

The Reeducation Labor Regime in Northwest China

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Introduction

The goal of factories associated with internment camps in Northwest China is to turn Kazakhs and Uyghurs into a deeply-controlled unfree working class. By turning a population of people regarded as not deserving of legal protections into workers, state authorities and private industrialists hope that they will extend the market expansion of the Chinese textile and garment industry through an ethno-racialized dormitory work regime that squeezes a constant surplus value from “surplus workers.” As state documents described in more detail below demonstrate, this system of controlled labor is “carried” (*zaiti*) forward by a massive reeducation system—a surveillance and detention mechanism that ensures that interned laborers are coerced into signing work contracts and forbidden to leave the industrial park.

While scholarship and press reports have focused on the political regime responsible for the internment camp system and framed it in relation to human rights discourses, less scholarship has focused on the economic logics of the system and their implications for Muslim societies. The work of Jennifer Pan and others demonstrates how nationwide poverty alleviation programs are related to surveillance and management of disfavored populations in China.¹ This essay shows how the Xinjiang “reeducation labor regime” functions as a limit case of these broader “repressive assistance” programs. Drawing on interviews conducted in 2020 with formerly interned workers who fled across the border to Kazakhstan in 2019, as well as examining industry documents, Chinese media reports, state assessments, and plans, this brief article presents evidence to show that the lives of many Muslims in Xinjiang have been radically transformed by an unfree labor system designed

¹ See Jennifer Pan, *Welfare for Autocrats: How Social Assistance in China Cares for Its Rulers* (London: Oxford University Press, 2020).

to turn them into isolated industrial workers and, by extension, transform their societies.²

Xinjiang's Reeducation Labor Regime

Since 2017, factory owners from cities across eastern China have arrived in Xinjiang to take advantage of newly built industrial parks associated with a reeducation camp system and the cheap labor and subsidies that accompany them. Often, involvement in these “Xinjiang Aid” (jiang ai) projects is also accompanied by political pressure placed on the factory owners back in their home cities.³ Xinjiang Aid is a specific “poverty alleviation” (fupin) and surveillance program that pairs local governments, police agencies, and manufacturers of provinces and cities in eastern China with counties and cities in Xinjiang. This program has been in place since the early 2010s, but its manufacturing and security foci were dramatically intensified as the internment camp system was built. By relocating part of their manufacturing base to the frontier, manufacturers ensure that their businesses will be protected by local authorities at home in eastern China, all while utilizing state incentives such as rent-free manufacturing facilities and subsidies allowing them to expand their production—something that is often described as a “win-win” opportunity. By late 2018, the Xinjiang Reform and Development Commission (XRDC) issued a statement announcing that the camps, or “vocational skills education and training centers” (jiaoyu peixun zhongxin), had become a “carrier” of economic stability because they had attracted so many manufacturers.⁴ Like oil and natural gas, two of the primary drivers of the Xinjiang economy, Uyghur and Kazakh labor were now being described as a resource available for exploitation by the market economy.

It is important to note that not all Uyghur and Kazakh labor that was directed toward these newly built factories came from former detainees. There was a broader process

² Since 2017, hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other Muslims from the Xinjiang have been “disappeared” into a widespread system of internment camps in Northwest China—a space known in Chinese by the name Xinjiang or “new frontier.” Nearly all Uyghurs and Kazakhs, a combined population of around 13.5 million people, have an immediate family member who is either interned in a camp or has been forced to work in one. This project affects every aspect of their lives. The phrase “everyone is gone” or “disappeared” (Uy: adem yoq) is something that is heard everywhere across Xinjiang. Across the entire Alaska-sized region, significant segments of the adult population—particularly men between the ages of 18 and 55—were deemed “extremists” and taken away, leaving behind children who are often sent to residential boarding schools where their native languages, Uyghur and Kazakh, are banned. In the same areas, an intensive family planning campaign combined with endemic family separation produced through the labor and detention system has produced dramatic drops in birth rates. See Joanne Smith Finley, “Securitization, Insecurity and Conflict in Contemporary Xinjiang: Has PRC Counter-terrorism Evolved into State Terror?” *Central Asian Survey* 38, no.1 (2019): 1-26; Sean R. Roberts, *The War on the Uyghurs: China's Internal Campaign against a Muslim Minority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

³ See Yuhui Li, *China's Assistance Program in Xinjiang: A Sociological Analysis* (New York: Lexington Books, 2018).

