the guards and the other rooms – offices.

I: So there were no beds, only stools. How many?

A: A row, two rows... Three rows of stools.

I: And how many total?

A: You could probably fit a total of 10-15 people in there.

I: So about 5 stools per row?

A: Yes, about.

I: Was this room always full, or was it somewhat empty? How many people were there?

A: Every day there'd be 4, 5, 6 – sometimes 10 – people arriving to have their names checked before being transferred to a camp. They'd have their blood, etc. checked. A day or two after getting there, they'd be transferred. In my case, I was there for 4-5 days. Don't know why they kept me there that long.

I: Did you talk to the other people?

A: Yes, we talked.

I: About what?

A: We talked about everything. The *kanshousuo* had called them all to say that they needed to be sent to the education center. They called them, said they had to come, and they came. [They told me] they'd be sent there.

I: Were they afraid of talking?

A: About what?

I: About the reasons for why they had been taken, their...

A: No, they weren't. They all knew that they were innocent. It was just an "education center".

I: And were there cameras?

A: Yes. There were cameras everywhere.

I: And after 4 days you were taken, as you said, to a hospital first?

A: Yes, first to the hospital and then straight to the camp from there.

I: Do you know which hospital?

A: The *xianyuan* (county hospital).

I: There was just one *xianyuan*?

A: Yes, just one.

I: And how long were you at the *xianyuan*? An hour or two?

A: Probably an hour about. Just to check everything.

I: They took your blood as well?

A: Yes.

I: Blood and... what else?

A: Blood. [Chest] scan.

I: And then?

A: And then we went straight to camp.

I: Were there many of you being taken there together? How did they take you? By car?

A: Yes, by police car. In handcuffs.

I: How many of you was there?

A: Two women were there with me.

I: Also in handcuffs?

A: Yes.

I: So, the three of you?

A: Yes.

I: And how many police officers?

A: Two.

I: Actually, back in the *kanshousuo*, was it all men or both men and women?

A: Women, men... everyone.

I: So about 50-50?

A: Well, more men.

I: Were you all in the same room?

A: In the same room during the day. The women who were brought to the *kanshousuo* were let go in the evening. They'd come during the day to report and then would be let go in the evening.

I: Back home?

A: Yes.

I: And the men...

A: And the men would all stay there.

I: So then they took you to the camp... Do you know approximately where that camp was?

A: Yes, more or less.

I: Maybe even the address?

A: I couldn't tell you the address. There's the No. 5 school near there.

I: Right next door? How close was it, about?

A: I couldn't say exactly...

I: But then how do you know...?

A: That's what we heard. That the No. 5 school was close by.

I: Where did you hear that from?

A: In the camp.

I: From whom?

A: From other people detained there.

I: So what happened on that day when you arrived at the camp?

A: They brought us to a room with 4-5 police officers. They had us all strip down to our underwear. There were two plastic plates – a small one and a slightly bigger one – a plastic spoon, and the cheapest soap possible [that we were given]. After which we'd go to our rooms.

I: So they gave you plates for...

A: Yes, a plate for eating. And a slightly bigger one for washing and whatnot.

I: And your things? What did you have with you when you arrived at the camp? Phone, etc.... Were they all...?

A: I didn't have anything.

I: Everything had already been taken from you?

A: Back in the *kanshousuo*, they told us to leave behind everything. My phone had been taken by the police. All my good, normal clothes I gave to my sister so that she could hold on to them for the time being. I only kept a set of athletic clothes.

I: And how big was the camp, about?

A: The camp was a four-story building. Maybe about 200 meters in length. Four stories. I heard that it used to be an old folks home – an elderly care facility – but now it's become a camp. The room they took me to had about 10 people in there, maybe 12 or 13. It was about 20 square meters. There wasn't enough space for everybody to sleep, as evidenced by some people sleeping under the bunk beds.

I: So you had one person under the bed, then one person on the first bunk...?

A: Yes. And on each bottom bunk you'd have people sleeping in twos, because of the lack of space. They didn't do that with the top bunk since it wouldn't have supported the weight. And that's how I slept, in those little beds. Top and tail, since there was no space.

I: Did you have pillows?

A: Not enough for everyone. I'd only get one later.

I: Were there cameras in the rooms?

A: Yes, there were.

I: Did you talk amongst yourselves? What was the mood like?

A: There was no mood. How could you have any mood [there]? It was almost forbidden for us to talk during the day.

