



WILL THE HUI BE SILENTLY ERASED?

A groundbreaking report
on the Chinese
government's campaign to
eliminate Hui Muslim
identity and the crisis of
survival for the Hui and
Islam in China

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Hope Umbrella
International
Foundation (HUIF)



Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD)

A coalition of Chinese and international human rights non-governmental organizations. The network is dedicated to the promotion of human rights through peaceful efforts to push for democratic and rule of law reforms and to strengthen grassroots activism in China. <https://www.nchrd.org/>

Hope Umbrella International Foundation

An organization whose mission is to preserve the cultural, religious, and intellectual heritage of the Hui people. The organization also documents the effects of government policies that violate the human rights of Hui communities in China.

Front image captions and credits (counterclockwise from top): The night market in the Muslim Quarter of Xi'an, China. This Muslim man takes a break from tending the line to his ròujiāmó stand. Aaron Guy Leroux (June 24, 2016), some rights reserved. Boys run into the mosque for evening prayers after Quran lessons. Xining, Qinghai province. Kevin Schoenmakers (June 29, 2011), some rights reserved. Hui woman, Xiahe, Gansu. Evgeni Zotov (July 25, 2012), some rights reserved. Young Muslim girls in China, Omar Ansari (August 10, 2002), some rights reserved. A man reading the Quran in Beijing's Cow Street Mosque. Kevin Schoenmakers (May 24, 2011), some rights reserved. Men praying in the Song Bolu Mosque in Xi'an, China. Kevin Schoenmakers (April 21, 2011), some rights reserved.

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Introduction

The Hui are the second largest minority group in China, with a population of 11.4 million.¹ Although this is greater than the population of Portugal, the Hui are an unfamiliar group to most outside of China. Yet over centuries, they have persisted in maintaining distinct communities and practices centered around Islam while residing throughout nearly every region of China. A few ethnically distinct Muslim groups in China are also classified as Hui by the Chinese government.

This Hui Muslim identity has been characterized by Chinese authorities as a threat to be resolved through forcible assimilation. Hui have long navigated as minorities under the Chinese Communist Party's governance model, and the period of social and market opening through the 2010s brought relatively greater freedom. Hui community members were able to openly participate in mosque communities, Arabic schools, and private worship, albeit under restrictions facilitated by Party liaisons. Meanwhile, Hui and other Muslim entrepreneurs were encouraged to develop business and tourism connections with the wider Muslim world as part of the Belt and Road Initiative.

However, an essential tenet of Party governance is that any form of social organization within China that is independent of the Party and government system is a potential threat to the Party's authority. From crackdowns on activists, Christian house churches, and even tech firms, China's government and Communist Party top leader Xi Jinping has shown that he believes in much stricter Party control over society than his immediate predecessors. In addition, authorities' actions against the Hui have also been influenced by Islamophobic rhetoric that has pervaded global counterterrorism discourse.

Chinese authorities have targeted the Hui through three main policy measures: (1) the counter-terrorism campaign in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR or Xinjiang), which has linked expressions of Hui Muslim identity to extremism and has landed more than 100,000 Hui in re-education centers; (2) a national "Sinicization" campaign to bring religious and ethnic groups under more direct control of the government and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and has led to wide-scale mosque closures and detentions of religious leaders; and (3) scattering minority communities through relocation via "poverty alleviation" programs. Those affected also include Muslim believers of other ethnic backgrounds, including ethnic Dongxiang, Baoan, Salar, Tajik, Mongolian, and Han, as well as those belonging to Turkic-speaking groups (Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Tatar).

The policies authorizing these campaigns are not transparent—official documents are classified and withheld even from the implementing authorities, but their effects are obvious. This report details how China's Hui population in Xinjiang—numbering over a million—has been among the groups targeted by crimes against humanity in the government's counter-terrorism campaign in the region. This is the same counter-terrorism campaign that has received widespread international coverage for targeting Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and other Turkic-speaking groups beginning in 2014 and escalating in 2017. As mentioned above, the campaign has resulted in the detentions of a plausible estimate of more than 100,000 Hui in re-education centers, in addition to pre-trial detentions and imprisonments.

Hui have also been subject to restrictions aimed at eliminating “signs of extremism” and intrusive surveillance of public and private life.

This report also covers violations of Hui cultural and religious rights throughout China. Through the government’s “Sinicization” campaign, authorities have tried to forcibly integrate religious groups into the government and Party system and to eliminate aspects of cultural expression that are seen by authorities as being incompatible with Han Chinese culture. This has led to mosque demolitions and closures and the removal of all signs of Islam and Arabic in Hui public life. Authorities have intimidated and detained lawyers taking up cases of Hui persecuted for exercising their cultural rights and censored publications and online content about Hui and Islam, while permitting officials to foment hate speech and campaigns attacking Hui communities on Chinese social media.

