

## Chinese Genocidal Campaigns In Xinjiang: A Critical Analysis

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### Abstract

*This paper aims to critically examine China's relentless attempts for the forcible assimilation of the native Uyghur Turkic Muslim population into Han culture in the Xinjiang Autonomous area.*

*The Uyghur and other Turkic minority groups in Xinjiang are now expected to submit to the cultural practices of the Han Chinese majority after losing their independence. According to CCP, local cultures and landscapes must be altered to fit the national narrative, and some aspects of minority culture must be eradicated as part of this assimilation process. The Chinese government is particularly skeptical of religious and foreign influences on non-Han cultures. Xi Jinping emphasized the need of avoiding foreign interference and merging religious concepts with Chinese culture during the 2016 National Religious Work Conference. According to Zhang Xunmou, the government's main religious policy adviser, who made this claim in 2019, complete sinicization—both inside and outside—is the ultimate goal of religious work. The international community is not stopping this process.*

**Key Words:** Han Culture, Sinicization, Mass Detention, Mass Surveillance

The northwest region of China is home to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (also known as XUAR), which borders Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia. Unlike the Han Chinese majority, who speak Mandarin Chinese, the Uyghur, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz groups in Xinjiang are Turkic, practice Islam as their main religion, and speak different languages. The region with the largest concentration of Muslims in China is Xinjiang, where Uyghurs make up 46% of the population, according to the 2010 census. Many organizations refer to the region as "East Turkestan," underlining the need for greater autonomy or perhaps independence from Chinese rule.

The Chinese government claims that Xinjiang has been an essential component of China for more than two thousand years. The majority of Uyghurs, however, disagree with this viewpoint and view Xinjiang as a separate area with a unique political and cultural past, much like Tibet. Even the name "Xinjiang" is rejected by Uyghur separatists, who instead call the region "East Turkestan" or "Uyghuristan." A complicated story of regional conquest and power struggles can be found in historical sources. In order to drive out the Huns and take control, Chinese emperors first invaded what is now Xinjiang in the first century B.C.

The Qing rulers had fragile control over Xinjiang from the 18th century until the end of the Qing empire in 1911. The Uyghurs made two attempts at secession prior to the Communist conquest in 1949, and China's nationalist government remained to rule Xinjiang. Uyghur nationalists founded the Eastern Turkestan Republic, an independent country, between 1931 and 1934 and again between 1944 and 1949. However, the Uyghurs' hopes for independence were dashed in 1949 with the Communist revolution. After communists took control of Xinjiang in late 1949, Chairman Mao Tse-Tung formally recognized the area as a "autonomous province" in 1955.

### Sinicizing Xinjiang under Xi Jinping

After losing their independence, the Uyghur and other Turkic minority groups in Xinjiang are now expected to fit in with the dominant Han Chinese population's cultural customs. CCP feels that certain facets of minority culture must be erased as part of this assimilation process, and local cultures and landscapes must be reshaped to fit the national narrative. Religious and foreign influences in non-Han cultures are especially viewed with suspicion by the Chinese government. During the National Religious Work Conference in 2016, Xi Jinping placed a strong emphasis on integrating religious ideas with Chinese culture and avoiding outside meddling. Complete Sinicization both inside and outside is the ultimate goal of religious work, according to Zhang Xunmou, the government's chief religious policy adviser, who made this statement in 2019.

The Chinese government has expanded its authority over religion in recent years. In 2017, it implemented updated laws pertaining to religious monitoring, and in 2018, it merged the state agency in charge of religious matters into the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFW). Despite being a Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) since 1955, Xinjiang is today presented as a place of "cultural integration," where many ethnic groups, religions, and civilizations are said to have coexisted and blended together.

