



# Systematic Persecution

Unveiling the Chinese Government's Atrocities  
towards Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims



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## Background

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang or XUAR) is situated in the north-western part of China, sharing borders with India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia. In contrast to the predominant Han Chinese population, who primarily speak Mandarin Chinese, the Uyghur, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz communities in Xinjiang belong to the Turkic ethnic group, adhere to Islam as their predominant religion, and possess distinct languages. According to the 2010 census data, Uyghurs constituted 46 per cent of Xinjiang's population, rendering it the region with the highest concentration of Muslims in China.<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that some Turkic Muslims employ the term 'East Turkestan' to denote the region, reflecting their aspirations for increased autonomy or even independence from Chinese governance.<sup>2</sup>

## History

According to the Chinese government, Xinjiang has been an integral part of China for over 2,000 years.<sup>3</sup> However, most Uighurs dispute this perspective and consider Xinjiang as a distinct region with its own cultural and political history, similar to Tibet. Uighur separatists even reject the name 'Xinjiang' and instead refer to the area as 'East Turkestan' or 'Uighuristan'.<sup>4</sup>

Historical records reveal a complex narrative of conquest and power struggles in the region. Chinese rulers first invaded what is now Xinjiang in the first century B.C., aiming to expel the Huns and establish control. In

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1 Human Rights Watch, *Devastating Blows: Religious Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang*, 2005, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/china0405/china0405.pdf>.

2 Ibid.

3 Historical Mattxrs Concerning Xinjiang. (n.d.). [http://pk.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/mlzg/201907/t20190721\\_1134956.htm](http://pk.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/mlzg/201907/t20190721_1134956.htm)

4 FRONTLINE/WORLD . China - Silenced . Facts and Stats | PBS. (n.d.-b). <https://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/china401/facts.html>

the second century A.D., Xinjiang was temporarily lost to Uzbek invaders, but China reclaimed the northwest region in the mid-seventh century. The Gok Turk Khans ousted the Chinese towards the end of that century, but their rule was short-lived. In the mid-700s, the Uighurs rose to power, establishing an independent kingdom that lasted approximately a century. Despite subsequent Mongol rule, central authority in the area remained limited until China's Manchu rulers invaded in the mid-18th century.<sup>5</sup>

Manchu invaders bestowed the name *Xinjiang*, meaning “new territory,” upon the region. From the 18th century until the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911, the Qing rulers maintained tenuous control over Xinjiang. China's nationalist government continued its governance of Xinjiang, and before the Communist takeover in 1949, the Uighurs attempted two instances of secession. Between 1931 and 1934 and again from 1944 to 1949, Uighur nationalists established an independent nation known as the Eastern Turkestan Republic.<sup>6</sup> However, with the Communist revolution in 1949, the Uighurs' aspirations for independence were extinguished. Communists occupied Xinjiang towards the end of 1949, and in 1955, Chairman Mao Tse-Tung (Zedong) officially incorporated the region as an “autonomous province.”<sup>7</sup>

## Religious Demography

According to a 2021 report released by the Chinese government's Department of Population and Employment Statistics of the National Bureau of Statistics,<sup>8</sup> the estimated population of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) is 26 million. The report indicates that the Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Hui, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and other predominantly Muslim

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5 Xinjiang and the dead hand of history. (n.d.). In *Ethnic Minorities in Xinjiang*. ROUTLEDGE.

6 FRONTLINE/WORLD . China - Silenced . Facts and Stats | PBS. (n.d.). <https://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/china401/facts.html>

7 Ibid.

8 <http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/>

ethnic minority groups together make up around 15 million individuals, which accounts for approximately 58 per cent of the total population. Among these, Uyghurs constitute the largest group, with a population of 12 million. The Han Chinese population is the largest non-Muslim segment, with approximately 11 million people, making up roughly 42 per cent of the population. Other minority groups, including Mongols, Tibetans, and others, make up less than one per cent of the population. It is important to note that the Uyghur population is predominantly Sunni Muslim. According to information from sources in the region reported by *The Globe* and *The Mail* in 2019, the likely numbers of Uyghur and Han Chinese Christians is in the thousands.<sup>9</sup>

### **'Borrowing Mouth' to Speak on Xinjiang**

*We have always attached great importance to 'borrowing a mouth to speak' and used international friends to carry out foreign propaganda,*

*—Zhu Ling, editor-in-chief, China Daily, 2016.<sup>10</sup>*

In a speech commemorating the 30th anniversary of the China Daily, Zhu Ling, the editor-in-chief at the time, underscored the significance of leveraging foreigners for propagating the agenda of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Zhu advocated for a tactic that involved utilizing content generated by foreigners that was perceived as friendly or noncritical, thereby serving as a tool for both domestic and international propaganda. This approach, which has been employed by the CCP since the era of Mao Zedong<sup>11</sup>, is commonly known as “using foreign strength to propagandize China” (利用外力为我宣传). The underlying premise of this

9 Xinjiang - United States Department of State. (2023, May 15). United States Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/china/xinjiang/>

10 Tell the Chinese story well and spread it internationally' [讲好中国故事 做好国际传播], Qiushi, 1 August 2016, online.

11 globaltimes.cn “Who is CPC?": Edgar Snow, the first Western journalist to introduce Red China to the world', Global Times 16 April 2021, online.

strategy is rooted in the belief that propaganda can wield greater influence when it originates from individuals who are not Chinese nationals.<sup>12</sup>

The Chinese government continues to refute allegations of human rights violations in Xinjiang, such as forced labor<sup>13</sup>, mass detention<sup>14</sup>, and cultural erasure<sup>15</sup>. A research conducted by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute's International Cyber Policy Centre (ICPC) has revealed that the Chinese state entities utilize social media platforms in the United States to create ambiguity, promote counter-narratives, and spread disinformation regarding the situation in Xinjiang.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the CCP employs tactics, including leveraging US social media platforms, to attack and discredit Uyghur victims, journalists, and researchers, as well as their affiliated organizations, who are involved in this field of study.<sup>17</sup> These tactics also involve coordination between pro-CCP social media influencers and state entities, targeting media outlets like the BBC for their coverage of allegations such as systematic rape in Xinjiang's internment camps, while simultaneously amplifying content that portrays Uyghurs as supportive of the Chinese government's policies in the region.<sup>18</sup>

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- 12 Anne-Marie Brady, Sidney Rittenberg, 'The political meaning of friendship: reviewing the life and times of two of China's American friends', *China Review International*, 2002, 9(2):307-19, online.
- 13 Vicky Xiuzhong Xu, Danielle Cave, James Leibold, Kelsey Munro, Nathan Ruser, Uyghurs for sale: 're-education', forced labour and surveillance beyond Xinjiang, ASPI, Canberra, 1 March 2020, online.
- 14 Nathan Ruser, 'Exploring Xinjiang's detention system', *The Xinjiang Data Project*, 24 September 2020, online.
- 15 Nathan Ruser, James Leibold, Kelsey Munro, Tilla Hoja, Cultural erasure, ASPI, Canberra, 24 September 2020, online.
- 16 Albert Zhang, Jacob Wallis, Zoe Meers, Strange bedfellows on Xinjiang: the CCP, fringe media and US social media platforms, ASPI, Canberra, 30 March 2021, online.
- 17 Zhang et al., Strange bedfellows on Xinjiang: the CCP, fringe media and US social media platforms.
- 18 Zhang et al, Strange bedfellows on Xinjiang: the CCP, fringe media and US social media platforms.

## Sinicizing Xinjiang under Xi Jinping

The Uyghur and other Turkic minority groups in Xinjiang have lost their autonomy and are now expected to assimilate into the cultural traditions of the dominant Han Chinese population.<sup>19</sup> This assimilation process involves erasing certain aspects of minority culture and reshaping local cultures and landscapes to align with the national narrative. The Chinese government is particularly suspicious of religious and foreign influences in non-Han cultures.<sup>20</sup> In 2016, Xi Jinping emphasized the fusion of religious doctrines with Chinese culture and the prevention of foreign interference during the National Religious Work Conference. The government's top religious policy adviser, Zhang Xunmou, stated in 2019 that the ultimate goal of religious work is complete Sinicization internally and externally.<sup>21</sup>

In recent years, the Chinese government has increased its control over religion by enacting revised regulations monitoring religion in 2017 and integrating the state body managing religious affairs into the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFWD) in 2018.<sup>22</sup> Although Xinjiang was designated as a Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in 1955, it is now portrayed as a site of "cultural integration" where different ethnic groups, religions, and cultures have supposedly coexisted and fused together.<sup>23</sup>

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19 cefc.com.hk Amy Anderson, Darren Byler, "Eating Hanness": Uyghur musical tradition in a time of re-education, *China Perspectives*, 2019, 3:17–26

20 rfa.org 'Yang Faming: adhering to the direction of Sinicisation of religion is the only way for Chinese Islam to take root and survive' (杨发明：坚持宗教中国化方向是中国伊斯兰教扎根本土，生生不息的必由之路), *Gunancha.net* (观察网), 7 September 2017, online. A number of religious leaders in Xinjiang, often imams, have been detained in the 2017 crackdown. See, for example, Emily Feng, "Illegal superstition": China jails Muslims for practicing Islam, relatives say, *NPR*, 8 October 2019, online; 'Ninety-year-old Uyghur imam confirmed detained in Xinjiang but condition unknown', *Radio Free Asia*, 22 January 2020

