

# ANNEX A

## Chinese Media Reports Regarding Forced Labor Accusations

Xinjiang cotton is essential to the Chinese cotton industry and by extension, an important pillar of China's economy. As a result, there is a wealth of domestic news coverage of this industry. The PRC has an exceptionally low degree of press freedom. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranks the PRC 177th out of 180 countries, and reports that “the Chinese authorities have tightened their grip on news and information even more since the emergence of COVID-19.”<sup>1</sup> This tight grip can also be found in the domestic coverage of the question of forced labor in Xinjiang cotton. Official media outlets, by which we mean directly state-run media (*Xinhua*, the *People's Daily*, CCTV) and official organized media outlets, and official media, by which we refer to blogs, microblogs, internet forum comments and vlogs, show surprisingly unified and complementary attitudes on the issue of Xinjiang cotton.

In 2020 and the first half of 2021, Chinese media have consistently defended Xinjiang cotton in the face of foreign accusations. The report “Uyghurs for Sale: ‘Re-education’, Forced Labor and Surveillance Beyond Xinjiang” published by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) in February 2020 raised a reaction in Chinese domestic media two months later which was spearheaded by the *Global Times* (环球时报), a *People's Daily* subsidiary under the direct auspices of the CCP. The article debunked the report's allegations and refers the Australian Strategic Policy Institute as an “anti-China think tank” (反华智库), a term that is consistently employed by other news agencies reporting on this issue in later months.<sup>2</sup> Adrian Zenz's December 2020 report “Coercive Labor in Xinjiang: Labor Transfer and the Mobilization of Ethnic Minorities to Pick Cotton” received a direct response from Wang Wenbin, the spokesperson for the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in which he referred to Zenz as an “anti-China scholar” (反华学者), which was used in the headline in the *People's Daily* article on Zenz's report and generally precedes his name when he is mentioned in Chinese domestic media.<sup>3</sup> Zenz was the subject of an official PRC government sanction in spring of 2021 for his research.

In 2021, The US Customs and Border Protection's Withhold Release Order (WRO) on products made by slave labor in Xinjiang on January 13 interestingly did not generate much media response in China, other than a translation of the original text by a legal expert on customs issues in China.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's official declaration of genocide in Xinjiang a week later generated a strong reaction, refuting all allegations of genocide and describing Mike Pompeo as a “doomsday

clown” (末日小丑).<sup>5</sup> Until this point, the general pattern had been for Chinese media to follow up to incriminating research reports or allegations of genocide and human rights abuses with official Foreign Ministry statements, after which media attention to the matter falls out of focus in the media again.

It was not until the H&M and Nike boycott of late March that the issue rose to national prominence in China, and led to an explosion of Xinjiang-cotton-related content in the Chinese media. On March 24, the Weibo account of the *China Youth Daily*, a newspaper run by the Communist Youth League of China, dug up a statement by the H&M group originally issued in March 2020, in which they voiced their concerns for the human rights situation in Xinjiang and stated that they would no longer purchase cotton produced in Xinjiang. The official Weibo account of the *China Youth Daily* initiated the affair by posting images of H&M statement with the text “Do they expect to make money in China while creating rumors and boycotting Xinjiang cotton? Are they delusional?” (一边造谣抵制新疆棉花，一边又想在中国赚钱？痴心妄想).<sup>6</sup> An hour later they followed up on this with a second post, a text image with the colors of H&M with three layers of text: “Xinjiang cotton is having none of this!” (新疆棉花不吃这一套), “Stop Yuejipengci with Xinjiang Cotton” in English, and “H&M took off their colored glasses, stop spreading fake news immediately” (H&M摘掉有色眼镜，立刻停止散布虚假信息). The “Yuejipengci” in the Weibo post is a Pinyin romanization of the Chinese slang 越级碰瓷, which literally means “crossing one’s status and knocking over the porcelain” and is mostly used to refer to fame-hungry Chinese celebrities creating a stir to generate attention. The *China Communist Youth League* is implying that H&M is doing the same thing, “accidentally” knocking over the porcelain to win goodwill in the West, but that Xinjiang cotton is “having none of that.” A few hours later, the *People’s Daily* also posted their own viral image on Weibo, a white image with red text “Xinjiang Mianhua” in English and “I support Xinjiang cotton” (我支持新疆棉花) in Chinese, in which they stylized the M and H of “mianhua”, the Chinese word for cotton, in the font of the H&M logo.<sup>7</sup> This image ended up being reshared over 40 million times on Weibo.

