



Breaking the Roots: China's Use of

Boarding Schools

as a Tool of Genocide Against
Uyghur Muslims



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Introduction

In the vast and resource-rich region of East Turkistan, referred to by the Chinese authorities as the “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region”, an insidious form of genocide is unfolding under the guise of “modernization and re-education”. A quieter but equally destructive tactic has emerged in the Uyghur Region, where, according to some sources, more than two million Uyghur Muslims are held in massive concentration camps: The systematic separation of Uyghur children from their families and forced assimilation in state-run boarding schools.

Behind closed gates and surveillance cameras, these institutions function not only as schools but also as centers of ideological re-programming. Here, children as young as four are forbidden to speak their mother tongue, Uyghur, discouraged or punished for practicing Islam, and taught to worship the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as the ultimate authority. The boarding school system in the Uyghur region is not an educational reform but a weapon designed to sever family ties, erase cultural identity, and instill in future generations loyalty to a state that is actively eradicating the existence of their people.

The United Nations defines genocide not only as acts of killing but also as “the forcible transfer of children of one group to another group” and measures aimed at “the total or partial destruction of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group” (1). The CCP’s boarding school campaign, which forcibly separated hundreds of thousands of Uyghur children from their families, language, religion

and community, meets the legal criteria of cultural genocide and may constitute genocide under international law.

This report provides an in-depth investigation into how the Chinese government uses boarding schools as a state-sponsored tool of erasure. Through analysis of recent data, documented case studies, first-hand testimonies, academic research, and state policy, we will examine the scale, structure, and intent behind these institutions. We will also explore the psychological and cultural impact on Uyghur children and families, assess the global response (or lack of response thereof), and provide a legal framework to consider the CCP's actions as genocide.

It is time to call this system what it is: a deliberate and well-coordinated mechanism of cultural destruction, and thus the world must come to terms with its consequences.

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1. Historical Background -

The Roots of Assimilation of the Uyghurs



Eid Kah Mosque, Urumqi

The struggle for identity, autonomy, and survival in the Uyghur region did not begin with the recent emergence of boarding schools. It is rooted in a long and painful history of colonization, forced assimilation, and cultural oppression. To fully understand the scope and purpose of China's current boarding school system, it is necessary to trace the ideological foundations and historical trajectory of Chinese state policy in the region.

1.1 Before Communist Rule

East Turkistan, known to Uyghurs as their ancestral homeland, has long existed as a separate region with its own cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious identity. The majority of the population historically consisted of Turkic-speaking, Sunni Muslim communities - most notably the Uyghurs, along with Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and other minority groups. The region has maintained various degrees of autonomy

and independence, with short-lived but symbolically important independent republics such as the First (1933-34) and Second (1944-49) East Turkistan Republics (2).

The Chinese Communist occupation of East Turkistan in 1949, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, marked the beginning of a comprehensive restructuring of the region's political and cultural landscape. In 1955, the CCP renamed the region the "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region" - a name that belied the increasingly centralized and Han-dominated control over the region (3).

1.2 Early Assimilation Policies (1950s-1970s)

From the mid 1950s until the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), the CCP began suppressing Uyghurs' religious and cultural expression as part of its national campaign against the "Four Olds" - ancient traditions, culture, habits, and ideas. Thousands of mosques, shrines, and religious schools were closed or destroyed. Religious leaders have been imprisoned or killed. The Uyghur language was marginalized in public education, and Islamic education

was replaced by Communist ideology (4).

During this time, Uyghur children were increasingly directed to public schools where Mandarin Chinese was prioritized, and loyalty to Mao was instilled through compulsory political education. However, while these early efforts were vigorous, they lacked the extensive infrastructure and surveillance systems that define today's repression.



*Chinese soldiers in Urumqi street in 2009 -
Photo credit: Andrew An (Flickr)*

1.3 China Is Exploiting the ‘Anti-terror’ Narrative to Intensify its Crackdown

The attack of September 11, 2001, provided the CCP with a strategic opening. By framing normal Uyghur muslims as “Islamic extremists”, the Chinese government began to legitimize its extensive security crackdown of Uyghurs under the banner of counterterrorism. Uyghurs’ religious gatherings, religious ceremonies, traditional dress, and even beards were criminalized as signs of “radicalization” (5).

This shift set the stage for the current wave of mass incarceration and separation of children, with the government branding these efforts as part of its “de-radicalization” program. Importantly, the boarding school system did not emerge in isolation but in tandem with these so-called “anti-extremism campaigns”.

1.4 The 2014 “Strike Hard” Campaign and the Birth of the Modern Boarding School System

The real turning point came in 2014, when Xi Jinping launched the “Strike Hard” campaign. Leaked internal Chinese government documents, later obtained by The New York Times, revealed that Xi called for ‘absolutely no mercy’ toward the mass detention of Uyghurs under the pretext of combating separatism and religious extremism in the region. (6).

This campaign led to the rapid expansion of concentration camps, the establishment of a high-tech surveillance regime, and, most importantly, the acceleration of boarding school construction. The aim was not only to imprison Uyghur and Khazakh popolation but also to “break the lineage, break the roots, break the connections and break the origins” of Uyghur identity - a quote found in leaked CCP documents describing the goals of the child separation policies (7).



Uyghur children in Chinese school – Photo Credit UHRH

1.5 A Model of Genocide

From Tibet to Inner Mongolia, the CCP has long employed assimilationist tactics to suppress other ethnic nationalities. In the Uyghur region, however, these strategies have reached a level of intensity and scale that many international jurists now classify also as cultural genocide, besides actual genocide. The boarding school model, which we will examine in detail in the following sections, is the mainstay of this effort, designed not only to suppress the current generation but also to erase the future of an entire people.