21 linkChen Xiaoyi (陈晓毅), 'Adhere to the direction of the sinicisation of religion in our country' (坚持我国宗教中国化方向), *China Ethnic News* (中国民族报), 29 August 2019

22 Madsen, 'The sinicization of Chinese religions under Xi Jinping'.

23 linkSCIO, 'Cultural protection and development in Xinjiang'; 'Full text: Historical matters concerning Xinjiang', *Xinhuanet*, 21 July 2019



However, in 2018, Uyghurs and other Turkic or Muslim minorities accounted for approximately 59 per cent of the XUAR's population,<sup>24</sup> with nearly 60 per cent of Xinjiang's 25 million residents practicing some form of Islam.<sup>25</sup>

While the Chinese government recognizes the importance of preserving the “excellent traditional ethnic cultures” of Xinjiang, as stated in a 2018 Government White Paper, it also emphasizes the need to modernize and localize these ethnic cultures, with Chinese culture being the unifying bond among the various ethnic groups.<sup>26</sup> During state-sponsored trips to Xinjiang, foreign reporters are told that Uyghurs are “immigrants” to the region and that Islam was imposed on them by foreigners.<sup>27</sup>

In Xinjiang, officials have cracked down, since 2009, on what they consider “illegal” or “abnormal” religious practices among Uyghurs and other Muslims. They have banned activities such as Islamic education, worship, fasting, veiling, and even Islamic names. Materials perceived as “extremist” (Qurans, prayer mats, CDs, etc.) have been confiscated and, in some cases, publicly burned.<sup>28</sup> In 2014, the former Executive Director of the UFWD,

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24 According to the 2019 Xinjiang statistical yearbook, the Uyghurs, Hui, Kazakhs, Tajiks, Kirgiz and Uzbeks had a total population of 14.55 million, or 58.52% of the total XUAR population of 24.87 million, in 2018. See 'Population, by nationality', Statistics Bureau, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, 2019.

25 Li Jianxin (李建新), 'The status of Xinjiang Muslim population and the new model of family reproductive health service' (新疆穆斯林人口现状 与家庭生殖健康服务的新模式), *Northwestern Ethnic Studies*, 2007, 1:20.

26 SCIO, 'Cultural protection and development in Xinjiang'.

27 Kate Wong, David Bogi, 'How China uses Muslim press trips to counter claims of Uighur abuse', *The Guardian*, 23 August 2020, online; 'Full text: Historical matters concerning Xinjiang', *Xinhuanet*, 21 July 2019.

28 'Several guiding opinions on further controlling illegal religious activities by law and preventing the infiltration of religious extremist thoughts (for trial implementation)' (关于进一步依法治理非法宗教活动、遏制宗教极端思想渗透工作的若干指导意见 (试行)), *The 4th Media (四月网)*, 17 March 2013, online; 'Some areas in Xinjiang learn to identify 75 religious extreme activities and can report to the police' (新疆部分地区学习识别75种宗教极端活动 遇到可报警), *Observer Network (观察者网)*, 24 December 2014.

Zhu Weiqun<sup>29</sup>, attributed unrest in Xinjiang to “religious fanaticism” and called for secularization within Xinjiang society in a state media interview.<sup>30</sup> In 2017, the XUAR passed regulations to guide “de-radicalization” efforts, which were revised in October 2018 to retroactively authorize the mass detention of Uyghurs in “re-education” camps.<sup>31</sup>

Xinjiang officials now actively discourage the “Halal-ization”<sup>32</sup>, “Muslim-ization,”<sup>33</sup> and “Arab-ization”<sup>34</sup> of religious practices in the region, seeking to rectify any practices, products, symbols, and architectural styles deemed inconsistent with “Chinese tradition.”<sup>35</sup> Tight control over mosques and religious personnel is central to the Sinicization plan for Islam in Xinjiang. The “four entrances campaign” by the UFWD requires mosques throughout Xinjiang to display the national flag, post copies of the Chinese Constitution, laws, and regulations, promote core socialist values, and reflect “excellent

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29 Alex Joske, *The Party speaks for you*, ASPI, Canberra, 9 June 2020.

30 ‘Zhu Weiqun on Xinjiang violent terrorism: dealing with violent terrorism incidents must be desensitised from ethnic and religious issues’ (朱维群谈新疆暴恐：处理暴恐事件要从民族宗教问题中脱敏), *Guancha.net* (观察网), 2 April 2014.

31 People’s Congress of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (including the Standing Committee) (新疆维吾尔自治区人大(含常委会)), ‘Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region De-radicalisation Regulations (2018 Amendment)’ (新疆维吾尔自治区去极端化条例(2018修正)), 9 October 2018.

32 ‘Correctly understand the meaning of “halal” and guard against and prevent the phenomenon of “pan-halal”—interpretation of “Deradicalisation Regulations of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region”’ (正确认识‘清真’涵义警惕和防范‘泛清真化’现象——《新疆维吾尔自治区去极端化条例》解读), United Front Work Department, Xinjiang Autonomous Region Party Committee (新疆自治区党委统战部), 27 April 2017.

33 ‘Xi Wuyi (习五一), ‘Adhering to the sinicisation of our country’s religion is a strategic measure to promote the resolution of outstanding problems in the religious field’ (坚持我国宗教的中国化方向是推动解决宗教领域突出问题的战略举措), *Kunlunce.net* (昆仑策), 24 December 2017.

34 ‘China Islamic Association: Mosques have shown “Arabisation” and other issues in the past 10 years’ (中国伊斯兰教协会：近10年清真寺出现‘阿拉伯化’倾向等问题), *Guancha.net* (观察网), 18 April 2017.

35 David R Stroup, ‘The de-Islamification of public space and sinicization of ethnic politics in Xi’s China’, *Middle East Institute*, 24 September 2019.

traditional Chinese culture.”<sup>36</sup> Architecturally, this involves removing Arabic calligraphy, minarets, domes, and symbols considered “foreign” and replacing them with traditional Chinese architectural elements.<sup>37</sup> Lastly, control and Sinicization of Xinjiang also serve the state’s economic agenda through commodified and curated tourism, as well as promoting Xinjiang as a key location in the Xi Jinping regime.<sup>38</sup>

## Mass Arbitrary Detention and Arrest

The timing and implementation of the mass detention of Turkic Muslims by Chinese officials remain unclear. Detention of Turkic Muslims in unofficial detention centres has been recorded since at least 2016, predating the surge of detentions that started in spring 2017.<sup>39</sup> The exact number of Turkic Muslims detained during the crackdown is unknown, but it is widely believed that between several hundred thousand and one million individuals have been detained in facilities referred to as “political education camps.”<sup>40</sup> Many Turkic Muslims have reported that over half of

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36 ‘China Islamic Association “Four Entry” mosque Launched in Beijing’ (中国伊斯兰教协会“四进”清真寺活动在京启动), *The Paper* (澎湃), 18 May 2018 .

37 See, for example, the 2020–2021 plan to ‘rectify’ all major mosques in the Xining city, Qinghai Province.

38 Michael Hardy, ‘In Xinjiang, tourism erodes the last traces of Uyghur culture’, *Wired*, 4 April 2020, online; Anna Hayes, ‘Interwoven “destinies”: the significance of Xinjiang to the China Dream, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Xi Jinping legacy’, *Journal of Contemporary China*, 2020, 29(121):31–45.

39 Human Rights Watch, “China: Free Xinjiang ‘Political Education’ Detainees,” September 10, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/10/china-free-xinjiang-political-education-detainees> ; Philip Wen and Olzhas Auyezov, “Tracking China’s Muslim Gulag,” *Reuters*, November 29, 2018; Emily Feng, “Uighur children fall victim to China anti-terror drive,” *Financial Times*, July 9, 2018.

40 Adrian Zenz, “New Evidence for China’s Political Re-Education Campaign in Xinjiang,” *China Brief*, 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/evidence-for-chinas-political-re-education-campaign-in-xinjiang>; Chinese Human Rights Defenders and Equal Rights Initiative, “China: Massive Numbers of Uyghurs and Other Ethnic Minorities Forced into Re-education Programs,” August 3, 2018, <https://www.nchr.org/2018/08/china-massive-numbers-of-uyghurs-other-ethnic-minorities-forced-into-re-education-programs>. This estimate was cited by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in its concluding observations to its review of China. CERD, Concluding observations on the combined fourteenth to seventeenth periodic reports of China (including

their family members have been interned in these camps, pretrial detention centres, or prisons. From April 2017 to December 2018 alone, the US State Department estimated that up to two million people passed through the political education camps, and a leaked internal memo by Chinese authorities mentioned the detention of 15,683 “suspicious persons” in a single week in June 2017.<sup>41</sup>

Majority of those detained in the political education camps are not charged with any specific crime. Chinese officials have instructed local authorities to inform detainees’ relatives that their loved ones are not criminals but are being held for their own benefit due to being “infected by unhealthy thoughts.”<sup>42</sup> While Chinese authorities claim that the political education camps are merely “Vocational Skills Education Training Centres”, they have also targeted well-educated Turkic Muslim academics, writers, journalists, doctors, entertainers, and older individuals.<sup>43</sup> Internal documents suggest that the centres are meant to function like schools, be managed like the

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Hong Kong, China and Macao, China), CERD/C/CHN/CO/14-17, 2018, para. 40. Note that Zenz has recently revised his estimate to between 900,000 and 1.8 million. Adrian Zenz, “‘Wash Brains, Cleanse Hearts’: Evidence from Chinese Government Documents about the Nature and Extent of Xinjiang’s Extrajudicial Internment Campaign,” *Journal of Political Risk*, vol. 7, no. 11, November 2019.