⁴ “Zizhiqu jingji jigou wenzhongyouthuo fazhan lianghao” 自治区经济结构稳中有活 发展良好 [The Economic Structure of the Autonomous Region Is Stable, Alive and Well Developed], Xinjiang Reform and Development Commission, December 5, 2018, [web.archive.org/web/20190520143306/http://www.xjrdc.gov.cn/info/9923/23516.htm](http://www.xjrdc.gov.cn/info/9923/23516.htm).

of state-mandated proletarianization underway across the region. In order to meet centrally determined “poverty alleviation” goals centered on placing Uyghur and Kazakhs in Han-owned factory jobs, local officials and their “Xinjiang Aid” counterparts from eastern China were tasked with creating jobs. The workers would be taught to speak Mandarin and embrace state political ideology all while learning to work on an assembly line. Though some of the new workers—called “surplus laborers”—were simply farmers from nearby villages, many of them were the relatives of detainees. And all of them knew that overt refusal of these job assignments could result in their internment in the camps. As another document from the XRDC mandates, local authorities were to “establish a development mechanism linkage between the industrial management of rural collective economic organizations and the industry of education and training centers”—the euphemism used for reeducation camps and associated factories (my emphasis).⁵ As documents used by state security workers note, refusing “poverty alleviation” (fupin) schemes, a euphemism that in this context is often used for assigned factory work, was to be regarded as a sign of untrustworthiness and religious extremism.⁶

In many cases, the everyday lives of these workers are confined within the boundaries of the industrial park. Like migrant workers in other parts of China, they are housed in the same space as the site of production. This is something that the labor scholars Pun Ngai and Chris Smith have described as a “dormitory labor regime.”⁷ In their work, they illustrate how this type of work arrangement allows factory owners to exploit their workers to a greater extent, demanding overtime and weekend work, garnishing wages to compensate for housing costs, and so on. In her more recent work, Pun shows that a system of subcontracting further insulates company owners from workers, making non-payment for work increasingly common.⁸ The same is true in the reeducation labor regime in Northwest China. However, unlike migrant workers in other parts of China, Uyghur and Kazakh workers are prevented from leaving by surveillance systems, material barriers, and the threat of internment. Rather than a system of subcontractors, factories in “Xinjiang Aid” industrial parks are often managed by a combination of low-level police and civil ministry personnel who also work in reeducation camps—a management scheme that blurs the line between private enterprise and state-sponsored internment camps.

Throughout the region, local authorities had also established comprehensive “safe county” surveillance systems that used real ID checkpoints and camera systems to monitor the

⁵ Yuan Weimin, “Dali jiaqiang nanjiang nongcun jiti jingji zuzhi jianshe” 大力加强南疆农村集体经济组织建设 [Vigorously strengthen the construction of rural collective economic organizations in southern Xinjiang], Zizhiqū fazhan gaigewei jingjiyanjiuyuan 自治区发展改革委经济研究院 [Economic Research Institute of Autonomous Region Development and Reform Commission], July 8, 2019, <https://archive.fo/rb16r>.

⁶ “Çin’in Yeni Planlarinin Yazili Emri İfşa Oldu” [Written Order of China’s New Plans Revealed], *Türkistan Press*, July 23, 2018, <http://turkistanpress.com/page/cin-39-in-yeni-planlarinin-yazili-emri-ifsa-oldu/247>.

