



Forced Marriage of Uyghur Women

State Policies for Interethnic Marriages in East
Turkistan

UHRP

UYGHUR HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECT

ئۇيغۇر كىشىلىك ھوقۇق قۇرۇلۇشى

About the Uyghur Human Rights Project

The Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) promotes the rights of the Uyghur people through research-based advocacy. We publish reports and analysis in English and Chinese to defend Uyghurs' civil, political, social, cultural, and economic rights according to international human rights standards.

About the Author

This briefing was a joint effort of the research staff at the Uyghur Human Rights Project. Andréa J. Worden and Nuzigum Setiwaldi led the research, writing, and analysis. Dr. Elise Anderson, Dr. Henryk Szadziwski, Louisa Greve, and Ben Carrdus provided comments on the text.

Acknowledgements

The Uyghur Human Rights Project thanks Dr. Darren Byler for his peer review of this briefing. Graphic design by Peter Irwin. Cover art by [YetteSu](#).



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I. Key Takeaways

- Chinese state media videos, government sanctioned stories, and accounts from women in the diaspora offer evidence that government-incentivized and forced interethnic marriages have been occurring in the Uyghur Region since 2014.
- Evidence suggests it is highly likely the Chinese government is systematically imposing forced interethnic marriages on Uyghur women.
- The Chinese state maintains that interethnic marriage promotes ethnic unity and social stability. However, evidence indicates that the government's program to incentivize and promote interethnic marriage is in fact a tactic intended to assimilate Uyghurs into Han society.
- Forced and incentivized marriages in the Uyghur Region are forms of gender-based crimes that violate international human rights standards and further the ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity being committed in East Turkistan.

II. Introduction

Researchers continue to document human rights violations in East Turkistan, particularly since the scale and impact of violations intensified dramatically in 2017.¹ Women and children have suffered from state-imposed systems of mass detention, torture and other assaults on bodily integrity, including forced

¹ We refer to the Uyghur homeland alternately as "East Turkistan" and the "Uyghur Region." A vast majority of Uyghurs prefer these toponyms to "Xinjiang" and the "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR)," which they consider to be colonial terms. However, in cases where we refer to select publications or Party or State agencies, we use "Xinjiang" or related forms such as "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region" or "the XUAR." See the bibliography compiled by Dr. Magnus Fiskesjö for a comprehensive and up-to-date listing of published research and documentation at <https://uhrp.org/bibliography>.

labor, and family separation. In addition, numerous reports have provided extensive evidence of state-sponsored gender-based violence against Uyghur women, including sexual assault, forced sterilization, forced use of birth control devices, forced abortions, and forced marriages.² Multiple governments and the United Nations have recognized that the human rights abuses in East Turkistan either amount to or may amount to genocide and/or crimes against humanity,³ and various governments, including those of Canada, the UK and the US as well as the EU, have imposed over 100 punitive sanctions on the Chinese government (Party-State) and commercial entities in response.⁴ However, Uyghur women continue to suffer from state-imposed gender-based violence, including forced marriage. Currently, governments have not imposed any sanctions in response to gender-based violence in East Turkistan.

In this report, we focus on the impacts of state-imposed human rights abuses on Uyghur women, particularly as they relate to forced marriage between members of the Uyghur and Han ethnic groups.⁵ In past decades, although not unheard of,

However, Uyghur-Han intermarriage has been increasing since 2018 due to state promotion of intermarriage.

² See for example: Adrian Zenz, “Sterilizations, IUDs, and Coercive Birth Prevention: The CCP’s Campaign to Suppress Uyghur Birth Rates in Xinjiang,” Jamestown Foundation, *China Brief*, Volume: 20, Issue 12, July 15, 2020, <https://jamestown.org/program/sterilizations-iuds-and-mandatory-birth-control-the-ccps-campaign-to-suppress-uyghur-birth-rates-in-xinjiang/>; Matthew Hill, David Campanale, and Joel Gunter, “‘Their goal is to destroy everyone’: Uighur camp detainees allege systematic rape,” BBC News, February 2, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55794071>; “Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China,” Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, August 31, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ohchr-assessment-human-rights-concerns-xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region>.

³ See for example: “International Responses to the Uyghur Crisis” on UHRP’s site at: <https://uhrp.org/responses/>; “Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China,” United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, August 31, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ohchr-assessment-human-rights-concerns-xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region>.

⁴ For a comprehensive database of proposed and enacted sanctions and measures by all governments, see the University of Nottingham Rights Lab’s database of Xinjiang Sanctions, at: <https://www.xinjiangsanctions.info/>. For a list of 107 US sanctions, see: <https://uhrp.org/sanctions/>. We refer to the Chinese government or the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as the “Party-State” or “Chinese Party-State” to emphasize one-party rule in China and highlight the difficulties in distinguishing between state and Party apparatuses, policies, and actions.

⁵ We use “coerced” and “forced” interchangeably to describe situations in which a person or persons are subjected to force, duress, or threats by a more powerful person or entity in order to compel the weaker party to yield to their demands. See Merriam-Webster:

ethnic intermarriage between Uyghurs and Han Chinese was extremely rare, with exogamy traditionally considered socially unacceptable in Uyghur culture.⁶ A survey based on China's 2000 national census showed nearly 40% of Uyghurs thought Uyghur-Han intermarriage was "not okay."⁷ The 2000 census showed that across all of the PRC and not just the XUAR, only 1 percent of Uyghurs and 1.5 percent of Han were living in an interethnic household,⁸ with a Uyghur-Han intermarriage rate of 0.56 percent in 2000.⁹ According to data from the 1990, 2000, and 2010 censuses, Uyghur-Han intermarriage declined markedly over the years due to tension between ethnic groups.¹⁰ Uyghurs were the

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/coercing>.

⁶ Edward Wong, "Weighing In on Paid Interethnic Marriages in Xinjiang," *New York Times* (Sinosphere blog), September 5, 2014, <https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/05/weighing-in-on-paid-interethnic-marriages-in-xinjiang/> in which James Millward shares his views on the new initiative, stating, *inter alia*, "Intermarriage between Han and Uyghurs has been almost non-existent."

⁷ 杨圣敏, "普通的利益诉求还是少数人的诉求 - 新疆维汉民族关系的调查与研究," *民族社会学研究通讯* (Yang Shengmin, "Putong de liyi suqiu haishi shaoshu ren de su qiu - Xinjiang Wei-Han guanxi de diaocha yu yanjiu, Minzu shehui kexue yanjiu tongxun") [Yang Shengmin, "Common interest demands or a minority's demands - a survey and study of Uyghur-Han ethnic relations in Xinjiang," *Sociology of Ethnicity*], Vol 46, February 20, 2008, provided to UHRP by Adrian Zenz.

⁸ Edward Wong, "Weighing In on Paid Interethnic Marriages in Xinjiang," *New York Times* (Sinosphere blog), September 5, 2014, <https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/05/weighing-in-on-paid-interethnic-marriages-in-xinjiang/>; Huang Jingjing, "Uyghur-Han couples face pressure from those seeking 'purity' of culture," *Global Times*, November 24, 2015, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20220105181028/https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/954396.shtml>.

⁹ 杨圣敏, "普通的利益诉求还是少数人的诉求 - 新疆维汉民族关系的调查与研究," *民族社会学研究通讯* (Yang Shengmin, "Putong de liyi suqiu haishi shaoshu ren de su qiu - Xinjiang Wei-Han guanxi de diaocha yu yanjiu, Minzu shehui kexue yanjiu tongxun") [Yang Shengmin, "Common interest demands or a minority's demands - a survey and study of Uyghur-Han ethnic relations in Xinjiang," *Sociology of Ethnicity*], Vol 46, February 20, 2008, provided to UHRP by Adrian Zenz.

¹⁰ 李晓霞, "新疆各民族交往交流交融 70 年回顾," *新疆社会科学* (Li Xiaoxia, "Xinjiang ge minzu jiaowang jiaoliu jiaorong 70 nian huigu," *Xinjiang Shehui Kexue*), [Li Xiaoxia, "A review of 70 years of exchanges and integration of various ethnic groups in Xinjiang," *Xinjiang Social Sciences*], Issue 4, November 22, 2019, provided to UHRP by Adrian Zenz.

least likely of all of the officially recognized 56 nationalities¹¹ to intermarry with any other nationality.¹²

However, Uyghur-Han intermarriage has been increasing since 2018 due to state promotion of intermarriage.¹³ A 2019 article in the journal *Xinjiang Social Sciences* noted that the number of Uyghur-Han intermarriages was increasing due to government “de-extremification work” promoting ethnic “exchange and integration,” and that attitudes towards such marriages were becoming more positive.¹⁴

In this report we examine the Party-State’s role in promoting, incentivizing, and coercing interethnic marriage between Uyghur women and Han men in East Turkistan. We offer compelling evidence to show that the Chinese Party-State is actively involved in carrying out a campaign of forcefully assimilating Uyghurs into Han Chinese society by means of mixed marriages.

We reference Party-State interests, incentive measures, and tactics that strongly indicate the campaign for Uyghur-Han interethnic marriages is largely forced or coerced. The Chinese government’s promotion of intermarriage continues today amid an environment that is already highly coercive and threatening for Uyghur women. Government policies incentivizing and

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¹¹ A consistent feature of the Chinese Party-State’s discourse on ethnicity in the PRC is the idea that there are 56 distinct “nationalities” within the overarching Chinese nation, i.e., the *Zhonghua minzu* - 中华民族. However, much of the taxonomy is arbitrary or redundant.

¹² 李晓霞, “新疆各民族交往交流交融 70 年回顾,” *新疆社会科学* (Li Xiaoxia, “Xinjiang ge minzu jiaowang jiaoliu jiaorong 70 nian huigu,” Xinjiang Shehui Kexue), [Li Xiaoxia, “A review of 70 years of exchanges and integration of various ethnic groups in Xinjiang,” *Xinjiang Social Sciences*], Issue 4, November 22, 2019, provided to UHRP by Adrian Zenz.

¹³ See: Darren Byler, “Uyghur love in a time of interethnic marriage,” *SupChina*, August 7, 2019, <https://supchina.com/2019/08/07/uyghur-love-in-a-time-of-interethnic-marriage/>; 李晓霞, “新疆各民族交往交流交融 70 年回顾,” *新疆社会科学* (Li Xiaoxia, “Xinjiang ge minzu jiaowang jiaoliu jiaorong 70 nian huigu,” Xinjiang Shehui Kexue), [Li Xiaoxia, “A review of 70 years of exchanges and integration of various ethnic groups in Xinjiang,” *Xinjiang Social Sciences*], Issue 4, November 22, 2019, provided to UHRP by Adrian Zenz.

