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## **Ideological Totalism and the Chinese Communist Party The Use of Cult Influence Tactics Against Disfavored Groups**

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### **I. Introduction**

In March 2023, a congressional select committee heard a first-hand account from a Uyghur survivor of the internment camps in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR):

While I was in the camp, there are eleven hours lesson, brainwashing lesson on daily basis. . . . And also, we have to learn songs praising the Chinese Communist Party and the government, and again we had to test at the end of the week. And also, we have to write daily record, daily description or expression about our thoughts . . . praising the government and authority . . . [and learning] we have to be grateful . . . that we're not sent to prison.<sup>1</sup>

This is just one example of a longer trend in practices of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), what James Leibold has described as “a paternalistic approach that pathologizes deviant thought and behavior, and then tries to forcefully transform them.”<sup>2</sup> This pattern — constructing an enemy and endeavoring to eradicate it in hearts and minds — shares striking similarities with cult operations. Indeed, scholars have long drawn on a study of the early CCP in identifying the tactics cults attempt to use to establish dominance.<sup>3</sup>

The CCP has changed since its founding, and some argue that the CCP has decreased reliance on these totalist tactics.<sup>4</sup> One area where the approach is still prevalent, however, is in CCP-led crackdowns on groups deemed enemies of the Party.<sup>5</sup> A former Chinese diplomat has

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<sup>1</sup> The Select Committee on the CCP, *The Chinese Communist Party's Ongoing Uyghur Genocide* at 55:23, YouTube (Mar. 23, 2023), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6S5OG9TesTc&t=1462s>.

<sup>2</sup> James Leibold, *Mind Control in China Has a Very Long History*, N.Y. Times (Nov. 28, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/28/opinion/china-reeducation-mind-control-xinjiang.html>.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Louis Jolyon West & Michael D. Langone, *Cultism: A Conference for Scholars and Policy Makers*, 3 *Cultic Stud. J.* 85, 86–87 (1986); Dennis Tourish & Tim Wohlforth, *On the Edge: Political Cults Right and Left* 11–14 (2000).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* viii (Univ. N.C. Press 1989) (1961).

<sup>5</sup> This report generally refers to “CCP” or “Party” actions throughout. While state agencies and actors in China are often formally separate from the CCP, there is broad agreement that the CCP controls, influences, and guides state action. See, e.g., Cong. Res. Serv., *China's Political System in Charts: A Snapshot Before the 20th Party Congress* 2–3, R46977 (Nov. 24, 2021) (describing the “interlocking nature of the Party's relationship with the state hierarchies” and the “Party-State” system); *Understanding the Black Box of Chinese Politics*, Asia Soc'y Pol'y Inst., <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/decoding-chinas-20th-party-congress/introduction-black-box-chinese-policy> (“The state (i.e. the government) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) is entirely under the monopolistic control of a single ruling political party, the CCP.”).

noted that the CCP refers to its enemies as “Five Poisonous Groups,” and this includes Falun Gong practitioners, Tibetan “Separatists,” Taiwan Pro-independence forces, “Uyghur Separatists,” and Pro-democracy activists.”<sup>6</sup> In targeting these groups, the CCP routinely uses totalist tactics to secure submission.

This report details the use of cult-like tactics in crackdowns targeting three of these groups in the past two decades: Falun Gong practitioners, Tibetans, and Uyghurs and Turkic Muslims in the XUAR. While two of these groups have long been subjected to severe human rights abuses, each has been subject to intense repression campaigns in the past two decades. And during those campaigns, the CCP has used tactics associated with cults to frame the issues and attempt to generate submission. These tactics are visible in party messaging and propaganda, actions to control information environments, and in re-education programs. Ironically, while the CCP has cynically labelled Falun Gong an “evil cult,”<sup>7</sup> the Party itself uses the tactics associated with cults.

These crackdowns are largely consistent, but they also contain variations. The CCP’s use of cult tactics involves adaptation to context and a feedback cycle, with innovations in one crackdown being transported to another. For example, because Falun Gong practitioners were spread out across the country, the Party was limited in its ability to deploy broad physical surveillance and instead used new technological tools. By contrast, the crackdowns against Tibetans and Uyghurs involved innovations in physical surveillance and control. And as technology developed, the CCP deployed increasingly advanced tools.

Part II briefly summarizes the literature on cults and the criteria of ideological totalism. Part III then offers an account of the CCP’s recent crackdowns against Falun Gong, Tibetans, and Uyghurs and Turkic Muslims in the XUAR. Each section describes how the CCP’s approach is manifest in party messaging and propaganda, milieu control, and re-education efforts.

## **II. Ideological Totalism and Cult Influence Tactics**

The term “cult” is amorphous and has varied over time. Initially, some used the term to describe forms of religion, but in the second half of the twentieth century the term entered more frequent use, often with negative connotations.<sup>8</sup> While this trend caused some to question the utility of the term,<sup>9</sup> subsequent work focused on identifying and studying groups that posed harms to members and society.<sup>10</sup> As two scholars put it, a motivation for study was identifying

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<sup>6</sup> *Falun Gong and China’s Continuing War on Human Rights*, 109th Cong. 40 (2005) (appendix 2 to statement of Mr. Yonglin Chen, First Secretary and Consul for Political Affairs, Former Chinese Consulate, Sydney, Australia); see also Samantha Hoffman & Peter Mattis, *Managing the Power Within: China’s State Security Commission*, War on the Rocks (July 18, 2016), <https://warontherocks.com/2016/07/managing-the-power-within-chinas-state-security-commission/> (discussing the “five poisons”).

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., *Why is Falun Gong a Cult?*, Consulate-Gen. of the People’s Repub. Of China in Auckland (Nov. 19, 2003), [http://auckland.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/zt/flgzt/200311/t20031119\\_230528.htm](http://auckland.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/zt/flgzt/200311/t20031119_230528.htm).

<sup>8</sup> See James T. Richardson, *Definitions of Cult: From Sociological-Technical to Popular-Negative*, 34 Rev. Religious Rsrch. 348, 348, 351–52 (1993).

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., *id.* at 348.