2. Expansion of Boarding Schools and the Scale of Disengagement

The transformation of the Uyghur homeland into one of the most tightly controlled and intensely surveilled regions in the world has been accompanied by a massive infrastructure project - the aggressive expansion of state-run boarding schools specifically designed to absorb Uyghur children. Far from being voluntary or supportive in nature, these institutions are built on coercion, surveillance, and a single overriding goal: assimilation.

2.1 The Construction Surge: Infrastructure for Assimilation

Following the 2014 “Strike Hard” campaign, the Chinese government began to invest heavily in the construction of boarding schools in the Uyghur Region. According to research conducted by German academic Adrian Zenz, the number of boarding school facilities in the region more than quadrupled between 2016 to 2018. These schools often feature high fences, surveillance cameras, and security checkpoints and resemble prisons more than educational campuses. Based on the Zenz reports, in September 2016, just one month after assuming office as the Chinese Communist Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Chen Quanguo initiated a sweeping acceleration of preschool education in the region’s southern, predominantly Uyghur, rural areas. Originally, the region’s development plan called for 80% enrollment of children aged 4–6 in preschools by 2020. However, Chen fast-tracked this initiative, launching an ambitious campaign in early 2017 to achieve universal three-year preschool education by the fall of the same year—far ahead of schedule. (8).

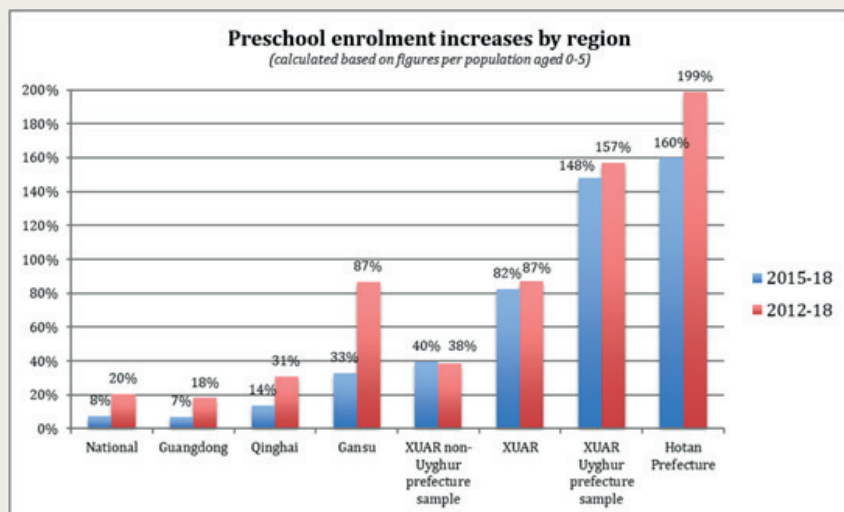


Figure 2: Sources are the socio-economic development reports of each region.

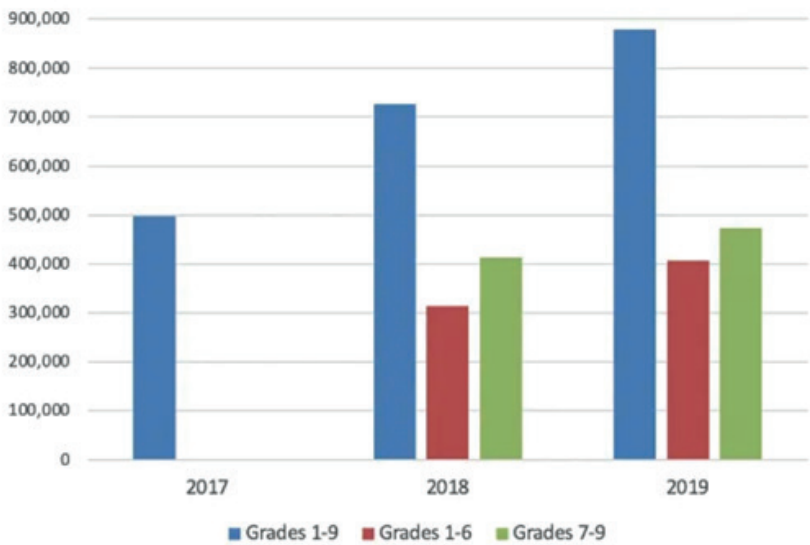
Source: Adrian Zenz - Journal of Political Risk

A concrete example of this policy shift is reflected in Kashgar Prefecture. The local five-year development plan, drafted in January 2016, targeted 80% enrollment for children aged 4–6 by 2020 and planned for the construction and expansion of 490 preschool facilities. Under Chen’s leadership, this plan was radically revised. By autumn 2017, Kashgar had built 1,152 preschools—more than double the original target. Across the region, construction of “bilingual” preschools—primarily focused on Mandarin Chinese instruction—gained rapid momentum. By late February 2017, Xinjiang authorities had launched the development of 4,387 such facilities, intending to enroll approximately 562,900 children. In Hotan Prefecture, authorities mandated that all preschool construction be completed by July 25, well ahead of the September school year. The scale of this campaign was supported by substantial financial backing, including 8 billion RMB in state bank loans allocated specifically for minority regions. Kashgar alone received 767.6 million RMB in central government subsidies. (9)

2.2 Separated on a Scale: How Many Children Affected?

According to research by Adrian Zenz, by 2019 an estimated 880,500 children—many with parents absent for a range of reasons—were living in boarding facilities across Xinjiang. This marked a staggering 76% increase since 2017, coinciding with the rapid expansion of China’s internment system.