¹⁴ 李晓霞, “新疆各民族交往交流交融 70 年回顾,” *新疆社会科学* (Li Xiaoxia, “Xinjiang ge minzu jiaowang jiaoliu jiaorong 70 nian huigu,” Xinjiang Shehui Kexue), [Li Xiaoxia, “A review of 70 years of exchanges and integration of various ethnic groups in Xinjiang,” *Xinjiang Social Sciences*], Issue 4, November 22, 2019, provided to UHRP by Adrian Zenz.

coercing intermarriage and other gender based-abuse only further the ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity being committed in East Turkistan.

III. Sources and Methodology

For this report, we analyzed primary and secondary sources in English and Chinese to explore Party-State policies and public messaging, incentive measures, and coercive practices related to Uyghur-Han marriages. The primary sources in this briefing include:

- State-approved online accounts of interethnic marriages and weddings written by cadres, journalists, and bloggers;
- State-approved personal testimonials from individuals in interethnic marriages posted online;
- Government statements, policy directives, and propaganda;
- First-hand accounts of coerced and incentivized marriages from Uyghur women in the diaspora, media reporting, social media accounts and official and unofficial fora.

We conducted online keyword searches using such Chinese-language terms as “interethnic marriage” (民汉通婚 - *minhan tonghun*), and “Uyghur-Han marriage” (维汉通婚 - *weihan tonghun*), along with terms frequently used in governmental intermarriage incentive measures such as “ethnic contact, exchange, and mingling” (民族交往交流交融 - *minzu jiaowang jiaoliu jiaorong*).

Secondary sources include research and analysis conducted by NGOs, academic researchers, and journalists. Due to the Party-State’s lack of transparency and censorship of information related to forced marriage, these particular sources provide only a limited picture of Uyghur-Han ethnic intermarriage. In addition, the reluctance or hesitancy of Uyghurs to discuss the

uncomfortable topic of intermarriage in East Turkistan presented a further limitation.¹⁵ Other sources include videos of wedding ceremonies suggestive of forced interethnic marriage that have been widely shared on social media, although we have not included those we were unable to authenticate or verify.

IV. Evidence of Forced and Incentivized Marriage

A. Xi Jinping and Chen Quanguo's Policy Directives

Evidence reviewed by UHRP demonstrates that the Party-State has actively encouraged and incentivized “interethnic” Uyghur-Han intermarriage since at least May 2014. Interethnic marriage policies gained momentum in Chinese President Xi Jinping’s signature “new era” period following the second Xinjiang Work Forum in 2014,¹⁶ during which President Xi promoted the policy of strengthening interethnic “contact, exchange, and mingling.”

Also in August 2014, when Chen Quanguo was still Party Secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) – prior to his appointment as Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) – he proclaimed that the TAR government must “actively promote intermarriages (积极推动各民族间通婚 - *jiji tuidong ge minzu jian tonghun*).”¹⁷ In a speech at an

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¹⁵ Darren Byler, “Uyghur love in a time of interethnic marriage,” *SupChina*, August 7, 2019, <https://supchina.com/2019/08/07/uyghur-love-in-a-time-of-interethnic-marriage/>.

¹⁶ James Leibold, “Xinjiang Work Forum Marks New Policy of ‘Ethnic Mingling’,” Jamestown Foundation, *China Brief*, Vol. 14, Issue 12, June 19, 2014, 3-4, <https://jamestown.org/program/xinjiang-work-forum-marks-new-policy-of-ethnic-mingling/>; Gerald Roche and James Leibold, “China’s Second-generation Ethnic Policies are Already Here” (op-ed), *Made in China Journal*, September 7, 2020, 32, <https://madeinchinajournal.com/2020/09/07/chinas-second-generation-ethnic-policies-are-already-here/>.

¹⁷ William Wan and Xu Yangjingjing, “China promotes mixed marriages in Tibet as a way to achieve ‘unity’,” *The Washington Post*, August 16, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/china-promotes-mixed-marriages-in-tibet-as-way-to-achieve-unity/2014/08/16/94409ca6-238e-11e4-86ca-6f03cbd15c1a_story.html.

“Ethnic Inter-marriage Family Forum” in June 2014 featuring 19 mixed-ethnicity families (including Tibetan, Han, Miao, Mongolian, and Hui),¹⁸ Chen invoked President Xi’s most recent speech on promoting mutual understanding, respect, and tolerance among ethnic groups, and called on those gathered to promote “ethnic intermarriage as an important starting point to promote the great unity of all ethnic groups in Tibet.”¹⁹ Chen added that Party and government authorities at all levels should become positive “matchmakers” and create opportunities to serve as a “bridge to connect soulmates,” providing tangible support and incentives to encourage ethnic intermarriage.²⁰ He urged the formulation of:

“[P]referential policies to encourage intermarriage of all ethnic groups, and give policy preference in terms of schooling, employment, joining the Party, joining the army, entrepreneurship support, and

¹⁸ “Chinese Party official promotes inter-racial marriage in Tibet to create ‘unity’,” International Campaign for Tibet, August 28, 2014, <https://savetibet.org/chinese-party-official-promotes-inter-racial-marriages-in-tibet-to-create-unity/#2>; citing: “陈全国：以各兄弟民族通婚为重要抓手推动西藏各民族大团结大融合” (“Chen Quanguo: yi ge xiongdì minzu tonghun wei zhongyao zhuashou tuidong Xizang ge minzu da tuanjie da ronghe”) [Chen Quanguo: Taking the intermarriage of all ethnic groups as an important starting point, promote the great unity and great integration of all ethnic groups in Tibet], *CPC News*, June 19, 2014, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0619/c64102-25172842.html>.

¹⁹ “Chinese Party official promotes inter-racial marriage in Tibet to create ‘unity’,” International Campaign for Tibet, August 28, 2014, <https://savetibet.org/chinese-party-official-promotes-inter-racial-marriages-in-tibet-to-create-unity/#2> citing: “陈全国：以各兄弟民族通婚为重要抓手推动西藏各民族大团结大融合” (“Chen Quanguo: yi ge xiongdì minzu tonghun wei zhongyao zhuashou tuidong Xizang ge minzu da tuanjie da ronghe”) [Chen Quanguo: Taking the intermarriage of all ethnic groups as an important starting point, promote the great unity and great integration of all ethnic groups in Tibet], *CPC News*, June 19, 2014, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0619/c64102-25172842.html>.

²⁰ “Chinese Party official promotes inter-racial marriage in Tibet to create ‘unity’,” International Campaign for Tibet, August 28, 2014, <https://savetibet.org/chinese-party-official-promotes-inter-racial-marriages-in-tibet-to-create-unity/#2> citing: “陈全国：以各兄弟民族通婚为重要抓手推动西藏各民族大团结大融合” (“Chen Quanguo: yi ge xiongdì minzu tonghun wei zhongyao zhuashou tuidong Xizang ge minzu da tuanjie da ronghe”) [Chen Quanguo: Taking the intermarriage of all ethnic groups as an important starting point, promote the great unity and great integration of all ethnic groups in Tibet], *CPC News*, June 19, 2014, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0619/c64102-25172842.html>. See also: William Wan and Xu Yangjingjing, “China promotes mixed marriages in Tibet as a way to achieve ‘unity’,” *The Washington Post*, August 16, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/china-promotes-mixed-marriages-in-tibet-as-way-to-achieve-unity/2014/08/16/94409ca6-238e-11e4-86ca-6f03cbd15c1a_story.html.

appraisals of excellence, so as to effectively mobilize enthusiasm for intermarriage among people of all ethnic groups.”²¹

Similarly, officials in the Uyghur Region have been directed to actively promote interethnic “contact, exchange, and mingling,” including interethnic marriages.²² According to scholar James Leibold, Chinese officials and academics “have long viewed high rates or high instances of interethnic marriage as a kind of proxy symbol for social cohesion and national integration.”²³ More interethnic marriages would mean more ethnic unity, greater stability, and a more secure environment for Xi Jinping’s defining foreign policy, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), according to Leibold’s analysis. National security and stability are paramount Party-State priorities for both the TAR and XUAR, but the Uyghur Region presents a heightened security challenge, according to scholars, and with more at stake – namely, President Xi Jinping’s key BRI.²⁴

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²¹ “Chinese Party official promotes inter-racial marriage in Tibet to create ‘unity’,” International Campaign for Tibet, August 28, 2014, <https://savetibet.org/chinese-party-official-promotes-inter-racial-marriages-in-tibet-to-create-unity/#2> citing: “陈全国：以各兄弟民族通婚为重要抓手推动西藏各民族大团结大融合” (“Chen Quanguo: yi ge xiongdi minzu tonghun wei zhongyao zhuashou tuidong Xizang ge minzu da tuanjie da ronghe”) [Chen Quanguo: Taking the intermarriage of all ethnic groups as an important starting point, promote the great unity and great integration of all ethnic groups in Tibet’], *CPC News*, June 19, 2014, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0619/c64102-25172842.html>.

²² Edward Wong, “To Temper Unrest in Western China, Officials Offer Money for Intermarriage,” *New York Times*, September 2, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/03/world/asia/to-temper-unrest-china-pushes-interethnic-marriage-between-han-and-minorities.html>.

²³ Eva Xiao, “China pushes inter-ethnic marriage in Xinjiang assimilation drive,” AFP via *Hong Kong Free Press*, May 18, 2019, <https://hongkongfp.com/2019/05/18/china-pushes-inter-ethnic-marriage-xinjiang-assimilation-drive/>; 李晓霞, “新疆各民族交往交流交融 70 年回顾,” *新疆社会科学* (Li Xiaoxia, “Xinjiang ge minzu jiaowang jiaoliu jiaorong 70 nian huigu,” *Xinjiang Shehui Kexue*), [Li Xiaoxia, “A review of 70 years of exchanges and integration of various ethnic groups in Xinjiang,” *Xinjiang Social Sciences*], Issue 4, November 22, 2019, provided to UHRP by Adrian Zenz.

²⁴ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “‘To Make Us Slowly Disappear’: The Chinese Government’s Assault on the Uyghurs,” November 9, 2021, <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/reports-and-resources/the-chinese-governments-assault-on-the-uyghurs>; Adrian Zenz and James Leibold, “Chen Quanguo: The Strongman Behind Beijing’s Securitization Strategy in Tibet and Xinjiang,” Jamestown Foundation, *China Brief*, Vol. 17, Issue 12, September 21, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/chen-quanguo-the-strongman-behind-beijings-securitization-strategy-in-tibet-and-xinjiang/>; Sean R. Roberts, *The War on the Uyghurs: China’s Internal Campaign against a Muslim Minority*, Princeton University Press, 2020, 174-75, 195, 228.