<sup>10</sup> See Thomas Robbins & Dick Anthony, *Deprogramming, Brainwashing and the Medicalization of Deviant Religious Groups*, 29 Soc. Probs. 283, 283 (1982); West & Langone, *supra* note 3, at 85–87.

those “groups capable of exploiting or harming members. . . and threatening and even attacking critics, former members defined as renegades, government agencies, or any person or group seen as opposed to their activities.”<sup>11</sup> On this view, the groups meriting concern — “totalist cults” — involved an excessive zealotry, manipulation, and the possibility of harm.<sup>12</sup>

Scholarship on cults has looked at methods that groups can use to generate zealous devotion and eliminate dissent, what might be referred to as thought reform or cult tactics. Much research has looked to Robert Lifton’s seminal study from the 1960s on thought reform.<sup>13</sup> Lifton conducted interviews of westerners who had been subjected to thought reform in Chinese prisons and Chinese intellectuals subjected to thought reform in universities or revolutionary colleges.<sup>14</sup> In Lifton’s view, the CCP carried its ideology “in a totalist direction,” making it “little more than an exclusive cult.”<sup>15</sup> Lifton identified eight practices or themes that are used by proponents of totalist ideologies:

1. *Milieu Control*: Employing means to control an individual’s external and internal information and communication environment, with the aim of depriving the individual of access to information inconsistent with the prevailing ideology and the capacity for independent judgment and expression.<sup>16</sup>
2. *Mystical Manipulation*: Appealing to a higher purpose that must supersede all other concerns, including “immediate human welfare.”<sup>17</sup>
3. *Demand for Purity*: Inculcating a strict worldview where the prevailing ideology is absolutely good thus justifying struggle to reform that deemed impure or evil. This tactic aims to provoke guilt and shame in individuals, such that they expect punishment, humiliation, and ostracism meted out by the totalist leaders.<sup>18</sup>
4. *Cult of Confession*: Demanding confessions to (a) reinforce the demand for purity discussed above; (b) break down the sense of self, “merging [the] individual and environment;” and (c) generate a sense of total exposure of the self.<sup>19</sup>
5. “*Sacred Science*”: Generating an “aura of scaredness” around the totalist ideology, prohibiting questioning and demanding reverence.<sup>20</sup>
6. *Loading the Language*: Deploying and acculturating individuals in “brief, highly reductive, definitive-sounding phrases, easily memorized and easily expressed.”<sup>21</sup> The

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<sup>11</sup> West & Langone, *supra* note 3, at 86.

<sup>12</sup> *See id.* at 87.

<sup>13</sup> *See supra* note 3.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* 8 (Univ. N.C. Press 1989) (1961).

<sup>15</sup> *Id.* at 419.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.* at 420–21.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 422.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.* at 423–24.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.* at 435–26.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at 428–29.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.* at 429.

goal of this tactic is to restrict the ability for thought outside of the narrow worldview created by the language.

7. *Doctrine over Person*: Subordinating experience to the logic of doctrine by, for example, rewriting history and influencing individuals to reform their experiences and identities to fit the doctrinal mold.<sup>22</sup>
8. *Dispensing of Existence*: Drawing sharp distinctions between the in-group and out-groups, justifying total exclusion and elimination of out-groups.<sup>23</sup>

Some of these criteria involve specific practices. For example, milieu control requires shaping the information and communication environment of a target — for example, by limiting access to disfavored information. Others, however, are less identifiable as practices but rather manifest in communications. Dispensing of existence, for example, can often be viewed in the content of messages disseminated. Lifton viewed these criteria as interdependent and argued that together, they create an environment to exert influence over the target.<sup>24</sup>

Decades after the original publication of Lifton’s study, he explained that “[t]endencies towards totalism in China itself have diminished over the years, as have specific thought reform programs.”<sup>25</sup> As the following Part details, the CCP still regularly uses these themes and practices when it cracks down on perceived enemies.

### **III. Deploying Cult Influence Tactics in Crackdowns on Perceived Enemies**

The primary motivation of the CCP is the survival of the Party.<sup>26</sup> Identities or groups that displace attention from the Party, or the Party’s vision of the nation, are viewed as threats to that fundamental goal. As will be discussed below, the three groups covered in this report are believed to have generated a sense of insecurity for the Party, thus influencing the decision to construct the groups as enemies and direct thought reform efforts in response.

The following sections trace crackdowns on Falun Gong practitioners, Tibetans, and Uyghurs and Turkic Muslims carried out in the past two decades. Each section dissects how the Party constructed the groups as enemies in Party statements, policy pronouncements, and propaganda, reprising the cult-like, totalist tactics identified by Lifton. Each section then describes different measures the Party used to shape the information and communication environment and to try to “transform” the thinking of the groups.

#### **A. The Crackdown on Falun Gong**

Falun Gong is a peaceful spiritual practice founded by Li Hongzhi in China in the early 1990s. By the end of that decade, Chinese officials estimated there were approximately 70

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<sup>22</sup> *Id.* at 431–32.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* at 433.

<sup>24</sup> *See id.* at 420.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.* at viii.

<sup>26</sup> *See, e.g.,* Michael Liu, *China’s Road to Power: What Does It Really Want?*, 44 *Atlantisch Perspectief* 4, 4 (2020).

million practitioners, which was greater than the number of CCP members at the time.<sup>27</sup> After thousands of practitioners assembled to petition the government for recognition of their right to practice in 1999, then-CCP General Secretary, Jiang Zemin, decided to crack down on the group.<sup>28</sup>

The CCP's crackdown on Falun Gong has relied on the quintessential thought-reform tools discussed above. The use of these tactics is best exemplified by (1) party statements and propaganda constructing Falun Gong as an evil other to justify the crackdown; (2) all-encompassing controls on the information environment on Falun Gong matters; and (3) direct targeting of Falun Gong practitioners and any dissenters for re-education.

### **1. Party Messaging and Propaganda: Defining Falun Gong as an Existential Threat to the CCP**

At the outset of the crackdown, CCP leaders made statements justifying the suppression campaign. And the Party used the media apparatus to disseminate a message to the population: that Falun Gong was incompatible with Communist ideology, caused significant harm to practitioners and the population, and believers had been corrupted. These themes exemplify Lifton's concepts of the demand for purity, the cult of confession, doctrine over person, and dispensing of existence.

Early statements by CCP leadership used common frames of thought reform. Jiang Zemin's comments in April and June 1999, for example, revised the history of Falun Gong and cast the group and its leader as a destructive threat to Party goals and ideology. Without evidence, Jiang implied that Falun Gong and its founder Li Hongzhi were conspiring with western enemies, arguing that Falun Gong was presenting an alternative to CCP ideology.<sup>29</sup> Months later, Jiang doubled down on his suggestion of foreign actors influencing or using Falun Gong to harm the Party, and made demands for purity, suggesting that Falun Gong practitioners had been poisoned by wrong thoughts and must be reformed.<sup>30</sup>

Early in the crackdown, media outlets adopted the Party line. For example, the Director of the Bureau of Religious Affairs claimed at a news conference that "Falun Gong had brainwashed and bilked . . . followers" and "threatened both social and political stability."<sup>31</sup> Another prominent publication asserted that the struggle against Falun Gong had consequences for the "future of the Communist Party," deploying the dispensing with existence theme to justify

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<sup>27</sup> Seth Faison, *In Beijing: A Roar of Silent Protesters*, N.Y. Times (Apr. 27, 1999), <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/world/asia/042799china-protest.html>.

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Hum. Rts. Law Found., *The Role of Jiang Zemin in the Persecution of Falun Gong – a Legal Brief*, Minghui (May 1, 2015), <https://en.minghui.org/html/articles/2015/5/1/149952.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from Comrade Jiang Zemin of the Standing Committee of the Politburo and Other Relevant Leading Comrades, Apr. 25, 1999 [江泽民同志给政治局常委及其他有关领导同志的信], Beijing Spring, available at <http://beijingspring.com/bj2/2001/60/2003727210907.htm>.