I: Did you spend many hours of each day in this room?

A: All of our time, night and day.

I: So then tell me what your standard schedule was like.

A: The standard schedule... At 6 o'clock, we'd already have the Chinese national anthem playing loudly.

I: That was in the room or outside?

A: In the room. At 6, we'd get up and wash up, then be given a steamed bread bun and boiled water for breakfast. As well as a little bit of porridge. Maybe 5-7 spoonfuls. That's it. After eating, the veteran detainees would go to study in the daytime. I heard that they'd gather a room of about 80 people, who would sit and study from the morning to the afternoon. 3-4 hours.

I: But you weren't called?

A: [cut]... There must not have been enough room or something like that. With us, it'd be sitting on the little stools they gave us from 7 or 8 in the morning all the way until noon. Then they'd give us lunch, we'd sleep for an hour, and then continue sitting, all the way until nighttime. 8 hours.

I: Sorry, what did you do between 7 and 12?

A: At 7, we would have finished breakfast and those going to study would have already left. The 5 or 6 of us who were new arrivals would just sit on the little stools there.

I: That's it?

A: That's it. We'd sit. They'd give us some books about, you know, Communism. There were 100 rules about things like religion being bad – religion being an opium – that they'd give to us all to read.

I: Was this a thick book or a small one?

A: Small. I mean, only 100 rules, so... There were also thick books about Lei Feng, Mao Zedong, Communists, the anthem... That's what we had.

I: Do you feel like these books were old or new?

A: New.

I: Recently published?

A: Yes.

Interviewer 2: May I ask a question? When you talk about getting up at 6 and the anthem playing... You said they played the anthem, right?

A: Yes, yes. From the speaker inside the room.

I2: There's a speaker inside the room?

A: Yes, inside the room.

I2: So there was a speaker in each room in the camp?

A: Yes.

I: Did you have to only listen, or did you have to sing as well?

A: Before every breakfast, lunch, and dinner, we'd sing first and then they'd give us permission to eat.

I: Would guards or wardens or anyone like that enter your room?

A: No. Sometimes people would enter to sanitize – to clean the room, the toilet...

I: Was the toilet in the room as well?

A: In our room, there was a toilet. That wasn't the case in the others, since people would come in from other cells to pee in ours.

I2: Just to clarify – they played music through the speakers and you had to sing along?

A: No, not sing along. The anthem was played in the morning just to...

I2: To wake you up?

A: Yes. At 1 or 2 o'clock [not sure, but possible he meant "after one or two hours"], the speaker would announce that we could stand up, since our legs were tired from sitting for so long, you'd have blood there [also not sure what exactly he means here, maybe numbness]. We'd stand up and move in place a little, about 10 minutes, and then the speaker would tell us to sit back down and we'd sit down to keep sitting some more.

I2: Could you try to estimate how many hours a day you spent sitting?

A: 8 hours. We'd basically spend all the daylight hours sitting, on the small stools. We weren't allowed to go lie on the bed or move around the room. None of that.

I2: 8 hours over the course of the day.

A: 8 hours of sitting, yes.

I: So there were 5-6 of you in the room who didn't go to the classes. Did you talk amongst yourselves, or did you just read those books?

A: Well, the rooms were small, and we were all sitting in a row. So yea, we'd talk, little by little. We'd talk little by little, yea.

I: So what kind of people were these? Were they Kazakhs, Uyghurs...?

A: Everyone. Kazakhs, Uyghurs...

I: Men and women were separated?

A: Yes, the women were somewhere else.

I: Were there women in your building?

A: There were. But, I mean, we basically never ran into each other.

I: And in the classes, were there both men and women?

A: I heard that it was separated. Yes, separated.

I: I see.

A: I was in that jail for 23 days, and then after the 23 days they took us to another jail. That place was a real jail. The first was an elderly folks home, but the second place was a real jail. They had triple-bunk beds. There was just a small window at the very top for the patrolling policemen to look in on us.

I2: When you talk of the camp that was close to the No. 5 school, that was the first place?

A: Yes, the first place. After 23 days, they called the names of the people who were to go outside, and we went out. That was our first time outside. We went out and had to kneel [on one knee]. There were 200-300 of us.

I: When you were coming out of the first camp?

A: Yes. They had us kneel down, then handcuffed us to one another – my arm to my neighbor's – and shackled our legs together as well. Then there was a long police bus, and they'd lead us in in pairs. They sat us down and put black hoods over our heads, so that we wouldn't see anything.