While global attention has largely focused on mass detentions of adults, the devastating impact on children and family structures remains one of the least examined aspects of Beijing’s repressive policies. Firsthand accounts from Uyghur exiles and researchers point to what experts identify as a systematic campaign to dismantle families through forced separation.



Based on extrapolated data from Yarkand County, The Economist estimates that up to 250,000 Uyghur children under the age of 15 may have lost one or both parents to internment.



Hotan Sunshine Kindergarten, seen through a wire fence – Photo Credit, BBC

Further evidence uncovered and analyzed by Zenz includes internal government records documenting children held in orphanages. One list identified 85 “double hardship” children under the age of 10—so named because both parents were either imprisoned or confined in internment camps. Among them was a one-year-old living in a Yarkand orphanage. In another case, a three-year-old boy and a seven-year-old girl were institutionalized after both parents were taken to so-called “re-education” centers.

In recent years, government investment in education across Xinjiang has surpassed even its spending on security—highlighting how schools have become a central tool in the state’s effort to eliminate the potential for dissent. These institutions are not typical learning environments: they are heavily fortified, outfitted with multi-layered intrusion detection systems, constant surveillance, electric fencing, and automated patrol technologies. Schools, once spaces for growth and learning, now serve as instruments of control. (10)

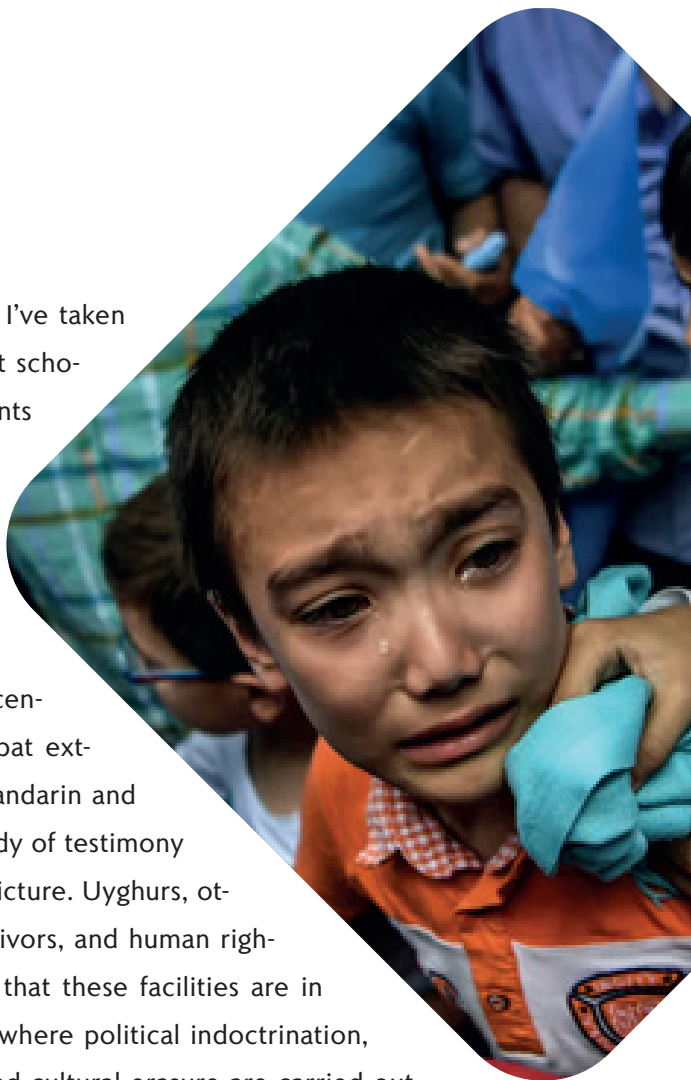


2.3 A Systematic and Centralized Campaign

Unlike rural boarding schools in other developing countries, where underfunded schools can result in partial boarding programs, boarding schools in the Uyghur region are part of a coherent and well-funded centralized policy. According to internal government tenders uncovered by researchers at most of the facilities include dormitories, isolation rooms, surveillance control rooms, and political indoctrination classrooms.

The expansion of boarding schools in Xinjiang has not slowed. According to an investigation by Radio Free Asia, at least six such facilities are currently operating in Yarkand County (Kashgar Prefecture), Kuchar Township (Aksu Prefecture), and Keriye County (Hotan Prefecture). A police officer in Yarkand County disclosed that she had been assigned to escort children—whose parents had been arrested—to schools in six different locations. “The most recent one I brought a child to was in Arslanbagh,” she told Radio Free Asia. “The facility was an existing school building, and it appeared to be used as a dormitory.” She added that the child, originally from Arslanbagh, had been relocated to

Lenger village. “So far, I’ve taken orphans to six different schools. All of their parents have been detained,” she said. While Chinese authorities claim these re-education centers are “vocational training centers” intended to combat extremism by teaching Mandarin and job skills, a growing body of testimony paints a much darker picture. Uyghurs, other Turkic Muslim survivors, and human rights organizations assert that these facilities are in fact detention camps—where political indoctrination, psychological abuse, and cultural erasure are carried out under the guise of education. (11).