“Poverty alleviation” is another Chinese government policy with a significant impact on Hui social, cultural, and economic rights. Officials have implemented two major poverty alleviation programs among Hui communities that require relocation: “ecological migration” and domestic “labor transfers” to more economically developed regions within China. In designing these programs, authorities have failed to conduct consultations with the communities that would be seriously affected. Officials have stated that the goals of these policies include assimilation of minority groups. These policies have forced the integration of ethnic minority communities into Han Chinese-dominant cities, where Hui find their employment opportunities limited to unstable and low-paying wage work.

Finally, this report covers violations of Hui economic rights in the context of forced labor in Xinjiang and the threatened deprivation of social benefits. Hui throughout China have also faced discrimination in education, the job market and the workplace, and this discrimination has worsened because of the stigmatizing effect of the government campaigns marginalizing and criminalizing Hui religious and cultural practices.

Chapter 1. Counter-Terrorism Policies Targeting Hui in Xinjiang

1.1 Targeting Hui for Exhibiting “Signs of Extremism”

Beginning in 2014 and escalating in 2017, the Chinese government’s “strike hard” campaign to counter “terrorism” and “extremism” in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang or XUAR) has resulted in egregious violations of the social, economic, and cultural rights of the over one million Hui persons in the region.² Though the resulting crimes against humanity directed at Uyghurs and Kazakhs have drawn more widespread attention, China’s Hui population has also been among the targeted groups.

As part of the “strike hard” campaign, authorities have implemented a series of laws³ and policies that have been used to impose severe sanctions on a wide range of activities that government officials have designated “signs of extremism.”⁴ Authorities have rounded up members of the Hui community and held them in detention centers and re-education camps and sentenced some of them to prison for engaging in Hui religious and cultural activities such as praying at home⁵ or in mosques,⁶ watching⁷ or discussing⁸ religious content online, traveling to Muslim-majority countries,⁹ having funded mosque construction,¹⁰ going on Hajj pilgrimages,¹¹ being an imam, both with¹² and without¹³ state licenses, publishing books on Islam and Hui culture,¹⁴ and keeping religious paraphernalia in the home.¹⁵ One Hui woman who taught at a religious school outside of Xinjiang with a degree from Al-Azhar University in Egypt was sentenced to seven years in prison.¹⁶ Such government measures targeting Hui persons for the above-listed activities violate their rights to non-discrimination and to take part in cultural life.

In further violation of the Hui community’s cultural rights, authorities have prohibited Hui communities in Xinjiang from engaging in religious and cultural activities such as observing Ramadan and Eid-al-Adha and have required Hui individuals to renounce their religion under duress.¹⁷ Authorities have required Hui families of those who had been detained in re-education camps to attend weekly flag-raising ceremonies¹⁸ and evening classes with “anti-religious” curriculum and demanded that attendees report on the religious observance of friends and family, threatening to send those who failed to report to a re-education camp.¹⁹

1.2 Detention of Hui & Mistreatment in Detention

As part of the counter-terrorism campaign beginning in 2014, Hui in Xinjiang have been detained in pre-trial detention centers and re-education camps and sentenced to prison. The Chinese government has made little information public about the number or ethnicity of those detained in the campaign. In the absence of official data, researcher Gene Bunin has found that many witness testimonies from former detainees who later fled to Kazakhstan mention that Hui were detained alongside them in Xinjiang; Bunin also found that a report of 43 persons detained in Xinjiang in one predominantly Hui village of 60 households was comparable to expert estimates of the proportion detained in Uyghur communities in Xinjiang.²⁰ Using researchers’ conservative estimate of 10 percent for the proportion of those detained in Uyghur communities,²¹ it is plausible to estimate that perhaps more than 100,000 Hui may have been deprived of liberty in connection with the campaign in Xinjiang.

The conditions in which Hui persons have been held in custody have resulted in serious violations of their rights to an adequate standard of living and to physical and mental health. Uyghur, Kazakh, and other majority Muslim groups have reported significant physical and psychological abuse in custody,²² and reports indicate that Hui in custody have been subject to similar treatment,²³ such as being crowded in squalid conditions of around 40 detainees to a cell with space so limited they could only sleep in shifts, being deprived of sunlight, and malnutrition so severe that detainees suffered from life-threatening anemia and weight loss.²⁴ Like other detainees, Hui have been handcuffed and shackled for long periods,²⁵ with at least one account having emerged of a Hui man dying in detention after being restrained in a tiger chair for 78 hours.²⁶