In mid-2016, Xi Jinping named Chen Quanguo as CCP Secretary in charge of XUAR, further escalating his reign of terror. Chen, notorious for his brutalities in Tibet, implemented: grid-style social management; a technology-intensive approach to urban governance and intelligence-led policing (as observed in eastern Chinese cities since the mid-to-late 2000s); and

the construction of approximately 7,500 "convenience police stations" in six months in early 2017 to torture Uyghurs under a "smart digital" regime. China's "digital gulag" in XUAR, which is evidence of current human rights abuses by China, is a place of pervasive surveillance that combines sophisticated technical systems with human spies.

The other Chinese political leaders, besides Mao and Xi, were also not perfect and cruelly treated the Uyghurs and other minorities. Even the so-called "reformist" Deng Xiaoping was inhumane and repressive in comparison to Mao Zedong. Deng was positioned on par with Mao as a result of events like the suppression of democratic voices in Xinjiang (1985) and Tiananmen Square (1989), as well as the spectacular executions that occurred in China in the early 1980s. In order to suppress violent separatist activities in Xinjiang, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin launched a military operation known as the "Strike Hard, Maximum Pressure Campaign" on April 28, 1996. The very term of this military operation suggests the intensity of the treatment of the Uyghurs by the Chinese security forces. The Chinese authorities claimed to have eliminated 70 "criminal organizations" and seized a cache of weapons, ammunition, and cash in Xinjiang alone, but they also unjustly jailed some 1,300 Uyghurs on April 29, 1996. The intensity of this military action is demonstrated by this. Throughout the following six months, the Chinese government continued its military crackdown in several regions of the XUAR. Amnesty International reports that during this Strike Hard period, over 1,000 people were put to death.

### **Mass Arbitrary Detention and Arrest**

When and how Chinese officials imprisoned Turkic Muslims in large numbers is unclear. Prior to the increase in detentions that started in the spring of 2017, Turkic Muslims had been held in unofficial imprisonment centers since at least 2016. It is uncertain how many Turkic Muslims were actually imprisoned during the crackdown, although it is widely believed that between several hundred thousand and one million people were detained in what are known as "political education camps." Many Turkic Muslims claim that jails, pretrial detention centers, or these camps have held more than half of their relatives. The US State Department estimates that up to two million people went through the political education camps between April 2017 and December 2018 alone. Additionally, an internal memo obtained by Chinese officials stated that 15,683 "suspicious persons" were detained in a single week in June 2017. The vast majority of individuals held in the political education camps are not accused of any particular offense. According to Chinese officials, local authorities are to tell relatives of detainees that their loved ones are not criminals but are being kept for their own benefit because they are "infected by unhealthy thoughts." Chinese officials have claimed that political education camps are merely "Vocational Skills Education Training Centres," although they have also targeted educated Turkic Muslim professors, writers, journalists, doctors, performers, and the elderly. According to confidential records, the centers are intended to be run like the military, operate like schools, and be protected like jails. Walls, watchtowers, and armed guards enclose these institutions to keep people from escaping. Detainees have been detained for unimportant reasons, and the "Qaraqash Document," an internal document that was leaked, sheds light on the justifications for holding people in a particular Qaraqash county district. Detention has been attributed to overseas ties, which include but are not limited to travel to specific countries, unofficial Hajj pilgrimages, passport applications, communication with foreigners, and even inadvertently visiting foreign websites on mobile devices. Additionally, there has been suspicion around communication with individuals outside the country or domestic movement within China.

Detentions have also resulted from harmless religious activities like praying, fasting, going to religious gatherings, studying religion, creating a religious environment at home, wearing headscarves, and growing a beard. Additionally, Turkic Muslims have been detained on the basis of breaking the state's birth regulations or failing to complete community service. The bodily freedom of the detainees has been violated due to the actions of others as well as their protected ideas and behaviors under international law, which amounts to collective punishment. As a kind of reprisal for their activities, authorities frequently target the families of Turkic Muslim journalists and activists, especially those who are employed overseas. The authorities maintain thorough records on the personal data of the inmates as well as that of their friends, neighbors, and immediate and extended family.