I: This was in the yard?

A: In the yard. There were police with machine guns, standing...

I: In the first camp?

A: In the first camp, when we went out. When they sat us down in the circle and the police...

I: It was a big spacious yard?

A: Yes, a big yard.

I: Bigger than the building, in area?

A: Yes, and closed. We were being treated like real... I mean, we were all innocent. This was just for "study", right? But we were being treated like real criminals, with leg shackles, handcuffs, and black hoods over

our heads. Then they loaded us onto the bus with the hoods over our heads, so we couldn't see anything, couldn't see where they were taking us.

I2: They never issued you a formal accusation, is that right?

A: No. There were people there who had gone to Friday prayers, or who prayed at work. There were some who had written complaints to the authorities because they were unhappy for having been forced to sell their land for cheap. That's all forbidden now [legal complaints]. For example, say the local government bought land for a really low price, and they'd file a legal [complaint]... Like, if the local village administrator [forcefully] bought someone's land and gave them very little for it, and the land owner filed a legal complaint... All these people [the ones filing] were there [in camp]. Also those who had spent too much time in Kazakhstan, over a month, or who had gone to Kazakhstan often, or had a residence permit there. All those were there [in camp] as well.

I: And you never received any kind of document accusing you of anything?

A: No, no, no.

I: You received no documents at all?

A: Absolutely nothing. The people there were innocent. Some were former imams at the mosque. Some had been mosque guards or cleaners. The people who had worked there... They were all there [in the camp]. What were they guilty of? The ones who cleaned the mosques, or who had gone to a Friday prayer once or twice. I mean, they had that registration sheet [at the mosque entrance]... They must have been planning that in advance. The IDs were there [on the registration sheet], so all of them... were taken to study.

I: I just wanted to ask – at the first camp, in the afternoon, what was your schedule like? You'd eat at 1, right?

A: Right.

I: What kind of food was that?

A: Rice, cabbage, all mixed in water [might just mean *zhou* – the traditional porridge]. That's it. Meat, [something else, unintelligible] – none of that. Cabbage and rice. In the evenings, we'd have some sort of black-mushroom thing... Couldn't tell what it was. Some sort of porridge.

I: So you were fed 3 times a day?

A: Yes... We heard that it was best not to eat that mushroom thing we had in the evenings. Because we heard that they put some sort of drug in there, to make men... unable to get aroused...

I: Right. There've been some rumors about that.

A: Because some people didn't eat it – I saw that myself. But they wouldn't tell us anything. Some of us didn't know. Now I think that some of them thought that there was something added and refused to eat for this reason, but they wouldn't tell us why they weren't eating. They didn't say anything, we didn't ask.

I: They weren't punished for this? For refusing to eat.

A (misunderstanding): Well, if you wanted to survive you had to eat...

I: I mean, if someone refused to eat, could they be punished for it?

A (misunderstanding): I don't know. After I left there, I heard through the internet that many were turning down the food because it was so bad. No one was eating. That did happen.

I2: What was the exact reason for why you refused to eat? Because of the rumors of impotence?

A: Yes, yes... No, no! I ate it! I ate. I didn't know. I didn't know, but later after getting out I heard that they were adding things... to make a man not able to get aroused. Because I've been feeling it as well... There isn't much of a reaction, you know?

I: And there were no women there [at the camp], right?

A: I didn't see any.

I2: And you believe in those rumors [about impotence]?

A: I do. Because some of the men who were there for a year, you know, without that... And they never turned off the lights. It was always bright and white there.

I: They didn't turn off the lights?

A: No.

I: The entire night?

A: The entire night. It was white during the day and white during the night. They didn't allow us to turn them off.

I2: If I may ask a vulgar question, and I apologize in advance if it's inappropriate...

A: Yes.

I2: You said that if a person spent a year there, and you know such people...

A: Yes.

I2: From Almaty, or from China?

A: From the Chinese population. Uyghurs, Kazakhs...

I: You had people in your room who were already there for almost...

A: Yes, almost a year.

I2: So those who were there for a year, they couldn't get a male [illustrates erection by straightening finger]...?

A: They probably could, but a weak one, I think.

I: Did they talk about that?

A: No, they didn't. They don't even feel it anymore... A weak one, I think.

I2: They couldn't get aroused?

A: Right.