1.3 Surveillance in Public and Private Life

The detentions described above underpin a broader system of surveillance and restrictions aimed at eliminating the aforementioned “signs” of religious “extremism” in public and private life in the XUAR. The implementation of such policies has violated the rights of Hui individuals to non-discrimination. These measures include close scrutiny of the movements and activities of Hui and other non-Han persons residing in the XUAR through security checkpoints,²⁷ forced inspection of social media history,²⁸ random cellphone checks,²⁹ home inspections,³⁰ regular questioning by police in person and over social media,³¹ and assigning public employees to stay in homes to monitor for religious observance and other “signs of extremism.”³²

To facilitate monitoring by local authorities, Hui persons have also been subjected to discriminatory travel, residence, and employment restrictions, with reports of local authorities selectively requiring Hui to return to their registered hometowns.³³ In December 2019, Xinjiang police reportedly detained a Hui woman who was teaching at a religious school outside of Xinjiang and forcibly returned her to her hometown of Tacheng prefecture.³⁴ Authorities have also prohibited Hui from relocating within Xinjiang by reportedly refusing to register them as new residents.³⁵

Authorities have also subjected Hui persons to physically and psychologically intrusive surveillance of their private lives. As part of the “becoming family” homestay program, public employees have reportedly monitored people in their homes for long periods of time with highly intrusive methods—continuously taking pictures of their activities, asking children about their parents’ activities,³⁶ and even sleeping with families in their beds.³⁷ The program constitutes a serious, coercive disruption of family life and also violates the right to enjoyment of mental health and to ensure the religious and moral education of one’s children.

Chapter 2. Discriminatory Policies and Practices Violating Hui Cultural and Religious Rights

2.1 “Sinicization” Policy Undermines Hui Religious Freedom and Identity

In 2016, Xi Jinping declared that “Sinicization” of religion in China would be a major policy priority.³⁸ “Sinicization” refers to the forcible assimilation of religious groups within the government and Party system while eliminating expressions of cultural distinctiveness from Han Chinese culture (as interpreted by Chinese authorities, that is).³⁹ Among those targeted for Sinicization are the Hui in a campaign which appears to be authorized and coordinated via secretive directives⁴⁰ from the PRC State Council and the United Front Work Department. Implementation of this campaign has had the effect of expunging communities of their connections to Hui culture, religion, and each other so thoroughly that some leaders view the erasure of a meaningful Hui identity within another generation as being a likely possibility.⁴¹

A classified 2018 State Council directive called for eliminating signs of Arab cultural influence in Islamic venues, dress, and religious observance, prohibiting charitable funds, referred to as *waqf*, from being independently held and administered by local Islamic communities, and barring Islamic organizations from running programs involving minors—from kindergartens to Arabic language schools and study abroad programs.⁴²

Among the forms of “Arab influence” being targeted for removal since 2016 are Arabic lettering and motifs on buildings, in public areas, and in people’s homes.⁴³ Islamic dietary restrictions have also been targeted as an unacceptable expression of Hui identity: since 2016 across China, restaurants and groceries have been forced to remove halal signage,⁴⁴ and by 2019 authorities in Ningxia, Beijing, and elsewhere were no longer allowing food, dairy, and wheat producers and restaurants to certify food as halal.⁴⁵

The Sinicization campaign also aims to prevent transmission of cultural and religious heritage across generations. Minors under 18 have been prohibited from entering mosques and other religious venues in many areas, and Arabic language and Islamic schools have been shut down by authorities. In Gansu, extremely limited quotas for Arabic language and religious instruction have made it impossible for most children to access instruction.⁴⁶

In 2018, the Chinese Islamic Association—the state-sanctioned leadership organization for Islamic religious leaders—released measures regarding the Sinicization of mosques and Islamic doctrine.⁴⁷ The policy was referred to as the “four entries,” and directed local officials to ensure that “four” things make their “entry” into Hui, Uyghur, and all other mosques: the national flag, the Chinese constitution and laws, core socialist values, and Chinese traditional culture.⁴⁸ Mosques were reportedly required to raise national flags,⁴⁹ which were often accompanied by slogans exhorting patriotism, ethnic unity, and social stability.⁵⁰

The “four entries” also heralded the intrusion of official surveillance into the religious and private life of Hui. Surveillance cameras have been installed by local police to monitor

activity inside mosques in Ningxia and Henan.⁵¹ Hui have also been expected by the government to report on the religious activities of friends and families, with monetary rewards offered to informants.⁵²