<sup>30</sup> Comrade Jiang Zemin's Speech at the Political Bureau Meeting of the Central Committee on Handling and Resolving the "Falun Gong" Issue, June 7, 1999 [江泽民同志在中央政治局会议上关于抓紧处理和解决“法轮功”问题的讲话], Beijing Spring, available at <http://beijingspring.com/bj2/2001/60/2003727210907.htm>.

<sup>31</sup> Amnesty International, *People's Republic of China: Crackdown on Falun Gong and other So-called "Heretical Organizations"* 6 (2000), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/011/2000/en/>.

eliminating Falun Gong.<sup>32</sup> And exemplifying the cult of confession, the Party promoted testimonials by alleged former Falun Gong practitioners who spoke of alleged harms the group caused to Chinese society, confessed to their “impurity,” and thanked the government for helping them see the error of their ways.<sup>33</sup>

Ironically, given that the CCP was itself using cult-like tactics, the Party labelled Falun Gong an “evil Cult” inconsistent with CCP ideology. An early series in the *People’s Daily* emphasized the need to “oppos[e] superstition and pseudo-science” and instead advocate a worldview of “Marxism-Lenism[] and materialism” to promote “rapid development and modernization.”<sup>34</sup> In the Party’s formulation, Falun Gong’s resistance “to scientific medical practice” was inconsistent with CCP ideology and harmed public health. For example, Party outlets regurgitated unsubstantiated claims that Falun Gong beliefs had caused more than a thousand deaths.<sup>35</sup> Party leaders loaded the language against Falun Gong, using the “evil cult” label and referring to Falun Gong as a “poisonous tumor[]” that poisons minds, “harm[ing] the country and the people.”<sup>36</sup>

## 2. High-Technology Milieu Control: Censorship and Surveillance of Falun Gong

While CCP officials controlled the media environment, and thus could deploy the anti-Falun Gong messages discussed above, the Party also took steps to eliminate accurate information about Falun Gong and to implement a comprehensive surveillance apparatus to generate fear. The Party combined traditional tools of milieu control, such as media censorship and physical surveillance, with new technological tools.

Shortly after the Falun Gong crackdown began in 1999, the CCP took steps to remove Falun Gong material from public life. As early as July 1999, state officials ordered the destruction of Falun Gong “books, pictures, audio-video products, and electronic publications.”<sup>37</sup> Just in Shanghai, 1,300 officials destroyed 45,000 book and pictures.<sup>38</sup> The Party also blocked access to Falun Gong websites, banned dissemination of Falun Gong material, and Chinese actors reportedly hacked foreign internet service providers that hosted Falun Gong material.<sup>39</sup>

The Party also relied on a decentralized “responsibility system” of interpersonal surveillance. This system “put the onus on local police and government workers, factory bosses

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<sup>32</sup> James Miles, *China Media Attacks Falun Gong*, BBC News (July 23, 1999), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/401678.stm>.

<sup>33</sup> Amnesty International, *supra* note 31, at 6.

<sup>34</sup> Hum. Rts. Watch, *Dangerous Meditation: China’s Campaign Against Falun Gong* (2002), [https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2002/china/China0102-02.htm#P331\\_49488](https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2002/china/China0102-02.htm#P331_49488).

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

<sup>36</sup> *See, e.g.*, Hu Guo et al., *Li Lanqing Spoke at the National Award-Giving Meeting for Advanced Groups and Individuals in Combating Evil Cults*, Xinhua (Feb. 26, 2001).

<sup>37</sup> Hum. Rts. Watch, *supra* note 34.

<sup>38</sup> *Id.*

<sup>39</sup> Kelly A. Thomas, *Falun Gong: An Analysis of China’s National Security Concerns*, 10 Pac. Rim Law & Soc’y Policy J. 470, 481 (2001).

and family members to find practitioners and get them to renounce their beliefs.”<sup>40</sup> For example, one foreman at a state-run factory described how he had been instructed to monitor suspected practitioners on the job.<sup>41</sup> These measures operated to generate fear that any outward expression could trigger consequences.

With the advent of new technology, the CCP also adopted high-technology forms of information and communication control. In the early 2000s, the CCP initiated the Golden Shield Project to “promote ‘the adoption of advanced information and communication technology to strengthen central police control, responsiveness, and crime combatting capacity, so as to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of police work.’”<sup>42</sup> In other words, the CCP wanted a “nationwide digital surveillance network, linking national, regional and local security agencies with a panoptic web of surveillance,” offering “immediate access to records on every citizen in China, while linking to vast networks of cameras.”<sup>43</sup>

This apparatus was designed and implemented to further control Falun Gong. A leaked document indicated one of the CCP’s primary goals with the Golden Shield was to “[c]ombat ‘Falun Gong’ evil religion.”<sup>44</sup> And individuals have alleged that the Golden Shield was customized with, for example, (1) a “[l]og/alert system” that was able to track Falun Gong internet activity and alert security of the relevant individuals; (2) a security software system that contained Falun Gong “computer usage profiles” that could detect Falun Gong internet activity; and (3) mechanisms for security officials to access detailed profiles of practitioners.<sup>45</sup> With this apparatus, the fear of monitoring was combined with a greater censorship capacity, enabling a tight hold on the information and communication environment concerning Falun Gong.

### **3. Direct Re-Education: Brutal Coercion to Transform Falun Gong Practitioners**

On top of the Party’s information and surveillance methods, the Party directly targets Falun Gong practitioners with coercive means to reform their thought-process in line with CCP ideology. In this way, the Party tries to engage in the very “brainwashing” of which it has accused Falun Gong.

Prior to the crackdown in 1999, many Party members had practiced Falun Gong, and the Party quickly worked to reform these persons. Central leadership ordered all Party members who had practiced Falun Gong “to sever their ties” with the faith and the Party required participation “in re-education sessions — exercises reminiscent of the pre-reform era [of the CCP] that included criticism sessions and study of approved documents to reinstill the

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<sup>40</sup> Matthew Forney, *The Breaking Point*, Time (July 2, 2001), <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,165163,00.html>.

<sup>41</sup> *Id.*

<sup>42</sup> Greg Walton, Int’l Centre for Hum. Rts. & Democratic Dev., *China’s Golden Shield* 6 (2001).

<sup>43</sup> *Id.*

<sup>44</sup> Cisco Systems, *Overview of the Public Security Sector* 57 (2002), available at [https://www.wired.com/images\\_blogs/threatlevel/files/cisco\\_presentation.pdf](https://www.wired.com/images_blogs/threatlevel/files/cisco_presentation.pdf).