This image and other variations thereof were picked up and shared by official news organizations and blogs alike, setting a snowball effect in motion. Celebrities such as Victoria Song and Wang Yibo ended their H&M partnerships, and H&M products were quickly taken off the websites of Chinese online retailers such as Taobao. Other non-CCP news outlets, such as Sina Finance, quickly picked up on these developments and published articles connecting them to earlier talking points on the Xinjiang situation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>8</sup> In addition to H&M, Nike’s previous statements on Xinjiang were also criticized in a similar vein. In fact, the most liked comment under the *People’s Daily*’s widely shared Weibo post was: “Let’s not forget Nike’s anti-Xinjiang statement! Any Chinese with a backbone will not wear Nike ever again! (请大家关注下耐克的反疆声明吧！有骨气的中国人不要再穿耐克了!) H&M and Nike’s statements were also explained as being part of larger anti-Chinese conspiracy by the West. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, Xiakedao, a popular social media account run by the overseas edition of the *People’s Daily*, claimed that the statements and sanctions by Western countries and companies directed towards Xinjiang in the past year have all been part of a wider conspiracy and that to them, Xinjiang is “nothing but a card in their anti-China deck” (西方反华势力打出的又一张“新疆牌”).<sup>9</sup> Similarly, pointing out Western and in particular American hypocrisy when it comes to human rights also became an important talking point. During an official interview held on the 25<sup>th</sup>, Foreign Ministry spokesman Hua Chunying held up a picture of African American slaves working in the cotton fields to demonstrate American hypocrisy, and as a result many news outlets, even history blogs, dedicated entire articles to explaining the role of slavery in the historical production of cotton in the American South.<sup>10</sup>

Although a large part of the coverage focused on attacking the H&M statement and Western intentions, many news outlets also focused on highlighting the positive aspects of Xinjiang cotton. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, the *People's Daily Online* posted a widely shared article that portrayed the Xinjiang cotton industry as a world-class, highly organized, and technologically advanced industry, without making many direct references to the H&M statement or the accusations of forced labor.<sup>11</sup> CGTN, an English-language state propaganda outlet, followed suit and posted pictures and videos of happy Uyghurs in cotton fields, organized cotton fields and mechanical pickers, suggesting that such an advanced and mechanized industry does not even need forced labor.<sup>12</sup>

Five days later, *Qiushi* (also known as *QStheory*), the CCP's leading official theoretical journal, published an official article on their stance on the issue, titled "Forced labor is a lie, Xinjiang cotton is as pure as can be."<sup>13</sup> In the article, *Qiushi* condemns 'anti-Chinese forces in the West,' citing a speech by former US Army colonel Lawrence Wilkerson from 2018 to show that the West has been trying to destabilize Xinjiang all along. It also emphasizes the innocence and purity (洁白) of Xinjiang cotton, its high degree of mechanization, the harmony between different ethnicities in Xinjiang (各族人民团结友爱), and the PRC and XUAR governments' commitment to poverty alleviation (扶贫), and the authors advise Western countries to stop interfering with their economy and work together instead. As most of the post-boycott media coverage has done, the *Qiushi* article also plays into the dichotomy of white as pure, and black as corrupt, by defending Xinjiang cotton as 'pure white' (洁白) and describing Western companies and politicians as 'black-hearted' (黑心), an expression used to denote avarice and duplicity in Chinese, in addition to their frequent usage of the word "slander" (抹黑), which consists of two Chinese characters meaning "to smear" and "black."