B. Cherchen County Intermarriage Incentives

In August 2014, shortly after the Second Xinjiang Work Forum, Party officials in Cherchen County (Qarqan, Ch. Qiemo) in Bayingolin Mongol Autonomous Prefecture, announced a new policy to promote interethnic marriage.²⁵ Likely inspired by then-TAR Party Secretary Chen Quanguo's "ethnic mingling" (民族交融 - *minzu jiaorong*) policies in the TAR,²⁶ the county issued a document entitled "Regarding Reward Measures for Encouraging Ethnic Minority-Han Interethnic Families (Trial Implementation)" (关于鼓励民汉通婚家庭奖励办法 (试行) - *Guanyu guli minhan tonghun jiating jiangli banfa [shixing]*), which appeared on the Cherchen County government website on August 26, 2014.²⁷ The measures allocated 10,000 *yuan* per year (US \$1,600) per "minhan" couple – approximately 2,600 *yuan* more than the average annual income of rural residents in East Turkistan at the time. The incentive would be provided for five years to newly-married *minhan* couples for as long as the marriage remained "harmonious."²⁸ Other incentives included help with housing,

²⁵ See generally: Edward Wong, "To Temper Unrest in Western China, Officials Offer Money for Intermarriage," *New York Times*, September 2, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/03/world/asia/to-temper-unrest-china-pushes-interethnic-marriage-between-han-and-minorities.html> (noting Cherchen County's effort was "similar to initiatives in Tibet"); Edward Wong, "Weighing In on Paid Interethnic Marriages in Xinjiang," *New York Times* (Sinosphere blog), September 5, 2014, <https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/05/weighing-in-on-paid-interethnic-marriages-in-xinjiang/>.

²⁶ See generally: Edward Wong, "To Temper Unrest in Western China, Officials Offer Money for Intermarriage," *New York Times*, September 2, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/03/world/asia/to-temper-unrest-china-pushes-interethnic-marriage-between-han-and-minorities.html> (noting Cherchen County's effort was "similar to initiatives in Tibet"); Edward Wong, "Weighing In on Paid Interethnic Marriages in Xinjiang," *New York Times* (Sinosphere blog), September 5, 2014, <https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/05/weighing-in-on-paid-interethnic-marriages-in-xinjiang/>.

²⁷ Edward Wong, "Weighing In on Paid Interethnic Marriages in Xinjiang," *New York Times* (Sinosphere blog), September 5, 2014, <https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/05/weighing-in-on-paid-interethnic-marriages-in-xinjiang/>.

²⁸ Edward Wong, "To Temper Unrest in Western China, Officials Offer Money for Intermarriage," *New York Times*, September 2, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/03/world/asia/to-temper-unrest-china-pushes-interethnic-marriage-between-han-and-minorities.html>; Andrea Chen, "Uyghur-Han Chinese couples offered 10,000 *yuan* a year to marry in Xinjiang county," *South China Morning Post*, September 2, 2014, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1583806/xinjiang-county-offers-10000-yuan-reward-uygurs-who-marry-han-chinese>; "To quell unrest, Xinjiang offers cash for mixed marriages," *Today*, September 3, 2014,

medical care, government jobs, and tuition waivers through high school for the children of such marriages, plus tuition subsidies for subsequent education.²⁹ One member of the couple had to be residing in Cherchen County, and the benefits could only be enjoyed once.³⁰

Official reports and statistics do not provide any indication of how these intermarriage measures impacted the rates of ethnic intermarriage in Cherchen County. However, according to a local official interviewed by Radio Free Asia, in 2014 there had been only 57 marriages between Han and members of other ethnic groups – not just Uyghurs – in the county in 2014, out of a total population of around 70,000 people at the time, of which just under a quarter was Han.³¹

Once Cherchen County's interethnic marriage-for-payment initiative was covered in numerous Chinese and foreign news outlets, including *The New York Times* and the *South China Morning Post*, the announcement was taken down from the county's website on September 2, 2014 – barely a week after it appeared.³² The measures themselves no longer appear to be available online, although they are still the subject of discussion

The incentive would be provided for five years to newly-married *minhan* couples for as long as the marriage remained “harmonious.”

<https://www.todayonline.com/chinaindia/china/quell-unrest-xinjiang-offers-cash-mixed-marriages> (citing *Financial Times* for average annual rural income figure).

²⁹ Edward Wong, “To Temper Unrest in Western China, Officials Offer Money for Intermarriage,” *New York Times*, September 2, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/03/world/asia/to-temper-unrest-china-pushes-interethnic-marriage-between-han-and-minorities.html>.

³⁰ “新疆且末县出台民汉通婚奖励办法 用经济手段加速同化？” (“Xinjiang qiemo xian chutai minhan tonghun jiangli banfa, yong jingji shouduan jiasu tonghua?”), [Cherchen County in Xinjiang Issues Reward Measures for Marriages between Han and Ethnic Minorities, Using Economic Means to Speed Up Assimilation?], *Radio Free Asia*, August 29, 2014, <https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/shaoshuminzu/ql1-08292014102352.html>.

³¹ “新疆且末县出台民汉通婚奖励办法 用经济手段加速同化？” (“Xinjiang qiemo xian chutai minhan tonghun jiangli banfa, yong jingji shouduan jiasu tonghua?”), [Cherchen County in Xinjiang Issues Reward Measures for Marriages between Han and Ethnic Minorities, Using Economic Means to Speed Up Assimilation?], *Radio Free Asia*, August 29, 2014, <https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/shaoshuminzu/ql1-08292014102352.html>.

³² Edward Wong, “Weighing In on Paid Interethnic Marriages in Xinjiang,” *New York Times* (Sinosphere blog), September 5, 2014, <https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/05/weighing-in-on-paid-interethnic-marriages-in-xinjiang/>.

in some China-based online fora.³³ An English-language report on their content remains live on the government-run news site *Tianshan Net*, and in November 2015, the official *Global Times* referred to the Cherchen incentive measures in an article about pressures facing Uyghur-Han couples, stating that the policy seemed to have been “ineffective” and that it had been widely

Uyghur-Han couples face pressure from those seeking ‘purity’ of culture

By Huang Jingjing in Urumqi Source:Global Times Published: 2015-11-23 20:28:01



Interethnic economic and cultural exchanges have not caused an increase in marriage between Xinjiang's Uyghur and Han communities. Today, such couples are a rarity due to pressure from both communities, especially after mass terror attacks in 2009. Many Uyghurs disagree with intermarriage as they feel their culture is at risk of being diluted.



Mawlan and his wife Ma Jie sit in a coffee shop in downtown Urumqi on November 16. Photo: Cui Meng/GT

In November 2015, the Global Times mentioned the Cherchen incentive measures in an article about the pressures facing Uyghur-Han couples. Source: Global Times.

³³ A Chinese-language search for the measures – “关于鼓励民汉通婚家庭奖励办法（试行）” (including the opening and closing speech marks) – returns around two dozen hits, mostly from 2014 when the measures were first released.

criticized.³⁴ A Cherchen County Propaganda Bureau official told the *Global Times* that the government had “suspended the policy after receiving wide external slander.”³⁵ The official also asked the *Global Times* reporter not to write about the policy.

Despite the measures apparently being suspended after the domestic and international outcry, at least some aspects of the Cherchen County measures have survived in the form of ongoing incentives and policy drives across the Uyghur Region. The measures in Cherchen County were the only ones to have been publicized. Similar measures in other jurisdictions appear not to have been broadly publicized. In an official document issued by the Kashgar City Civil Affairs Bureau and provided to UHRP by scholar Adrian Zenz, there is a line item for 20,000 *yuan* (US \$2,811) for ethnic intermarriage awards (民汉通婚奖励 - *minhan tonghun jiangli*) for the fiscal year 2018.³⁶ Another similar document from 2018 from the Payzawat County (Ch. Jiashi County) Civil Affairs Bureau showed that a 100 percent disbursement rate for the ethnic intermarriage reward fund (民汉通婚奖励资金发放率 - *minhan tonghun jiangli zijin fafang lv*) had been achieved for the year; however, there was no indication in the document of what the total allocation may have been from the bureau’s 238 million *yuan* (US\$ 33.4 million) budget for 2018.³⁷

C. Chinese State Media Promotions

Since 2018, official Party-State media outlets have posted several videos on social media promoting Uyghur-Han interethnic marriage. Many Uyghurs in the diaspora were deeply disturbed

Despite the measures apparently being suspended after the domestic and international outcry, at least some aspects of the Cherchen County measures have survived in the form of ongoing incentives and policy drives across the Uyghur Region.

³⁴ Huang Jingjing, “Uyghur-Han couples face pressure from those seeking ‘purity’ of culture,” *Global Times*, November 24, 2015, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20220105181028/https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/954396.shtml>.

³⁵ Huang Jingjing, “Uyghur-Han couples face pressure from those seeking ‘purity’ of culture,” *Global Times*, November 24, 2015, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20220105181028/https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/954396.shtml>.

³⁶ “喀什市财政项目支出绩效自评报告” (“Kashi Shi caizheng xiangmu zhichu jixiao zhiping baogao”) [“Self-assessment report on expenditure performance for financial projects in Kashgar City”], Kashgar City Civil Affairs Bureau, February 5, 2019, provided to UHRP by Adrian Zenz.

³⁷ “绩效目标申报表” (“Jixiao mubiao shenbao biao”) [Performance goal statement], Payzawat County Civil Affairs Bureau, 2018, provided to UHRP by Adrian Zenz.

on viewing them, stating that such videos were “evidence of forced racial assimilation.”³⁸ In the posted videos, the Uyghur women appear distressed during the wedding ceremonies, prompting viewers’ concerns that the marriages are forced or coerced.



Screengrab from a video posted in 2018 appears to show a coerced or otherwise forced marriage between a Uyghur woman and Han man. Source: Douyin.

³⁸ Isobel Cockerell, “How TikTok opened a window into China’s police state,” *Coda Story*, September 25, 2019, <https://www.codastory.com/authoritarian-tech/tiktok-uyghur-china/>; See also: “China Video Ad Calls for 100 Uighur Women to ‘Urgently’ Marry Han Men,” *Voice of America*, August 22, 2020, https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific_voa-news-china_china-video-ad-calls-100-uyghur-women-urgently-marry-han-men/6194806.html.

In August 2020, another disturbing video surfaced depicting the wedding of a Han man and Uyghur woman and featuring the couple thanking the CCP for the “beautiful life” the government had given them. The Uyghur voiceover with Chinese subtitles explains that there is an “urgent need” for 100 brides to “actively respond to the call from the government to promote marriage between Uyghurs and Han.”³⁹ The fact that a contact number was provided (reportedly for the couple), as well as a suggestion for viewers to introduce their relatives and friends to the couple, suggests that this video was promotional and that the couple were likely acting as brokers.⁴⁰ The “urgency” also suggests that local officials were possibly underperforming in their superiors’ requirements to facilitate interethnic marriages. The use of media promotions is one major way the Party-State has promoted its policy of interethnic marriages. As local governments are cautious about criticism of their measures to incentivize interethnic marriage, it is assumed that online video promotions are probably the most visible of their strategies, while other more covert strategies are detailed below.

D. Officially Sanctioned Stories

The accounts of mixed marriages UHRP located online are virtually all situated in the Uyghur-majority southern regions of the Uyghur homeland. The accounts have a strong propagandistic tenor to them, primarily targeting Han men as “recruits.” We describe these accounts as “officially sanctioned” because they were posted on the tightly controlled Internet and continue to be available as of this writing.