- 41 Testimony of Deputy Assistant Secretary Scott Busby, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, “The China Challenge, Part 3: Democracy, Human Rights, and the Rule of Law,” December 4, 2018, [https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/120418\\_Busby\\_Testimony.pdf](https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/120418_Busby_Testimony.pdf); “一体化联合作战平台” 每日要情通报: 第 14 期 (“Integrated Joint Operation Platform” Daily Essentials Bulletin No. 14), <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/6558505/China-Cables-IJOP-Daily-Bulletin-14-Chinese.pdf>, translated at <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/6558506/China-Cables-IJOP-Daily-Bulletin-14-English.pdf>.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Testimony of Rushan Abbas, Director of Campaign for Uyghurs, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, “ARIA in Action, Part 1: Human Rights, Democracy, and Rule of Law,” April 9, 2019, [https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/040919\\_Abbas\\_Testimony.pdf](https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/040919_Abbas_Testimony.pdf); Sada Seytoff and Alim Seytoff, “Academic Freedom Watchdog Demands China Unconditionally Release Prominent Uyghur Scholar,” *Radio Free Asia*, November 2, 2018, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/scholar-11022018134451.html>.

military, and be guarded like prisons.<sup>44</sup> These facilities are surrounded by walls, watchtowers, and armed guards to prevent escapes.<sup>45</sup>

Detainees have been held for trivial reasons, and the 'Qaraqash Document', an internal leaked document, provides insight into the grounds for detaining individuals in one district of Qaraqash county.<sup>46</sup> Overseas connections, including travel to certain countries<sup>47</sup>, unofficial Hajj pilgrimage, passport applications,<sup>48</sup> communication with individuals abroad, and even accidentally accessing overseas websites on mobile phones, have been cited as reasons for detention.<sup>49</sup> Suspicion has also been raised for domestic travel within China or communication with people outside the county.<sup>50</sup> Innocuous religious practices such as fasting, prayer, attending religious events, studying religion, having a religious atmosphere at home, wearing headscarves, and having a beard have also

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44 Ben Dooley, "Inside China's internment camps: tear gas, Tasers and textbooks," Agence France-Presse, October 25, 2018, <https://www.afp.com/en/inside-chinas-internment-camps-tear-gas-tasers-and-textbooks>.

45 自治区机关发电 (Autonomous Region State Telegram), <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/6558509/China-Cables-Telegram-Chinese.pdf>, para. 14, translated at <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/6558510/China-Cables-Telegram-English.pdf>; Philip Wen and Olzhas Auyezov, "Tracking China's Muslim Gulag," Reuters, November 29, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/muslims-camps-china/>.

46 Uyghur Human Rights Project, "'Ideological Transformation': Records of Mass Detention from Qaraqash, Hotan," February 2020, [https://docs.uhrp.org/pdf/UHRP\\_QaraqashDocument.pdf](https://docs.uhrp.org/pdf/UHRP_QaraqashDocument.pdf).

47 These countries are Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, and Yemen. Alexandra Ma, "China is using flimsy excuses to lock up its Muslim minority on a huge scale — here are some of the bizarre reasons people are in jail," Business Insider, September 16, 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com/china-gives-these-excuses-to-imprison-uyghur-ethnic-minority-2018-9>.

48 Detention for this reason is especially unjust in that the government, during a brief period in 2015, encouraged Uyghurs to apply for passports, and that many of the Uyghurs detained on this basis appear to have applied for passports during this window. Uyghur Human Rights Project, "Ideological Transformation," p. 10.

49 Uyghur Human Rights Project, "Ideological Transformation," p. 10.

50 Ibid.

led to detentions.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, failure to perform community work or violations of the state's birth planning policies have been used as grounds for detaining Turkic Muslims.<sup>52</sup>

The detainees' physical freedom has been violated not only based on their protected beliefs and behaviours under international law but also due to the actions of others, amounting to collective punishment<sup>53</sup>. Authorities often target the relatives of Turkic Muslim journalists and activists, particularly those working abroad, as a form of retaliation for their work.<sup>54</sup> The authorities keep detailed records of detainees' personal information and the information of their immediate and extended family, friends and neighbours, and religious circles.<sup>55</sup> Detainees appear to be categorized and subjected to different levels of security and duration of detention.<sup>56</sup> A confidential internal document indicates that detainees are initially placed in general management, strict, or very strict zones, with varying education and training methods.<sup>57</sup> A scoring system based on behaviour determines potential transfers between zones, treatment within zones, as well as rewards, punishments, and family visits. To be released, detainees must maintain a good score, be categorized at the "general management"

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51 Ibid., p. 11, 16.

52 Ibid., p. 13.

53 Human Rights Watch, "Eradicating Ideological Viruses," p. 3, 24-25.

54 Amnesty International, "Separated Souls: Uighur journalist's unbreakable resolve to help her detained family," March 16, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/03/uighur-journalists-unbreakable-resolve-to-help-detained-family/>; Amnesty International, "Urgent Action: Detained Uighur Has Nervous Breakdown."

55 Uyghur Human Rights Project, "Ideological Transformation," p. 4. This information appears to power what officials termed the "three circles and six diagrams collision analysis" (三圈六图碰撞分析), a method by which authorities analyze and evaluate detainees.

56 Gerry Shih, "China's mass indoctrination camps evoke Cultural Revolution," AP News, May 17, 2018, <https://apnews.com/6e151296fb194f85ba69a8babd972e4b/China%E2%80%99s-massindoctrinationcamps-evoke-Cultural-Revolution>.

57 自治区机关发电 (Autonomous Region State Telegram), para. 14.

level, and have served at least one year.<sup>58</sup>

Apart from the political education camps, the 'Strike Hard Campaign' has led to an increase in the arbitrary detention and formal arrest of Turkic Muslims within the criminal justice system. Data suggests that individuals have been targeted for prosecution solely based on their ethnic and religious identity.<sup>59</sup> Indictments and convictions in Xinjiang accounted for approximately 13 percent of all indictments in China in 2017.<sup>60</sup> The number of arrests and criminal indictments in Xinjiang has significantly risen compared to the previous five-year period.<sup>61</sup> Estimates, supported by the Xinjiang Victims Database, suggest that around 300,000 people have been sentenced since the escalation of the Strike Hard Campaign in late 2016.<sup>62</sup> These increases are attributed to the campaign and the policies implemented by Chen Quanguo, who is believed to have contributed to a substantial increase in security spending and police recruitment in Xinjiang.<sup>63</sup>

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58 Ibid., para. 16.

59 Tactics from Turpan City.

60 Terence McCoy, "China scores 99.9 percent conviction rate last year," Washington Post, March 11, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/03/11/china-scored-99-9-percent-conviction-rate-last-year/>; Lily Kuo, "China's criminal conviction rate is 99.9 percent," Quartz, August 7, 2014, <https://qz.com/246696/chinas-criminal-conviction-rate-is-99-9/>; Chinese Human Rights Defenders, "Criminal Arrests in Xinjiang Account for 21% of China's Total in 2017," July 2018; Emily Feng, "Illegal Superstition': China Jails Muslims For Practicing Islam, Relatives Say," National Public Radio, October 8, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/10/08/764153179/china-has-begun-moving-xinjiang-muslim-detainees-to-formal-prisons-relatives-say>; Chris Buckley, "China's Prisons Swell After Deluge of Arrests Engulfs Muslims," New York Times, August 31, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/31/world/asia/xinjiang-china-uighurs-prisons.html>.

61 Chinese Human Rights Defenders, "Criminal Arrests in Xinjiang Account for 21% of China's Total in 2017."

62 Gene A. Bunin, "The Elephant in the XUAR," December 9, 2020, <https://livingotherwise.com/2020/12/09/the-elephant-in-the-xuar-i-entire-families-sentenced/>.

63 Adrian Zenz, "China's Domestic Security Spending: An Analysis of Available Data," China Brief, 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-domestic-security-spending-analysis-available-data/>; Adrian Zenz and James Leibold, "Chen Quanguo: The Strongman Behind Beijing's Securitization Strategy in Tibet and

Turkic Muslims have often been detained based on overbroad crimes such as “separatism,”<sup>64</sup> with charges of “terrorism” and “religious extremism” frequently levelled against them. Many of these arrests and detentions lack evidentiary basis, and detainees’ due process rights are frequently disregarded. Authorities fail to present warrants, evidence of crimes, or any other documentation to detainees or inform them about the responsible authorities for their arrest. Defendants facing terrorism charges are not allowed to plead “not guilty” and are swiftly put on trial and sentenced. Lawyers attempting to protect their clients’ due process rights risk being dismissed from cases. Procedural abuses, such as preparing verdicts before trials or having government officials rather than judges decide sentences, have been reported.<sup>65</sup>

Xinjiang authorities tightly control information, and only a limited number of publicly available verdicts exist for those imprisoned since late 2016. These verdicts reveal the convictions of individuals from various ethnic backgrounds, including Hui, Uyghur, and ethnic Kazakh, on charges such as “splittism,”<sup>66</sup> “inciting ethnic hatred and discrimination,”<sup>67</sup> “spying and fraud,”<sup>68</sup> “disturbing public order and extremism,”<sup>69</sup> “assisting in terrorist

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Xinjiang,” China Brief, September 2017.