<sup>45</sup> See Second Am. Compl. ¶ 97, *Doe v. Cisco Sys., Inc.*, Case No. 5:11-cv-02449 (C.D. Cal. Sept. 18, 2013), ECF No. 113.

ideological rectitude expected of Party members.<sup>46</sup> For example, Li Qihua, a lieutenant general in the People's Liberation Army with access to the highest circles of the CCP, had written in defense of Falun Gong in May 1999.<sup>47</sup> Just a few months later, Li publicly confessed his "mistakes" in the *Liberation Army Daily*, explaining that he was "cheated" by Falun Gong and affirming that the CCP's crackdown is "wise[ and] correct."<sup>48</sup>

The Party went further to "reform" ordinary practitioners. By 2005, the U.S. Department of State estimated that more than 100,000 Falun Gong practitioners had been arbitrarily detained and noted that authorities believed that "at least half of the 250,000 officially recorded inmates" in re-education through labor camps at the time were practitioners.<sup>49</sup>

The concept of re-education has a long history in China, but the CCP developed a new concept for measures to brainwash Falun Gong practitioners — "transformation through education" (教育转化).<sup>50</sup> During this process, authorities force individuals to "attend daily, often lengthy, 'study sessions' where they are required to publicly criticize their behavior, accept criticisms from others, study CCP documents, directives and relevant political doctrine, and generally demonstrate their submissive and cooperative attitude to camp authorities."<sup>51</sup> Falun Gong practitioners are often required to write five documents — a guarantee that they will renounce any connection to Falun Gong, a self-criticism where they denounce their prior behavior, a "personal assessment" where they recount where they went wrong and how they will be better in the future, an "expose and criticize" account of their wrong-doing and the evils of Falun Gong doctrine, and a promise to sever all ties and condemn Falun Gong.<sup>52</sup> In this way, the authorities demand that practitioners reject the impurities of Falun Gong, place doctrine over person by rewriting their past experiences and positive associations with the religion, and use confession and self-criticism as a form of humiliation that generates a sense of exposure. These psychological tools are paired with increasingly severe forms of physical torture, ranging from sleep and food deprivation and stress positions to beatings and oxygen deprivations for those who persist in their "wrong beliefs."<sup>53</sup>

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The Party's continued use of thought reform tactics is clear across these three areas. The CCP has struggled to eliminate support for Falun Gong, structuring the environment so only the Party's anti-Falun Gong messages are available, and attempting to make citizens fear conveying

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<sup>46</sup> Jacques deLisle, *Who's Afraid of Falun Gong?*, Foreign Pol'y Res. Inst. (Aug. 1, 1999), <https://www.fpri.org/article/1999/08/whos-afraid-of-falun-gong/>.

<sup>47</sup> Seth Faison, *Ex-General, Member of Banned Sect, Confesses 'Mistakes,'* N.Y. Times (July 31, 1999), <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/07/31/world/ex-general-member-of-banned-sect-confesses-mistakes-china-says.html>.

<sup>48</sup> *Id.*

<sup>49</sup> *China's Human Rights Record and Falun Gong: Testimony before the House Comm. on Int'l Relations*, U.S. Dep't of State (July 21, 2005), <https://2001-2009.state.gov/g/drl/rls/rm/2005/50110.htm>.

<sup>50</sup> Sarah Cook, *The Learning Curve: How Communist Party Officials Are Applying Lessons from Prior "Transformation" Camps to Repression in Xinjiang*, 19 China Br. (2019), <https://jamestown.org/program/the-learning-curve-how-communist-party-officials-are-applying-lessons-from-prior-transformation-campaigns-to-repression-in-xinjiang/>.

<sup>51</sup> Amnesty Int'l, *supra* note **Error! Bookmark not defined.**, at 16.

<sup>52</sup> *Id.*

<sup>53</sup> *Id.* at 20–21.



a contrary message. And with the advance of technology, the CCP was able to adapt its milieu control tactics to achieve greater coverage, deploying the highly sophisticated Golden Shield and its anti-Falun Gong components to counter a widespread spiritual practice.

## **B. The Crackdown on Tibetans**

The Tibetan people are an East Asian ethnic group with a distinctive culture and traditions. Tibetans are concentrated in the Tibetan Autonomous Region, but many Tibetans also live in prefectures in other Chinese provinces.<sup>54</sup> Between 1949 and 1950, China occupied Tibet, ultimately causing the head of Tibetan Buddhists, the Dalai Lama, to flee for exile in India, where the Dalai Lama continued calls for greater Tibetan autonomy.<sup>55</sup> From the CCP's perspective, however, self-determination in Tibet contradicts "China's ideal vision of a 'new multiethnic Communist state.'"<sup>56</sup>

Since the occupation began, the CCP has imposed discriminatory and repressive policies on the region, and there have been flashpoints of conflict. The CCP views Tibetan Buddhism as "a threat," and it has periodically engaged in campaigns to stifle dissent.<sup>57</sup> This report focuses on an increasingly repressive crackdown starting in or around 2008 following demonstrations and protests in the region.<sup>58</sup> As with the crackdown on Falun Gong, the CCP used thought-reform tactics, and those tactics are exemplified by (1) Party communications and propaganda constructing the Dalai Lama and supporters as threats to the nation; (2) widespread surveillance and censorship as a form of milieu control; and (3) re-education of religious leaders and widespread indoctrination of children.

### **1. Party Messaging and Propaganda: Constructing Religious Figures as a Threat to the Nation**

CCP messaging and propaganda following the 2008 protests in Tibet painted the Dalai Lama — and religious figures more broadly — as foreign threats to the nation, persons who had generated a false consciousness in the Tibetan people that distracted them from CCP ideology. These statements reflect a strong emphasis on the thought reform themes of the sacred science, doctrine over person, and dispensing with existence.

Shortly following the protests in 2008, CCP leaders propounded a narrative of sinister and hostile foreign influences threatening the nation. Then-Premier Wen Jiabo alleged that "[t]here is ample fact and plenty of evidence proving [the protests were] organized, premeditated,

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<sup>54</sup> U.S. Dep't of State, Tibet 2021 Human Rights Report 1 (2022), [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/313615\\_TIBET-2021-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/313615_TIBET-2021-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf).

<sup>55</sup> See, e.g., Jamie FlorCruz, *Analysis: Why the Dalai Lama Angers China*, CNN (Feb. 18, 2010), <https://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/02/18/analysis.china.dalai.lama/index.html>.

<sup>56</sup> Hum. Rts. Found., 100 Years of Suppression: The CCP's Strategies in Tibet, the Uyghur Region, and Hong Kong 10 (2021), <https://hrf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/CCP-100-Years-of-Suppression-FINAL-VERSION.pdf>.

<sup>57</sup> *Id.* at 11.