In the posted videos, the Uyghur women appear distressed during the wedding ceremonies, prompting viewers’ concerns that the marriages are forced or coerced.

³⁹ Destinee Bright (@BrightDestinee), “Thanks for the beautiful life #CCP and government has given us. To actively respond to the call by government, to promote the marriage between #Uyghurs and #Han, there is an urgent need for 100 #brides....Our contact phone is 176 99 98 97 66,” Twitter, July 22, 2020, 1:07 pm, <https://twitter.com/brightdestinee/status/1285983592204496896>.

⁴⁰ “China Video Ad Calls for 100 Uighur Women to ‘Urgently’ Marry Han Men,” *Voice of America*, August 22, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific-voa-news-china-china-video-ad-calls-100-uighur-women-urgently-marry-han-men/6194806.html>.

In light of historically low rates of Uyghur exogamy and the mistrust and tension between Han and Uyghurs in the Uyghur Region and beyond,⁴¹ a common theme in the reports of interethnic marriages is the fortitude of the couples in overcoming initial stigma, bias, and pressure from family members, or “gossip” in their community, and persevering in their plans to marry. “Love conquers all” is a repeated trope in these stories.

We identified three main themes in these reports of interethnic marriages:

Theme 1: Inter-marriage fosters “ethnic unity”

A prominent theme in state-sanctioned stories shows that Party-State officials encourage intermarriage by emphasizing the idea of “ethnic unity.” In these cases, “ethnic unity” essentially entails Uyghur assimilation into the Han way of life.

An informal marriage guide for male Han cadres published in 2019, entitled “How to Win the Heart of a Uyghur Girl,” cautions Han men that as they are “selecting” a Uyghur woman, they must first and foremost uphold a few iron-clad principles: the woman they love “must love the Motherland, love the Party, and she must have unrivaled passion for socialist Xinjiang.”⁴²

Party officials and village committees appear to often play an outsized role in facilitating interethnic marriages by offering gifts and various benefits, including providing venues for weddings and inviting local officials and “relatives” to join in the

A prominent theme in state-sanctioned stories shows that Party-State officials encourage intermarriage by emphasizing the idea of “ethnic unity.”

⁴¹ See: Darren Byler, “Uyghur love in a time of interethnic marriage,” *SupChina*, August 7, 2019, <https://supchina.com/2019/08/07/uyghur-love-in-a-time-of-interethnic-marriage/>; James Leibold, “Xinjiang Work Forum Marks New Policy of ‘Ethnic Mingling,’” *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, Vol. 14, Issue 12, June 19, 2014, <https://jamestown.org/program/xinjiang-work-forum-marks-new-policy-of-ethnic-mingling/>; Huang Jingjing, “Uyghur-Han couples face pressure from those seeking ‘purity’ of culture,” *Global Times*, November 24, 2015, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20220105181028/https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/954396.shtml>; Joanne Smith Finley, *The Art of Symbolic Resistance: Uyghur Identities and Uyghur-Han Relations in Contemporary Xinjiang* (Leiden: Brill, 2013) 296–304.

⁴² “如何赢得一个维吾尔族女孩的芳心?” (“*Ruhe yingde yige weiwu'er zu nihai de fangxin?*”) [“How to Win the Heart of a Uyghur Girl?”], June 25, 2019, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/LdD84znWi1VIBP-Hd_sT1A.

celebration.⁴³ For example, according to an article posted in March 2021, two village committees in Aksu County awarded 40,000 *yuan* (US \$5,622) to the families of a newly wed interethnic couple as part of its “National Unity, One Family” campaign.⁴⁴ In July 2020, a member of the Xinjiang Financial Writers Association who also worked with a China Everbright Bank village team, profiled a young Uyghur-Han couple who had married in Yengimehelle (Ch. Yingmaili) Village in Aksu Prefecture in 2018. While depicted as a love story, the piece describing their story was nevertheless entitled “Uyghur and Han Youths Marry to Promote Ethnic Unity.”⁴⁵

In the piece, Rayhangul Aziz (Ch. Reyihan Guli Aizezi), the Uyghur wife of Chen Qiancheng, told the “financial writer” that she and her Han husband had met at a daily youth gathering organized by the village committee. Her husband spotted her in the crowd and invited her to dance, and gradually they got to know each other and fell in love. Rayhangul’s father, a farmer, told the writer:

“Our family did not really accept their marriage at the beginning. After all, such marriages are very rare in the village, but the state and government are very supportive of Uyghur-Han intermarriage, and have even introduced many policies to encourage intermarriage, such as land, cash, and subsidies for housing, children’s education, and other things. In addition, the current situation of ethnic unity is very good, and this kind of intermarriage is becoming more and more common.”⁴⁶

Party officials and village committees appear to often play an outsized role in facilitating interethnic marriages by offering gifts and various benefits.

⁴³ Darren Byler, “Uyghur love in a time of interethnic marriage,” *SupChina*, August 7, 2019, <https://supchina.com/2019/08/07/uyghur-love-in-a-time-of-interethnic-marriage/>.

⁴⁴ “The village-based work team commends the “Min Han” intermarriage families,” Sohu, March 23, 2021, archived at <https://archive.ph/wip/XcANF>.

⁴⁵ “维汉青年联姻 促进民族团结 作者：种向东” (“*Weihan qingnian lianyin cujin minzu tuanjie - Zhong Xiangdong*”) [“Uyghur and Han youths marry to promote ethnic unity”], Sohu, July 16, 2020, archived at: https://web.archive.org/web/20211225204456/https://www.sohu.com/a/393360781_120521832.

⁴⁶ “维汉青年联姻 促进民族团结 作者：种向东” (“*Weihan qingnian lianyin cujin minzu tuanjie - Zhong Xiangdong*”) [“Uyghur and Han youths marry to promote ethnic unity”], Sohu, July 16, 2020,

The wedding, in 2018, was held in the village Party Committee’s large auditorium. Over 1,200 people participated in the “grand occasion,” including leaders of the township, village representatives, and ordinary residents. The writer, writing in 2020, discusses the young couple’s business ventures and congratulates them on the upcoming birth of their baby, which was due the following month.⁴⁷



Screengrab from Rayhangul’s wedding to Chen. The two are dressed in culturally Han wedding outfits. Source: Sohu.

archived at: https://web.archive.org/web/20211225204456/https://www.sohu.com/a/393360781_120521832.

⁴⁷ “维汉青年联姻 促进民族团结 作者：种向东” (“Weihan qingnian lianyin cujin minzu tuanjie - Zhong Xiangdong”) [“Uyghur and Han youths marry to promote ethnic unity”], Sohu, July 16, 2020, archived at: https://web.archive.org/web/20211225204456/https://www.sohu.com/a/393360781_120521832.

Theme 2: Inter-marriage comes with financial benefits

Since 2018, headlines of stories in official media have consistently highlighted financial incentives for interethnic marriages. For example, the Hong Kong newspaper *Ta Kung Pao*, which is owned by the Chinese Party-State and controlled by China’s representative office in Hong Kong, ran a short Chinese-language article in November 2018 with the headline: “To Encourage Interethnic Marriage, Xinjiang Gives Rewards of 10,000 *yuan*.”⁴⁸ The report begins with a discussion of the 2014 Cherchen measures – not exactly news in 2018 – and then briefly mentions three other examples of interethnic marriage, none of which relate to Cherchen County.



Photo of a village team standing with a newlywed Uyghur-Han couple in Aksu County. Source: Sohu.

⁴⁸ 应江洪, “鼓励民族通婚 新疆奖万元” (Ying Jianghong, “Guli minzu tonghun Xinjiang jiang wan yuan”) [To Encourage Interethnic Marriage, Xinjiang Gives Reward of 10,000 *yuan*], *Ta Kung Pao*, November 19, 2018, <http://www.takungpao.com/news/232108/2018/1119/207238.html>. For a discussion on the background and evolving political uses of *Ta Kung Pao* by the Chinese Party-State, see Timothy McLaughlin, “How China Weaponized the Press,” *The Atlantic*, September 9, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2021/09/hong-kong-china-media-newspaper/620005/>.

The report mentions the marriage of a Uyghur-Han couple from Qumul (Kumul, Ch: Hami) and asserts that there are many such interethnic families in the region. The same report gives two other examples: a “typical” young Uyghur woman in Aksu County who married a young Han man from Shanxi Province in August 2018, and a marriage between a young Kazakh man from Karamay City and a Han woman in October 2018. According to the report, the Kazakh man said that some relatives in his hometown gossiped about his relationship, but that he knew it was up to him to decide his own path.⁴⁹

In June 2021, an official or semi-official account on *NetEase* called “Xinjiang Stories” (新疆的故事 - *Xinjiang de gushi*),⁵⁰ posted an article entitled “What is Interethnic Marriage? What Policies Does Xinjiang Have to Encourage Interethnic Marriages?”⁵¹ The article suggests that Cherchen-type payments and incentive measures are available in the Uyghur Region, and appeared to be part of a push to encourage Han men to migrate to East Turkistan.

The post begins with an answer to the first question: “*Minhan* intermarriage refers to a marriage between an ethnic minority and a Han,” and then proceeds to describe the Cherchen incentive measures.⁵² The remainder of the *NetEase* post is a reprint of an article that appeared in September 2014 on the official *TianshanNet* site describing the Cherchen measures, including quotes from local Cherchen Party-State officials about

⁴⁹ 应江洪, “鼓励民族通婚 新疆奖万元” (*Ying Jianghong, “Guli minzu tonghun Xinjiang jiang wan yuan”*) [To Encourage Interethnic Marriage, Xinjiang Gives Reward of 10,000 yuan], *Ta Kung Pao*, November 19, 2018, <http://www.takungpao.com/news/232108/2018/1119/207238.html>.

⁵⁰ The “Xinjiang Stories” account appears mainly to repost “good Xinjiang stories” from official Party-State sites, although it also posts other official information such as standard biographies of XUAR officials.

⁵¹ “什么是民汉通婚？新疆对民汉通婚有什么鼓励政策？” (*Shenme shi minhan tonghun? Xinjiang dui minhan tonghun you shenme guli zhengce?*) [“What is interethnic marriage? What policies does Xinjiang have to encourage interethnic marriages?”], Xinjiang Stories, *NetEase*, June 8, 2021, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20211230171901/https://www.163.com/dy/article/GC0DO1F10515GFNO.html>.