It appears that detainees are classified, subjected to varying degrees of security, and held for varying lengths of time. Initially, detainees are placed in general management, stringent, or very strict zones, with different techniques of instruction and training, according to a private internal document. Rewards, penalties, family visits, treatment inside zones, and possible transfers between zones are all determined by a behavior-based scoring system. To be eligible for release, detainees need to have served for at least a year, maintain a satisfactory score, and be classified at the "general management" level. Aside from the political education camps, the "Strike Hard Campaign" has increased the number of Turkic Muslims who are formally arrested and subjected to arbitrary imprisonment by the criminal judicial system.

Statistics indicates that people have been singled out for prosecution based only on their religious and ethnic affiliation. In 2017, Xinjiang accounted for about a percentage of all indictments and convictions in China. In comparison to the preceding five-year period, Xinjiang has seen a sharp increase in the number of arrests and criminal prosecutions. Since the Strike Hard Campaign escalated in late 2016, more than one million people have been convicted, according to estimates backed by the Xinjiang Victims Database. These increases are ascribed to Chen Quanguo's campaign and policies, which are said to have played a significant role in Xinjiang's increased police recruitment and security expenditures.

Frequently accused of "terrorism" and "religious extremism," Turkic Muslims have been imprisoned on accusations of "separatism" and other wide offenses. Due process rights of detainees are often ignored, and many of these arrests and

detentions lack an evidential foundation. Authorities do not provide detainees with warrants, criminal evidence, or any other paperwork, nor do they notify them of the authorities who are in charge of their arrest. When charged with terrorism, defendants are not permitted to enter a plea of "not guilty" and are promptly tried and condemned. Attorneys who fight for their clients' due process rights run the danger of losing their cases.

There have been reports of procedural abuses, such as the preparation of verdicts prior to trials or the use of government representatives to determine penalties instead of judges. Information is strictly regulated by Xinjiang authorities, and there are very few publicly accessible rulings for people detained since late 2016. Those convicted of "splittism," "inciting ethnic hatred and discrimination," "spying and fraud," "disturbing public order and extremism," "assisting in terrorist" activities, and "illegal use of the internet" are among the ethnic groups represented in these verdicts. These include Hui, Uyghur, and ethnic Kazakh. Numerous Turkic Muslims have been imprisoned for ambiguous and overbroad offenses such as "inciting ethnic hatred," "picking quarrels and provoking trouble," and viewing "extremist" content, according to other examples.

### **Torture and Other Forms of Mistreatment in Detention.**

Numerous deaths among Xinjiang inmates have been documented since 2018, both while they were in detention and soon after they were released. 177 deaths were recorded in the Xinjiang Victims Database, the majority of which happened while the victim was in prison or as a result of untreated diseases or injuries that arose in these facilities, including mental disorders. According to Radio Free Asia, four people died in different political education camps in 2018<sup>73</sup>, and 150 people died in one camp in Aksu Prefecture.

The Chinese government has hardly ever acknowledged these killings. In both police prison facilities and political education camps, cases of torture and other harsh, inhuman, and degrading treatment have been documented by Human Rights Watch and other sources. They have been beaten, hung from walls and ceilings, deprived of sleep, and shackled for extended periods of time in Xinjiang's police detention facilities. When being questioned by authorities, some inmates have been tied to metal chairs, sometimes referred to as "tiger chairs." Accounts of maltreatment of vulnerable people, physical and psychological punishments, poor medical care, and suicide attempts have been recounted by former detainees. Mihrigul Tursun, a former Uyghur prisoner, reported seeing nine people killed during her three months of imprisonment, while another person claimed that his father had died in the camp after being tortured.