Authorities have sought to introduce the last two “entries”—core socialist values and Chinese traditional culture—through Hui religious leaders. Imams are only able to openly preach contingent on whether they demonstrate loyalty to the government’s Sinicization program.⁵³ Mosques without licensed imams have been shut down entirely.⁵⁴ Officials in Ningxia and Henan now require imams to attend monthly training sessions regarding Party ideology and official policies governing ethnic minorities; for renewal of their imam license they must pass yearly tests regarding Party ideology.⁵⁵ Imams are closely policed to monitor their deviation from officially prescribed interpretations of Islam.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, the Sinicization policy seeks to change the very beliefs of Islam by inserting “core socialist values” into the religious doctrine itself. The state-led China Islamic Association began leading conferences in December 2020 for the purpose of generating official re-interpretations of Islamic theology from the perspective of Confucianism and “core socialist values” so that they can be in line with “Chinese traditional culture.”⁵⁷ Officials have worked methodically to remove signs of Arabic influence from mosques: the call to prayer in Arabic was prohibited in at least Ningxia and Gansu and replaced with the sound of a siren; as with all other buildings, Arabic inscriptions and motifs were removed from mosque walls.⁵⁸

Finally, there are also signs that local governments are linking the Sinicization campaign to Xinjiang’s counter-terrorism campaign. Ningxia authorities signed a cooperative agreement to “learn from Xinjiang’s counter-terrorism campaign” in December 2018.⁵⁹ Two Xinjiang public security officials traveled to the southern island province of Hainan in February 2019 to register the identification of all the attendees of Friday prayer for at least one mosque in the city of Sanya, where there is a concentration of the 10,000-member Utsul population, who are classified by the Chinese government as Hui although they are more closely related to the Cham of Southeast Asia.⁶⁰

2.2 Mosque Closures, Consolidations, Demolitions

The Sinicization measure that has arguably the greatest impact on Hui communities is the closure of mosques via “consolidation” policies and outright demolition. Such measures have been reported in Ningxia, Qinghai, Henan, Gansu, and Yunnan. These closures have inflicted considerable damage on Hui communities given that the heart of Hui community life is the mosque. Neighborhoods have been organized around the mosque, and in addition to being the spiritual center of the community, the mosque has provided education in Arabic and other subjects through schools, opportunities for social connection and support, and has even stewarded financial resources for the surrounding community through charitable community funds (*waqf*)—all aspects of mosque activity that have been targeted by the Sinicization campaign.

Authorities in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region have drastically reduced the number of mosques through a policy of “consolidation” begun in 2020.⁶¹ The plan reportedly mandates the closure of all mosques but one within every 2.5 square kilometers, with eventual plans for demolition of the closed mosques. In just one county, Pingyuan, an estimated 50 mosques were closed under this policy. Plans for implementing this policy have reportedly been in place since 2017, but local communities have not been shown any official documentation authorizing the closure and destruction of mosques. Such “consolidation” actions have also been reported in Gansu province.

Authorities have also implemented mosque “rectification” measures for remaining mosques on a massive scale. According to independent Hui researchers, nearly every mosque in China with a domed roof and minaret has had these features forcibly demolished over the last five years. Authorities characterized such features as being unacceptable signs of Arab influence.⁶² In many cases they have been replaced with traditional Chinese roof designs.⁶³ Authorities have retaliated against those opposing or even simply documenting the demolitions. Following mass protests in Tongxin, Ningxia over the attempted removal of a mosque dome in August 2018, authorities visited each Hui household in the community requiring each to give consent to the replacement of the dome, issuing threats such as job loss for family members who were public employees.⁶⁴ In April of 2019, authorities in Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu province demolished a mosque and reportedly arrested seven or eight people for taking videos and posting them to private groups on WeChat.

2.3 Intimidation and Detention of Lawyers Taking on Cases Involving Hui Cultural Rights

Chinese authorities have harassed, threatened, and detained lawyers for representing Hui clients charged in connection with their religious identity or activities. Instead, authorities have forced Hui detainees to accept representation by government-appointed attorneys. One Hui interviewee told CHRD in 2022 that in 2017, a lawyer was disappeared by authorities in Xinjiang for several days after being engaged to represent Hui religious leader Jin Dehuai, who was convicted for separatism based on religious activities such as preaching in his home, encouraging proselytizing, and organizing religious conferences with participants from abroad.⁶⁵ The lawyer withdrew his representation after he was released by authorities.

The same interviewee informed CHRD that authorities in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in 2019 warned lawyers against attempting to represent Hui defendants who had been detained for their refusal to consent to the government’s removal of a mosque minaret. The defendants were members of the leadership committee of the Weizhou Grand Mosque in Ningxia’s Tongxin county,⁶⁶ Consequently, the defendants were assigned government-appointed lawyers and later convicted for “criminal syndicate activity.”⁶⁷

Charges involving “criminal syndicates” have allowed for expedited prosecution and lower levels of judicial scrutiny under a major national anti-corruption campaign initiated in 2018 known as “Sweep Away the Dark Forces and Eliminate the Evil” (*saohei chu’e*).⁶⁸ The campaign targeted not only criminal organizations but also a wide range of social institutions existing outside the government.⁶⁹ This includes religious communities like the Hui as implementation guidelines criminalized the use of “religious connections at villages and

townships to form mobs”; such guidelines targeted behavior like the mass gatherings like the Weizhou Grand Mosque to protest the demolition of the mosque dome.⁷⁰ Authorities also reportedly informed Hui communities that unsanctioned religious events and proselytizing would be treated as gatherings of “black” forces—that is, criminal gang activity—and therefore a target for the anti-corruption campaign.⁷¹

2.4 Internet Censorship

Chinese Internet regulations have led to the selective censorship of content posted by Hui Internet users while allowing denigrating and hateful speech about Hui and Islam to proliferate on social media. This combined with the encouragement of hate speech by public figures in official positions has contributed to worsening discrimination against Hui persons in Chinese society more generally.