⁵² “什么是民汉通婚？新疆对民汉通婚有什么鼓励政策？” (*Shenme shi minhan tonghun? Xinjiang dui minhan tonghun you shenme guli zhengce?*) [“What is interethnic marriage? What policies does Xinjiang have to encourage interethnic marriages?”], Xinjiang Stories, *NetEase*, June 8, 2021, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20211230171901/https://www.163.com/dy/article/GC0DO1F10515GFNO.html>.

promoting “positive energy” and boosting “ethnic fusion” for the great rejuvenation of the *Zhonghua minzu*.⁵³

However, the post omitted mention of the only publicly reported XUAR-wide incentive measure and preferential policy for Han-ethnic minority intermarriages: bonus points for their mixed-ethnicity children on the university entrance exam (高考 - *gaokao*). In May 2019, the XUAR government established a new policy where mixed-ethnicity students would be afforded an extra 20 points on the *gaokao*, but students whose parents were both from ethnic groups would only receive 15 extra points, a significant decrease from previous years.⁵⁴

In line with the adoption of increasingly assimilationist ethnic policies and a heightened focus on national unity, officials in other areas of China, including Anhui Province, are also gradually phasing out the bonus points system on the *gaokao* for students whose parents are both from non-Han ethnic groups, long a source of resentment among Han.⁵⁵ The change in this

⁵³ “新疆且末县为民汉通婚家庭每年奖励 1 万元” (“Xinjiang qiemo xian wei minhan tonghun jiating meinian jiangli 1 wan yuan”) [“Xinjiang Qiemo County provides a 10,000 *yuan* annual reward to interethnic families”], *Tianshan Net*, September 2, 2014, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20211229175824/http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2014-09-02/120030782337.shtml>. The original reporting on the measures clearly indicates they were issued by Cherchen County, for Cherchen County, on a trial implementation basis. See also: “新疆且末县出台民汉通婚奖励办法 用经济手段加速同化?” (“Xinjiang qiemo xian chutai minhan tonghun jiangli banfa, yong jingji shouduan jiasu tonghua?”) [Cherchen County in Xinjiang Issues Reward Measures for Marriages between Han and Ethnic Minorities, Using Economic Means to Speed Up Assimilation?], *Radio Free Asia*, August 29, 2014, <https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/shaoshuminzu/ql1-08292014102352.html>. A Cherchen County official told an RFA reporter that they were interim measures (暂行办法 - *zanxing banfa*) for trial implementation, and that if they were not suitable, they would probably be adjusted or withdrawn; but that wasn’t definite. *Zhonghua minzu* can be translated *inter alia* as “Chinese nation,” “Chinese race,” or a combination of both terms — “Chinese nation-race.” A concept with a complex history, *Zhonghua minzu* under Xi Jinping now effectively means the elimination of all non-Han ethnic identities and consciousness, and an assimilation of all ethnic groups into a single Han-dominated national identity and “collective consciousness.” See: “Ethnic Groups Fear More Repression After Chinese President’s Speech on Minorities,” *Radio Free Asia*, September 3, 2021, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/ethnic-groups-09032021172409.html>.

⁵⁴ Eva Xiao, “China pushes inter-ethnic marriage in Xinjiang assimilation drive,” AFP via Hong Kong Free Press, May 18, 2019, <https://hongkongfp.com/2019/05/18/china-pushes-inter-ethnic-marriage-xinjiang-assimilation-drive/>; Darren Byler, “Uyghur love in a time of interethnic marriage,” *SupChina*, August 7, 2019, <https://supchina.com/2019/08/07/uyghur-love-in-a-time-of-interethnic-marriage/>.

⁵⁵ Wang Qi, “Anhui Province to cancel bonus points for ethnic minorities in college entrance exams,” *Global Times*, September 15, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1200893.shtml>;

policy illustrates yet another way the Chinese government is prioritizing and promoting interethnic marriages.

Theme 3: Inter-marriage is the future

In February 2019, the state-run *Shanghai News Net* posted a Valentine's Day story about the trials and resilience of 14 interethnic couples who were already married or preparing to marry. The main message of these brief curated love stories is that love ultimately triumphs and knows no ethnic boundaries, and that the difficult days for interethnic couples are in the past. Most of the couples include a Han (usually a man), but several of them are composed of two different non-Han ethnic groups.⁵⁶

Ayan Dawulaiti tells the story of her mixed parents – her mother is Uyghur and her father Kazakh – and how she will raise her children differently. Ayan said that because her parents are from different ethnic groups, she faced many difficulties dating when she was younger. She states she was about to give up on love when she met a Han man who cared about her very much. They gradually developed feelings for each other and faced many obstacles together but are now married with a lovely son. She explains that, as parents, they must tell their children that they first belong to the *Zhonghua minzu* before telling them about their ethnic group. She implies that her life would have been smoother had her parents explained to her when she was young that she was first and foremost *Zhonghua minzu*.⁵⁷

James Leibold, "Planting the Seed: Ethnic Policy in Xi Jinping's New Era of Cultural Nationalism," Jamestown Foundation *China Brief*, Vol. 19, Issue 22, December 31, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/program/planting-the-seed-ethnic-policy-in-xi-jinpings-new-era-of-cultural-nationalism/>; Eva Xiao, "China pushes inter-ethnic marriage in Xinjiang assimilation drive," AFP via *Hong Kong Free Press*, May 18, 2019, <https://hongkongfp.com/2019/05/18/china-pushes-inter-ethnic-marriage-xinjiang-assimilation-drive/>; Shan Jie, "Several regions to eliminate gaokao points for minorities," *Global Times*, April 20, 2017, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1043439.shtml>.

⁵⁶ "有情人终成眷属—14对民汉通婚情侣的爱情微故事" ("You qingren zhongcheng juanshu—14 dui minhan tonghun qinglü de aiqing wei gushi" ["Love will find a way—14 micro-love stories of lovers in ethnic minority-Han marriages"], Hetian Internet Police Inspection and Law Enforcement, via *Shanghai News Net*, February 16, 2019, archived at: <https://archive.fo/oiX4v#selection-747.0-747.7>.

⁵⁷ "有情人终成眷属—14对民汉通婚情侣的爱情微故事" ("You qingren zhongcheng juanshu—14 dui minhan tonghun qinglü de aiqing wei gushi" ["Love will find a way—14 micro-love stories of lovers

The story of Uyghur gynecologist Mahire Qadir and her Han husband, Yue Lei, highlights a key theme in intermarriage propaganda since 2018: the idea that “the evil forces are gone now and everything is great for ethnic mingling in Xinjiang!”⁵⁸ The couple, who are from Qumul (Kumul; Ch. Hami), in the eastern part of the Uyghur Region, re-married in August 2018 after divorcing in 2005. Their story appears repeatedly in reports of interethnic marriages in East Turkistan.

Mahire Qadir and Yue Lei were in the same class in middle school; they became friends and gradually fell in love, although Mahire never expected she would have a relationship with a Han man. They secretly dated; only her two brothers knew. They married in 2000 and had a daughter a year later. The couple and their parents endured years of harassment, rumors, and stigmatization from relatives, friends, and others, until finally in 2005, the couple decided to get a “fake divorce” mainly to lessen the pressure on their parents. However, in 2018, due to “de-radicalization” and, according to Mahire: “the awakening of people of all ethnic groups across the great land of Xinjiang during the preceding two years, the haze created by those with sinister intentions has been swept away. This change also brought new hope to Yue Lei and me.”⁵⁹ This account implies that “re-education” was the driving factor that made marriage between Uyghur-Han couples more acceptable and safe.

in ethnic minority-Han marriages”], Hetian Internet Police Inspection and Law Enforcement, via *Shanghai News Net*, February 16, 2019, archived at: [#selection-747.0-747.7](https://archive.fo/oiX4v).

⁵⁸ “冲破宗教阴霾 维汉夫妻续前缘” (“*Chongpo zongjiao yinmai weihan fuqi xu qianyan*”) [“Breaking through the religious haze, Uyghur-Han couple continue their relationship”], *Ta Kung Pao*, November 19, 2018, <http://www.takungpao.com/news/232108/2018/1119/207234.html>; 应江洪, “鼓励民族通婚 新疆奖万元” (*Ying Jianghong, “Guli minzu tonghun Xinjiang jiang wan yuan*”) [To Encourage Interethnic Marriage, Xinjiang Gives Reward of 10,000 yuan], *Ta Kung Pao*, November 19, 2018, <http://www.takungpao.com/news/232108/2018/1119/207238.html>.

⁵⁹ “冲破宗教阴霾 维汉夫妻续前缘” (“*Chongpo zongjiao yinmai weihan fuqi xu qianyan*”) [“Breaking through the religious haze, Uyghur-Han couple continue their relationship”], *Ta Kung Pao*, November 19, 2018, <http://www.takungpao.com/news/232108/2018/1119/207234.html>.

In early 2018, Mahire's mother reportedly suggested that the couple remarry, and they duly held a grand re-marriage ceremony in August of that year. Friends, relatives, and colleagues from both sides came to the event to congratulate them, and their daughter sang a song for them at the ceremony. The happy resolution for the couple, following years of discrimination and isolation, led to their story being re-packaged and posted multiple times, most recently by Mahire Qadir herself in a February 2021 post on *NetEase*.⁶⁰



Collage of photos of Mahire and her husband Yue Lei with their daughter. Source(s): Ta Kung Pao

While most of the reports and messaging around interethnic marriages focus on Han men “finding” and marrying beautiful, kind Uyghur women,⁶¹ accounts have also appeared in official online state media about Uyghur men falling in love with and marrying Han women. In July 2020, the official *People's Daily* tweeted a short and obviously propagandistic video, entitled

⁶⁰ 玛丽亚·卡德尔, “被迫假离婚 13 年后, 这对维汉夫妻终于复婚了!” (Mahire Qadir, “Bei po jia lihun 13 nian hou, zhei dui Wei-Han fuqi zhongyu fuhun le”) [“After 13 years of living through a forced fake divorce, this Uyghur-Han couple finally remarried”], *NetEase*, February 15, 2021, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20220109014805/https://www.163.com/dy/article/G2RJQAL0528OOTH.html>.

⁶¹ See Darren Byler, “Uyghur love in a time of interethnic marriage,” *SupChina*, August 7, 2019, <https://supchina.com/2019/08/07/uyghur-love-in-a-time-of-interethnic-marriage/>; “如何赢得一个维吾尔族女孩的芳心?” (“Ruhe yingde yige weiwu'er zu nühai de fangxin?”) [“How to Win the Heart of a Uyghur Girl?”], June 25, 2019, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/LdD84znW1VIBP-Hd_sT1A.

“Alijman – a Man in Love,” about a young Uyghur man finding a Han girlfriend online.⁶² *People’s Daily* tweeted: “Alimjan is one of numerous young people in NW China’s #Xinjiang who pursue love earnestly. Take a look at his story!”



Screengrab of tweet. Source: Twitter.

Alijman, as narrator, says he and his Han girlfriend have the support of both of their families, mutual understanding, and trust between the two of them, confidence about their relationship, and hope that they will “witness the brighter future of this city together.”⁶³

Another account of interethnic marriage between a Uyghur man and Han woman was posted on the social media knowledge-sharing platform *Zhihu* in November 2017. A young

⁶² *People’s Daily* (@PDChina), “Alimjan is one of numerous young people in NW China’s #Xinjiang who pursue love earnestly. Take a look at his story!” Twitter, July 12, 2020, 4:30pm, <https://twitter.com/pdchina/status/1282411911615778819>.