I: Another question – about how many Uyghurs and how many Kazakhs were there?

A: 50-50, about...

I: Any (Han) Chinese?

A: Very... In my room, there weren't any. There were in other rooms. But very few. Maybe 5%, about. Former drug addicts, murderers... With the matter previously settled, I mean. So, for example, drug addicts who had done their jail time already and weren't drug addicts anymore... They were all called back in there [into the camps]. There were Uyghurs and Kazakhs, too [among the ex-convicts, probably]... Anyone with a history of drug addiction was summoned and sent to the camp. Or people who had gotten into fights before, went to court, served their sentence or paid the fine – their cases were closed, but still in the computer system, so they'd all be called and sent to the camp. They'd be like: "Am I guilty of something? Yes, I had gotten in a fight in the past, but that case is closed. I was fined or jailed, but I was let out and the matter's settled." Right? But they have their computer system, which keeps your history of fights you've gotten in 10 years earlier. So they just call all those and send them to camp. Basically 100% of the people there were all innocent, with some just having [past transgressions]... They just viewed me,

or some guy next to me, as being “dangerous”, so they decided to have us study for a year, two years, however long...

I: Did they tell you when you arrived how long you would be there for?

A: Nobody knew that. Nobody knew how long they’d be there for.

I: So, what was your schedule in the afternoon like?

A: We’d have an hour to sleep or rest. Then the video camera [probably means loudspeaker] would tell us to get up, and we’d be back to sitting.

I: The books again?

A: The books again.

I: Until dinnertime?

A: Until dinnertime.

I: You didn’t do any exercising [shows military punching motion]?

A: We did in the evening. We’d just [demonstrates marching].

I: In the room?

A: In the room. For an hour or longer. I mean, there was no room. [Demonstrates turning and says something, but not sure if he means “it was too cramped to turn” or “turning was all there was room to do”].

I: Did anybody enter your room during this time? Or was this all done through the loudspeaker?

A: Through the loudspeaker.

I: So you’d just be told to stand, turn, march...?

A: Yes, yes.

I: I have a photo here. Did you have drills like these?



A: We never even [went or] saw the outside.

I: So just in the...

A: 24 hours a day in the cell. That's all. What it was like outside... No, none of that.

I: So for 20 days it was all like this?

A: [Nods.]

I: No diversity, nothing new...?

A: [Nods.]

I: And the people in your room – the ones who lived with you – did they ever leave or disappear? Or did everyone who arrived there with you just stay there?

A: They just stayed there.

I: And new people didn't arrive?

A: New people did arrive. Those [first] 20 days, there were 12 people there when I first arrived, but later it would reach 16.

I: Did any of those 12 leave?

A: No.

I: So everyone who was there with you...?

A: Yes. And then after 23 days, half of us would be called to go to the other jail. Some stayed there [in the first jail].

I: And the second place – was it a *camp* or a *prison*?

A: Which one?

I: The second one.

A: The second was a real prison. A new prison.

I: But how did they call it? Did they also call it a *xuexi zhongxin* ("education center")?

A: Yes, yes. That's how they called it, but it was a prison. With the construction work just completed. A new prison.

I: But they called it an "education center"?

A: Yes.

I: And how long would you spend there?

A: The rest of my time [in detention], I spent there.

I: Approximately how long? A month?

A: More than a month.

I: And was the schedule there similar?

A: There we started to study [have classes] as well. They gave us permission to study [maybe means "had us study"]. There was a big room there with a metal barrier. We'd walk into the room and there'd be the metal barrier, with a guard standing there, with a machine gun and that [stun baton]...

I: Machine gun?

A: No, not a machine gun, though they probably had handguns... [They had] that electric [means stun baton]... Then we'd go into the room 8-10 people at a time. They didn't let us all enter at once. Our cell would enter, then the guard would go and get another cell, and have people enter the room group by group. It'd be really full then, 8 [sounds like "eight", but probably said "eighty"] people. And then they'd lock the metal barrier – there was a lock there. There was a blackboard out front with stuff written down [or "for us to write down", not sure]. Characters, pinyin... Very easy things that we didn't need, because this was first-grade material. There were university students and graduate students there, all in that classroom... Who needed that stuff? No one. Because of the metal barrier with its squares, we couldn't even clearly see what was written there.

I: What about farmers?

A: Tons of those. Yes, lots of those as well.

I: This was difficult for them, I imagine?