In March 2022, a state ban on independent publication of “religious information” online went into effect, allowing only officially registered organizations vetted by the government to publish information online about “religious doctrine, knowledge, culture, or activities.”⁷² Prior to this ban, websites and online platforms popular among users in the Hui community had already been shut down.

For example, the website Zhongmu (www.2muslim.com) was shut down when a user-posted open letter to Xi Jinping calling for the release of political prisoners. Chinese Academy of Social Sciences scholar Xi Wuyi had reposted the letter on Chinese social media platform Sina Weibo as evidence of Hui subversion.⁷³ The website had been online for over 13 years and included forums for 77 local communities throughout China, and former users searching for “Zhongmu” on Chinese social media found that searches on these platforms produced no results, thus preventing them from reconnecting.⁷⁴ In addition to Zhongmu, the personal websites of leading Hui cultural figures such as imam Li Yunfei and writer Zhang Chengzhi were shut down in 2020 and 2021, respectively.⁷⁵

Individual Hui Internet users have also encountered censorship online. Researchers reported in a 2018 study that Hui users frequently found that their online posts about Islam or official ethnic policies were deleted or their accounts blocked, while state-approved imams have been allowed to discuss Islam online.⁷⁶ Such targeted censorship has effectively prevented Hui persons from freely exchanging ideas and information on the Internet.

While websites and Hui Internet users have been censored, discriminatory and hateful speech about Islam and Muslims has flourished on Chinese-language social media platforms. Academic experts have observed that such anti-Muslim rhetoric online has been indirectly encouraged by state media, which almost always portrays Muslims as the grateful beneficiaries of state programs or as violent extremists.⁷⁷ Studies also find that social media platforms selectively fail to remove Islamophobic content clearly in violation of platform policies,⁷⁸ which experts note is itself a reflection of suspicion of Muslim groups among Chinese authorities⁷⁹ because authorities have significant control over what content appears online.⁸⁰ Islamophobic hate speech also comes in the form of vicious online attacks against

social media users identified as Hui, which has caused many Hui Internet users to avoid engaging on issues related to Islam online.⁸¹

Government officials are often both the source and propagators of some of the most vitriolic comments about Muslims and Islam on Chinese social media. Scholar of Marxism at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Xi Wuyi (mentioned above) has led numerous online campaigns against accommodations for or acknowledgment of Muslim members of Chinese society.⁸² Another government figure who has mobilized online followers to target the Hui community is a government propaganda and cyberspace official named Cui Zijian, who said it was part of his “professional and patriotic duty” to lead a 2017 online campaign to shut down the construction of a mosque in Hefei, provincial capital of Anhui.⁸³ The status of such officials as in government capacity further legitimates hate speech about Muslims in mainstream discourse.

2.5 Targeting of Hui Intellectual and Cultural Leaders

Publishers of books on topics related to Islam and Hui are among those in the Hui community who authorities have targeted with the heaviest penalties. Beijing-based publisher Ma Yinglong was arrested in 2017 for illegal publishing and terrorism; he is believed to still be in detention in Xinjiang while his bookstore and publishing company Qingzhen Shuju have been shut down. Qingzhen Shuju had been a major publisher of Islamic religious texts and Chinese translations of Arabic publications. Another publisher based in Yunnan, Ma Zhixiong, was imprisoned in 2015 and released on probation in 2020, and reported humiliating treatment in prison: he was interrogated daily with others while naked and forced to maintain a squatting position with his hands over his head.⁸⁴

The imprisonment of Hui intellectuals follows a pattern of Chinese authorities’ imprisoning Uyghur intellectuals and cultural leaders in order to destroy the communities’ links to their cultural and religious heritage. These publishers and writers played an integral role in maintaining Hui cultural and religious life by connecting and engaging with Hui community members across China.

