

Social Control After Internment: Forms of Involuntary Labor in Xinjiang

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I would like to thank the chairman, the ranking member and the others for inviting me to testify.

In 2017, China's Xinjiang region embarked on the probably largest incarceration of an ethno-religious minority since the Holocaust. Now, it is clear that this internment forms only the first phase of a long-term strategy of unprecedented and intrusive social control.

Beijing's long-term strategy in Xinjiang is being implemented under the heading and guise of "poverty alleviation", notably “industry-based poverty alleviation”. I have identified three schemes by which the state seeks to place the vast majority of minority adults into different forms of coercive or at least involuntary labor.

Flow 1 pertains to persons in Vocational Training Internment Camps. Camp detainees can end up in factories on internment camp compounds, in industrial parks which can be located near camps (or camps in them), or village satellite factories. One document promised a participating company that 500 internment camp laborers would be brought to the facility with police guards. The employing companies receive a 1,800 Chinese Yuan state subsidy for each internment camp laborer they train, 5,000 Yuan for each they employ, and a shipping cost subsidy of 4 percent of their sales volume. In 2018, Huafu Corporation, which operates the world's largest dyed yarn production in Xinjiang, received half a *billion* Chinese Yuan, or 71 million US\$, in subsidies from the Xinjiang government.

Flow 2 pertains to a vast government scheme that puts hundreds of thousands of so-called rural surplus laborers into centralized training that lasts between 1-3 months, involving 1 month of military drill in order to produce standardized behavior, 1 month of political thought indoctrination, and 1 month of vocational skills training. Workers are then sent off to their new work destination in large groups, and live in factory dormitories, often far from home.

Flow 3 places rural Uyghur women into village factories equipped with nurseries for infants as young as a few months old. Government village work teams use thought transformation to "convince" these women and their parents of the benefits of full-time factory labor. Government documents note that factory work transforms women away from traditional customs and backward thinking and propels them into modernity. One propaganda text on states that this causes minority workers to become born again. There, the Chinese term for "born again" is the same as in the Chinese Bible, where Jesus says: "You must be born again".

Beijing is turning its internment campaign into a business of oppression, where participating companies benefit not from government subsidies and from cheap minority labor. As a result, they will be able to undercut global prices.

A particular concern is that all of these labor flows are mixing beyond recognition. Graduates from internment camps now work alongside workers from flows 2 and 3. Products made by any combination of these three types of workers are then either directly exported, or are shipped to eastern China, where they may form components of products, or be repackaged, re-labeled, and then exported.

As a result, many or most products made in China that rely at least in part on low-skilled, labor-intensive manufacturing, can contain elements of involuntary ethnic minority labor from Xinjiang. Due to the local police state conditions, due diligence audits of supply chains are impossible.

The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI), the world's largest cotton standard which aims to promote sustainability and better working conditions, recently stated that "a continued presence and engagement in [Xinjiang]...would continue to benefit local farmers".

BCI states that there is "no direct evidence that...forced labor is being used on BCI licensed farms in Xinjiang." After Huafu, which is not only a BCI partner but sits on its council, was scrutinized in the above-mentioned media report, BCI responded by noting that Huafu had "commissioned an independent social audit...[which] did not identify any instances of forced labor." But asking for an 'independent social audit' in an environment as controlled as Xinjiang is like asking the fox to check that no hens are missing.

My own research on Huafu comes to far more troubling conclusions. Over 90 percent of its staff are ethnic minorities, mostly "rural surplus laborers".

Huafu's website states that "... a large number of rural surplus laborers are idle at home, which...brings hidden dangers to public security." Company reports depict hundreds of Uyghurs in military uniforms at a staff training event, and a Xinjiang government website reports that Huafu is part of an official training initiative that subjects Uyghurs to centralized "military drill, thought transformation... and de-extremification." Once employed, staff are subjected to intensive ongoing political indoctrination, including oath swearing sessions and mandatory written reports designed to "establish correct values".

Similarly, the German company Adidas audited Huafu's spinning facilities in Aksu and found "no evidence of forced labor, or of government involvement in the hiring of their workforce." However, a cursory search shows Chinese media outlets citing Peng Xianxiang, Huafu's staff training and development manager, as openly saying that "the local government sends us workers according to [our] company's staffing needs." A report from the Aksu government propaganda bureau confirms that the prefecture trains and then sends Uyghur workers to Huafu. Government reports indicate that in that very region, as many as 200 adults from a single village were rounded up by government work teams and "shipped off" to work at textile or other factories.

The third example pertains to garment maker H+M, which continues to procure yarn from Huafu's, but from their yarn mills outside of Xinjiang. However, 19 provinces and cities in eastern China are "mutually paired" with minority regions in Xinjiang, and that this involves extensive, state-mandated labor transfers. Government reports explicitly state that one county in Xinjiang alone sent 103 rural minority surplus laborers to Huafu's factory in Anhui province in eastern China.

In order to benefit from Beijing's economic policies in Xinjiang and to maintain favor with the Chinese government, western companies are telling themselves that doing business with Xinjiang or with companies who are heavily invested in Xinjiang is fine, until proven otherwise. This is not only unethical, but also increasingly risky in terms of their own reputation.

In light of the present findings, I call upon the United States government to embark on a detailed investigation of policies and practices of involuntary labor in relation to Xinjiang and the involvement of American companies. After passing the Uyghur Human Rights Act, stopping the business of oppression in Xinjiang is the next step. Thank you.