⁶³ *People’s Daily* (@PDChina), “Alimjan is one of numerous young people in NW China’s #Xinjiang who pursue love earnestly. Take a look at his story!” Twitter, July 12, 2020, 4:30pm, <https://twitter.com/pdchina/status/1282411911615778819>.

male Uyghur cadre, Yusuf Reshit, who worked at the local tax bureau in Maralbeshi County (Ch. Bachu) in Kashgar Prefecture, described how he met and courted the Han woman who would eventually become his wife.⁶⁴ Yusuf said that he studied in the “Xinjiang Class” in Tianjin Municipality close to Beijing, and then tested into Sichuan University, where the couple met. They are now living together in East Turkistan.⁶⁵ In October 2020, the manager of a public *Zhihu* account⁶⁶ with a focus on the western regions of China, re-posted Yusuf’s 2017 essay, entitled “I am Uyghur, My Wife is Han, Who Said That Marriage Between a Han and a Member of an Ethnic Group is Destined to be Unhappy?”⁶⁷

The account manager explained he was re-posting Yusuf’s article because he had been criticized by some who claimed that he only published articles about “ethnic” women marrying Han men but never any articles about Han women marrying men from ethnic groups. As such, the account had been accused of “drawing out hatred and fomenting discord.”⁶⁸ The account

⁶⁴ “我是维吾尔族，我的媳妇儿是汉族，谁说民汉通婚注定不幸福？” (“*Wo shi Weiwu'er zu, wode xifu'r shi Hanzu, shei shuo minhan tonghun zhuding bu xingfu*”) [I’m Uyghur, my wife is Han; who said marriage between an ethnic minority and Han is destined to be unhappy?], October 18, 2020, *Zhihu*, Western Regions Protectorate [西域都护府 - *Xiyu duhufu*], <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/266721678>.

⁶⁵ For an explanation and analysis of the Xinjiang Class system, see Timothy Grose, *Negotiating Inseparability in China: The Xinjiang Class and the Dynamics of Uyghur Identity* (Hong Kong University Press, 2019).

⁶⁶ *Zhihu* (知乎), which was created in 2011 and listed on the NYSE in March 2021, began as a Quora-like question-and-answer site, but then grew in size and scope to become one of the most important social media knowledge platforms in China. According to TechCrunch, “[n]ow it would be more accurate to say that the platform is like a combination of Quora, LinkedIn and Medium’s subscription program.” See: Catherine Shu, “How *Zhihu* has become of China’s biggest hubs for experts,” TechCrunch, September 3, 2019, <https://techcrunch.com/2019/09/03/how-zhihus-become-one-of-chinas-biggest-hubs-for-experts/>.

⁶⁷ “我是维吾尔族，我的媳妇儿是汉族，谁说民汉通婚注定不幸福？” (“*Wo shi Weiwu'er zu, wode xifu'r shi Hanzu, shei shuo minhan tonghun zhuding bu xingfu*”) [I’m Uyghur, my wife is Han; who said marriage between an ethnic minority and Han is destined to be unhappy?], October 18, 2020, *Zhihu*, Western Regions Protectorate [西域都护府 - *Xiyu duhufu*], <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/266721678>.

⁶⁸ The main turning point in the violence in Shaoguan City in Guangdong Province that led to the Ürümchi massacre was reportedly local outrage at reports that Uyghur men had raped Han women. See: James Carter, “July 5, 2009: The riots that changed everything in Xinjiang,” *The*

manager also included links to additional stories about interethnic marriages for “further reading.” He wrote there were so many of these kinds of stories that it was impossible to include them all.⁶⁹

After describing some of the discrimination and challenges he and his Han wife had faced, Yusuf encouraged other mixed couples not to be afraid and noted that he hoped his story might give them the confidence and courage to proceed. He wrote:

“My wife and I never thought we had any differences. We are both Chinese, descendants of Yan and Huang [i.e., the Yellow Emperor], and we both grew up drinking water and food from this land. We have a common mother, called the motherland. The 56 nationalities are the 56 sons and daughters of the motherland, and they have jointly created a glorious history on this land. Today, the ethnic policies of the Party and the government strive to promote ethnic unity, and the exchanges and integration of various ethnic groups are getting closer and closer. The 56 ethnic groups live in harmony in the big family of the Chinese nation [中华民族大家庭 - *Zhonghua minzu da jiating*] and live a beautiful and happy life together.”

Xi Jinping delivered a speech endorsing “firmly casting Zhonghua collective consciousness as the main line” of ethnic policy.

China Project, July 6, 2022, <https://thechinaproject.com/2022/07/06/july-5-2009-the-riots-that-changed-everything-in-xinjiang/>.

⁶⁹ “我是维吾尔族，我的媳妇儿是汉族，谁说民汉通婚注定不幸福？” (“*Wo shi Weiwu'er zu, wode xifu'r shi Hanzu, shei shuo minhan tonghun zhuding bu xingfu*”) [I'm Uyghur, my wife is Han; who said marriage between an ethnic minority and Han is destined to be unhappy?], October 18, 2020, Zhihu, Western Regions Protectorate [西域都护府 - *Xiyu duhufu*], https://zhuankan.zhihu.com/p/26_6721678.

The October 2020 timing of the re-posting of Yusuf’s story is possibly related to the Third Xinjiang Work Forum held in late September 2020, where Xi Jinping delivered a speech endorsing “firmly casting *Zhonghua* collective consciousness as the main line” of ethnic policy.⁷⁰



Photo of Yusuf with his wife. Source: *Zhihu*.

In 2020, a Han state worker posted on *Zhihu* about a discussion he’d had with another government official about ethnic intermarriage. The two officials pointed out how it is uncommon for Han women to marry Uyghur men compared to Han men marrying Uyghur women.⁷¹

“He said that many ethnic girls marry Han people, but Han women rarely marry minority ethnic people. I said that I heard that women of ethnic minorities were under pressure to marry Han men, and relatives and parents did not approve of this sort of thing. He said it was much better now than before. No one will say anything now. So, I hope male compatriots who like ethnic girls will come to

⁷⁰ See James Millward’s discussion of this new focus in: “Notes on Xi Jinping’s speech to the 3rd Xinjiang Central Work Forum, 25-26 September 2020,” *Medium*, September 27, 2020, <https://jimmillward.medium.com/notes-on-xi-jinpings-speech-to-the-3rd-xinjiang-central-work-forum-25-26-september-2020-768b43242b8f>.

⁷¹ “怎么做才能和新疆姑娘结婚?” (“*Zenme zuo cai neng he Xinjiang guniang jiehun?*”) [“What Can I Do to Marry a Xinjiang Girl?”], *Zhihu*, undated (archived on April 20, 2021), <https://archive.fo/bnNex>.

Xinjiang and help build northwestern China as quickly as possible. There are a large number of [Han] migrants here, most are from Gansu and Henan, and many of them have stayed behind to marry wives and have children. My impression is that as long as you come to Xinjiang, you are basically always able to do it [i.e., marry a Uyghur woman].”

E. Accounts from Uyghur Women Abroad

Threats and Coercion

Women in the Uyghur diaspora have shared stories and offered testimony attesting to Uyghur women being coerced into marriage with Han men.⁷² In December 2021, the Uyghur Tribunal convened in London found that “Uyghur women have been coerced into marrying Han men with refusal running them the risk of imprisonment for themselves or their families.”⁷³ The threat of the internment camps for reluctant Uyghur women and their families is ever-present.⁷⁴ The threat of detention combined with the longstanding cultural taboo against exogamy – particularly regarding Uyghur women marrying Han men – suggests that some measure of coercion, however indirect, is likely present in many “new-era” Uyghur-Han interethnic marriages.

As scholar Darren Byler has argued, coercion permeates the contemporary dynamics of intermarriage between Uyghur women and Han men.⁷⁵ Young Uyghur women and/or their

⁷² See Simina Mistreanu, “Uyghur Women Are China’s Victims – and Resistance,” *Foreign Policy*, March 12, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/12/uyghur-women-are-chinas-victims-and-resistance/>.

⁷³ “Uyghur Tribunal Judgment: Summary Form,” 10, para. 33 (k), December 9, 2021, <http://uyghurtribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Uyghur-Tribunal-Judgment-9th-Dec-21.pdf>.

⁷⁴ Darren Byler, “Uyghur love in a time of interethnic marriage,” *SupChina*, August 7, 2019, <https://supchina.com/2019/08/07/uyghur-love-in-a-time-of-interethnic-marriage/>.

⁷⁵ Darren Byler, “Uyghur love in a time of interethnic marriage,” *SupChina*, August 7, 2019, <https://supchina.com/2019/08/07/uyghur-love-in-a-time-of-interethnic-marriage/>; “China cuts Uyghur births with IUDs, abortion, sterilization,” *Associated Press*, June 29, 2020, <https://apnews.com>.

parents face an ever-present threat of punishment if the women decline to marry a Han “suitor.” Moreover, the demographic realities are such that there are simply fewer available young Uyghur men, with so many of them detained or sent to eastern China as laborers.⁷⁶ The surplus of single Han men in the region creates pressures, too.⁷⁷ One of the women Byler interviewed expressed a sense of inevitability that she would eventually end up with a Han man, like so many other Uyghur women.⁷⁸

Another factor Uyghur women identified as adding to the overall threatening environment facing Uyghur women is the “Becoming Family” (结对认亲 - *jie dui renqin*) program.⁷⁹ Under this program, mostly Han cadres stay in Uyghur homes to monitor the conduct of families and promote assimilation.⁸⁰ Many Uyghur men are absent from their households on account of having been detained. As a result, these “relatives” – including men – have sometimes slept in the family bed, with consequences

[com/article/ap-top-news-international-news-weekend-reads-china-health-269b3de1af34e17c1941a514f78d764c](https://www.nytimes.com/article/ap-top-news-international-news-weekend-reads-china-health-269b3de1af34e17c1941a514f78d764c).

⁷⁶ “The Xinjiang Papers—Document No. 2, Speeches by Comrades Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang and Yu Zhengsheng at the Second Central Xinjiang Work Forum (May 28–29, 2014),” Introduction, Authentication and Transcription by Dr. Adrian Zenz, submitted to the Uyghur Tribunal on November 27, 2021, Section IV, Document Contents and Comparison to Public Sources, Comrade Yu Zhengsheng’s concluding speech (May 29, 2014), <https://uyghurtribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Transcript-Introduction-02.pdf>.

⁷⁷ Darren Byler, “Uyghur love in a time of interethnic marriage,” *SupChina*, August 7, 2019, <https://supchina.com/2019/08/07/uyghur-love-in-a-time-of-interethnic-marriage/>; See also Leigh Hartman, “China coerces Uyghur women into unwanted marriages,” *Share America*, September 24, 2019, <https://share.america.gov/china-coerces-uyghur-women-into-unwanted-marriages/>; “China Video Ad Calls for 100 Uighur Women to ‘Urgently’ Marry Han Men,” *Voice of America*, August 22, 2020, https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific_voa-news-china_china-video-ad-calls-100-uighur-women-urgently-marry-han-men/6194806.html.