<sup>58</sup> See, e.g., FIDH & Int'l Campaign for Tibet, Chinese Crackdown on Tibetan Buddhism: A Report Published for the People's Republic of China's Second Universal Periodic Review 5–6 (2013), <https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/en-report-tibet-4.pdf>.

masterminded and incited by the Dalai clique.”<sup>59</sup> Tibet’s CCP Secretary used similarly existential language, claiming “[w]e are in the midst of a fierce struggle involving blood and fire, a life and death struggle with the Dalai clique.”<sup>60</sup> The Secretary underscored the need to “deepen [the CCP’s] nationalist education” to combat this so-called foreign influence.<sup>61</sup>

CCP policy on Tibet following the protests further reveal a totalist framing. In 2010, a high-level Standing Committee of the CCP hosted the “Fifth Tibet Work Forum” to consider perceived problems in Tibet.<sup>62</sup> The Party discussed the need to insist on the “four adherences” — adherence to CCP leadership, the socialist system, regional autonomy, and “a development path with Chinese characteristics and Tibetan traits.”<sup>63</sup> Then-CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao also framed the issue of the Dalai Lama within the Party’s ideology, drawing on the concept of a “special contradiction” where a group is alienated by some force and mistakes that alienation for differentiation.<sup>64</sup> Resolving this contradiction required increasing the struggle against the alleged separatist forces, and Hu proposed strengthening the CCP’s work to shape Tibetan Buddhism “in line with the socialist society.”<sup>65</sup> These statements reflect the CCP’s desire to generate an aura of sacredness around CCP ideology, demanding reverence without question and striving to rewrite individual histories to fit the doctrinal mold, waving away any genuine desire for autonomy as confusion rooted in the special contradiction.

## 2. New Forms of Milieu Control: An Expanding Net of Surveillance and Censorship in Tibet

Whereas Falun Gong practitioners were relatively dispersed throughout China and not necessarily easily identifiable, Tibetans lived in smaller geographic areas. In addition to traditional measures of censorship and information control, the CCP used innovative forms of milieu control in Tibet made possible by the geographic proximity. And while the Party’s messaging framed a certain segment of the population as concerning, the measures broadly targeted the Tibetan population.

Following the demonstrations, the CCP went to extreme lengths to control information. In March 2008, the CCP shut down the internet in Tibet, only to briefly restore it nine months later and then shut it off again.<sup>66</sup> Internet shutdowns enabled the CCP to prevent the spread of accurate information and to instead saturate the environment with the preferred narrative. According to one report, since 2011 the CCP has allocated more than 600 million yuan to spread

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<sup>59</sup> *China Blames Dalai Lama for Riots*, BBC News (Mar. 18, 2008), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7302021.stm>.

<sup>60</sup> Lindsay Beck & Benjamin Kang Lim, *China Warns of “Life and Death Struggle” Over Tibet*, Reuters (Mar. 18, 2008), <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSPEK334594>.

<sup>61</sup> *Id.*

<sup>62</sup> *See Communist Party Leadership Outlines 2010-2020 “Tibet Work” Priorities at “Fifth Forum”*, Congressional-Executive Comm’n on China (Mar. 9, 2010), <https://www.cecc.gov/publications/commission-analysis/communist-party-leadership-outlines-2010-2020-tibet-work-priorities>.

<sup>63</sup> *Id.*

<sup>64</sup> *Id.*

<sup>65</sup> *Id.*

<sup>66</sup> Oiwan Lam, *In Tibet and Uyghur Regions, Internet Blackouts Are the Norm*, Global Voices (Dec. 17, 2013), <https://advox.globalvoices.org/2013/12/17/in-chinas-ethnic-minority-regions-internet-blackouts-are-the-norm/>.

propaganda in Tibet, particularly in Tibetan monasteries, and the goal is for “no voices and images of enemy forces and [the] Dalai clique” to be seen or heard.<sup>67</sup>

To further tighten control, CCP officials employed new physical surveillance techniques. In 2012, officials announced the implementation of a physical system as a “key to ‘social stability maintenance.’”<sup>68</sup> The system, known as “grid-style social management,” involves construction of “convenience police stations” within close distances of one another in largely urban and semi-urban areas and massive increases in security.<sup>69</sup> Under the leadership of Party Secretary Chen Quanguo, more than 700 “convenience police stations” had been constructed in Tibet as of 2016 and advertising for security positions multiplied, from around 866 in 2008–2009 to 12,313 from 2011–2016.<sup>70</sup> The stations are equipped with high tech systems, including video cameras and databases, that enable near-constant and proactive surveillance of people and events in the grid area.<sup>71</sup> Thus, not only did the CCP diminish the availability of accurate information, it also implemented surveillance systems to squelch independent expression.

CCP officials also sent cadres to Tibet. The Party initiated the “Benefit the Masses” campaign in 2011 by sending approximately 21,000 cadres to thousands of villages.<sup>72</sup> The primary goal of these cadres “was to turn each village into ‘a fortress’ in ‘the struggle against separatism.’”<sup>73</sup> The cadres gathered information on residents and conducted education sessions.<sup>74</sup> One person subjected to the surveillance claimed that the cadres would monitor and then classify residents into categories, including those who “want wealth and support the current system,” those who “secretly . . . support the Dalai Lama but do not protest openly,” and those who “do not have faith in motherland and party.”<sup>75</sup> The CCP would often send those in the latter category to coercive re-education programs.<sup>76</sup> Others indicated that the cadres would go house to house and interview villages on their political opinions and connections.<sup>77</sup>

### 3. Direct Re-Education: Targeting Religious Figures and Tibetan Youth

Unlike Falun Gong and the situation in Xinjiang discussed further below, the Party has not resorted to mass detention for re-education in Tibet. The Party has, however, engaged in a

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<sup>67</sup> *The Origin of the ‘Xinjiang Model’ in Tibet under Chen Quanguo: Securitized Ethnicity and Accelerating Assimilation*, Int’l Campaign for Tibet (Dec. 19, 2018), <https://savetibet.org/the-origin-of-the-xinjiang-model-in-tibet-under-chen-quanguo-securitizing-ethnicity-and-accelerating-assimilation/>.

<sup>68</sup> *China: Alarming New Surveillance, Security in Tibet*, Hum. Rts. Watch (Mar. 20, 2013), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/03/20/china-alarming-new-surveillance-security-tibet>.

<sup>69</sup> See, e.g., Adrian Zenz & James Leibold, *Chen Quanguo: The Strongman Behind Beijing’s Securitization Strategy in Tibet and Xinjiang*, 17 *China Br.* (2017), <https://jamestown.org/program/chen-quanguo-the-strongman-behind-beijings-securitization-strategy-in-tibet-and-xinjiang/>.

<sup>70</sup> *Id.*

<sup>71</sup> See *id.*; see also *China: Alarming New Surveillance Security in Tibet*, *supra* note 68.

<sup>72</sup> *China: No End to Tibet Surveillance Program*, Hum. Rts. Watch (Jan. 18, 2016), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/18/china-no-end-tibet-surveillance-program>.

<sup>73</sup> *Id.*

<sup>74</sup> *Id.*

<sup>75</sup> *China: ‘Benefit the Masses’ Campaign Surveilling Tibetans*, Hum. Rts. Watch (June 18, 2013), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/06/18/china-benefit-masses-campaign-surveilling-tibetans>.

<sup>76</sup> *Id.*

<sup>77</sup> *Id.*

variety of re-education measures, with varying levels of coercion, against religious figures, the youth, and the general population.