A: For them it was difficult, yes. You'd have 70-year-old Kazakhstan farmers [not sure if he just meant "Kazakh"] whose eyesight was too poor to write down or remember those characters. They'd be told that they had to study, and that's all there was to it. They didn't tell us that, because we already knew all that stuff... The characters.

I2: Can I ask you: being a Kazakhstan citizen who found himself in this situation, did your telling them that you were a Kazakhstan citizen have any effect on anything?

A: No effect. The last time – during the last interrogation – they admitted that I wasn't guilty of anything. They told me I had dual citizenship. I asked them: if I had dual citizenship, then why was the Chinese consulate in Kazakhstan giving me a Chinese visa for my Kazakhstan passport? Where was my second Chinese passport? The Chinese consulate in Kazakhstan represents China, right? Why didn't they tell me back then that I had a dual citizenship and have me get the visa for either the Kazakhstan or Chinese passport [not 100% what he means by getting the visa for the Chinese passport – probably just means going to China without a visa]? That and there's the law about anyone who gets a foreign citizenship automatically having their Chinese citizenship cancelled. There is such a law. I know this. I told them: this law exists, so why am I in this situation right now? And during that last meeting, they actually told me: yes, you're not guilty of anything, this is just what our internal policies are like now. We have to sort all of these things out, they said [not sure if this means "we have to follow the rules as ordered" or "we have to sort these contradictions, like yours, out"].

I: When was that last meeting?

A: About a week before they'd release us. They'd be interrogating us every day [not long before the release]. "How many kids do you have?" "Do you want Kazakh citizenship or Chinese citizenship? Choose." I told them that I didn't have two citizenships. I explained to them a hundred times that I was a Kazakhstan citizen. I had already handed in my Chinese passport and ID to our government when I got my Kazakhstan citizenship. To an organization in Kazakhstan – I had already given it to them. On that day – on May 22, 2002 – they mailed my Chinese passport and ID to the Chinese consulate. Then they gave me a Kazakhstan passport and ID. Dual citizenship is forbidden by Kazakhstan law too. We have that law. I explained this to them a hundred times. A hundred times. I don't know if they didn't know or just didn't understand.

I2: Could you try to say, if it's not too difficult, what percentage of the people you were interned with – in the first camp and in the second, together – were ethnic Kazakhs?

A: About half Uyghurs, half Kazakhs. There were about 500-600, right?

I: In the first?

A: Both in the first and second. That was the capacity, you couldn't fit more. You could see it from the triple bunks. A lot of Hui, too.

I2: Okay. So let's say 40% Kazakh? 45%?

A: Yes. And 15% Hui. And 1, 2, or 3% [Han] Chinese.

I2: So, roughly speaking, about 40% Kazakh?

A: Yes.

I2: How many of them were citizens of Kazakhstan?

A: There were 3.

I2: In addition to yourself?

A: Those released with me.

I: They were released as well?

A: All on the same day.

I2: So there were 4 of you? Or 3?

A: 3. In that jail.

I2: Including yourself?

A: Yes, yes. I don't know if there were any others from the other jail. That day they released 4. [This is confusing, since I know he was released with Orynbek and Arman, and I've never heard of a fourth guy. Might be a misunderstanding / language issue.]

I: Was the way you were treated any different because of your Kazakhstan citizenship?

A: No. Same treatment.

I: Did you hear of anyone being beaten?

A: I heard of it. Didn't see it.

I: You yourself were not beaten?

A: No.

I: And you weren't tortured?

A (slightly misunderstanding): Well, if you did something wrong... Like if you fought with someone, or if you said something bad about Communism, or if you didn't sing the anthem...

I: Then they could punish you?

A: Yes, of course. 100%.

I: How were people punished?

A: They had a *jinbishi* (solitary confinement room). I don't know if you've heard of it. A small, cold, dark room.

I: How small is "small"? A square meter?

A: Probably a square meter.

I: And you get locked in there and...

A: Yes.

I: But you yourself were never in there?

A: No, never.

I2: I just want to clarify. Were you ever tortured or physically harmed?

A: Physically... How to put it...? We had the *zuzhang* (group leader)...

I: From among the detainees?

A: Yes, from the detainees. There were Chinese there [not sure what he means – maybe that the group leader was Chinese, though he said earlier that there were no ethnic Han in his cell, but maybe this is the second camp, or maybe the group leader didn't actually live in their cell]. There was a time when he tried to hit me so that I would sing louder.