⁷ Chris Smith and Pun Ngai, “The Dormitory Labour Regime in China as a Site for Control and Resistance,” *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 17, no. 8 (2006): 1456-1470.

⁸ Pun Ngai, *Migrant Labor in China* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2016).

movements of registered citizens in the county. The factory spaces themselves typically featured “people’s convenience police stations” (bianmin jingwuzhan) or surveillance hubs where movements of detained workers were checked and monitored. Inside the factories, camera systems and minders—often the same guards and community workers who monitor detainees in the camps—watched the workers. In some cases, the factory floors themselves were divided into cubicles locked from the outside, which restricted the movement of the workers. In most cases, though, these forms of interior material confinement appear to have been deemed unnecessary.

In the reeducation labor regime, Uyghur and Kazakh workers are not able to protest their wage garnishments or even stage minor protests such as assembly line slowdowns. Failure to work and perform a docile subjectivity can result not just in losing their jobs, but in detention in the camps. In addition, the surveillance equipment in the factories means that all aspects of their lives are monitored. Factory authorities decide if and when workers can go to the bathroom, what food they eat, if they are permitted to carry or use phones, what language they speak, when and how long they work and sleep, and even how they spend their free time. Since many of them are former detainees, the factory managers and civil servants often appear to treat them as criminals. Many had simply been deemed guilty of minor religion or ethnicity related offenses, such as praying too often, having a passport, possessing Uyghur or Kazakh language books, or offenses such as installing WhatsApp or VPNs. Through my interviews with former detainee-workers, I found that because the system has criminalized them, significant portions of their work is unpaid or underpaid. They are not permitted to freely choose or leave their jobs and, in many cases, are separated from their children and other family members.

Case Study

During a research trip to Kazakhstan in early 2020, I interviewed a number of former workers who had recently fled across the border from China. Most of them had been able to leave, because they had lived in Kazakhstan in the past and had family there who had pressured the Kazakhstan government to intervene on their behalf. Before they left, the local authorities had pressured them not to speak about what they had experienced, often using the threat of punishing their family members who remained in China if they spoke publicly. For these reasons, many of my interviewees asked me not to use their real names. Dina Nurdybai, a twenty-eight-year-old mother of a toddler, was an exception. She felt she had nothing to lose by telling her story.⁹

Nurdybai was first detained in Nilka County, near the border with Kazakhstan, in October 2017. She later learned that she had been deemed untrustworthy because she had downloaded WhatsApp to contact her relatives in Kazakhstan. She said, “At first I was held in a huge room with thirty other women. We just had to sit on the floor. It

⁹ The faithfulness of Nurdybai’s account is corroborated by another interview conducted with her, independent of my own, by investigative journalist Megha Rajagopalan. See Megha Rajagopalan, “The Factories in the Camps,” *Buzzfeed*, last updated January 4, 2021, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/alison_killing/xinjiang-camps-china-factories-forced-labor.

was so cold and wet.” Then she was taken from the detention center, what is typically referred to as a county-level jail (*kanshou suo*), to a purpose-built camp, what is officially referred to as a “concentrated closed education and vocational training center” (*jizhong fengbi jiaoyu zhiye peixun zhongxin*), where they studied speeches given by Xi Jinping for many hours each day. In the detention center or jail, they were forced to use a bucket as a toilet due to overcrowding. In the camp, they were allowed to go to a bathroom, but both were directly in front of cameras. Soon, they learned to stop thinking about the way the most private aspects of their lives were being monitored and recorded. “We couldn’t speak with each other. I saw people faint. But we didn’t have the right to care about them. They just pulled them away.”