During interrogations, Mihrigul Tursun reportedly reported being assaulted, electroshocked, stripped forcibly, and examined by a doctor. She described how scores of women were packed into a tiny, poorly ventilated underground cell while chained at the wrists and ankles. There have been reports of captives being continuously monitored with video cameras and microphones, and in certain instances, being prohibited from speaking their native Turkic languages. These claims are corroborated by a leaked CCP regulation that mandates blind spot-free, extensive video surveillance of classrooms and dorms. Issues like sharing beds, sleeping in shifts, and overcrowding were brought to light by former inmates. There was severe emotional suffering as a result of the appalling living conditions and indefinite incarceration. Inadequate and subpar food was served, usually consisting of thin soup and steamed buns. Despite the availability of basic medical care, detainees—even those who were elderly or had significant illnesses—were not released. They made the detainees perform songs that praised Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Strict penalties were applied for even small rule violations, such as refusing food to someone who refused to speak Chinese. As one former inmate described, solitary confinement was used, which included handcuffing, denying food and water, and standing without sleep for 24 hours. According to a leaked internal document, authorities were told to employ "assault-style transformation through education" on detainees who show resistance or bad attitudes in order to achieve the intended outcomes.

### **Enforced Disappearances**

Families of people in custody frequently don't know where their loved ones are or how they're doing. In the event that their relatives are sent to official prisons, they might occasionally be notified. The "#MeTooUyghur" social media campaign, which calls on Chinese authorities to provide proof of the welfare of those jailed by the state, was sparked by the lack of information and enforced disappearances. Family members and friends, especially those who live overseas, are reluctant to report missing people or offer help in finding the jailed individuals out of fear of reprisals from the government.

Authorities have in some cases arrested parents while their children are not in school. According to The New York Times, a classified guideline issued by the CCP leadership in November 2019 directs authorities how to respond to questions students have about their jailed family members when they return home at the end of the semester. The guidance instructs officials to notify students that their relatives are unable to leave a "training school set up by the government." Additionally, students are cautioned that their actions may affect their relatives' chances of being released. In addition, the Qaraqash Document shows that when deciding whether to release captives, local authorities consider the behaviors and views of their family members. The Qaraqash Document states in one note that a detainee's family members were not advised to be released because they had not quickly participated in flag-raising ceremonies.

A key figure in China's rights advocacy movement, Gao Zhisheng was among the first human rights attorneys to appear in the early 2000s. He took on cases to support migrant workers and defend spiritual practitioners, like as Christians and

Falun Gong members. Gao exposed the mistreatment he had endured in defending Falun Gong practitioners and their predicament by writing open letters to China's highest political authorities.

Gao was served a three-year prison sentence in 2006 for "inciting subversion of state power." Following his release on parole, he was tortured by police between 2007 and 2011 and repeatedly disappeared for prolonged periods of time. Gao was imprisoned in the Uyghur area to carry out his sentence after breaking the terms of his parole, according to a December 2011 state media report. After being freed in 2014, he continued to be under house arrest.

Gao has not communicated with his Chinese family, colleague rights attorneys, or activists who used to stay in touch with him since August 13, 2017. Chinese officials have since made the absurd argument that Gao is not subject to any "criminal coercive measures." Gao has essentially stayed in an enforced disappearance for the last six years.

### Mass Surveillance

The Chinese government's monitoring methods are particularly intrusive in Xinjiang when it comes to Turkic Muslim citizens, especially when it comes to national mass surveillance. The government employs government officers to keep a close eye on this particular group and aggressively encourages a culture of informant reporting. One example is the "ten households, one unit" program, in which groups of ten households are jointly in charge of keeping an eye on and reporting on one another. Any offenses committed by one home under this arrangement may lead to sanctions being applied to the entire group.

The truth about Xinjiang's human rights abuses has a remarkable tendency to come to light. The serious human rights situation in Xinjiang and the fact that the Uyghurs have endured suffering at the hands of Chinese authorities for the past 70 years are known to the world community. At this point, the whole community needs to work steadily, but China and its supreme leader Xi Jinping still bear the burden. When it comes to the Uyghur issue, China regrettably still takes pride in its ability to sway international opinion in its favor rather than extending compassion to this oppressed group. The Uyghurs, the province's predominant ethnic group and its own residents, were browbeaten by Chinese authorities in Xinjiang under the pretext of defending national interests on its crucial frontier. It is unacceptable for China, a responsible global power and nation state, to deny the Uyghurs their fundamental human rights.

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