⁷⁸ Darren Byler, “Uyghur love in a time of interethnic marriage,” *SupChina*, August 7, 2019, <https://supchina.com/2019/08/07/uyghur-love-in-a-time-of-interethnic-marriage/>.

⁷⁹ “Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China,” United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, August 31, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ohchr-assessment-human-rights-concerns-xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region>.

⁸⁰ “The Xinjiang Papers — Document No. 2, Speeches by Comrades Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang and Yu Zhengsheng at the Second Central Xinjiang Work Forum (May 28–29, 2014),” Introduction, Authentication and Transcription by Dr. Adrian Zenz, submitted to the Uyghur Tribunal on November 27, 2021, Section IV, Document Contents and Comparison to Public Sources, Comrade Xi Jinping’s speech (May 28, 2014), <https://uyghurtribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Transcript-Introduction-02.pdf>.

including sexual harassment and rape.⁸¹ Indeed, two Uyghur survivors living outside China, Zumrat Dawut, who was detained in an internment camp, and Qelbinur Sidiq, who was forced to teach in two camps, have said that “Uyghur girls and women have been sexually assaulted in their homes” as a result of the Becoming Family policy.⁸²

A Kazakh woman named Sholpan Amerkhan told Byler that many women, including her own sister-in-law, divorced their detained spouses in part due to sexual violence by state workers under the homestay assessment program.⁸³

“During the regular visits in the homes of ethnic minority women whose husbands had been taken to the ‘re-education’ camps, Han male ‘relatives’ often pressured women to drink liquor and dance with them. She said, ‘The Han men always went to the female’s homes. There were a lot of divorces as a result of this.’ She said she was not sure if the women were raped in these visits, but since this was widely believed to be the case in the village the visits drove many women to feel they had no choice but to leave their husbands. If they severed familial ties and denounced their husbands as religious ‘extremists,’ they were often no longer subjected to mandated state visits by the ‘relatives.’”

The threat of detention combined with the longstanding cultural taboo against exogamy – particularly against Uyghur women marrying Han men – suggests that some measure of coercion, however indirect, is likely present in many “new-era” Uyghur-Han interethnic marriages.

⁸¹ Uyghur Tribunal Summary Judgment, 11 (1); “Male Chinese ‘Relatives’ Assigned to Uyghur Homes Co-sleep with Female ‘Hosts’,” *Radio Free Asia*, October 31, 2019, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/cosleeping-10312019160528.html>; Elise Anderson, “Coerced Kinship: The Pomegranate Flower Plan and the Forced Assimilation of Uyghur Children,” Uyghur Human Rights Project, January 27, 2022, <https://uhrp.org/report/coerced-kinship-the-pomegranate-flower-plan-and-the-forced-assimilation-of-uyghur-children/>; “Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China,” United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, August 31, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ohchr-assessment-human-rights-concerns-xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region>.

⁸² Gulchehra Hoja, “Chinese government targets Uyghur children with ‘pomegranate flower’ policy,” *Radio Free Asia*, October 21, 2021, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/pomegranate-flower-program-10212021092622.html>.

⁸³ Darren Byler, “Negative Eugenics, Sexual Violence and Involuntary Surveillance: A report prepared for the Uyghur Tribunal,” November 2021, <https://uyghurtribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/UT-211214-Darren-Byler.pdf>.

Byler also reports there have been cases where women who divorced their husbands then married the Han men who stayed in their homes under the Becoming Family policy.

A young Uyghur woman in the southern part of the Uyghur Region told Byler that she knew of many women getting married to their Han “relatives” or “comrades.” Another young woman described the pressure she faced from her parents to quickly marry a young available Uyghur man as protection against being forced to marry a Han, despite the young woman’s desire to marry her long-term Uyghur boyfriend who was pursuing a graduate degree in Europe at the time.⁸⁴

Members of the diaspora expressed the fear that Uyghur women would be unable to refuse if representatives of the Party-State were to suggest they marry a Han. A Uyghur woman is simply not in a position to reject a Han man who expresses interest in marrying her.⁸⁵ The involvement of local cadres and Party officials in “arranging” interethnic marriages makes it virtually impossible for Uyghur women to refuse because doing so could easily be construed as being “uncooperative” or even a sign of “extremism” by Party-State officials.

A Uyghur activist and camp survivor who now lives in the US told Voice of America (VOA) that her neighbors in Meket County in Kashgar Prefecture “had to agree to wed their 18-year-old daughter to a Han Chinese out of fear that they could be sent to internment camps.”⁸⁶ Local government officials forced the interethnic marriage after a Han Chinese man approached the young woman in the factory where she worked and took a

⁸⁴ Darren Byler, “Uyghur love in a time of interethnic marriage,” *SupChina*, August 7, 2019, <https://supchina.com/2019/08/07/uyghur-love-in-a-time-of-interethnic-marriage/>.

⁸⁵ “Another Form of Torture for the Uyghurs: Forced to Marry Han Chinese,” Campaign for Uyghurs, April 4, 2020, <https://campaignforuyghurs.org/another-form-of-torture-for-the-uyghurs-forced-to-marry-han-chinese/>; Leigh Hartman, “China coerces Uyghur women into unwanted marriages,” *Share America*, September 24, 2019, <https://share.america.gov/china-coerces-uyghur-women-into-unwanted-marriages/>.

⁸⁶ “China Video Ad Calls for 100 Uighur Women to ‘Urgently’ Marry Han Men,” *Voice of America*, August 22, 2020, https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific_voa-news-china_china-video-ad-calls-100-uighur-women-urgently-marry-han-men/6194806.html.

photograph with her, which the officials claimed was proof that they were dating, and then demanded she agree to the marriage.⁸⁷

A journalist writing in *Foreign Policy* observed that reports “abound of forced marriages between minority women and Han men,” and cited as an example that women “may be offered a deal by local officials” along the lines of an exchange: if they marry a Han man, then one of their male family members would be released from detention.⁸⁸ In its November 2021 report finding that the Chinese government may be committing genocide against the Uyghurs, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum also noted the risks of detention for women who refused to submit to marriage with Han men.⁸⁹

Government Incentives

Uyghur women in the diaspora have also spoken about the role of incentives in interethnic marriages. A former Uyghur female camp detainee told Amnesty International in an interview, “The government encourages people to intermarry and gives privileges [to those who do], like exempting you from re-education and also [providing] some economic benefits... People intermarrying with Han get the same rights as Han... All of this is on television. It is in the newspapers. They promote it.”⁹⁰

The Associated Press reported on an example of a local effort to “lure Han migrants” to the region: an interethnic married couple in an unspecified location in the Uyghur homeland told

“The government encourages people to intermarry and gives privileges [to those who do], like exempting you from re-education and also [providing] some economic benefits [...]”

⁸⁷ “China Video Ad Calls for 100 Uyghur Women to ‘Urgently’ Marry Han Men,” *Voice of America*, August 22, 2020, https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific_voa-news-china_china-video-ad-calls-100-uyghur-women-urgently-marry-han-men/6194806.html.

⁸⁸ Simina Mistreanu, “Uyghur Women are China’s Victims — and Resistance,” *Foreign Policy*, March 12, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/12/uyghur-women-are-chinas-victims-and-resistance/>.

⁸⁹ “‘To Make Us Slowly Disappear’: The Chinese Government’s Assault on the Uyghurs,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, November 9, 2021, <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/reports-and-resources/the-chinese-governments-assault-on-the-uyghurs>.

⁹⁰ “‘Like we were enemies in a war’: China’s Mass Internment, Torture and Persecution of Muslims in Xinjiang,” Amnesty International, ASA 17/4137/2021, June 2021, <https://xinjiang.amnesty.org>.

AP that “they were given money for housing and amenities like a washing machine, refrigerator and TV.”⁹¹

V. Implications

A. Increasing Incentivized Interethnic Marriages

While independently verifying claims of forced marriage has been challenging, research has demonstrated that Uyghur-Han marriages, long rare, are on the rise. In his paper, Darren Byler notes that marriage between Uyghur women and Han men has risen substantially in frequency since 2018.⁹² Byler also observes that there remains much yet to be examined “about the scale of new interethnic marriages between Uyghur women and Han men.”⁹³

Evidence suggests that state-incentivized marriage is continuing to occur in the Uyghur Region. However, the extent of local government initiatives across the region is unclear. Furthermore, although incentives seem aimed at encouraging Han men to move to the region, it is also unclear whether government incentivizing measures are successfully promoting intermarriage. Some evidence suggests that local Party-State officials may be acting as “matchmakers” or facilitators of interethnic marriage to fulfill quotas as a performance target. It is unclear how this impacts their performance evaluations and whether officials also get incentives or bonuses for each Uyghur-Han marriage they facilitate.

While independently verifying claims of forced marriage has been challenging, research has demonstrated that Uyghur-Han marriages, long rare, are on the rise.

⁹¹ “China cuts Uighur births with IUDs, abortion, sterilization,” *Associated Press*, June 29, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/ap-top-news-international-news-weekend-reads-china-health-269b3de1af34e17c1941a514f78d764c>.

⁹² Darren Byler, “Uyghur love in a time of interethnic marriage,” *SupChina*, August 7, 2019, <https://supchina.com/2019/08/07/uyghur-love-in-a-time-of-interethnic-marriage/>.

⁹³ Darren Byler, “Uyghur love in a time of interethnic marriage,” *SupChina*, August 7, 2019, <https://supchina.com/2019/08/07/uyghur-love-in-a-time-of-interethnic-marriage/>.

B. Coercive Nature of Incentivized Intermarriages

Accounts suggest that some if not all of these intermarriages are coercive in nature. Cases of marriage have resulted from homestay surveillance programs where Han government officials have sexually assaulted Uyghur women. Additionally, there have been cases where women have married Han men out of fear of detention. Statements from Uyghur women no longer in the PRC paint a disturbing picture of the prevalence of Uyghur women being coerced into marriages with Han men. Uyghur women are not in a position to refuse or negotiate if a Han man “selects” them, nor if a local government official facilitates a meeting with a prospective Han suitor.

Because so many young Uyghur men are interned in “re-education camps,” forced labor camps or prisons, Uyghur women are also living “profoundly unfree lives marked by various forms of Party-State intrusion,”⁹⁴ including into the most intimate spheres: home, marriage, and family. Uyghur women are in a disempowered position where they have no agency or choice. Refusing to participate in interethnic marriage is not a feasible option and comes with grave consequences.