In May 2018, Nurdybai was moved to another facility, an industrial park, that she says the workers were told to refer to as another vocational training center, just as her previous camp had been officially called. She and other workers thought of it as just another camp. The new facility, known officially as the Nilka-Wujin Small to Medium Enterprise Entrepreneurship Base (*Nileike-Wujin zhong xiao qiye chuangye jidi*), had been built through the partnership that Nurdybai’s home county of Nilka had established with Wujin, a medium-size city in Jiangsu Province in eastern China. Many of the factories that had been set up in the facility were Jiangsu-based companies. As part of the “Xinjiang Aid” scheme, Wujin had invested 70 million yuan (approximately USD 10.7 million) in building the factory, and offered the buildings rent-free to Jiangsu and Nilka-based companies for up to ten years in some cases (in others, the rent appeared to simply be subsidized).¹⁰ There were more than a dozen factory buildings when Nurdybai was transferred to the facility. In the years since, the number of factories has more than doubled.

The factory complex and the camp were directly related. They shared the same organizational structure, including some of the same staff. Nurdybai recalled that nearly all of the workers in the facility were ethnic minority people, most of them women. Nilka County itself is a rare, Kazakh-majority county. It has an adult ethnic minority population of around 80,000. By 2019, 52,000 people in the county, most of whom were drawn from the adult ethnic minority population, had been assigned jobs in and outside of the county.¹¹ Many women who were assigned work inside the county appeared to be in the factory complex where Nurdybai was transferred. Meanwhile, the brand-new camp and prison structure that had been built nearby remained fully operational.

¹⁰ “Nileike xian zhongxiao qiye chuangyejidi ruyuan xiangmu yi da 7 jia” 尼勒克县中小企业创业基地入园项目已达7家 [Nilka County SME Entrepreneurship Base has reached 7 projects], Xinjiang Nilka County People’s Government Office, June 23, 2016, <https://archive.vn/Nm8wS>; “Yili: renzhen xuexi guanche zong shu jizhong yao jiang hua jing shen rang gonggong weisheng fanghu wangshou huren minjian kang” 伊犁: 认真学习贯彻总书记重要讲话精神 让公共卫生防护网守护人民健康” [Yili: Earnestly study and implement the spirit of the important speech of the General Secretary, let the public health protection net protect people’s health], Yili Radio and TV Station, June 27, 2020, <https://archive.fo/bNeQM>.

¹¹ “2019 nian nileike xian guomin jingji he shehui fazhan tongji gongbao” 2019年尼勒克县国民经济和社会发展统计公报 [2019 Statistical Communiqué on the National Economic and Social Development of Nileke County], Xinjiang Nilka County People’s Government Office, March 25, 2019, <http://www.xjnlk.gov.cn/info/1095/20896.htm>.

According to Nurdybai, there were many women in the factory complex, most of them former detainees from the “concentrated closed education and vocational training center.” She told me, “Everything in our lives was inside the complex. The factory, the kindergarten, the cafeteria, the store, everything is there. In this ‘camp,’ women who had children were allowed to stay together with them at night. Some also had husbands. It was better than the other camp, but still we were not free. We couldn’t have a real phone. We couldn’t take pictures. We couldn’t get any food from outside.” Although there was greater contact between family members, young children were still largely being raised outside of the Kazakh family structure and language environment in the state-run kindergarten. Older children were often only able to visit their mothers once or twice per month. Even phone calls were restricted. The workers were issued phones that had government-issued SIM cards. They were ordered to carry them everywhere they went. But, she said, “We were not allowed to use the phones to talk. They were just for the government to track us.” From Nurdybai’s perspective there was a great deal of overlap between the jail, the camp, and the factory. She thought of them as all part of the same institution, with just slightly different measures of freedom, ranging from toilet facilities to communication with family. The guards were the same in each space, and they often regarded the detainees-turned-workers as criminals.