- 64 Amnesty International, “Urgent Action: Detained Uighur Has Nervous Breakdown,” March 20, 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA1700732019ENGLISH.pdf>; Amnesty International, “Urgent Action: 30 Relatives of Uighur Activist Arbitrarily Detained,” November 14, 2017, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/uaa25117-3.pdf>; Amnesty International, “Urgent Action: 20 Relatives of Uighur Journalist Detained,” March 1, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA1779642018ENGLISH.pdf>.
- 65 Chinese Human Rights Defenders, “Criminal Arrests in Xinjiang Account for 21% of China’s Total in 2017.”
- 66 Entry 13409: Jin Dehuai, Xinjiang Victims Database, <https://shahit.biz/eng/viewentry.php?entryno=13409>.
- 67 Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Chaqiliq County People’s Court Criminal Verdict, 2018, Xinjiang 2824 Criminal-Case No. 121, <https://shahit.biz/verview.php?no=35>.
- 68 Entry 915: Asqar Azatbek, Xinjiang Victims Database, <https://shahit.biz/eng/viewentry.php?entryno=915>.
- 69 Entry 5821: Nurlan Pioner, Xinjiang Victims Database, <https://shahit.biz/eng/>



activities,”<sup>70</sup> and “illegal use of the internet.”<sup>71</sup> Other cases indicate that many Turkic Muslims have been imprisoned for vague and overbroad offenses like “inciting ethnic hatred” or “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” and for accessing “extremist” content.

## Torture and Other Ill-treatments in Custody

Since 2018, numerous deaths have been reported among detainees in Xinjiang, both during their custody and shortly after their release. The Xinjiang Victims Database documented 177 deaths, occurring mostly while in custody or due to complications from injuries sustained or untreated illnesses developed in these facilities, including mental disabilities<sup>72</sup>. Radio Free Asia reported 150 deaths in one camp in Aksu Prefecture and an additional four deaths in separate political education camps in 2018<sup>73</sup>. Chinese authorities have rarely acknowledged these deaths<sup>74</sup>.

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viewentry.php?entryno=5821.

70 Entry 11997: Nie Shigang, Xinjiang Victims Database, <https://shahit.biz/eng/viewentry.php?entryno=11997>.

71 Ibid.

72 Of the 177, 124 died in custody; of that number, 101 were Uyghurs, 20 were Kazkachs, and 1 each were Han, Tatar, and Uyghur-Kazakh. The numbers were generated using the database’s filter function; see <https://shahit.biz/eng/#filter>.

73 “At Least 150 Detainees Have Died in One Xinjiang Internment Camp: Police Officer,” Radio Free Asia, October 29, 2019, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/deaths-10292019181322.html>; “Uyghur Father of Two Dies After Falling Ill in Xinjiang Re-Education Camp,” Radio Free Asia, April 12, 2018, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/father-04122018153525.html>; “Uyghur Man Buried Amid Strict Security After Latest Xinjiang Reeducation Camp Death,” Radio Free Asia, June 8, 2018, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/guljaburial-06082018164250.html>; “Uyghur Teenager Dies in Custody at Political Re-Education Camp,” Radio Free Asia, March 14, 2018, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/teenager-03142018154926.html>; “Elderly Uyghur Woman Dies in Detention in Xinjiang ‘Political Re-Education Camp,’” Radio Free Asia, May 24, 2018, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/woman-05242018164854.html>.

74 Helen Davidson, “China confirms death of Uighur man whose family says was held in Xinjiang camps,” *Guardian*, October 2, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/02/china-confirms-death-of-uighur-man-whose-family-says-was-held-in-xinjiang-camps>.

Human Rights Watch and other sources have reported instances of torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment in political education camps and police detention facilities. Detainees in Xinjiang's police detention facilities have been subjected to beatings, hanging from ceilings and walls, sleep deprivation, and prolonged shackling. Some detainees have been strapped to metal chairs, known as "tiger chairs," during police interrogations.<sup>75</sup> Former detainees have shared accounts of physical and psychological punishments, mistreatment of vulnerable individuals, inadequate medical care, and suicide attempts. Mihrigul Tursun, a former Uyghur detainee, witnessed nine deaths during her three months of detention<sup>76</sup>, and another individual reported his father's death in the camp with signs of torture<sup>77</sup>. Mihrigul Tursun also described being forcibly stripped, subjected to medical examinations, and electroshocked and beaten during interrogations. She recounted how dozens of women, chained at the wrists and ankles, were crammed into a small underground cell with poor ventilation.<sup>78</sup> In some cases, detainees were not allowed to speak their Turkic languages, and constant surveillance through video cameras and microphones was reported.<sup>79</sup> A leaked CCP directive supports these allegations, ordering comprehensive video surveillance of dormitories and classrooms without blind spots.

Former detainees highlighted issues of overcrowding, sharing beds, and taking turns sleeping. The deplorable living conditions and indefinite

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75 Human Rights Watch, "Eradicating Ideological Viruses," p. 41-42.

76 Harry Cockburn, "Muslim woman describes torture and beatings in China detention camp: 'I begged them to kill me,'" *The Independent*, November 28, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/uighur-muslim-china-mihrigul-tursun-torture-reeducation-camps-a8656396.html>.

77 Human Rights Watch interview with Ismail (pseudonym), 40, whose father died in a political education camp and his brother is held in a camp, May 12, 2018.

78 Testimony of Mihrigul Tursun; Gerry Shih, "China's mass indoctrination camps evoke Cultural Revolution," *AP News*, May.

79 Human Rights Watch, "Eradicating Ideological Viruses," p. 41-42; Philip Wen and Olzhas Auyezov, "Tracking China's Muslim Gulag," *Reuters*, November 29, 2018.

detention caused significant emotional distress.<sup>80</sup> Food provided was poor and inadequate, typically consisting of steamed buns and thin soup. Although basic medical care was available, detainees were not released even when they suffered from serious illnesses or were elderly.<sup>81</sup> Detainees were compelled to sing songs praising the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Xi Jinping. Harsh punishments were imposed for minor rule infractions, such as denying food to those who resisted speaking Chinese.<sup>82</sup> Solitary confinement was employed, involving handcuffing, deprivation of food and water, and 24 hours of standing without sleep, as recounted by a former detainee.<sup>83</sup> An internal document leak instructed officials to use “assault-style transformation through education” on detainees with negative attitudes or resistance to ensure desired results.<sup>84</sup>

## Enforced Disappearances

Relatives of detained individuals often have no information regarding the whereabouts or condition of their family members. They may occasionally receive notifications when their relatives are transferred to formal prisons, if such transfers occur. The lack of information and enforced disappearances have prompted the emergence of the ‘#MeTooUyghur’ social media campaign<sup>85</sup>, where individuals demand evidence from Chinese authorities to prove the well-being of those detained by the state.<sup>86</sup> An online platform allows relatives of detainees and activists to gather testimonies about

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80 Human Rights Watch, “Eradicating Ideological Viruses,” p. 2, 36, 41-42, 49-50, 54-55.

81 自治区机关发电 (Autonomous Region State Telegram), para. 3.

82 Human Rights Watch, “Eradicating Ideological Viruses,” p. 2, 36, 41-42, 49-50, 54-55.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.

85 “#MenmuUyghur” in Uyghur.

86 Austin Ramzy, “‘Show Me That My Father is Alive.’ China Faces Torrent of Online Pleas,” *New York Times*, February 17, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/17/world/asia/uyghurs-china-internment-camps.html>.

disappearances, with over 11,500 accounts recorded as of December 2020.<sup>87</sup> Fear of retaliation from authorities has led family members and friends, particularly those residing abroad, to hesitate in seeking information about missing individuals or providing assistance to locate the detained persons.<sup>88</sup>

In certain instances, authorities have detained individuals while their children are away at school. A classified directive issued by the CCP leadership in November 2019, as reported by *The New York Times*, instructs officials on how to handle inquiries from students about their detained family members upon returning home at the end of the academic semester.<sup>89</sup> According to the guide, officials are to inform students that their relatives are in a “training school set up by the government” and cannot leave. Students are also warned that their behaviour could impact the prospects of their relatives’ release. Similarly, the *Qaraqash Document* reveals that local officials assess the attitudes and actions of detainees’ relatives when determining the likelihood of their release. One entry in the *Qaraqash Document* mentions that a detainee was not recommended for release because their family members had failed to participate in flag-raising ceremonies promptly.<sup>90</sup>

## Mass Surveillance

In the context of national mass surveillance, the Chinese government’s monitoring practices exhibit a heightened level of intrusiveness in Xinjiang, especially concerning Turkic Muslim individuals.<sup>91</sup> The government

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87 Xinjiang Victims Database, shahit.biz.

88 Patrick Poon, “Families of missing Uighurs terrified to search for their loved ones,” Amnesty International, March 31, 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2019/03/ughurs-too-scared-to-search-for-missing-family/>.

89 Austin Ramzy and Chris Buckley, “‘Absolutely No Mercy’: Leaked Files Expose How China Organized Mass Detentions of Muslims,” *New York Times*, November 16, 2019.