Protesters in Turkey denounce China’s treatment of Uyghur Muslims, Photo Credit - AFP



2.4 Official Justifications: “Stability” and “Integration”

Chinese state media portray these schools as a progressive means to alleviate poverty, improve access to education, and integrate Uyghur children into the “national family”. In reality, the curriculum in these schools replaces Uyghur cultural and religious identity with a version of “Han-centered patriotism” designed to shift children’s loyalties away from their families and toward the CCP.

Videos surfacing from state-run orphanages in Xinjiang reveal a chilling transformation: Uyghur children, once fluent in their native language, are now speaking exclusively in Mandarin. In some clips, children are seen condemning their own parents—calling them “bad people.” Several Uyghur refugees, forced to flee China and separated from their families, have identified their children in these videos shared on social media. Heartbroken, they report that their sons and daughters are being indoctrinated to see them as “enemies” of the Chinese state. (12).

3. Psychological and Cultural Consequences - Breaking the Roots of Uyghur Identity



The trauma of the boarding school system in the Uyghur region is far deeper than numbers and politics can fully describe. At its core, the system is designed to sever the most fundamental bonds in Uyghur society - the ties between parent and child, individual and community, and past and future. The psychological and cultural consequences of such forced separation and indoctrination are profound, long-lasting, and, in many cases, irreversible.

3.1 The Trauma of Separation

The act of forcibly separating children from their families - particularly during formative developmental stages - has well-documented psychological harms. Studies of similar separation practices in indigenous communities in North America and Australia have shown increased rates of depression, anxiety, identity confusion, and long-term emotional detachment (13). Uyghur children in Chinese boarding schools experience similar effects, exacerbated by language loss and

the criminalization of their heritage. These children are often told that their parents are criminals, extremists, or enemies of the state. This manipulation breaks trust and instills a sense of shame towards their origins.

3.2 Language Erasure and Cultural Amnesia

The elimination of the Uyghur language is a central feature of the boarding school curriculum. Mandarin Chinese is the only language of instruction, and students are penalized for speaking Uyghur, even in casual conversation with their peers (14).

Language is much more than a means of communication; it is the carrier of history, religion, oral storytelling, and identity. When a child is deprived of his or her mother tongue, he or she loses his or her connection not only to his or her family but also to his or her cultural memory. The goal of the Chinese state is clear: The goal is to create a generation of assimilated Uyghurs who speak, think, and identify like Han Chinese citizens—and who will no longer be able to communicate with their own grandparents or understand traditional Uyghur poetry, prayers, or proverbs.



*Uyghur boy at school in Yutian
County – Photo Credit, Xinhua*

3.3 Crushing faith to enforce allegiance to Communist doctrine

Islam, the backbone of Uyghurs' spiritual and social life, is framed in boarding schools as dangerous and backward. Religious practices such as praying, fasting during Ramadan, and even saying "Assalamu Alaikum" are discouraged or banned altogether. Children are told to report family members who practice Islam, creating an atmosphere of suspicion and internalized guilt.

China justifies these forced detentions and relocations of both Uyghur children and parents by declaring that religious belief is an "illness to be cured." Since this punishment has been directly and openly linked to the beliefs of a child's parents, this action is a clear violation of the CRC. (15).

By severing a child's connection to Islam, the CCP seeks to erase not only the faith of the Uyghur people but also the moral, ethical, and social frameworks that have defined their society for centuries.



3.4 Indoctrination and the Reconstruction of Identity

In these schools, children are subjected to daily political education sessions, singing “red songs” praising Xi Jinping and participating in patriotic ceremonies. Children are taught that the Chinese Communist Party is their “real family”, a phrase repeated in textbooks, murals, and school anthems.

According to internal training manuals for school staff, the aim is to “reshape the child’s ideology” and instill in them a “correct national consciousness” - a euphemism for loyalty to Han culture and the Chinese state.

This indoctrination process is not a peripheral element of their education but its foundation. By the time most of these children reach adolescence, they are emotionally alienated from their families, linguistically cut off from their roots, and ideologically agents of the system that oppresses their people.



4. Curriculum, Indoctrination, and Political Loyalty - Reprogramming Uyghur Children

Within the walls of boarding schools in the Uyghur region, children are subjected to more than basic education, they are immersed in an environment that systematically erases their ethnic and religious identity and instills an unwavering loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The curriculum is not only a tool of assimilation but also a psychological weapon used to restructure belief systems, moral frameworks, and personal identity.

4.1 Imposing Mandarin Supremacy While Eradicating Ethnic Languages

Central to this indoctrination process is the language policy of Putonghua (Standard Mandarin) supremacy. Although China officially recognizes Uyghur as a “minority language”, its use is banned in almost all boarding school settings. Teachers are instructed to punish students for speaking Uyghur, even during play or rest times (16).

For the Chinese state, boarding schools serve as an ideal mechanism for the long-term

Primary school students in Urumqi, are reading children's rhymes in Chinese. Photo Credit – Bitter Winter



In this photo, shot through a car window, a child and a woman wait outside a school entrance with multiple layers of barbed wire and barricades in Peyzawat. Photo Credit, AP



cultural reprogramming of minority communities. Within these tightly controlled institutions, the state establishes the rules—and enforces strict discipline on those who fail to comply. Children are removed from their cultural roots and placed in environments where state ideology can be instilled from an early age. (17)

A March 2019 report by Bitter Winter exposed the methods of indoctrination and forced assimilation employed in Xinjiang's public schools. One teacher, Mr. Liu, explained: "Uyghur teachers are required to speak Mandarin the moment they enter any public space," he said. "They must teach in Mandarin, even if their pronunciation is poor. All communication between teachers and students must be in Mandarin." According to Liu, school administrators regularly inspect classrooms, and the consequences for using the Uyghur language are severe: "If a student answers a question in Uyghur, the teacher's salary is docked." (18)

This policy reflects a broader effort to erase linguistic and cultural identity through systematic control of education. This linguistic cleansing is supported by state policy. In 2017, Xinjiang's education bureau mandated that all public school instruction be conducted in Mandarin, citing the goal of national unity. But the real aim is to undermine the intergenerational transmission of Uyghur culture - a calculated move that isolates children from their parents, elders, and community traditions.