I: He tried to?

A: Yes. He said: sing the national anthem louder!

I: But didn't actually hit you?

A: No, he didn't.

I: For the second camp... Do you know where that was?

A: I heard it was by the *saimachang* (horse racetrack).

I: The *saimachang* in Tacheng?

A: Yes.

I: There's only one there?

A: Yes, yes.

I: So you had hoods over your heads when you arrived there?

A: Yes, with our arms and legs chained to one another's.

I: And so you couldn't see what the outside was like?

A: No, not with the black hoods.

I: And when were the hoods taken off?

A: After we entered that building. In the interior of the prison.

I: So they took off the hoods, the handcuffs...

A: Yes. More or less all to their rooms. [Not sure what he means – possibly that they kept the same cellmates as before.]

I: So how big were the rooms there? How many people?

A: 30-40 square meters. There were almost 30 of us living there. Every day there'd be more people coming. At the start it was a little over 20, then another 10 arrived.

I: And there were cameras in this room too?

A: Yes. The toilet in the room as well.

I (misunderstanding): Where was it [the camera] in the toilet? Above you?

A (misunderstanding): The toilet was in the corner [of the room]. An open one.

I: Ah! But was there a camera in the toilet also?

A: The toilet wasn't separate. It was in the corner of the room. And there were cameras in all four corners. A camera here, another there...

I2 (to I): What was he wearing? Since at the beginning they stripped down to their underwear.

I (to A): They gave you clothes, right?

A: No, they didn't. We had to wear our own.

I2: [not sure if "athletic" or "your own"] clothes.

A: Yes, yes. Our own clothes.

I: But when you first got to the camp, you undressed? In the first camp.

A: Yes.

I: Then they let you get dressed again.

A: Yes.

I: Then in the second camp as well... And was it almost the same in the second camp? Did they also give you a plate, etc.?

A: No. They told us to bring our [old] plates with us.

I: From the first camp to the second?

A: Yes.

I2: What did they tell you regarding Mao? What topics did they cover? You were studying all the time, right?

A: Yes.

I2: Chinese history...? Maybe the revolution, yea?

A: No, just some rubbish. Songs. "Mao is our sun, without him we are slaves." All that Communism rubbish about how great our life was now [thanks to Communism].

I: Did they talk about Xi Jinping?

A: Yes, they did.

I: What specifically?

A: That Xi Jinping was a real leader. Our ideology. That we should do what he said. That he would lead us to a good life.

I: They said that to you in class?

A: In class, yea...

I: So, I want to try to understand the schedule you had there again. So in the second camp – in the jail – you also got up at 6 in the morning?

A: Uh-huh. Same schedule.

I: The same?

A: Yes.

I: But did you spend your mornings sitting or did you actually go out somewhere?

A: Where? In the second...?

I: In the mornings, after breakfast, did you just sit in your room?

A: Yes, we sat.

I: In the second camp?

A: Yes.

I: And also read books?

A: Yes. And when the time came, we'd go to study [in the classroom]. In the... There was the hall, and [down the hall] there was the big room. We'd sit for 3-4 hours.

I: And what time was that, about?

A: Because you couldn't fit everyone in there... Sometimes we'd go in the mornings, with another group in the afternoon, and then another in the evening. My classes were in the morning.

I: 3-4 hours a day?

A: Yes.

I: And there were instructors there?

A: There were teachers, yes.

I: So, you're there, sitting in that room. How many of you are there?

A: 80.

I: Approximately 80?

A: Yes.

I: And there's a guard standing in the corner?

A: Yes.

I: One?

A: Two, one... [sounds like it may have varied]

I: With the stun baton?

A: Yes.

I: And then there [out front] you have the board and the instructor?

A: Yes.

I: Was it a woman? A man?

A: A woman.

I: And all 80 of you were men?

A: Yes. There were women in other classes, but there weren't any in mine. There were women in other classes... There were women in the second jail. Maybe about 80 of them. 50-60...

I: Why do you think it was 60?

A: There were two female cells across from where we were. You couldn't see them, but sometimes we'd see them as they went to class.

I: And this was not a 4-story [camp] anymore? This was something else?

A: Just one story. It was not a 3-story [4-story] – this was like a real prison. Just one.

I: Did you get to go outside there?

A: Not at all.

I: And they didn't [let you] turn out the lights there either?

A: No, [they didn't].

I2: They didn't turn the lights off inside the cell?