90 Uyghur Human Rights Project, “Ideological Transformation.”

91 US Committee on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report, 2019, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>; Jianli Yang

actively promotes a culture of informant reporting, deploying government officials to closely monitor this specific demographic. An illustrative policy employed is the “ten households, one unit” initiative, whereby groups of ten households are collectively responsible for monitoring and reporting on each other.<sup>92</sup> In this arrangement, any transgressions committed by a single household can result in punitive measures imposed upon the entire group.

One notable aspect of the ‘Strike Hard Campaign’ in Xinjiang involves the implementation of *fanghuiju* (访惠聚) teams. These teams consist of a large number of government officials who are stationed in villages, conducting regular visits and surveillance of individuals, and propagating political ideologies.<sup>93</sup> In October 2016, a related initiative known as the “Becoming Family” (结对认亲) campaign was launched, whereby over a million officials were assigned to spend a minimum of five days every two months residing in the homes of Xinjiang residents, primarily in rural areas. Additionally, a network of street corner police stations, referred to as

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and Lianchao Han, “Did a Muslim Slave Make Your Chinese Shirt?” Wall Street Journal, October 16, 2019.

- 92 “Timeline of Chen Quanguo’s Uyghur Region Policy,” Radio Free Asia, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/special/uyghur-oppression/>. See also, “—体化联合作战平台” 每日要情通报: 第 2 期 (“Integrated Joint Operation Platform” Daily Essentials Bulletin No. 2), <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6558501-China-Cables-IJOP-Daily-Bulletin-2-Chinese.html>, translated at <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/6558502/China-Cables-IJOP-Daily-Bulletin-2-Enlgsh.pdf>, encouraging the use of 10-household units to monitor individuals in Xinjiang known to have obtained foreign nationality and applied for Chinese visas, or have obtained certificates from Chinese embassies and consulates.
- 93 An acronym that stands for “Visit the People, Benefit the People, and Get Together the Hearts of the People” (访民情、惠民生、聚民心). These teams, also known as “village-based work teams,” were first implemented in the Tibetan Autonomous Region in 2011—then extended indefinitely—by then-Tibet Party Secretary Chen Quanguo. See Human Rights Watch, “China: No End to Tibet Surveillance Program,” January 18, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/18/china-no-end-tibet-surveillance-program>; “200,000 Communist Party members Dispatched to Stay in Grassroots Villages in Xinjiang to Visit the People, Benefit the People, and Get Together the Hearts of the People” (新疆 20 万机关干部下基层住万村, 访民情、惠民生、聚民心), People Online (人民网), <http://xj.people.com.cn/GB/188750/361873/>.

“convenience police stations,” has been meticulously established in a grid system, strategically dividing populations into geometric units to enable more stringent and targeted surveillance measures.<sup>94</sup>

Another aspect of the extensive surveillance targeting Turkic Muslims involves the mandatory and comprehensive collection of their biometric information.<sup>95</sup> Chinese authorities engage in the gathering of DNA samples, fingerprints, iris scans, and blood types from all residents of Xinjiang aged 12 to 65, often under the guise of a medical examination program called “Physicals for All.” The collection of biometric data from Turkic Muslims occurs without their choice or informed consent.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, the biometrics of individuals categorized as “focus personnel” (those perceived as posing a threat to regime stability) and their family members are obtained, irrespective of their age.<sup>97</sup> Additionally, voice samples from Turkic Muslims have been collected during passport applications and at police checkpoints.<sup>98</sup> Substantial portions of this data are entered into searchable databases.<sup>99</sup> The collection of these biometrics is part of the government’s drive to form a “multi-modal” biometric portrait of individuals and to gather ever more data about its citizens. All of this data can be linked in police databases to the person’s identification number,

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94 Human Rights Watch, *China’s Algorithms of Repression*, May 2019, [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/china0519\\_web5.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/china0519_web5.pdf), p. 15-16.

95 Xinjiang: 2017 Nián Quánmín Jiànkāng Tǐjiǎn Gōngzuò Quánbù Wánchéng (新疆:2017 年全民健康体检工作全部完成), *Xīnjiāng Rìbào* (新疆日报), November 2, 2017, [http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2017-11/02/content\\_5236389.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2017-11/02/content_5236389.htm); Human Rights Watch, “China: Minority Region Collects DNA from Millions,” December 13, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/13/china-minority-region-collects-dna-millions>.

96 Human Rights Watch, *China’s Algorithms of Repression*, p. 15; “China: Minority Region Collects DNA from Millions.”

97 Human Rights Watch, “China: Minority Region Collects DNA from Millions.”

98 Human Rights Watch, *China’s Algorithms of Repression*, p. 15; Isobel Cockerell, “Inside China’s Massive Surveillance Operation,” *Wired*, May 9, 2019, <https://www.wired.com/story/inside-chinas-massive-surveillance-operation/>.

99 Human Rights Watch, “Police DNA Database Threatens Privacy,” May 15, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/05/15/china-police-dna-database-threatens-privacy>.

which in turn is linked to any of their additional biometric and personal information on file.

The Xinjiang regional authorities have implemented a comprehensive network of automated sensory systems across the area. These systems consist of various surveillance technologies such as CCTV cameras equipped with facial recognition capabilities, automated license plate recognition, and infrared functionality. Additionally, Wi-Fi sniffers are utilized to capture identifying information from networked devices, while security checkpoints and visitors' management systems collect personal data for identification purposes.<sup>100</sup> Notably, even kitchen knives in Xinjiang are monitored through QR codes that contain detailed information such as the owner's identification number, photograph, ethnicity, and address. Furthermore, vehicles in the region are required to have mandatory location trackers installed.<sup>101</sup>

In the Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP), a significant amount of the aforementioned information is gathered, wherein it consolidates data pertaining to individuals, identifies those considered potentially threatening, and determines individuals to be apprehended by law enforcement, investigated, and subsequently placed in political re-education camps or other detention facilities.<sup>102</sup> The *Human Rights Watch*, in December 2020,

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100 Human Rights Watch, "China: Big Data Fuels Crackdown in Minority Region," February 26, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/26/china-big-data-fuels-crackdown-minority-region>; Uyghur Human Rights Project, "Ideological Transformation': Records of Mass Detention from Qaraqash, Hotan," February 2020, [https://docs.uhrp.org/pdf/UHRP\\_QaraqashDocument.pdf](https://docs.uhrp.org/pdf/UHRP_QaraqashDocument.pdf), p. 16-17.

101 Steven Melendez, "In locked-down Xinjiang, China is tracking kitchen knives with QR codes," Fast Company, December.

102 Human Rights Watch, *China's Algorithms of Repression*, p. 1, 24; "China: Big Data Fuels Crackdown in Minority Region." IJOP collects information such as the individual's name, ID type and number, ethnicity, address, license plate number, profession, education, passport, phone number, relationship with head of household, blood type, height, photo, political status, religion, "religious atmosphere" (fair or strong), reason for seeking asylum or education abroad, destination country, exit time, changed identity? (if yes, to what), and reason for leaving Xinjiang. See also, Uyghur Human Rights Project, "Ideological Transformation," p. 14-15; and "一体化联合作战平台" 每日要情通报: 第 2

released a research report that relied on a leaked list encompassing over 2,000 detainees from Aksu prefecture. This report presented compelling evidence that the vast majority of individuals flagged by the IJOP system were detained for engaging in ordinary, lawful, and nonviolent activities.<sup>103</sup> An illustrative example includes the case of a woman who was regarded as suspicious by the IJOP system due to receiving four phone calls from a foreign number in March 2017, with the system even documenting the exact duration of these calls.

Former individuals who were once detained now face even more severe conditions of extensive surveillance. Alongside the aforementioned surveillance methods, local officials closely monitor the behaviour and emotions of these former detainees and their family members. They regularly evaluate and document various aspects, including their mental stability, ability to acknowledge past errors, and demonstration of sincere remorse.<sup>104</sup> Some of these individuals experience daily visits from local authorities, and they are required to sign in every morning and participate in evening roll-calls.<sup>105</sup>

In addition to its application within Xinjiang, mass surveillance measures are also applied to the Turkic Muslim diaspora residing outside of China. These individuals are subjected to pressure from authorities to provide comprehensive personal information, such as their residential address, contact number, and details regarding their educational institution or place

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期 (“Integrated Joint Operation Platform” Daily Essentials Bulletin No. 2), encouraging the detention of Xinjiang residents who IJOP identified as having obtained foreign nationality and applied for Chinese visas, or having obtained certificates from Chinese embassies and consulates.

103 Human Rights Watch, “China: Big Data Program Targets Xinjiang’s Muslims: Leaked List of Over 2,000 Detainees Demonstrates Automated Repression,” December 9, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/09/china-big-data-program-targets-xinjiangs-muslims>.