Shortly after the 2008 demonstrations, the CCP launched a campaign of re-education. Officials targeted religious figures, such as monks and nuns, for “patriotic re-education.”<sup>78</sup> Cadres used meetings with these groups to discourage support for Tibetan autonomy. One account on a blog reported that cadres required participants to “expose, repudiate and denounce the evil doings of the Dalai clique, and firmly struggle against splittists.”<sup>79</sup> Exemplifying the cult of confession, the Party forced religious authorities to appear on TV and denounce the Dalai Lama and condemn his actions.<sup>80</sup> The CCP’s propaganda materials condemned Tibetan independence and the Dalai Lama, and detailed the CCP’s proposed narrative on what happened in the demonstrations and “how Tibet became part of China.”<sup>81</sup> The CCP reportedly required monks to pass tests on these materials,<sup>82</sup> demonstrating the CCP’s efforts to place doctrine over person by forcing individuals to suppress their judgment of history and events and replace them with the Party’s own.

While from a later period, the journal of one Tibetan’s experience in a re-education center is informative. After the individual visited a Buddhist study center in 2017, he was sent for re-education and put in a cell with six others.<sup>83</sup> Upon arrival, the individual was interrogated by his cellmates, who asked about his trust of the CCP.<sup>84</sup> Officials forced him to memorize the Chinese national anthem and other Party songs and to attend daily classes praising the Party and denouncing the Dalai Lama.<sup>85</sup>

The Party has also attempted to establish ideological purity in the youth. While boarding schools have a longer history in Tibet, in the past twenty years there has been dramatic change in educational policies. In the early 2000s, Chinese authorities began to close village schools in rural areas, with more than 80% of village schools closed by 2010.<sup>86</sup> By 2015, while reversing trends on boarding schools in Han areas, the regime decided to expand boarding schools in minority regions, calling for ethnic minorities to “study in a school, live in a school, and grow up in a school.”<sup>87</sup> By the 2020s, nongovernmental organizations estimated that more than 75% of all Tibetan students between the ages of 6 and 18 were in boarding schools.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Central Tibetan Admin., 2008 Uprising in Tibet: Chronology and Analysis 178 (2010), <https://tibet.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/tibetprotest2008.pdf>.

<sup>79</sup> *Id.* at 179 (quoting Wooser, *Tibet Update: 10 March – 31 April 2008*, High Peaks Pure Earth, <http://highpeakspureearth.blogspot.com/2008/09/march-10th-may-21st-2008-tibet-updates.html>).

<sup>80</sup> *Id.*

<sup>81</sup> Lucy Hornby, *Tibetan Monks Forced to Take “Patriotic Tests”*, Reuters (June 13, 2008), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tibet/tibetan-monks-forced-to-take-patriotic-tests-idUKPEK28885420080613>.

<sup>82</sup> *Id.*

<sup>83</sup> Yeshi Dorje, *Tibetans Re-Education Camp Journal Tells of China’s Tactics Now Used on Uighurs*, VOA News (May 25, 2019), <https://www.voanews.com/a/tibetan-re-education-camp-journal-tells-of-china-s-tactics-now-used-on-uighurs/4932153.html>.

<sup>84</sup> *Id.*

<sup>85</sup> *Id.*

<sup>86</sup> Tibet Action Inst., *Separated from their Families, Hidden from the World 8* (2021), [https://s7712.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2021\\_TAI\\_ColonialBoardingSchoolReport\\_Digital.pdf](https://s7712.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2021_TAI_ColonialBoardingSchoolReport_Digital.pdf).

<sup>87</sup> *Id.* at 9.

<sup>88</sup> *Id.* at 22.

The boarding schools operate as hubs for CCP thought reform. Children in boarding schools are displaced from the social interaction of the family unit, cutting the children off from the “language, religion, and traditions” of home life.<sup>89</sup> Removed from those influences, the CCP then subjects the children to ideological transformation. As a matter of state policy, the education at these boarding schools requires “unremitting propaganda and education on socialism with Chinese characteristics and the China dream.”<sup>90</sup> Schools use curricula to promote the “four identifications,” or identification with the “Chinese nation, the Chinese culture, the Chinese Communist Party, and socialism with Chinese characteristics.”<sup>91</sup>

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Like the crackdown on Falun Gong, the CCP’s heavy use of thought reform tactics against Tibetans are visible in the Party’s propaganda in the region constructing the Dalai Lama as a malign outside influence, significant controls on the information environment within Tibet, and in re-education efforts. The crackdown on Tibetans further demonstrates how the CCP adapts its thought reform practices based on local conditions: whereas reforming Falun Gong practitioners required a broad net and the deployment of novel technological tools, the geographic concentration of Tibetans was suitable for new forms of physical milieu control.

### **C. The Crackdown on Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang**

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, alternatively referred to as “East Turkestan,” is in the northwest of China and has a large population of Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and Kyrgyz who are ethnically Turkic.<sup>92</sup> The CCP has a long history of discriminatory practices in Xinjiang, but like the crackdown on Falun Gong, this report focuses on a specific “Strike Hard” campaign launched in 2014.<sup>93</sup> That campaign, especially under Party Secretary Chen Quanquo, who moved to Xinjiang from Tibet, has become increasingly repressive and has involved the commission of crimes against humanity.<sup>94</sup>

Like the crackdowns on Falun Gong and Tibetans, the CCP’s crackdown on Uyghurs and Muslim residents of Xinjiang is an area where the CCP’s use of thought-reform tactics is at its height. Like the campaign in Tibet, while the Party has formally constructed the enemy in the XUAR as a small subset of the population, namely “separatists” or “terrorists,” the policies broadly target Uyghurs and Turkic Muslims. The Party’s thought reform tactics are especially prominent in (1) party statements constructing Uyghurs as susceptible to hostile influence and

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<sup>89</sup> *Id.* at 4.

<sup>90</sup> *Id.* at 12 (quoting Hum. Rts. Watch, China’s “Bilingual Education” Policy in Tibet 65 (2020), [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/tibet0320\\_web\\_0.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/tibet0320_web_0.pdf)).

<sup>91</sup> China’s “Bilingual Education” Policy in Tibet, *supra* note 90, at 71.

<sup>92</sup> Hum. Rts. Watch & Mills Legal Clinic, Stan. L. Sch., “Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots”: Chinese Government Crimes Against Humanity Targeting Uyghurs and Other Turkic Muslims 7 (2021), [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media\\_2021/04/china0421\\_web\\_2.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2021/04/china0421_web_2.pdf).

<sup>93</sup> *Id.* at 8–9.

<sup>94</sup> *See, e.g.*, Hum. Rts. Watch, “Eradicating Ideological Viruses”: China’s Campaign of Repression against Xinjiang’s Muslims 11-12 (2018), [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/china0918\\_web2.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/china0918_web2.pdf).

thus in need of reform; (2) strong and all-encompassing controls on the information environment within Xinjiang; and (3) large-scale targeting for re-education efforts in detention.