4.2 Political Re-education in the Classroom

The curriculum in these boarding schools places extraordinary emphasis on political ideology. Children are taught songs such as “No New China without the Communist Party” and participate in daily flag-raising ceremonies and collective pledges of allegiance to the Party.

Textbooks reinforce narratives of Han Chinese superiority and “civilization” and frame Uyghur traditions as outdated or problematic. Important historical events, such as the violent suppression of the 2009 Urumqi massacre, are either distorted or omitted altogether.

A former teacher who fled China and shared her testimony with Amnesty International recalled that children were questioned daily about Party slogans and punished for not remembering them. “They memorized Xi Jinping’s speeches without being able to read stories about their own people,” she said.

4.3 “Gratitude Training” and Changing Parents

The CCP’s “gratitude education” campaign is the cornerstone of its ideological education. Children are taught that everything they have - security, food, education - is thanks to the benevolence of the Party, not their parents or society. Posters in school corridors display slogans such as “Love the Party like you love your mother” and “The Party is the sun that illuminates your life”.

The calculated reframing of loyalty redirects emotional attachment away from the family and towards the state. For Uyghur children who have lost their parents in the camps or the surveillance state, boarding school becomes not only a place of residence but also a new source of identity - an identity entirely regulated by the state.



The entrance to the No. 4 High School with a sign that reads “Entering school grounds, please speak Mandarin,” left, in Peyzawat, © 2018 Photo Credit – HRW - AP Photo/Ng Han Guan

4.4 Surveillance and Thought Control

These Boarding schools are among the most intensively monitored schools in the world. Classrooms are monitored by high-definition CCTV, and every child's behavior is recorded by a network of staff trained in psychological observation (17). Children are encouraged to report each other and even their own families, creating an environment of mistrust and internalized oppression.

Teachers are trained to identify “extremist tendencies”, including signs such as silence, lack of enthusiasm for patriotic songs, or interest in Uyghur literature. Those who show no enthusiasm for party slogans or the use of Mandarin are labeled as “ideologically weak” and are often subjected to “corrective education”, sometimes including solitary confinement or restricted food access.

4.5 Militarization of Childhood

In many of these schools, students wear military-style uniforms and receive “disciplinary training” modeled on People's Liberation Army (PLA) exercises. Exercises include marching in formation, chanting Party slogans, and “combat readiness” drills to build loyalty and cohesion (19).

This blending of education and militarization not only prepares students to serve the Chinese state but also removes their attachment to their own ethnic or religious identity. It encourages blind obedience, not intellectual development, and turns them into docile subjects of an authoritarian regime.

5. Case Studies - Testimonies of Broken Families

Statistics and policies can only mean so much. To truly understand the trauma of the Chinese Communist Party's boarding school system in East Turkistan, one must listen to the voices of those who lived it. Their stories of separation, loss, forced silence, and despair reveal the deeply personal cost of a campaign aimed not just at assimilation but at destroying the soul of a people.

5.1 Story of Kuchar Brothers

Aysu and Lütfullah Kuchar, two Uyghur siblings, were forcibly taken from their family and held in a state-run boarding school for nearly twenty months. During their confinement, they endured both physical and emotional abuse. Their heads were shaved, they were routinely beaten, and as punishment, they were locked in dark rooms. When they were finally released, they had lost their ability to speak Uyghur—their native language.



“That was the heaviest moment of my life,” their father said. “Standing before my own children, hearing them speak only Chinese, I felt like I had died inside.” By the time Aysu and Lütfullah were reunited with their family in Türkiye in December 2019, they were severely malnourished and deeply traumatized—shadows of the children they once were. (20)

Lütfullah Kuçar, 8, waits at home for his sister, Aysu Kuçar, to return from school, in Istanbul - NPR

*A Uyghur woman
holds her baby in a
night market in Hotan,
in China's western Xin-
jiang region. Photo Credit
– Radio Liberty - AFP*



5.2 The kidnapping the Mihriban Kader's Kids

In 2016, Mihriban Kader and Ablikim Memtinin fled Xinjiang for Italy after facing relentless police harassment and pressure to surrender their passports. Fearing for their safety, they made the agonizing decision to leave their four children in the temporary care of their grandparents. But soon after, their worst fears began to unfold—the children's grandmother was sent to an internment camp, and the grandfather was taken in for police interrogation. "Our other relatives were too afraid to help," Mihriban told Amnesty International. "After what happened to my parents, they feared they'd be sent to the camps too." The couple's three youngest children were eventually placed in an "orphan camp"—one of many facilities across Xinjiang designed to house and indoctrinate children whose parents had been detained or imprisoned. Their eldest child was sent to a boarding school under constant surveillance. (21)

From Italy, Mihriban and Ablikim were unable to communicate with their children. But in November 2019, they finally received permission from the Italian government to bring their children to safety. The four siblings—aged between 12 and 16—set out on their own, traveling across China to reach the Italian consulate in Shanghai. Before they could reach it, however, Chinese police intercepted them. They were forcibly returned to the orphanage and boarding school. "Now my children are in the hands of the Chinese government, and I don't know if I'll ever see them again," Mihriban said. "What hurts the most is knowing that, to them, it's as if we no longer exist—as if we've died and they've become orphans." (22)

5.3 There is no contact at all.

In a large hall in Istanbul, dozens of Uyghur parents stand in line, waiting to share their stories. Many clutch faded photographs of their missing children—children who vanished back home in Uyghur region. “There is no contact at all,” said a mother to a BBC reporter, her voice trembling as she spoke about her three young daughters, with whom she had lost all communication.