104 Uyghur Human Rights Project, “Ideological Transformation,” p. 13.

105 Ibid.



of employment.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, the Chinese government has engaged in the infiltration of smartphones belonging to Turkic Muslims across the globe. This is accomplished through the incorporation of malicious software within apps and commonly utilized software utilized by individuals of Turkic Muslim origin. Such software possesses the capability to remotely activate a phone's microphone, record phone conversations, and extract photos, geolocation data, and dialogues occurring on messaging applications.<sup>107</sup>

## Cultural and Religious Erasure

The Chinese government's primary objective in establishing the camps is to eradicate Turkic Muslim culture and religion. Government sources explicitly state that the purpose of these camps is to "cleanse hearts" and "wash brains".<sup>108</sup> Detainees are compelled to learn Chinese and are prohibited from using any other language.<sup>109</sup> Singing praises of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and memorizing rules specific to Turkic Muslims, including restrictions on Islamic practices and the Uyghur language, are mandatory.<sup>110</sup> Former detainees have disclosed that they were

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- 106 For information on targeted digital surveillance against the Uyghur diaspora, see Stevens Le Blond, Adina Uritesc, Cédric Gilbert, Zheng Leong Chua, and Prateek Saxena, "A Look at Targeted Attacks Through the Lens of an NGO," San Diego: USENIX Association, 23rd USENIX Security Symposium, August 20-22, 2014, <https://www.usenix.org/system/files/conference/usenixsecurity14/sec14-paper-blond.pdf>.
- 107 Paul Mozur and Nicole Perlroth, "China's Software Stalked Uighurs Earlier and More Widely, Researchers Learn," *New York Times*, July 1, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/01/technology/china-uighurs-hackers-malware-hackers-smartphones.html>.
- 108 Zenz, "Wash Brains, Cleanse Hearts," *Journal of Political Risk*.
- 109 Peter Stubley, "Uighur Muslims forbidden to pray or grow beards in China's 're-education' camps, former detainee reveals," *The Independent*, March 22, 2019. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/china-uighur-muslim-education-camps-forbidden-beards-pray-pork-xinjiang-a8835861.html>. See also, 自治区机关发电 (Autonomous Region State Telegram), para. 8, describing how detainees should "adhere to the daily concentrated study of the national language (Chinese), law, and skills" and how camps should "make remedial Chinese studies the top priority."
- 110 Human Rights Watch, "Eradicating Ideological Viruses," p. 4, 9-10, 39-40.

informed they could not leave the camps unless they learned over 1,000 Chinese characters, spoke Chinese fluently, or demonstrated sufficient loyalty to the Chinese state.<sup>111</sup> Detainees are coerced into self-criticism and criticizing their fellow detainees, friends, and family members for their cultural and religious practices. Exceptional adherence to state propaganda or harsh criticism of peers may lead to rewards such as improved living conditions.<sup>112</sup> These practices align with an internal directive emphasizing the need for detainees to “repent and confess” their past behaviour to fully grasp its illegal and dangerous nature.<sup>113</sup>

Religious practice is strictly prohibited within the camps, and detainees face punishment for engaging in any form of religious expression. Guards vigilantly monitor detainees for signs of religious activity and prevent them from praying or growing beards, which are deemed extremist symbols.<sup>114</sup> Detainees are isolated from the outside world, apart from prescribed activities, and are forbidden from possessing cell phones.<sup>115</sup> To ensure the eradication of religious practice, camp officials reportedly force detainees to sign documents renouncing their religion before their release.<sup>116</sup>

Outside of the camps, the Chinese government enforces the assimilation of Turkic Muslims into mainstream Han Chinese culture while actively

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According to a former detainee, these rules included prohibitions on Islamic greetings, Uyghur and Kazakh writing on Uyghur restaurant signs, the use of Uyghur or Kazakh in public spaces, Uyghur- and Kazakh-language schools, and the establishment of minority-only chat groups on WeChat, QQ, and other social media websites; a ban on communications with any person in the 26 “sensitive” countries; and cash rewards for the intermarriage of Han Chinese and Kazakhs.

111 Human Rights Watch, “Eradicating Ideological Viruses,” p. 4, 38-39.

112 Shih, “China’s mass indoctrination camps evoke Cultural Revolution,” AP News.

113 自治区机关发电 (Autonomous Region State Telegram), para. 11.

114 Peter Stubley, “Uighur Muslims forbidden to pray or grow beards in China’s ‘re-education’ camps, former detainee reveals,” The Independent.

115 自治区机关发电 (Autonomous Region State Telegram), para. 3.

116 Emily Rauhala and Anna Fifield, “She survived a Chinese internment camp and made it to Virginia. Will the U.S. let her stay?” Washington Post, November 17, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/11/17/she-survived-chinese-internment-camp-made-it-virginia-will-us-let-her-stay/?arc404=true>.

eroding Turkic Muslim culture. Requirements include attending Chinese flag-raising ceremonies, participating in political indoctrination meetings, and sometimes attending Chinese language classes on a weekly or even daily basis.<sup>117</sup> Punishments are imposed for refusing to watch state-run television programs or listen to state-run radio programs.<sup>118</sup> The use of the Uyghur language is discouraged, and teaching materials in Uyghur and Kazakh languages have been banned. State employees who use these languages are labelled as “unpatriotic” and could be detained as “two-faced” individuals.<sup>119</sup>

Since 2017, Turkic Muslim public figures have published letters renouncing their Turkic heritage, cultural ties, and religious beliefs, expressing gratitude and loyalty to the CCP, and denouncing religious extremism and “two-faced” Turkic Muslims.<sup>120</sup> Arabic greetings have been banned, and Arabic script has been removed from signage, mosques, street signs, and murals.<sup>121</sup> The Chinese government strictly regulates the practice of Islam in Xinjiang, effectively outlawing expressions of faith beyond state control.<sup>122</sup> Bans have been imposed on “abnormal” beards, public wearing of headscarves, and

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117 Human Rights Watch, “Eradicating Ideological Viruses,” p. 4, 69.

118 Sophie Richardson, “China Bans Many Muslim Baby Names in Xinjiang,” Human Rights Watch, April 24, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/24/china-bans-many-muslim-baby-names-xinjiang>.

119 Dake Kang, “Correction: China-Xinjiang-Banished Textbooks story,” AP News, September 3, 2019, <https://apnews.com/4f5f57213e3546ab9bd1be01dfb510d3>; Qiao Long and Yang Fan, “China Bans Use of Uyghur, Kazakh Textbooks, Materials in Xinjiang Schools,” Radio Free Asia, October 13, 2017, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/ethnic-textbooks-10132017135316.html>; Darren Byler, “The ‘Patriotism’ of Not Speaking Uyghur,” SupChina, January 2, 2019, <https://supchina.com/2019/01/02/the-patriotism-of-not-speaking-uyghur/>; Uyghur Human Rights Project, “Ideological Transformation,” p. 17.

120 “Xinjiang’s ‘Open Letter’ Forces Uyghurs to Put Loyalty to China in Writing,” Radio Free Asia, 2017, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/special/uyghur-oppression/ChenPolicy3.html>; “Timeline of Chen Quanguo’s Uyghur Region Policy,” Radio Free Asia, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/special/uyghur-oppression/>.

121 Byler, “The ‘Patriotism’ of Not Speaking Uyghur,” SupChina.

122 Human Rights Watch, “Eradicating Ideological Viruses,” p. 4.

Islamic names with religious connotations.<sup>123</sup> Regular religious acts such as prayer and fasting are considered signs of extremism.<sup>124</sup> Confiscation of Qurans and prayer mats occurs, and possession of these items can result in severe punishment. The term “halal” is restricted to certain food products, and the consumption and dissemination of materials deemed detrimental to national unity, social stability, economic development, or religious harmony are prohibited.<sup>125</sup>

Authorities have demolished numerous burial grounds, severing connections to Turkic Muslim history and ancestry. Burial sites have been replaced with parks or industrial zones, with little regard for the remains left behind. Crematoria, in contradiction to Muslim burial traditions, have been established. Mosques have also been targeted for demolition, with thousands damaged or destroyed, and remaining mosques often desecrated with removal of crescents and installation of state policies on their walls.<sup>126</sup>

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123 The rationale is that such names “exaggerate religious fervor.” Although not “illegal” per se, children with banned names cannot obtain household registration, which is essential for accessing public school and other social services. The ban was also imposed retroactively, thereby requiring parents to change their children’s names. Sophie Richardson, “China Bans Many Muslim Baby Names in Xinjiang,” Human Rights Watch; “Timeline of Chen Quanguo’s Uyghur Region Policy,” Radio Free Asia.

124 Ibid.; Amnesty International, “‘Forgive my children for not fasting’ – Ramadan in Xinjiang,” May 3, 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2019/05/forgive-my-children-ramadan-in-xinjiang/>.

125 US Committee on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report, 2019, p. 37.

126 Joanne Smith Finley, “‘Now We Don’t Talk Anymore’: Inside the ‘Cleansing’ of Xinjiang,” ChinaFile, December 28, 2018, <https://www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/viewpoint/now-we-dont-talk-anymore>; Lily Kuo, “Revealed: new evidence of China’s mission to raze the mosques of Xinjiang,” Guardian, May 6, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/07/revealed-new-evidence-of-chinas-mission-to-raze-the-mosques-of-xinjiang> (“If one were to remove these ... shrines, the Uighur people would lose contact with earth. They would no longer have a personal, cultural, and spiritual history. After a few years we would not have a memory of why we live here or where we belong.”) For a comparison of such demolitions to the demolitions of synagogues and Jewish cemeteries during Kristallnacht in Nazi Germany, see Fred Hiatt, “In China, every day is Kristallnacht,” Washington Post, November 3, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/11/03/china-every-day-is-kristallnacht/?arc404=true>.