Inside the complex there were checkpoints between different sections and at entrances to the factories. The factory where she was assigned was partitioned with 20 to 30 workers inside each workroom. The rooms were often locked from the outside. These open-air corrals seemed to have more to do with security than with worker efficiency. Nurdybai heard from a staff member that the camp managers, the factory owners from Jiangsu, saw the workers as dangerous. There were cameras everywhere, even in the bathrooms. At night she and the other workers continued to study Chinese and political ideology. They were not supposed to speak any language other than Chinese. This, she understood, was part of her “reeducation.”

The factory system produced a type of “off-shoring” effect, or what critical economists refer to as “super exploitation.” This means that because their labor was devalued due to their criminalized status and ethnic identification, they were paid less than the legal minimum wage. After a period of time the staff realized that Nurdybai was an experienced seamstress and clothing designer because she had her own clothing company. So, they assigned her to teach the other workers in her corral how to sew school uniforms. She was told that she would be paid more than the others since she was an instructor, but she later learned that like the others, much of her salary would be garnished due to the living costs that were covered by the factory. In the end she received only on average 9 yuan (USD 1.50) per month—far below the minimum wage of around 1,800 yuan (USD 300) in the region. Another woman assigned to a nearby factory complex said in a county government interview that she earned “more than 80 yuan (USD 13) in a

day,” which would make her less of a burden on her family.¹² The interview published by the county government states that the “precise poverty alleviation” scheme would allow workers to earn up to 1,500 to 2,500 yuan (USD 230–380) per month. However, it did not mention the wage garnishment process that numerous former workers like Nurdybai have reported.

Eventually Nurdybai was released from confinement in the factory complex. She was told that she was now on a kind of probation that would last at least six months. During visits from government monitors, which happened every two days, she was told that she would be transferred to work in eastern China. But, after reuniting with her husband, she used a weapon that Uyghurs and Kazakhs across the region have deployed in the face of the reeducation regime: she appealed to the authority of the clinic. “I got pregnant so that I would have an excuse not to go.” On May 15, 2019, after much petitioning, she received permission to travel back to Kazakhstan when her father was hospitalized for an illness. She promised only to stay for a short time. But she plans never to go back.

Back at the factory complex, as recently as 2020, Kazakh and Uyghur women were still sewing government uniforms.¹³ Another factory in the complex began to produce disposable face masks, with a plan to produce 3.6 million masks by the end of 2020.¹⁴ Other Uyghurs and Kazakhs in the county were transferred to Wujin to work in factories beginning in 2018.¹⁵ At the same time, the “poverty alleviation” program back in the complex where Nurdybai was held has continued to expand. In 2020, a new garment factory with over 1,200 employees, most of whom were women, was established. One ethnic minority worker told a Nilka County state employee: “I will work here for a long time to increase my income.”¹⁶

¹² “Nileke xian Subutai xiang fuzhuang jiagongchang daidong jiuye zhuli qunzhong tuopin” 尼勒克县苏布台乡服装加工厂带动就业助力群众脱贫 [The garment processing factory in Subtai Township, Nilka County, drives employment and helps the people alleviate poverty], Xinjiang Nileke County People’s Government Office, February 9, 2017, <https://archive.vn/dpUk7>.

¹³ Wujin’s Xinjiang Aid, “Changzhou shi Xuejia zhen minying jingjixiehui fu ni kaocha, juanzizhuxue” 常州市薛家镇民营经济协会赴尼考察, 捐资助学 [The Private Economic Association of Xuejia Town, Changzhou City went to Nilka for inspection and to donate funds], Weixin, June 20, 2019, <https://archive.fo/W866L>; “Yili Hasake Nileike xian xinkuan fuzhuang pifa shichang pinzhi wenjian” 伊犁哈萨克尼勒克县新款服装批发市场品质文件 [Quality document for the new clothing wholesale market in Yili Kazakh Nilka County], Yanggu Gushan Sign Garment Factory, March 31, 2020, <https://archive.fo/hDvbF>.