### 1. Party Messaging and Propaganda: Framing “Religious Extremism” as a Corrupting Force

Over the past decade, CCP statements and propaganda in the XUAR have emphasized a need to cement commitment to Party ideology. Latching onto sporadic incidents of violence, the CCP has constructed “separatists” or “extremists” as an existential threat to China, justifying a campaign to reform the broader population’s thinking to prevent the spread of these ideas.

The CCP’s policy statements suggest that minorities in Xinjiang lack a commitment to the Party that requires correction. CCP General-Secretary Xi Jinping’s vision for Xinjiang, as relayed by a Party researcher, largely centers around the concepts of “social stability” and “long-term peace,” where strong measures are necessary to combat what the CCP labels “anti-terrorism, anti-infiltration, and anti-separatism activities” in the region.<sup>95</sup> These measures include deepening “the ideological struggle against separatism, eliminat[ing] the influence of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism, . . . [and] promoting core socialist values.”<sup>96</sup> The Party desires “to increase . . . identification with the great motherland, the Chinese nation, Chinese culture, the Communist Party of China, and socialism with Chinese characteristics.”<sup>97</sup>

Like CCP statements justifying the crackdown on Falun Gong, the Party deployed the dispensing with existence frame, creating a category of evils in the form of “separatism” or “extremism” that must be eliminated. For example, Xi Jinping likened these ideas to a “virus-like contagion and a dangerously addictive drug.”<sup>98</sup> In Xi’s view, these influences cause people to “have their consciences destroyed [and] lose their humanity.”<sup>99</sup> Xi argued that curing the malign influence would involve a “period of painful, interventionary treatment.”<sup>100</sup> And Xi did not believe that these “enemies” had limited influence. He argued that “Islamic extremism had taken root across swaths of Uighur society,” requiring “an effort to rewire the thinking of the region’s Muslim[s].”<sup>101</sup>

The Party’s propaganda casts manifestations of Muslim faith or independent expression as suspect and dangerous. An official publication discussing indicators of “religious extremism” contained several common faith practices, including quitting smoking and drinking, travelling to participate in religious activities, worshipping in public outside of mosques, and encouraging

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<sup>95</sup> Judge Blanchette, Ctr. For Strategic & Int’l Stud., Xi Jinping’s Vision for Xinjiang 2–3 (2020), [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/200930\\_Blanchette\\_XiJinping\\_Vision\\_Xinjiang.pdf](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/200930_Blanchette_XiJinping_Vision_Xinjiang.pdf).

<sup>96</sup> *Id.* at 4.

<sup>97</sup> *Id.* at 6.

<sup>98</sup> Austin Ramzy & Chris Buckley, ‘Absolutely No Mercy’: Leaked File Expose How China Organized Mass Detentions of Muslims, N.Y. Times (Nov. 16, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/16/world/asia/china-xinjiang-documents.html>.

<sup>99</sup> *Id.*

<sup>100</sup> *Id.*

<sup>101</sup> *Id.*

students to pray, study religion, and fast.<sup>102</sup> Murals painted in Uyghur regions depict good and bad models of behavior with, for example, women wearing veils shown as bad and Uyghurs reading Chinese materials (i.e., embracing a “Chinese first and Muslim second”) as good.<sup>103</sup>

Media reports repeat the Party line, explaining how “religious extremism” “confuses and wins people over with simple religious sentiment” and distracts from CCP’s preferred ideology of the “four identities” and “three inseparables.”<sup>104</sup> These concepts refer to the demand that Uyghurs identify “with the motherland, the Chinese nation’s identity, the identity of Chinese culture, and the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics” and acknowledge that ethnic minorities are inseparable from each other and the Han nationality.<sup>105</sup>

## 2. Accelerating Physical and Technological Milieu Control: Xinjiang as “Open-Air Prison”

Like Tibetans, Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims live in relatively close geographic areas. As such, the CCP has used similar physical milieu control techniques, importing the grid style management practice from Tibet along with the deployment of cadres to villages. As with Falun Gong, the CCP has also deployed even more sophisticated technologies to create a sense of total surveillance, what some have described as an “open-air prison.”<sup>106</sup>

The CCP’s milieu control combines advanced technology with physical surveillance methods also deployed in Tibet. The basic design of these systems revolves around databases on individuals linked to their personal identification card, a massive number of surveillance cameras, and data analytics.<sup>107</sup> Xinjiang has a vast array of checkpoints, where Uyghurs must scan identification cards and be photographed to pass by.<sup>108</sup> Information on the individual and their location is fed into databases, and the same happens at smaller checkpoints near banks, schools, mosques, and places where identification is necessary to purchase phones, computers, and other goods.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *Identifying Religious Extremism*, Univ. British Columbia, <https://xinjiang.sppga.ubc.ca/chinese-sources/online-sources/identifying-religious-extremism/>.

<sup>103</sup> *The Colourful Propaganda of Xinjiang*, BBC News (Jan. 12, 2015), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-30722268>.

<sup>104</sup> Nicholas Dynon, *The Language of Terrorism in China: Balancing Foreign and Domestic Policy Imperatives*, 14 *China Br. J.* 11–12 (2014), available at <https://jamestown.org/program/the-language-of-terrorism-in-china-balancing-foreign-and-domestic-policy-imperatives/>.

<sup>105</sup> *Id.*

<sup>106</sup> *U.S. Calls Xinjiang an ‘Open-Air Prison,’ Decries Religious Persecution by China*, Reuters (May 12, 2021), <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-calls-xinjiang-an-open-air-prison-decries-religious-persecution-by-china-2021-05-12/>.

<sup>107</sup> See, e.g., Hum. Rts. Watch, *China’s Algorithms of Repression: Reverse Engineering a Xinjiang Mass Police Surveillance App* 12 (2019), [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/china0519\\_web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/china0519_web.pdf).

<sup>108</sup> See, e.g., Chris Buckley & Paul Mozur, *How China Uses High-Tech Surveillance to Subdue Minorities*, *N.Y. Times* (May 22, 2019), <https://web.archive.org/web/20230210082537/https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/22/world/asia/china-surveillance-xinjiang.html>.

<sup>109</sup> *Id.*

The litany of cameras that blanket Xinjiang record images that are then processed with facial recognition technology. One cybersecurity researcher obtained access to a Chinese database containing a “compilation of real-time data on more than 2.5 million people” in Xinjiang, including each person’s name, birthdate, and place of employment.<sup>110</sup> The database captured more than 6.7 million coordinates in a 24-hour period.<sup>111</sup> Thus, not only must Uyghurs be concerned and censor their communications for fear of retribution, they must constantly fear how their behaviors and actions — for example, who they visit, how often they attend mosques, or how they appear in public — will be interpreted by authorities.