The Chinese government promotes marriages between Turkic Muslims and Han Chinese, incentivizing mixed marriages through preferential university entrance for children of such couples. Online content showcasing inter-ethnic couples and articles advising Han Chinese men on how to attract Uyghur women are disseminated.<sup>127</sup> Refusal or criticism of these marriages can result in detention in political education camps or the detainment of family members.<sup>128</sup> The “Becoming Family” homestay policy has led to marriages between Turkic Muslim women and Han male cadres, with cases of vulnerability to sexual violence documented.<sup>129</sup>

Turkic Muslims in China are effectively isolated from the global Muslim community, including family and friends abroad. Communication with international contacts is punished, and individuals caught using foreign communication software or having connections to sensitive countries may face interrogation, detention, trials, and imprisonment.<sup>130</sup> The Qaraqash Document specifically identifies detainees with overseas relatives. The use of Zapyra<sup>131</sup>, a file-sharing app enabling Quran downloads and sharing religious teachings, is targeted.<sup>132</sup> The Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP) identifies individuals from Xinjiang seeking foreign

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- 127 Eva Xiao, “China pushes inter-ethnic marriage in Xinjiang assimilation drive,” Agence France-Presse, May 16, 2019, <https://news.yahoo.com/china-pushes-inter-ethnic-marriage-xinjiang-assimilation-drive-044619042.html>; Darren Byler, “Uyghur Love in a time of Interethnic Marriage,” SupChina, August 7, 2019, <https://supchina.com/2019/08/07/uyghur-love-in-a-time-of-interethnic-marriage/>; “Xinjiang Authorities Push Uyghurs to Marry Han Chinese,” 2017, Radio Free Asia (2017), <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/special/uyghur-oppression/ChenPolicy2.html>.
- 128 Ibid.; Leigh Hartman, “China coerces Uighur women into unwanted marriages,” ShareAmerica, September 24, 2019, <https://share.america.gov/china-coerces-uighur-women-into-unwanted-marriages/>.
- 129 Human Rights Watch, “Eradicating Ideological Viruses,” p. 11-25.
- 130 Ibid., p. 4, 14-15.
- 131 Known as Kuai Ya in Chinese.
- 132 “一体化联合作战平台” 每日要情通报: 第 20 期 (“Integrated Joint Operation Platform” Daily Essentials Bulletin No. 20); Scilla Alecci, “How China Targets Uighurs ‘One By One’ For Using A Mobile App, Int’l. Consortium of Investigative Journalists,” November 24, 2019, <https://www.icij.org/investigations/china-cables/how-china-targets-uighurs-one-by-one-for-using-a-mobile-app/>.

citizenship, applying for Chinese visas, or renewing identity documents abroad for detention.<sup>133</sup> Former detainees are often “released” to distant job placements, possibly intended to weaken their sense of community, culture, and heritage.<sup>134</sup>

## Separation of Families

In addition to the separation caused by mass detentions and the relocation of former detainees to distant job placements, there has been a significant impact on families due to increased restrictions on the movement of Turkic Muslims. Stricter passport controls and border crossings have resulted in some children being stranded in Xinjiang while their parents are abroad.<sup>135</sup> The authorities in Xinjiang punish contact with relatives abroad, leading many Turkic Muslims to lose touch with their family members, including young children, for extended periods of time.<sup>136</sup> A consequence of government policies, whether deliberate or unintentional, is the intergenerational separation of Turkic Muslims. Many Turkic Muslim children have effectively become parentless due to the large-scale incarcerations. Urgent directives were issued by the state in early 2018 to address the situation of children whose parents had been detained or were “double-detained.”<sup>137</sup>

In certain cases, Chinese authorities have ordered the removal of these children from the care of their extended families and placed them in state

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133 “一体化联合作战平台” 每日要情通报: 第 2 期 (“Integrated Joint Operation Platform” Daily Essentials Bulletin No. 2).

134 Uyghur Human Rights Project, “Ideological Transformation,” p. 12.

135 Human Rights Watch, “Eradicating Ideological Viruses,” p. 5, 83-86; Testimony of Mihrigul Tursun, Hearing before the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China, 2018.

136 Ibid.; Amnesty International, China: Uyghurs living abroad tell of campaign of intimidation, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/02/china-uyghurs-living-abroad-tell-of-campaign-of-intimidation/>.

137 Zenz, “Wash Brains, Cleanse Hearts,” *Journal of Political Risk*.

institutions without the consent of their relatives.<sup>138</sup> This action follows a directive from Chen Quanguo in November 2016, which aimed to place all Xinjiang “orphans” into state institutions by 2020. The policy, which lacks mention of the families’ or children’s consent, broadly defines orphans as “children who have lost their parents or whose parents cannot be found,” including children whose one or both parents have been detained.<sup>139</sup> Reports also suggest that some children who are not orphans by any definition have been transferred, without parental consent, to full-time boarding schools where they are only allowed home on weekends and holidays, with limited visiting privileges for parents.<sup>140</sup> Those who resist the removal of their children to these schools risk being sent to detention camps.<sup>141</sup> The institutions housing these children range from boarding schools, including boarding preschools, to centres specifically designed for the care and protection of children in challenging circumstances, as well as traditional orphanages.<sup>142</sup> The CCP is rapidly constructing these centres, with a budget of over US\$30 million allocated by September 2018 to build or expand at least 45 “rescue, care, and protection centres” since the beginning of 2017, providing enough capacity to accommodate 5,000 children.<sup>143</sup> Children in these placements are taught Chinese, and some are punished for speaking their native languages. They are also taught to

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138 Human Rights Watch, “China: Xinjiang Children Separated from Families,” September 15, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/15/china-xinjiang-children-separated-families>; “China: Children Caught in Xinjiang Crackdown,” October 16, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/10/16/china-children-caught-xinjiang-crackdown>.

139 Ibid.

140 “China is putting Uighur children in ‘orphanages’ even if their parents are alive,” *The Independent*, September 21, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/china-uighurs-human-rights-muslims-orphanages-xinjiang-province-reeducation-a8548341.html>.

141 Emily Feng, “Uighur children fall victim to China anti-terror drive,” *Financial Times*, July 9, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/f0d3223a-7f4d-11e8-bc55-50daf11b720d>.

142 Adrian Zenz, “Break Their Roots: Evidence for China’s Parent-Child Separation Campaign in Xinjiang,” *Journal of Political Risk*, vol. 7, no. 7, July 2019.

143 “China is putting Uighur children in ‘orphanages’ even if their parents are alive,” *The Independent*.

sing and dance to propagandistic songs.<sup>144</sup> The state accompanies these placements with propaganda that emphasizes the benefits of placing children under the care of the Party and the government.<sup>145</sup>

## Forced Returns to China

Chinese authorities have actively pursued and located numerous Turkic Muslim asylum seekers in various countries and compelled them to return to China, where they face repression and, in some cases, detention. The fate of these returnees is often shrouded in uncertainty, as it is challenging to obtain information about their well-being and circumstances.<sup>146</sup> In July of the same year, Thai authorities allowed approximately 170 members of this group, as well as other Turkic people in Thailand seeking asylum, to proceed to Turkey. However, about 100 individuals identified as Turkic Muslims were forcibly returned to China.<sup>147</sup> Despite efforts by Human Rights Watch to gather information about their situation and whereabouts, no relevant details have been uncovered.

In early 2017, the Chinese government demanded the repatriation of Turkic Muslim students residing abroad, accusing the community of engaging in “separatism” and “religious extremism.”<sup>148</sup> Subsequently, there were reports of Chinese authorities detaining family members of these

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144 Ibid.; Human Rights Watch, “China: Xinjiang Children Separated from Families.”

145 Zenz, “Break Their Roots,” *Journal of Political Risk*.

146 Human Rights Watch, “China: Forcibly Returned Uighur Asylum Seekers At Risk,” December 22, 2009; “Thailand: More Uighurs Face Forced Return to China,” March 21, 2014; “Letter to Malaysian Prime Minister Concerning Forced Return of Uighurs,” February 1, 2013; “Saudi Arabia: Clarify Status of Uyghur Detainees,” November 23, 2020.

147 Catherine Putz, “Thailand Deports 100 Uyghurs to China,” *The Diplomat*, July 11, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/07/thailand-deports-100-uyghurs-to-china/>.

148 Human Rights Watch, “Egypt: Don’t Deport Uyghurs to China,” July 7, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/07/egypt-dont-deport-uyghurs-china>; Matt Rivers, Max Foster, and James Griffiths, “Disturbing video shows hundreds of blindfolded prisoners in Xinjiang,” *CNN*, October 7, 2019.



students as a means of coercing them to return to China.<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, the Chinese government has exerted pressure on other governments to collaborate in facilitating the return of Turkic Muslims residing abroad. For instance, in July 2017, Egyptian authorities arrested at least 62 Turkic Muslims in Egypt without disclosing the reasons for their detention. These individuals were denied access to legal representation and communication with their families. At least 12 of them were subsequently deported to China. These arrests and deportations followed a meeting between Egyptian Interior Minister Magdy Abd al-Ghaffar and Chinese Deputy Public Security Minister Chen Zhimin, during which Chen emphasized China's willingness to share information on "extremist organizations."<sup>150</sup>

## Forced Labor

There have been multiple credible reports indicating that Chinese authorities are compelling Turkic Muslims to engage in forced labor through the implementation of government "idle labor transfer programs" in Xinjiang and other parts of China. These programs, which began in 2006 but experienced a decline after the Kunming train station attack in 2014, were revived around 2017 and 2018 as part of China's nationwide poverty alleviation initiatives.<sup>151</sup>

Under the 'Strike Hard Campaign', the level of coercion involved in these labor transfer programs appears to have significantly escalated. Evidence suggests that individuals who have been released from Xinjiang's political education camps are being sent to perform forced labor. Satellite imagery has revealed the establishment of new factories connected to or in close proximity to the camps, where inmates allegedly engage in low-cost

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149 Human Rights Watch, "Egypt: Don't Deport Uyghurs to China."