¹⁴ “Xinjiang Nileike xian: shoujia kouzhaochang jiancheng jinru shiyunxing jieduan” 新疆尼勒克县: 首家口罩厂建成进入试运行阶段 [Nilka County, Xinjiang: The first mask factory is completed and enters the trial operation stage], People’s Daily, June 22, 2020, <https://archive.vn/Wxjqc>.

¹⁵ Wujin Official Weixin 微武进 [Wei Wujin], “Wuni hezuo zai jie shuoguo! Wujin-Nileike jiaoyu, jiuye deng jiaoliu hezuo jinyibu shenhua” 武尼合作再结硕果! 武进尼勒克教育、就业等交流合作进一步深化 [Wu-Ni cooperation bears fruit again! Wujin-Nilka further deepens exchanges and cooperation in education and employment], Weixin, December 3, 2018, <https://archive.fo/PjYKD>.

¹⁶ “Xinjiang boyuan fushi youxian gongsi zai nileke xian jiepai cheng li” 新疆博远服饰有限公司在尼勒克县揭牌成立 [Xinjiang Boyuan Clothing Co., Ltd. was unveiled and established in Nilka County], Communist Party of Nilka County, July 22, 2020, <https://archive.vn/a1Rfn>.

Implications of the Reeducation Labor Regime: Poverty Alleviation as Repressive Assistance

As Jennifer Pan has shown, since the early 2000s Chinese state authorities have embarked on a widespread plan to engage targeted populations, ranging from religious and ethnic minorities to former prisoners and petitioners, with what she terms “repressive assistance.” In numerous locations across the country, programs carried out by grassroots-level neighborhood Civil Ministry employees have been transformed into a program of surveillance and control through a mechanism of authoritarian statecraft Pan refers to as institutional “seepage.” This process describes the way state power begins to shape the effects of seemingly unrelated social programs. What began as a welfare campaign to address poverty among historically marginalized populations, instead becomes a kind of management system that prevents marginalized people from being disruptive. A paradigmatic example of this approach for Pan is the way poverty alleviation programs—which often do offer real aid—simultaneously extract data and profits from targeted groups and foster state dependence, while pulling targeted populations into relationships of obligation.¹⁷

Writing in a similar vein, Rune Steenberg and Alessandro Rippa show that a similar pattern has developed in Xinjiang—where “Xinjiang Aid” poverty alleviation programs have provided investment opportunities for paired assistance with other Chinese cities and provinces.¹⁸ In the garment factory where Nurdybai worked in Nilka County, Wujin City provided support for the same type of program. Steenberg and Rippa show that since 2014 and the beginning of the People’s War on Terror, a “reeducation” campaign has seeped into “Xinjiang Aid” programs. This means that Wujin factory owners are compelled to employ unfree Uyghur and Kazakh workers in the carceral space of the factory complex by political obligations in their home localities, and the mandates of the Xinjiang Public Security Bureaus who run the camps alongside Wujin Public Security Bureau personnel.¹⁹ This is not to say that the Wujin factory owners are good faith actors in this arrangement, as Nurdybai’s experience indicates they appear to be convinced that the women they employ are in fact dangerous criminals. It is also likely that in most cases the ten-year rent-free factory spaces and the ability to garnish wages from the employees make the shift to production to Xinjiang highly profitable.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As state documents cited above and this case study show, there is a direct relationship between the factory spaces and the “concentrated closed education and training centers.” Workers such as Nurdybai saw them as interrelated camp spaces, which means that

¹⁷ Pan, *Welfare for Autocrats*, Chapter 5.