The Party also imported techniques from its campaign against Tibetans to Xinjiang. Party Secretary Chen Quanguo, who formerly launched “grid-style social management” in Tibet, brought the practice to Xinjiang.<sup>112</sup> Leaders also deployed hundreds of thousands of party cadres in villages for surveillance and propaganda, and initiated a program where cadres would spend “five days every two months in” Xinjiang residences.<sup>113</sup> In this latter campaign, the cadres use the visits to “promote identification with China and weed out ‘radical’ Islamic beliefs and practices.”<sup>114</sup> The impact of this near-constant monitoring is significant: not only are there reports of self-censorship of speech and behaviors, but Uyghurs are influenced or compelled to express gratitude for their new “family” members.<sup>115</sup>

### **3. Direct Re-Education: Thought Reform During Mass Arbitrary Detention in Xinjiang**

The CCP’s crackdown on Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang has involved arbitrary detention on an extraordinary scale. The U.S. government has estimated that since the acceleration of the strike hard campaign in 2017, the CCP has detained more than one million individuals.<sup>116</sup> As with the crackdown on Falun Gong practitioners, the CCP uses detention to employ psychological and physical tools in attempts to alter the thinking and personality of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims.

Leaked CCP documents reveal the CCP’s objectives with the detentions. A memo by Zhu Hailun, then deputy-secretary of the Communist Party in Xinjiang, ordered officials to “[p]romote repentance and confession,” “[m]ake remedial Mandarin studies the top priority,” and

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<sup>110</sup> Yanan Wang & Dake Kang, *Exposed Chinese Database Shows Depth of Surveillance State*, AP News (Feb. 19, 2019), <https://apnews.com/article/china-technology-beijing-race-and-ethnicity-international-news-6753f428edfd439ba4b29c71941f52bb>.

<sup>111</sup> *Id.*

<sup>112</sup> See Zenz & Leibold, *supra* note 69.

<sup>113</sup> Hum. Rts. Watch & Mills Legal Clinic, *supra* note 92, at 23.

<sup>114</sup> “Hundred Questions and Hundred Examples” *Cadre Handbooks in the Fanghuiju Campaign*, Univ. British Columbia, <https://xinjiang.sppga.ubc.ca/chinese-sources/cadre-materials/cadre-handbooks/>.

<sup>115</sup> See, e.g., Dake Kang & Yanan Wang, *China’s Uighurs Told to Share Beds, Meals with Party Members*, AP News (Nov. 30, 2018), <https://apnews.com/article/ap-top-news-international-news-prayer-weddings-occasions-9ca1c29fc9554c1697a8729bba4dd93b>.

<sup>116</sup> See, e.g., U.S. Dep’t of State, 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: China — Xinjiang (2022), <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/CHINA-INCLUDES-TIBET-XINJIANG-HONG-KONG-AND-MACAU-2021-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>.



“[e]ncourage students to truly transform.”<sup>117</sup> Exemplifying the doctrine over person frame, officials were instructed to influence students “for them to understand the deeply illegal, criminal and dangerous nature of their past activities.”<sup>118</sup>

Survivors of the camps have testified on the nature of the CCP’s “education” activities. Gulbahar Haitiwaji, who was detained in a camp outside Karamay, described a daily routine of forced memorization and singing of CCP songs and forced praise of CCP leader Xi Jinping.<sup>119</sup> Other detainees testified that authorities required detainees to attend flag-raising ceremonies each morning, singing “Without the CCP, There’s No New China” and “Socialism is Good.”<sup>120</sup> Haitiwaji related that at the beginning and end of the eleven-hour education sessions detainees were forced to recite short statements — “Thank you to our party,” “Thank you to our dear President Xi Jinping,” “Long live President Xi Jinping.”<sup>121</sup> By attributing a sacredness to the party and Xi Jinping, and loading the language with these phrases, the CCP “weakened [their] critical abilities.”<sup>122</sup> As Haitiwaji explained, the net effect of the daily sessions and quizzes began to take away a sense of individuality in the sense of personal memories, all in an effort to avoid public humiliation by the instructors.<sup>123</sup>

Survivor accounts also contain elements of the cult of confession and doctrine over person. Haitiwaji noted that over her two years in detention, the instructors and guards made it their fundamental goal to convince her “that Uighurs are terrorists, and thus that” she herself was a terrorist.<sup>124</sup> Under increasing psychological and physical pressure, Haitiwaji gave in and confessed to false crimes.<sup>125</sup> Another former detainee, who was apprehended for reciting a Quran verse at a funeral, succumbed to false confessions and a denunciation of his life after two months in a camp.<sup>126</sup> An alleged former guard at one of the camps also noted that torture, such as electrocution, was used to extract false confessions “to a variety of perceived offences.”<sup>127</sup>

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The Party’s crackdown in Xinjiang bears substantial similarities in terms of thought reform as the crackdowns on Falun Gong practitioners and Tibetans. The Party’s messaging

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<sup>117</sup> *Data Leak Reveals How China ‘Brainwashes’ Uighurs in Prison Camps*, BBC News (Nov. 24, 2019), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-50511063>.

<sup>118</sup> *Id.*

<sup>119</sup> *An Eyewitness Reveals How China Is Brainwashing the Uyghurs*, Wash. Post (Apr. 9, 2023), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/04/09/uyghur-camps-china-gulbahar-haitiwaji/>.

<sup>120</sup> Hum. Rts. Watch, *supra* note 94, at 37.

<sup>121</sup> Gulbahar Haitiwaji & Rozenn Morgat, *‘Our Souls Are Dead’: How I Survived a Chinese ‘Re-education’ Camp for Uyghurs*, Guardian (Jan. 12, 2021), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/12/uyghur-xinjiang-re-education-camp-china-gulbahar-haitiwaji>.

<sup>122</sup> *Id.*

<sup>123</sup> *Id.*

<sup>124</sup> *Id.*

<sup>125</sup> *Id.*

<sup>126</sup> Chris Buckley, *China Is Detaining Muslims in Vast Numbers. The Goal: ‘Transformation’*, N.Y. Times (Sept. 8, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/08/world/asia/china-uyghur-muslim-detention-camp.html#:~:text=The%20goal%20is%20to%20remove,to%20renounce%20their%20past%20lives>.

<sup>127</sup> Matthew Hill et al., *‘Their Goal Is to Destroy Everyone’: Uighur Camp Detainees Allege Systematic Rape*, BBC News (Feb. 2, 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55794071>.

constructs Uyghurs are susceptible to a malign outside influence intent on destroying the nation, justifying efforts to eliminate that susceptibility. And in pursuit of that goal, the Party went to extraordinary lengths to shape the information and communication environment in the XUAR — taking elements of physical surveillance and control from Tibet and combining them with even more advanced technological tools.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Whether or not the CCP has retreated from the use of totalistic, thought reform tactics more generally, the recent crackdowns on Falun Gong practitioners, Tibetans, and Uyghurs and Turkic Muslims demonstrate that they are a principal tool in managing perceived threats to CCP dominance. And in recent years the Party has generated new techniques and taken advantage of new technologies to further its thought reform goals. The efficacy of these tools in achieving the end of “brainwashing” is questionable. But the tools undeniably represent a grave intrusion into internationally protected human rights, including the rights to freedom of thought and conscience, the freedom of religion, and the right to take part in cultural life.