To give an indication of how important the H&M and Nike controversy has been to bringing the issue of Xinjiang cotton to domestic attention, in July 2021, the first 50 search results of a Baidu search using the terms "Xinjiang" (新疆), "cotton" (棉花) and "forced labor" (强迫劳动) yield 38 from after March 24 and only 12 from before March 24. The fact that Xinjiang cotton was inserted into the national conscience is no coincidence. The *China Youth Daily* and the *People's Daily* initiated the backlash by attacking a year-old statement, and embedded it with slang and pop-culture references to ensure that it would go viral. Chinese authorities (which these two outlets are part of considering they are CCP newspapers ultimately directed by the Propaganda Department) have increasingly started using pop culture and internet memes to tap into cyber-nationalism, as we have also seen during the Hong Kong protests in 2019.<sup>14</sup> The Communist Youth League has also frequently shown their support for and interacted with cybernationalist groups, for example during the so-called Diba Expedition of 2016, when Diba members (named after the forum from which they originated) crossed the firewall to spam nationalist memes on the Facebook pages of Taiwanese president Tsai Yingwen and Taiwanese Pro-Independence Groups.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the China authorities also frequently employ bots and paid agents to manipulate online public discourse. In 2016, it was estimated that individuals employed by the Chinese state post almost 500 million messages as if they were genuine opinions by real individuals.<sup>16</sup> It is not unlikely that the PRC made use of bots and paid to help the *China Youth Daily* and the *People's Daily's* initial posts achieve almost instant viral status. This would make the backlash against H&M not a grassroots nationalist movement, but a coordinated government instead. It also happened two days after the EU, UK, US and Canada jointly announced sanctions against officials in China over human rights abuses against ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, which suggests that this may have been retaliation for increasing pressure from Western countries.

After the initial wave of outrage died down in early April, Xinjiang cotton was still in the news, albeit not so centrally as the preceding weeks. April, May and June can be considered the post-boycott months, and although the issue currently is on standby, major outlets such as the *China Daily* and *Xinhua* still post articles once or twice every week to remind their readers of the issue, in which they reiterate established points. There is also increased attention for the positive aspects of Xinjiang, such as its natural beauty and fast development. Mid-April, the People's Daily promoted a documentary on Xinjiang that promised to show the real Xinjiang, and drastically different than the Xinjiang described by the West.<sup>17</sup> Xinjiang cotton itself is also featured positively in domestic media, where many outlets enthusiastically reported that bolls of cotton were given out to participants as souvenirs at the Xinjiang booth of the China International Consumer Products Expo.<sup>18</sup> By presenting Xinjiang cotton in a positive light, the media are helping cement the Xinjiang cotton industry in Chinese minds as a legitimate industry that deserves national pride, and defense against foreign accusations.

Since the events of late March, Xinjiang cotton and allegations of forced labor have entered the conscience of the Chinese public due to a concerted effort by the PRC government and its media to incite the public's outrage. Even after the initial outrage died out, the issue is kept on standby by constant reiteration of earlier talking points, making sure that the public does not forget about the issue. Considering the fact that the *China Youth Daily* and the *People's Daily* were able to create a large-scale popular defense of Xinjiang cotton out of a few old statements, we can expect that Chinese authorities will use this weapon again in the future if they feel threatened enough.

**Following are English translations of select Chinese domestic media articles on Xinjiang cotton over the past year. Articles and blogs were chosen on the basis of their relevance in the Chinese public discourse on Xinjiang cotton, which we were able to determine on the basis of how often they were cross-referenced and often even copied completely by other news outlets, as well as their prominence in the search results of Baidu and Sogo, China's largest search engines. These articles are presented in chronological order. Keywords have been added to the beginning of each article. Images in the articles have been omitted from the translations due to potential copyright issues, these can be consulted through the original article URL provided in the footnotes. Chinese measurement units, such as mu, have been converted to their common international equivalents.**

## Editorial: Pompeo's "doomsday lie" is not worth refuting<sup>19</sup>

**Keywords:** *Pompeo, genocide, human rights, Western accusations*

On the day before former U.S. President Trump stepped down, Pompeo once again targeted China, slandering China by accusing it of "genocide and crimes against humanity" against Uighur Muslims and other minorities in Xinjiang.