“I don’t know who’s taking care of them,” one mother says, holding up a picture of her three daughters. “There’s been no word. No contact. Nothing.” Another mother wipes away tears as she shows a photograph of her three sons and a daughter. “I heard they’ve been taken to an orphanage,” she whispers. “Thousands of innocent children are being torn from their parents,” another mother says, her voice filled with anguish. “We keep giving our testimonies over and over. Why does the world remain silent, even after hearing the truth?”

Through 60 separate interviews, a heartbreaking picture emerges: wave after wave of grief-stricken testimonies from parents and relatives who recount the disappearance of more than 100 children. Each story is a plea—for recognition, for justice, and for the world to finally listen. (23)

5.4 UN Expert’s warning

UN experts have voiced deep concern over the rapid expansion of state-run boarding schools in Xinjiang, where Uyghur and other Muslim minority children are being forcibly separated from their families and placed in institutions that provide education almost exclusively in Mandarin, with little or no instruction in their mother tongue.

These children—many of whom are labeled “orphans” due to the detention or exile of their parents—are being raised in highly controlled environments with limited or no contact with their families or communities. Experts warn that this system erodes children’s ties to their cultural, linguistic, and religious identities, amounting to forced assimilation.

Information also indicates that teachers may be punished for using the Uyghur language, and local schools offering minority-language education have been shut down. The scale and systemic nature of these practices, the experts say, represent grave violations of human rights. (24)



The Hotan Kindness Kindergarten, like many others, is a high security facility – Photo Credit BBC

6. What does international law say?

International law is based on a solemn promise: The world will never again allow a people to be destroyed by calculated acts of cruelty. The 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines genocide not only as the physical destruction of a people but also as acts intended to erase their identity, descent, and future. China's boarding school campaign against Uyghurs in the Uyghur Region - when viewed through the lens of international legal standards - clearly and alarmingly conforms to this definition.

6.1 Understanding Genocide in International Law

Article II of the Genocide Convention defines genocide as follows:

“...any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy in whole or in part a national, ethnic, racial or religious group:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Intentionally inflicting living conditions that lead to the total or partial physical destruction of the group;
- (d) Implementing measures to prevent births within the group;
- (e) **Forcibly transferring the children of one group to another group.**” (25)

China’s boarding school system clearly falls under subparagraph (e) and, depending on the evidence, may also meet subparagraphs (b) and (c).



Missing Uyghur Children photos – Photo Credit, BBC

6.2 Forced Transfer of Children

This is perhaps the clearest and most obvious match. According to numerous academic studies, satellite surveys, and leaked government documents, the Chinese state has forcibly separated **hundreds of thousands** of Uyghur children from their families (26). These children are placed in state-run facilities where they are denied the right to prac-

*Photo Credit –
Associated Press*



tise their religion,
speak their language,
or access their cultural
heritage.

Unlike voluntary state childcare in
other countries, these removals often take
place without parental consent and under duress. In many cases,
parents are in detention camps or prisons and have no legal means to regain custody.

As international law expert Beth Van Schaack noted in her analysis for Just Security,
“The systematic and coercive nature of this transfer and the deliberate reprogramming
of the children’s identities constitute a textbook case of genocidal practice under Ar-
ticle II(e)” (27).

6.3 Intention to Destroy Uyghur Identity

Genocide is not just physical extermination. It is the destruction of a group’s essence,
its continuity. The goal of China’s boarding school system is not just integration but the
destruction of Uyghur identity. Evidence of this intention can be found in leaked Party
documents that make statements such as the following:

- “Break their bloodline”
- “Cut the roots”
- “Breaking ties with religion and family” (28)

These statements, coupled with indoctrination curricula and state propaganda, reveal
a clear desire to eliminate the Uyghur people as a distinct group - culturally, spiritually
and psychologically.

6.4 Psychological Damage and Cultural Destruction



Article (b) of the Genocide Convention - causing serious bodily or mental harm - is also applicable. Psychological studies of children forcibly separated from their parents (such as the Canadian Residential School system or the Stolen Generations in Australia) show widespread trauma, loss of identity, and lifelong mental health problems (29). Uyghur children subjected to surveillance, ideological repression, and cultural erasure suffer similar harms.

Moreover, as Genocide Watch has noted, the destruction of Uyghur mosques, books, cemeteries, and names - in parallel with the reprogramming of children - amounts to cultural genocide, a term used in the 2021 independent Uyghur Tribunal in London (30).

6.5 Uyghur Tribunal Verdict: Genocide

In December 2021, the independent Uyghur Tribunal, chaired by Sir Geoffrey Nice QC (who also presided over the trial of Slobodan Milošević), delivered its final judgment: The CCP is guilty of genocide against Uyghurs, including the systematic elimination and indoctrination of children (31).