Chapter 3. “Poverty Alleviation” Policies Disperse Hui Communities and Facilitate Cultural Assimilation

3.1 Political Goals and Effects of “Poverty Alleviation” Programs

Chinese officials have implemented two major poverty alleviation policies among Hui communities that require relocation: “ecological migration” and domestic “labor transfers” to more economically developed regions within China. “Ecological migration” has been touted by President and Party Chairman Xi Jinping as part of a series of the government’s ethnic minority policies that would create “mutually embedded social structures,” “intermingle ethnic groups,” and “guide people of different ethnic groups to correctly understand ethnic relations and issues.”⁸⁵ Meanwhile, officials involved in a 2020 “labor transfer” recruitment

effort targeting Hui workers cited the importance of “ensuring social stability and harmony” and “strengthening national unity.”⁸⁶

In practice, such policies force the integration of ethnic minority communities into Han Chinese-dominant society, where they find employment opportunities limited to unstable and low-paying wage work. In designing these programs, authorities have failed to conduct consultations with the Hui communities that would be seriously affected by their implementation. The Chinese government’s implementation of “ecological migration” and “labor transfer” policies has violated the rights of Hui persons to an adequate standard of living and/or to participate in cultural life. The design and execution of these programs have also negatively impacted the rights of the Hui persons to non-discrimination by targeting Hui for dispersal to achieve political goals.

3.2 “*Ecological migration*”

The Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region (Ningxia) hosts the world’s largest planned “ecological migration” project in terms of people affected. Begun in 1983, the government has relocated more than 1.1 million residents, out of a total of 7.2 million people in the region to achieve “environmental” and “poverty alleviation” goals.⁸⁷ Scholars have contended that the policies are also a cover for dispersing and dislocating ethnic minority groups.⁸⁸ Ecological migration projects have been used to disperse hundreds of thousands of ethnic minorities in other areas: 710,000 people—72 percent ethnic minority—were resettled across 506 resettlement areas in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region between 2016 and 2020. The design of the resettlement plan emphasized relocating people from Zhuang, Miao, Yao, Maonan, and other ethnic minority groups and resettling them in mixed communities to promote “ethnic unity.”⁸⁹ In Ningxia, although Hui make up 35% of the population, the majority of those resettled have been Hui.⁹⁰

In one example, journalists found that Hui were forced to abandon independent farming for poorly remunerated jobs on industrial farms when 7,000 of them were relocated from Yejiaye Village in the Xihaigu region to the newly established Miaomiao Lake Village.⁹¹ Authorities denied farm subsidies and water pipelines to households that chose to remain.⁹² The relocated villagers were not compensated for the land they relinquished in their original village, and they were required to pay a “resettlement fee” of 14,000 RMB (USD \$2,100) per household.⁹³ Local officials told Chinese media that in exchange each household received 300 square meters for housing,⁹⁴ but journalists found that relocated families of as many as eleven people were living in 50-square-meter, 2-bedroom apartments.⁹⁵

Despite government promises that some families would be able to support themselves by farming allotted land in the new village, officials forced families to lease their plots to an agricultural company at low rates that the company allegedly stopped paying after the first year.⁹⁶ A quarter of the 350,000 people⁹⁷ relocated between 2011 and 2015 were not allotted any land for farming.⁹⁸ Officials justified this by insisting that proximity to highways and urban areas amounted to an improvement in quality of life and encouraging residents to work in nearby cities.⁹⁹ Officials boasted a high employment rate at 93 percent, but these figures were contested by local residents who reported that men were unable to find construction

work and families relied on government loans to meet expenses.¹⁰⁰ By 2021, Chinese media reported that garment work had been brought onsite to the village in a trailer.¹⁰¹

3.3 Domestic “labor transfers”

The other major “poverty alleviation” policy resulting in relocation and dispersal for Hui communities is the practice of domestic “labor transfers” coordinated by authorities in Ningxia,¹⁰² Gansu,¹⁰³ Qinghai,¹⁰⁴ and Yunnan,¹⁰⁵ where majority-Hui communities are concentrated. Government officials run these programs in conjunction with companies and other cities or regions seeking workers.

These “labor transfer” programs have displaced hundreds of thousands of people at any given time. In 2020, the Ningxia government had coordinated the “labor transfer” of 817,600 residents to work in the coastal province of Fujian and other parts of China as of August.¹⁰⁶ In Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu province, 550,000 out of 2 million total residents of the province were working as transferred labor outside of Gansu, according to numbers reported in 2020.¹⁰⁷ Some of these local governments have been engaged in labor transfers of their residents for decades—Ningxia and Qinghai began enlisting residents to work for companies in coastal areas such as Fujian, Guangdong, and Shanghai as early as 2005.¹⁰⁸

Although there is no available official data tracking the exact number and proportion of Hui people involved in “labor transfers,” there are indications that the Hui people in particular are significantly impacted. A free trade-zone official from Ningbo met with government leaders from both the Ningxia region and Linxia Prefecture in Gansu Province in 2020 to recruit Hui workers specifically, citing the importance of “ensuring social stability and harmony,” and “strengthening national unity.”¹⁰⁹ Such “labor transfer” coordination is discriminatory as it targets Hui communities to achieve political goals.