¹⁸ Rune Steenberg and Alessandro Rippa, “Development for All? State Schemes, Security, and Marginalization in Kashgar, Xinjiang,” *Critical Asian Studies* 51, no. 2 (2019): 274-295

¹⁹ Changzhou Wisdom Salon, “Lüpo gonganbu duban da’an, zhe wei Changzhou wangjing xiaoge, zhandouli baopeng!” 屡破公安部督办大案，这位常州网警小哥，战斗力爆棚 [Repeatedly breaking big cases supervised by the Ministry of Public Security, this Changzhou Internet police officer is bursting with energy!], Weixin, November 6, 2020, <https://archive.vn/xrj4W>.

factory managers also understand that they are what stand between the workers and their return or entrance into the camps. They likely have clear knowledge of conditions in the camps and the overreach of the system. Here, the addition of state power to the dormitory labor regime, which has already created unfair work conditions in eastern China, produces what labor scholars refer to as a form of “super exploitation.” That is, the differential legal and material environment of the colonial frontier produces a kind of “off-shoring” effect, where the labor value of colonized Muslim workers is diminished even more than migrant labor in other parts of the country. The surveillant and carceral system turns a dormitory labor regime into a reeducation labor regime producing unfree workers who have no choice but to work even while their wages are garnished. Not only does the system turn Muslim farmers into unfree factory workers, in many cases it also transforms their society by separating parents from each other and from their children, placing the children in state-run residential boarding schools. A study published by state-sponsored Chinese researchers in 2019 noted that a primary purpose of the labor programs was to diminish the importance of Islamic practice and accelerate “social modernization” (*shehui xiandaihua*) within Uyghur and Kazakh societies.²⁰ By diminishing and replacing Uyghur and Kazakh cultural and social institutions—their language, their faith, even their family structure—the reeducation labor regime eats into their ability to reproduce themselves as a society. To conclude this brief assessment of this unfree labor system, I offer two recommendations for policy makers and future research.

First, given the evidence of seepage between reeducation camps and job creation programs in Xinjiang, it is imperative that global brands reevaluate their supply chains. The region is the source of more than 80 percent of Chinese cotton and the state hopes to place nearly one in eleven garment manufacturing jobs in Xinjiang. As Nurdybai’s account makes clear, much of this production is geared toward state contracts for uniforms, but some is also intended for the domestic and international consumer market. Policymakers and proponents of fair and ethical manufacturing practices should examine supply chains for connections to “Xinjiang Aid” programs. They should also be cognizant that localities in eastern China, like Wujin, that have a “Xinjiang Aid” program, likely also employ Uyghurs and Kazakhs in unfree conditions where the employers are from. Tracking pairing assistance programs requires examining localities in both Xinjiang and eastern China.

Second, in the absence of investigations of global supply chains by global companies and government agencies, researchers with a working knowledge of Chinese should examine localities in Xinjiang and eastern China for the presence of “Xinjiang Aid” programs. Because these aid programs are promoted by localities as a public good as a way of building public buy-in and obscuring their relationship to carceral systems, they are usually well-documented in public state records. Often, local government institutions will describe the programs in granular detail in public forums hosted on WeChat. By

²⁰ China Institute of Wealth and Economics, “Xinjiang hetian diqu weizu laodongli zhuan yi jiuye fupin gongzuo baogao” 新疆和田地区维族劳动力转移就业扶贫工作报告 [Work Report on Poverty Alleviation Work of Uyghur Labor Force Transfer in Hotan, Xinjiang], Nankai University, December 23, 2019, <https://archive.is/PyluL>.

searching for localities and their jiang ai programs on Chinese search engines such as Sogou.com—a website that makes public WeChat forums searchable—researchers will discover thousands of documents related to these programs. In addition, small collections of related documents are already archived by the Xinjiang Documentation Project hosted by the University of British Columbia, but they have yet to be translated and analyzed.²¹ Examining such documents—again, a task that any researcher with a working knowledge of Chinese can undertake—will begin to further untangle the way Uyghur and Kazakh unfreedom is linked to global economic systems and Chinese state power.

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21 See, for example, this collection of documents collected by researcher Timothy Grose, “Online Sources: State Surveillance, Propaganda Work, and Coerced Gratitude,” Xinjiang Documentation Project, <https://xinjiang.sppga.ubc.ca/bloggingfanghuiju/>