A: Yes.

I2: They were on the whole time?

A: Yes.

I: And how did you sleep? Did you cover your eyes, or did you just [makes passing out motion]...?

A: We had gotten used to it by then. You get used to it. No big deal.

I2: It was like that everywhere – in the education center and in the camp? [likely means "in both camps"]

A: Yes. There was no darkness at all... I [also] didn't drink any tea. Nothing but boiled water for 2 months. And it was completely forbidden for relatives to bring us any food. They wouldn't accept it.

I: So, your relatives there were... your sister?

A: Yes.

I: Anyone else?

A: No.

I: Just the one sister?

A: Yes.

I2: Did she know where you were?

A: Yes, she knew.

I: Could she visit you? Could she come see you?

A: No. We could only talk over the phone.

I: Did that happen often?

A: No. Maybe once every week or two.

I: How did that work? Did you have to sign up somewhere and wait for your turn, or how?

A: No...

I: Or did they just summon you and say "there, go!"

A: No... We'd have a phone call once a week, but always with a guard next to us. To watch over you so that you not say anything bad. And they warned us beforehand, telling us to say that everything was great, that everything was wonderful. It was forbidden to say anything bad. They probably recorded everything that was said in case you said something bad, and there was the guard there too.

I: And how long did a single call last?

A: 5 minutes. That's all. To say how great and wonderful everything was. "We're studying, it's great here!"

I: But did they summon you there? Did they come in and say "Amanzhan, there's a phone call for you", or did you yourself request it?

A: They called us. Every week or two, everyone would have phone calls. They'd have a *gongshi* (office) there, right? They informed us once a week.

I: You all went there together?

A: In turns. This day it'd be this section [of the prison], that day it'd be that section...

I: Was the food all the same [as in the first camp]?

A: Yes.

I: So – porridge, steamed buns...

A: Yes, yes. The same.

I: And the mushroom dish?

A: Yes.

I2: From time to time, Kazakhstan's foreign affairs minister makes a statement where he doesn't talk about the camps specifically – he just says that people were "freed" – and also makes mention of "dual citizenship". Do you believe that Kazakhstan played a role in your being freed? I mean, you mention that you were let out with other Kazakhstan citizens. The three of you. Do you believe that this was Kazakhstan's influence?

A: I do think so, because there were a lot of requests filed. We sent them [not sure who "we" is], others did as well, and I heard that Kazakhstan had sent them to China. Asking about us – where we were, how we were, what the reason for the detention was. They sent several diplomatic notes to China. You know, diplomatic notes – a sort of formal request.

I2: A diplomatic note from where? From Almaty or... ["from Xinjiang", I think]?

A: From Kazakhstan's minister.

I2: So from Kazakhstan?

A: Yes, from Kazakhstan.

I2: About the general situation? Not yours specifically?

A: Yes.

I: And in the second camp you also don't know anyone who left or disappeared? From your cell.

A: I only know – I only saw – us three Kazakhstan citizens. I didn't hear or see any of the locals being released.

I: So in your cell – of the people who were there – did anyone disappear, vanish, go away?

A: No.

I: So everyone who was there on Day 1 when you arrived was still there when you left? No one was freed?

A: Yes, yes.

I: Did you become friends with anyone? Were there any relations between you? Did people trust each other?

A: There was trust. There was a Kazakh there who was detained in the June of last year. [He had] a residence permit. A lot of people who went to and from Kazakhstan often were getting detained. His wife and kids are all in Almaty. He had already filed his application for a Kazakhstan citizenship to the ministry. Twenty days before he was supposed to get the citizenship, he went to China while he still had the [Kazakhstan] residence permit. And he was detained. In June 2017. He still hasn't obtained his Kazakhstan citizenship because he needs to sign off on it. But he's still there in the camp, since the Chinese government detained him and is not letting him go. [Pretty sure he's talking about Erbaqyt Otarbai.]

I: You got to know him?

A: Yes.

I: He was in your cell?

A: Yes.

I: And those others who you said were from Kazakhstan. I think you said there were two?

A: Yes.

I: Were they also in your cell?

A: No, in other cells.

I: How did you usually talk to them?

A: We almost never talked.

I: So did you have any opportunities to talk with people in other cells? Or just with those in your own?

A: Just with those in our own. Very few opportunities [otherwise].

I: And you weren't allowed to talk to each other in the classes either?

A: We weren't.