We do not currently have evidence that these government-coordinated labor transfers are coercive in nature, in contrast to the labor transfer programs organized by local governments in Xinjiang (see Section 4.1).¹¹⁰ However, surveys suggest that the transfers are neither planned nor implemented in consultation with the affected communities, who have found that labor transfers disrupt social and cultural life in undesirable ways.

One 2014 study of the labor transfer programs in Zhangjiachuan Hui Autonomous County in Gansu province found that the 70 percent Hui population preferred to continue individual farming and to earn income without having to leave the region and work in other parts of the country.¹¹¹ A survey of Muslim “labor transfer” participants from Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu province found that transferred laborers faced language barriers, difficulty finding Halal food, and lack of accommodation for religious observance, particularly for those traveling to eastern coastal cities where there was not a significant Muslim presence.¹¹² Despite their preferences, such communities have become dependent on the labor transfer system for income—in 2021, remittances from labor transfers were more than half of local GDP in Zhangjiachuan county (1.77 billion RMB out of 3.39 billion RMB).¹¹³

Chapter 4. Violations of Hui Economic Rights

4.1 Forced Labor in Xinjiang

There is evidence suggesting that Hui detainees in Xinjiang (see Section 1.2) have been subjected to forced labor: Hui persons have served for periods in and around Ürümchi at Wujiaqu Prison and Badaowan Vocational Education and Training Center where forced labor has been documented;¹¹⁴ in at least one case, authorities sent a Hui person to work in a factory rather than allowing him to return home after being released from a re-education camp.¹¹⁵

Xinjiang authorities have also promulgated official policies intended to forcibly displace residents for the purpose of performing forced labor as part of a political and cultural reform program. In 2018, the Yanqi Hui Autonomous County government in the XUAR issued Document No. 99 outlining a government-administered system of coercive relocation for labor, stating that “those who are transferred for work are not allowed to return without permission,” workers would be assessed based on “ideological education,” and administrative units would report on their progress in ideological training to the local Political Legal Committee and the Public Security Bureau.¹¹⁶

The scale of detentions of Hui and other Muslim-majority persons has also directly impoverished entire communities in the region. For example, a 2020 report describes 43 men in a village of around 60 households in Tacheng prefecture being sent to re-education camps. Without their labor, the main economic activity in the village, farming, was largely discontinued and the families remaining in the farming community no longer have sufficient income for necessities.¹¹⁷ Thus, the mass detentions have infringed on the right of the families of the detained to an adequate standard of living.

4.2 Deprivation of Social Benefits, Rights to Work and Education

Chinese government officials have denied or threatened to deny public education, pensions, and other social benefits to compel Hui persons to comply with certain counter-extremism policies. This is in violation of their rights to work, social security, and education. For example, a Hui woman in Karamay prefecture in Xinjiang was threatened with the loss of her pension and her son’s minimal living allowance if she did not renounce her religion.¹¹⁸ In some cases, officials have coerced Hui migrants in Xinjiang to other parts of the regions to return to their registered residential locations by denying employment and public education for their children in the cities where they had been found work and lived for a long time.¹¹⁹

4.3 Employment Discrimination against Hui Muslims

Hui have historically faced discrimination in the job market and the workplace. In recent years this discrimination has worsened because of the stigmatizing effect of government campaigns marginalizing and criminalizing Hui religious and cultural practices described in preceding sections. A 2020 academic study found that Muslim job seekers in China are more than 50 percent less likely to advance beyond an initial interview than Han Chinese job

seekers, discrimination that would primarily affect Hui, Uyghur, other predominantly Muslim groups. The study also found that despite government mandates to prioritize ethnic minority applicants, state-owned enterprises are as likely as private companies to engage in discriminatory hiring.¹²⁰

More recently, such pervasive discrimination has been compounded by religious restrictions in the workplace imposed by local authorities as part of the government's nationwide crackdown on religion in general. Since 2015, civil servants, teachers, and other public sector employees in Xinjiang have been banned from fasting during Ramadan;¹²¹ Hui make up approximately 9 percent of the population of Xinjiang of the population. Around 2016, the Chinese Communist Party warned its members of disciplinary measures if they believe in any religion, with state media publicized cases of CCP officials being subjected to disciplinary penalties for harboring religious beliefs.¹²² From at least 2018, public sector employees in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region have been prohibited from appearing at work wearing the white caps Hui men customarily wear.¹²³ Such bans have also affected students, with female students not permitted to enter school in Sanya, Hainan for a time starting September 2021 because local authorities barred them from attending school with their headscarves.¹²⁴

Conclusion

Although far from comprehensive, this report details some of the crises of survival that Chinese authorities have imposed on the Hui people beginning in 2014 and escalating around 2016 and continuing through the present day. These include the brutal detentions and surveillance in Xinjiang, the breaking apart of Hui communities through mosque closures and relocations for “poverty alleviation,” and the discriminatory indignities that Hui persons experience as an everyday part of living within Chinese society.