The Court concluded that "the conditions imposed on Uyghur children in boarding

schools, including the denial of their mother tongue, faith and contact with their families, are aimed at destroying Uyghur identities and creating a generation devoid of heritage".



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi attended OIC gathering in Islamabad, Pakistan, March 2022 – Photo Credit AP

6.6 Global Legal Inaction and the Silence of the Muslim World

Despite mounting evidence and expert conclusions, no international court has formally tried China for genocide. The jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) has limitations as China has not signed the Rome Statute. Attempts to take the case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) have stalled due to geopolitical pressures.

Perhaps most painful **is that the vast majority of Muslim-majority countries remain silent** or supportive of China - a political calculation influenced by China's Belt and Road Initiative, debt diplomacy, and strategic coercion.

7. Global Complicity and the Politics of Silence

The scale of China's repression in the Uyghur region - from mass concentration camps to the systematic segregation of children - is no longer a secret. Countless studies, satellite analyses, leaked documents, and survivor testimonies have made this one of the best-documented human rights atrocities of the 21st century. **Despite this, the global response has been characterized by strategic silence, not decisive action.**

Behind this silence lies a web of economic dependency, political intimidation, and selective morality that allows the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to pursue its genocidal policies without meaningful international consequences.



7.1 The Muslim World's Deafening Silence

Perhaps the most tragic and perplexing aspect of the Uyghur crisis is the inaction—and, in some cases, the active support—of many Muslim-majority countries siding with China. Despite the overwhelming evidence of the CCP's brutal campaign against Uyghur, Kazakh, and other Muslims, countries such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates have largely remained silent or openly defended China's policies.

In 2019, **37 countries**, including around **15 Muslim-majority countries**, signed a letter to the United Nations Human Rights Council supporting China's so-called “counter-terrorism and anti-radicalization measures” in East Turkistan (32). Signatories included Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Oman, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the UAE, and others.

That same year, China pressured Muslim governments to repatriate Uyghurs seeking asylum. **The United Arab Emirates and Egypt** arrested Uyghur students and refugees and sent them back to China, where they risked immediate detention or disappearance (33).

This betrayal is particularly painful for the Uyghur community. As Turkic-speaking Muslim people with centuries of Islamic history and identity, they once looked to the Muslim world for solidarity. Today, many Uyghur exiles call this hope “a dream turned into silence.”

7.2 China's Economic Leverage and Belt and Road Diplomacy

The Muslim world's silence is not inexplicable - it is due to China's aggressive diplomacy, especially under **the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**. Through massive infrastructure investments, loans, and economic partnerships, the CCP has gained powerful influence over nations in Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

Countries like Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia are heavily dependent on Chinese capital for development projects and trade. This economic dependence has effectively bought political compliance, including turning a blind eye to egregious human rights abuses.

In 2020, following the publication of a damning UN report on China's treatment of Uyghurs, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which is supposed to represent the collective voice of Muslim nations, issued no condemnation. In fact, some members of the OIC voted against a motion to only discuss the report at the UN Human Rights Council in 2022 (34).

7.3 Western Democracies: Rhetoric without Consequences

Although some Western countries, notably the US, Canada, the UK, and the Netherlands, have officially declared China's actions against the Uyghurs as genocide and or crimes

against humanity, their reactions so far **have been symbolic** rather than punitive.

In 2021, the US passed the **Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act**, which bans imports linked to the forced labor of Uyghurs (35). However, enforcement remains limited, and the law does not specifically address child separation or the boarding school system.

Europe, on the other hand, pursued a cautious balancing policy. Despite strong condemnations from the European Parliament, the EU has struggled to impose coherent sanctions due to internal divisions and economic interests, especially in Germany and France (36).

No country has yet referred the case to the **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** for adjudication and the International Criminal Court (ICC) has not opened an investigation due to jurisdictional limits.

7.4 The Role of the United Nations

The United Nations has been extremely limited in addressing the Uyghur crisis. Although the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a long-delayed report in 2022 confirming evidence of “grave human rights violations”, the **UN Human Rights Council failed to even discuss the report** and 19 **countries, including many Muslim-majority countries, voted against putting forward a resolution to discuss Uyghur human rights**(37).

The CCP’s influence within the UN system, particularly its role on human rights committees, and its growing coalition of sympathetic states have turned the promise of global justice into a political chessboard where Uyghur lives are merely pieces to be sacrificed.

7.5 Civil Society and Diaspora’s Struggle for Recognition

As governments faltered, civil society,

investigative journalists, and the Uyghur diaspora emerged as leading voices for justice. Organizations such as the Campaign for Uyghurs and Amnesty International have published extensive documents, survivor interviews, and legal frameworks advocating for urgent global action.

Uyghur activists such as Rushan Abbas—whose sister was detained in retaliation for her advocacy—and Abdulhakim Idris—whose nieces have been indoctrinated in Chinese boarding schools and who has extensively documented China’s ideological war on Islam—continue to testify before parliaments and international forums.

Their advocacy reminds the world that silence is not neutrality but complicity.



8. Conclusion - Erasure of a Nation, Responsibility of the World



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi attended OIC gathering in Islamabad, Pakistan, March 2022 – Photo Credit AP

Behind closed doors, barbed wire fences, and walls covered with patriotic murals, a crime of staggering proportions is being committed in East Turkistan. The Chinese Communist Party's use of boarding schools to forcibly separate Uyghur children from their families, culture, and faith is not an educational policy but the systematic destruction of a nation's future.