150 Ibid.

151 See, for example, 新疆的农村劳动力转移出现四个转变产生四大效应, [http://www.gov.cn/gzdt/2007-06/18/content\\_652170.htm](http://www.gov.cn/gzdt/2007-06/18/content_652170.htm), mentioning that over 100,000 Xinjiang workers were exported to other provinces under the scheme in 2006.

or unpaid labor.<sup>152</sup> In certain instances, such factories have effectively become extensions of political education camps, with laborers residing in dormitories, facing restrictions on returning home, and receiving no wages until they “complete their training.”<sup>153</sup>

The crackdown on Turkic Muslims since 2014 aligns with the Chinese government's push for vertical integration in the country's garment manufacturing sector, which involves relocating textile and garment factories closer to cotton production centres in Xinjiang. This indicates a textile and apparel expansion plan heavily reliant on the forced labor of individuals in various detention facilities.<sup>154</sup>

Furthermore, authorities have gathered Turkic Muslims and dispatched them to factories in different provinces of China. The conditions surrounding these programs strongly suggest coercion, including the presence of minders and political indoctrination of the workers.<sup>155</sup> Reports have highlighted instances where individuals, despite their reluctance to be away from home, were pressured by officials to participate in these schemes. A leaked study from Nankai University described how some exported workers expressed a strong desire to return home.<sup>156</sup> Although organized labor transfer programs exist in other parts of China, such as Shanxi province, workers from Xinjiang do not seem to experience the

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152 Chris Buckley and Austin Ramzy, “China's Detention Camps for Muslims Turn to Forced Labor,” *New York Times*, December 16, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/16/world/asia/xinjiang-china-forced-labor-camps-uyghurs.html>.

153 Shohret Hoshur, “Internment Camp Assigned Uyghur Forced Laborers to Xinjiang Textile Factory: Official,” *Radio Free Asia*, November 14, 2019, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/laborers-11142019142325.html>.

154 Fair Labor Association, “Issue Brief: Forced Labor Risk in Xinjiang, China,” 2020, [https://www.fairlabor.org/sites/default/files/documents/reports/fla-brief-xinjiang\\_forced\\_labor\\_risk\\_final.pdf](https://www.fairlabor.org/sites/default/files/documents/reports/fla-brief-xinjiang_forced_labor_risk_final.pdf); Citizen Power Initiatives for China, *Cotton: The Fabric Full of Lies*, 2019.

155 ASPI, “Uyghurs for Sale,” <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/uyghurs-sale>.

156 John Sudworth, “‘If the others go I'll go’: Inside China's scheme to transfer Uyghurs into work,” *BBC News*, March 2, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-56250915>.

same coercive conditions as their counterparts.<sup>157</sup> Official plans published online, highlight the intention of these programs to transform ethnic minorities into a disciplined, patriotic, and Chinese-speaking industrial workforce.<sup>158</sup> According to Chinese government documentation from 2018, around 450,000 new Turkic Muslim workers, including impoverished household members, relatives of prisoners and detainees, and individuals from political education camps, have been employed in the cotton and textiles industry.<sup>159</sup>

## Sexual Violence and Violations of Reproductive Rights

Disturbing reports have emerged regarding instances of sexual violence against Turkic Muslim women in detention. Tursunay Ziawudun, who was held in a camp for nine months in 2018, disclosed that she was gang-raped by masked men on multiple occasions and subjected to electroshock on and inside her genitals. She further stated that women in her cell were taken to be raped every night by camp authorities.<sup>160</sup> Other former detainees and camp teachers have also attested to witnessing or hearing about instances of rape. Qulbinur Sedik, a Uyghur political education camp teacher, mentioned that police officers informed her about women being raped, including with electric batons.<sup>161</sup> An ethnic Kazakh woman who was a former detainee revealed that a police officer threatened her with rape if

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157 我省出台措施进一步加大就业扶贫力度, [http://www.jcgov.gov.cn/dtxx/sxyw/202003/t20200315\\_890057.shtml](http://www.jcgov.gov.cn/dtxx/sxyw/202003/t20200315_890057.shtml).

158 Bernhard Zand and Adrian Zenz, "The Equivalent of Cultural Genocide," Spiegel Online, November 28, 2019, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/chinese-oppression-of-the-uyghurs-like-cultural-genocide-a-1298171.html>.

159 孙瑞哲分享十大行业发展热点 (Sun Ruizhe Shares Top Ten Industry Development Hot Topics), March 4, 2018, transcript, [http://www.ccta.org.cn/hyxx/201803/t20180305\\_3683861.html](http://www.ccta.org.cn/hyxx/201803/t20180305_3683861.html); Jianli Yang and Lianchao Han, "Did a Muslim Slave Make Your Chinese Shirt?," Wall Street Journal, October 16, 2019.

160 Matthew Hill, David Campanale, and Joel Gunter, "'Their goal is to destroy everyone': Uighur camp detainees allege systematic rape," BBC News, February 2, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55794071>.

161 Ruth Ingram, "Confessions of a Xinjiang Camp Teacher," The Diplomat, August 17, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/08/confessions-of-a-xinjiang-camp-teacher/>.

she was not honest.<sup>162</sup> There have also been accounts of sexual humiliation, such as forcibly pulling pubic hair.<sup>163</sup>

Emerging reports have also shed light on violations of the reproductive rights of Turkic Muslim women in Xinjiang. Former detainees and residents have described being subjected to procedures without their consent, including forced implantation of intrauterine contraceptive devices (IUDs) and forced abortions.<sup>164</sup> These coercive measures to control women's fertility may be implemented more strictly in Xinjiang as part of the Strike Hard Campaign. The Qaraqash Document, which listed reasons for detention, revealed that violating birth policies by having too many children was the most common reason for internment. Chinese academics and officials have previously referred to Turkic Muslim population growth in the region as excessive and a catalyst for religious extremism and separatism, labelling it a threat to national security. Government documents and statements have linked religious extremism with violations of family planning policies.

In recent years, the government in Xinjiang has launched campaigns and implemented policies targeting birth control violations. These efforts include the Special Campaign to Control Birth Control Violations and the Special Action Plan of the "Two Thorough Investigations" of Illegal Births.<sup>165</sup> These campaigns involve intrusive measures such as

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162 Forthcoming ChinaFile publication.

163 Amie Ferris-Rotman, "Abortions, IUDs and Sexual humiliation: Muslim women who fled China for Kazakhstan recount ordeals," *Washington Post*, October 7, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/abortions-iuds-and-sexual-humiliation-muslim-women-who-fled-china-for-kazakhstan-recount-ordeals/2019/10/04/551c2658-cfd2-11e9-a620-0a91656d7db6\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/abortions-iuds-and-sexual-humiliation-muslim-women-who-fled-china-for-kazakhstan-recount-ordeals/2019/10/04/551c2658-cfd2-11e9-a620-0a91656d7db6_story.html); Amie Ferris-Rotman, Aigerim Toleukhan, Emily Rauhala, and Anna Fifield, "China accused of genocide over forced abortions of Uighur Muslim women as escapees reveal widespread sexual torture," *The Independent*, October 6, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/china-uighur-muslim-women-abortion-sexual-abuse-genocide-a9144721.html>.

164 Ferris-Rotman, "Abortions, IUDs and Sexual humiliation," *Washington Post*.

165 Zenz, "Sterilizations, IUDs, and Coercive Birth Prevention," *China Brief*.

mandatory IUD placements and permanent sterilizations.<sup>166</sup> The number of sterilization procedures has surged in Xinjiang, despite traditional reservations within Turkic Muslim communities towards such practices. Refusal to undergo these procedures can result in threats of internment.<sup>167</sup>

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the evidence presented in this article points to a wide range of human rights abuses and violations against Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, China. The testimonies of former detainees, along with various reports and investigations, shed light on the severe mistreatment experienced by individuals in detention camps, including forced labor, sexual violence, and infringements on reproductive rights. These acts are part of a systematic campaign aimed at erasing Uyghur Muslim culture, religion, and identity. The Chinese government's policies and actions in Xinjiang, particularly under the guise of the *Strike Hard Campaign*, have resulted in mass detentions, forced assimilation, surveillance, and restrictions on basic freedoms.

The gravity and consistency of the evidence presented here warrant urgent international attention and a comprehensive response. The international community must collectively condemn these egregious human rights abuses and take concrete steps to hold the responsible parties accountable. Efforts should focus on ensuring transparency, independent investigations, access to justice for victims, and the provision of support and protection for affected individuals and communities. Addressing the crisis in Xinjiang requires a multi-faceted approach, including diplomatic pressure, economic measures, targeted sanctions, and engagement with relevant stakeholders. It is crucial to prioritize the protection of human rights, promote the rule of law, and uphold international legal norms and standards. Furthermore, the findings presented in this article underscore the need for robust

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166 Ibid., p. 13.

167 Ibid., p. 15-16.

mechanisms to monitor and document human rights abuses, strengthen international legal frameworks, and establish accountability mechanisms to prevent future atrocities. The experiences of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang serve as a stark reminder of the importance of safeguarding human rights and upholding the dignity and well-being of all individuals, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, or cultural background.

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