C. Forced and Incentivized Intermarriage as a Tool of Genocide

The Party-State has repeatedly emphasized the concept of ethnic unity in its promotion of ethnic intermarriages. Since 2018, the Chinese Party-State has vigorously promoted Uyghur-Han intermarriage in East Turkistan in furtherance of “ethnic unity” through articles and reports in state-run media extolling “happy” interethnic couples and their often-challenging journeys. Similarly, reports available on the Chinese Internet highlight financial and other incentives for intermarriage offered by local officials. The Chinese government has claimed that interethnic

Uyghur women are in a disempowered position where they have no agency or choice. Refusing to participate in interethnic marriage is not a feasible option and comes with grave consequences.

⁹⁴ Elise Anderson, “Coerced Kinship: The Pomegranate Flower Plan and the Forced Assimilation of Uyghur Children,” Uyghur Human Rights Project, January 27, 2022, <https://uhrp.org/report/coerced-kinship-the-pomegranate-flower-plan-and-the-forced-assimilation-of-uyghur-children/>.

exchange, including by way of ethnic intermarriages, fosters ethnic unity and social stability among all groups.

However, in conjunction with campaigns against Uyghur language, culture, and religion, the promotion of intermarriage is another tactic of assimilation. The Chinese government's incentivization of interethnic marriage serves its agenda of creating a one Chinese nation-race – the *Zhonghua minzu* – and the “total national security” imperative.⁹⁵ The Party-State, and in particular the XUAR government under the leadership of Chen Quanguo and now Ma Xingrui, has prioritized eliminating all possible risks to governance, stability, investment and development in East Turkistan, not least because it is a critical hub for Xi Jinping's signature foreign policy strategy, the Belt and Road Initiative.⁹⁶

[I]n conjunction with campaigns against Uyghur language, culture, and religion, the promotion of intermarriage is another tactic of assimilation.

Furthermore, the promotion of interethnic marriage as a means of assimilation indicates that this policy is another tool of genocide and crimes against humanity. Since the beginning of the ongoing mass internment campaign in 2017, scholars, journalists, and NGOs have documented a range of policies and practices aimed at destroying the cultural practices and traditions of the Uyghur people. The Party-State has implemented policies and practices that have violated Uyghur human rights and criminalized Uyghur identity. Researchers have found that these amount to crimes against humanity and genocide.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ For analyses of the Chinese Party-State's “total national security” paradigm (also referred to as “comprehensive national security”), see: Matthew D. Johnson, “Safeguarding socialism: The origins, evolution and expansion of China's total security paradigm,” *Sinopsis*, June 11, 2020, <https://sinopsis.cz/en/johnson-safeguarding-socialism/>; and Helena Legarda, “China's new international paradigm: security first,” *MERICs*, June 15, 2021, <https://merics.org/en/chinas-new-international-paradigm-security-first>.

⁹⁶ Henryk Szadziewski, “Meet the New Uyghurs” (op-ed), *The Diplomat*, December 21, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/meet-the-new-uyghurs/>.

⁹⁷ See, for example: “‘Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots’: China's Crimes Against Humanity Targeting Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims,” *Human Rights Watch*, April 19, 2021, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2021/04/china0421_web_2.pdf; Darren Byler, “In the Camps: China's High-Tech Penal Colony,” *Columbia Global Reports*, New York, 2021, 18-19; Emily Feng, “‘Illegal Superstition,’ China Jails Muslims for Practicing Islam, Relatives say,” *NPR*, October 8, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/10/08/764153179/china-has-begun-moving-xinjiang-muslim-detainees-to-formal-prisons-relatives-say>.

Other research based on Chinese government documents and statistics has highlighted Party-State policies aimed at preventing Uyghur births which impacts the community's ability to transmit the Uyghur language, and religious and cultural practices to new generations.⁹⁸ In December 2021, the non-governmental Uyghur Tribunal centered state violence against women in its judgment, finding that the Chinese government's actions in the Uyghur homeland to prevent Uyghur births supported a determination that the government had the requisite "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a protected group" that has a "particular group identity" under the Genocide Convention.⁹⁹

According to leaked official documents, areas with high concentrations of Uyghurs, particularly in the south of the Uyghur Region, present an unacceptable "population security" (人口安全 - *renkou anquan*) risk to the Chinese government.¹⁰⁰ In 2018, the Han population share of the four Uyghur-majority prefectures in southern East Turkistan (i.e., Aksu, Kashgar, Kizilsu, and Hotan) was only 8.4%.¹⁰¹ In order to "optimize" (优化

⁹⁸ See Adrian Zenz, "Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control: The CCP's Campaign to Suppress Uyghur Birthrates in Xinjiang," Jamestown Foundation, June 2020 (updated March 17, 2021), <https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Zenz-Internment-Sterilizations-and-IUDs-REVISED-March-17-2021.pdf?x18135>.

⁹⁹ Uyghur Tribunal, "Judgment: Summary Form," December 9, 2021, 3, 40-41, paras. 10, 148-49, <http://uyghurtribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Uyghur-Tribunal-Judgment-9th-Dec-21.pdf>. The Uyghurs are a "protected group," as defined by the 1948 Genocide Convention; see discussion at para. 148 (b). See also, "'To Make Us Slowly Disappear': The Chinese Government's Assault on the Uyghurs," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, November 9, 2021, 39, <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/reports-and-resources/the-chinese-governments-assault-on-the-uyghurs>.

¹⁰⁰ Adrian Zenz, "'End the dominance of the Uyghur ethnic group': an analysis of Beijing's population optimization strategy in southern Xinjiang," *Central Asian Survey*, 40:3, 219-312, 292, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02634937.2021.1946483>. On "population security," see 296-7, and discussion of Chinese scholars' research premised on the belief that ethnic populations are a threat to population security and national security, while Han are viewed as a benefit. See also: Sean R. Roberts, *The War on the Uyghurs: China's Internal Campaign against a Muslim Minority*, Princeton University Press, 2020, 25 (noting the "Uyghur heartland of the southern Tarim Basin" and observing that in 1980, despite large influxes of Han to the Uyghur Region, the heartland "remained overwhelmingly Uyghur in population, and few Uyghurs welcomed either assimilation into a Han dominated state culture or education in the Chinese language," and chapters 1 and 2 *passim*.)

¹⁰¹ Adrian Zenz, "'End the dominance of the Uyghur Ethnic Group': An Analysis of Beijing's Population Optimization Strategy in Southern Xinjiang," *Central Asian Survey*, June 8, 2021, 303, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3862512. Zenz notes that Bayingol

- *youhua*) the population structure in the Tarim Basin region and correct the “imbalance” between Han and Uyghurs, the Party-State adopted increasingly draconian measures to forcibly restrict Uyghur births.¹⁰² In addition, the Party-State encouraged large-scale Han in-migration and the movement of young ethnic minority surplus laborers out of the region to eastern China.¹⁰³

Population optimization and birth prevention policies in conjunction with evidence that indicate Uyghur-Han intermarriage may be forced, coerced, or incentivized suggest an alarming finding. Incentivized and forced marriage is yet another policy that furthers the government’s ongoing genocide in the Uyghur Region. Incentivized and forced marriages together with sexual assault, forced sterilization, forced abortions, family separation, mass detention, and forced labor meet the definition of genocide.¹⁰⁴ Forced interethnic marriages contribute to the destruction of an ethnic group; additionally, forced interethnic marriages can also fall under the definition of cultural genocide as they are intended to destroy Uyghur culture, religion, and identity. Examining forced marriages and other gender-based crimes in the context of the broader crimes against humanity and genocide is vital to understanding government policies and identifying solutions for responses and prevention.¹⁰⁵

Forced marriages violate international human rights laws including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

Incentivized and forced marriage is yet another policy that furthers the government’s ongoing genocide in the Uyghur Region.

Prefecture is “frequently considered part of southern Xinjiang” (294), but he does not include it here. In 2018, ethnic groups in the prefecture comprised 46.7% of the total population, thus rendering Bayingol a Han-majority prefecture.

¹⁰² Adrian Zenz, “End the dominance of the Uyghur Ethnic Group’: An Analysis of Beijing’s Population Optimization Strategy in Southern Xinjiang,” *Central Asian Survey*, June 8, 2021, 293-4, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3862512.

¹⁰³ Adrian Zenz, “End the dominance of the Uyghur Ethnic Group’: An Analysis of Beijing’s Population Optimization Strategy in Southern Xinjiang,” *Central Asian Survey*, June 8, 2021, 298, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3862512.

¹⁰⁴ United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, “Genocide” definition, undated, <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>.

¹⁰⁵ Erin Farrell Rosenberg, “Gender and Genocide in the 21st Century: How Understanding Gender can Improve Genocide Prevention and Response,” Newline Institute for Strategy and Policy, November 30, 2021, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/gender/gender-and-genocide-in-the-21st-century-how-understanding-gender-can-improve-genocide-prevention-and-response/>.

Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Trafficking Protocol.¹⁰⁶ Forced marriages are linked to forms of modern slavery and can amount to human trafficking in cases involving force, fraud, or coercion and involuntary servitude.¹⁰⁷ People who are subjected to forced marriages often experience forms of exploitation, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization, forced labor, and restricted physical movement.¹⁰⁸ Forced interethnic marriages also fall under crimes against humanity along with other ongoing gross human rights violations, including sexual violence, forced pregnancy, and forced sterilization.¹⁰⁹

Forced marriages are linked to forms of modern slavery and can amount to human trafficking in cases involving force, fraud, or coercion and involuntary servitude.

VI. Recommendations

- Analysis of gender-based violence against Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples should include state-sponsored forced and incentivized marriage;
- Civil society, governments, and multilateral bodies should raise state-sponsored forced marriages and sexual violence faced by Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples as a core element of ongoing atrocity crimes;

¹⁰⁶ United Nations Office of the High Commission for Human Rights, “Child and forced marriage, including in humanitarian settings” definition, undated, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/child-and-forced-marriage-including-humanitarian-settings>. “Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage,” International Labour Organization (ILO), Walk Free, and International Organization for Migration (IOM), September 2022, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_854733.pdf.

¹⁰⁷ Helen McCabe and Lauren Eglén, “‘I bought you. You are my wife’: Modern Slavery and Forced Marriage,” *Journal of Human Trafficking*, July 24, 2022, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23322705.2022.2096366>.

¹⁰⁸ Helen McCabe and Lauren Eglén, “‘I bought you. You are my wife’: Modern Slavery and Forced Marriage,” *Journal of Human Trafficking*, July 24, 2022, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23322705.2022.2096366>.

¹⁰⁹ United Nations Office of the High Commission for Human Rights, “Child and forced marriage, including in humanitarian settings” definition, undated, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/child-and-forced-marriage-including-humanitarian-settings>; UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, “Crimes Against Humanity” definition, undated, <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/crimes-against-humanity.shtml>.

- Women’s rights advocacy campaigns should call for accountability and an end to forced and incentivized marriages suffered by Uyghur and other Turkic women;
- The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) should thoroughly examine evidence of gender-based crimes in its 2023 country review of China, and call on the Chinese government to implement measures to effectively end and prevent state-sponsored forced marriages and sexual violence suffered by Uyghur and other Turkic women.



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