By documenting these crises, this report seeks to bear witness to the Party’s destruction of cultural, religious, and linguistic heritage under its jurisdiction, and also the harm done to Hui communities, families, and individual people. This report is also an exhortation to its readers to take the actions listed in our report recommendations. We know that among these readers are the Chinese officials who are monitoring those who dare to speak out about these abuses. As these officials contemplate our report on their campaign to eliminate the culture and communities of the Hui people, we invite them to reflect on these words from the late writer Liu Xiaobo:

“An enemy mentality will poison the spirit of a nation, incite cruel mortal struggles, destroy a society’s tolerance and humanity, and hinder a nation’s progress toward freedom and democracy.”

Recommendations to PRC Government and Chinese Communist Party Leaders

End Crimes Against Humanity in Xinjiang

- Chinese authorities should immediately stop the implementation of current counterterrorism policies in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights has found that these policies may constitute crimes against humanity and restrict fundamental rights.
- Authorities should release from arbitrary detention Hui and other non-Han or Muslim persons who are in re-education camps, detention centers, and prisons based on presumptions of extremism due to their ethnic or religious identity and end any system of forced labor operating either in conjunction with or separate from such detentions. Authorities should also provide support to families whose primary breadwinner has been arbitrarily detained.
- Authorities should also end prohibitions on religious and non-Han cultural expression in the region and the intrusive surveillance which enforces these provisions even in private life.
- Hui and other affected communities should be given the opportunity to make claims for restitution for such abuses without retaliation, and authorities should provide accountability, redress, and compensation.

End “Sinicization” campaign

- Chinese authorities should end attempts to eradicate the culture, religion, and language of Hui communities through the destruction and closure of mosques and other sacred cultural and religious sites and bans on religious activity.
- Authorities should furthermore provide accountability, redress, and compensation for the harms caused by this campaign.
- The official implementing documents of the campaign should be made public.
- Authorities should provide an enabling environment for lawyers and human rights defenders to advocate for the fundamental rights of Hui and other non-Han or religious groups.
- The government should ensure free exchange of ideas and information online without interference to the enjoyment of Hui persons to cultural rights and religious freedom.

End discrimination against Hui

- Chinese authorities should work to actively resolve discriminatory restrictions against Hui, including in education, employment, and property rights. Authorities should end discriminatory travel restrictions against Hui and return confiscated passports, allowing Hui to leave China.

End dispersal of Hui communities through “poverty alleviation” programs

- The Chinese government should involve the affected individuals and communities in designing and implementing poverty alleviation projects in ethnic Hui regions.
- Provincial authorities should end both the temporary (as in the case of labor transfers) and permanent relocation of residents (as in the case of ecological migration), and those already affected by such programs should be consulted in designing any plans to restore communities.

Recommendations to the U.S. and other Foreign Governments

Investigate and Avoid Complicity in Human Rights Abuses

- Promote legislation and provide funding for investigating and ensuring prohibitions against imports made by forced labor throughout China. Risk factors include manufacturers with operations in Xinjiang and outside of Xinjiang yet using the labor of Uyghur, Kazakh, Hui, and other non-Han people for whom the Xinjiang government has coordinated transport out of Xinjiang. Not only do such imports sustain coercive and abusive systems within China, they are also subsidized by them. They thus undermine the competitiveness of domestic labor costs and harm the domestic economy.

Accountability

- Call for the Chinese government to respect the rights of Hui and other minority and religious groups and condemn rights abuses, particularly via multi-lateral statements in relevant international forums.
- Countries without robust research from domestic institutions about Chinese policies and their human rights impacts should support the development of such policy and rights monitoring.
- Call for authorities to release information about the secretive measures targeting Hui identity and religious practices. Also, support Hui, Uyghur, Kazakh, and other groups with family members seeking information about loved ones in detention.

Refugee Protection and Support

- Provide expedited refugee status to Hui and other majority-Muslim ethnic groups with Chinese citizenship.
- Work to prevent the refoulement of Hui and other majority-Muslim ethnic groups with Chinese citizenship by providing humanitarian visas in urgent situations, coordinating with other country governments, and rejecting extradition treaties or encouraging other countries to do so.

Recommendations to Citizens and Civil Society Organizations

- Continue learning about the Hui community and advocate within your country's government for the policies mentioned above.
- Independent research and reporting on Chinese policy and its human rights impacts is extremely important for citizens and governments to be well-informed when it comes to their engagement with China, which can have wide-ranging impacts. Advocate within your country's government to provide support to academic and other institutions that can provide such information. Meanwhile, consider translating reports like this one into your own language.

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