What this report documents in this report through data, testimonies, official policies, and legal interpretations reveals a clear and deliberate plan of cultural annihilation. By stripping children of their language, banning religious practices, inculcating political loyalty, and disrupting family ties, China is producing a generation of Uyghurs who are cut off from their ancestors and reshaped to serve a state that denies their existence.

The boarding school system meets the criteria for genocide under Article II(e) of the 1948 Genocide Convention: the forced transfer of children from one group to another. It also complies with Articles II(b) and II(c) through psychological harm and erasure of identity. The intent is not hidden, as evidenced by leaked internal guidelines and Party slogans such as "break their lineage, cut their roots". It is declared.

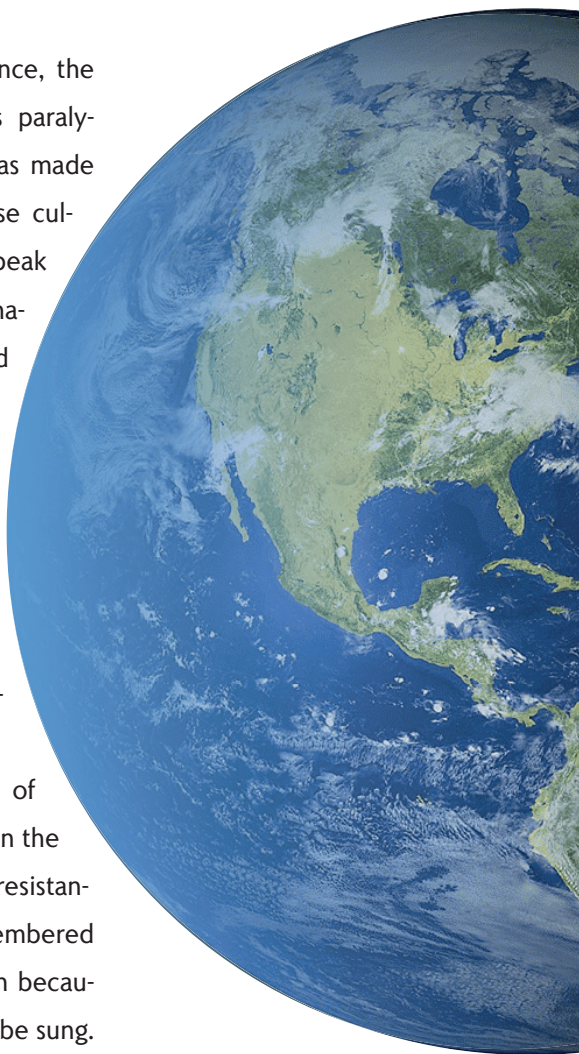
This is not assimilation, it is extermination by other means.

GLOBAL MORAL CRISIS

Despite the abundant evidence, the international community is paralyzed. China's economic power has made many countries - especially those culturally or religiously obliged to speak out - silent collaborators. International institutions like the United Nations have failed to act decisively, and geopolitical calculations continue to trump moral responsibility.

But silence is not neutral. Silence in the face of genocide is complicity.

The story of the Uyghurs - and of children torn from their families in the name of patriotism - is a story of resistance in the shadows, of faith remembered in whispers, of lullabies forgotten because they are no longer allowed to be sung.



WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

- **Legal Action:** Governments should seek international legal accountability through the ICJ and universal jurisdiction mechanisms. The boarding school program alone provides sufficient grounds for a genocide trial.
- **Sanctions:** Sanctions should target not only individuals but also Chinese state institutions involved in the financing and operation of the boarding school system.
- **Global Advocacy:** Civil society and the diaspora must continue to amplify the voices of testimonies, press for their recognition, and pressure governments to move beyond rhetorical condemnations.
- **Islamic Solidarity:** The Muslim world must reclaim its moral authority by breaking its silence, rejecting Chinese propaganda, and defending fellow Muslims whose faith is under attack.
- **Historical Preservation:** Urgent efforts are needed to document and preserve Uyghur culture, language and religion outside East Turkistan so that they can be remembered and revitalized abroad, even if they have been erased at home

Last Word

If the world allows China to carry out this campaign without consequences, it will be affirming that a superpower can erase an entire people - not just with bullets, but by taking their children, their prayers, their language, and their memories.

The boarding schools in East Turkistan are not just a symbol of China's war against the Uyghurs. They are the front line.

And history will remember whether we stood by or stood up.



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Breaking the Roots: China's Use of Boarding Schools as a Tool of Genocide Against Uyghur Muslims

In East Turkistan—rich in resources but gripped by repression—the Chinese government is carrying out a silent form of genocide under the pretense of “modernization.” While over two million Uyghur Muslims are reportedly held in concentration camps, another insidious tactic is unfolding: the mass separation of Uyghur children from their families and their forced assimilation through state-run boarding schools.

These schools function not as places of learning but as centers for ideological indoctrination. Children as young as four are banned from speaking Uyghur, punished for expressing their Islamic faith, and taught to revere the Chinese Communist Party as their highest authority. This system is not educational reform—it is a calculated tool to destroy Uyghur identity, family bonds, and cultural continuity.

According to the UN, genocide includes the “forcible transfer of children” and acts aimed at destroying a national, ethnic, or religious group. China’s boarding school campaign meets this definition. By erasing language, religion, and community ties, it constitutes cultural genocide—and may fulfill the legal threshold for genocide itself.

This report examines how the CCP uses boarding schools as a state-sponsored strategy of cultural erasure. It draws on case studies, data, survivor testimonies, and legal analysis to reveal the devastating impact on Uyghur children and their families.