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded to this on January 20: "This American politician, notorious for lying and deceiving, is turning himself into a doomsday clown and a joke of the century with his doomsday madness and lie of the century."

### Where are the facts on Xinjiang?

The rebuttal to Pompeo's false claims of "genocide" contains a set of statistics that is particularly convincing: in the past 60 years, the average life expectancy in Xinjiang has increased from 30 to 72 years. Moreover, the Uyghur population continued to grow between 2010 and 2018, an increase of 25.04%, higher than the 13.99% increase of Xinjiang's overall population, and much higher than the 2% increase of the Han population.

Xinjiang's society is harmonious and stable, its economy continues to develop, its people live and work in peace, the customs and culture of its ethnic minorities are respected and passed down to the next generations, and policies guaranteeing the freedom of religious belief are in place. Xinjiang, China, which has not had violent terrorist incidents for more than four consecutive years, is radiating unprecedented vitality. These facts cannot be contested.

Our rule of Xinjiang has resulted in this land becoming civilized and advanced, but in Pompeo's narrative it resulted in "genocide" and "acts against humanity." May I ask, what is the reality of Xinjiang in China in line with the above allegations? If you are looking for what is happening in Xinjiang, why not ask the more than 1,200 diplomats, journalists, and representatives of religious organizations who have visited Xinjiang?

A reporter from the US magazine *International Focus* wrote after visiting Xinjiang in 2019 that multiple ethnic groups coexist harmoniously, freedom of religious belief is guaranteed, and Xinjiang is a safe and prosperous region.

### The U.S. is not in a position to cast stones

International law has a clear answer to Pompeo's accusations. In December 1948, the "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide" adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations established genocide as "the act of deliberately destroying a certain ethnic, racial or religious group in whole or in part" as "genocide." In July 2002, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defined "crimes against humanity" as "a matter constituted by numerous acts of extremely serious violations and abuses against human dignity."

Speaking of these crimes, Pompeo may wish to look back at the United States' own history: the United States used to exploit and assimilate native Americans in the past, and the infamous bison extermination policies and acts of scalping led to a substantial decrease in the number of native Americans. America

has still not been able to come terms with the marks this has left. Moreover, it was not until 1988 that the aforementioned “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide” was passed in the United States. In this light, can we really say that American politicians have learned to self-reflect?

Just when his term of office is about to come to an end, he cannot help but throw dirt towards Xinjiang. This move is undoubtedly politically calculated. Looking back over the past four years, Pompeo and other American politicians have certainly been very “diligent” in interfering with Xinjiang affairs.

### **Pompeo’s lies are not worth refuting**

The act of striving for “political heritage” by provoking the topic of Xinjiang in the American political tradition has already become an international joke. In April 2019, Pompeo publicly admitted, “I was the CIA director. We lied, we cheated, we stole. We had entire training courses.” He also called this “the glory of the American experiment.”

“Long-arm jurisdiction” of China’s internal affairs under domestic law has been a common tactic used by US politicians in the past four years. Making a fuss about Xinjiang, a sensitive point in China-US relations, can also be regarded as Pompeo’s “last dance.”

The fact is that these kinds of lies can no longer deceive anyone in possession of basic judgement. Covering one’s eyes and turning a blind eye to the facts is a great insult to both China and the United States. Xinjiang’s current stable development and opening up will certainly not be affected by Pompeo and his like.

Today’s China no longer needs to expect the US to abandon its “double standards.” Instead, it should maintain a high degree of vigilance on issues including Xinjiang-related issues. Pompeo’s crazy words and deeds will surely be dismissed as worthless rubbish in the greater history of the development of relations between China and the United States.

**Do they expect to make money in China while creating rumors to undermine Xinjiang cotton? H&M’s statement this evening<sup>20</sup>**

***Keywords: H&M and Nike boycott, social media***

In the evening of March 24th, H&M China released a statement saying that the H&M group has consistently maintained the principles of transparency in governing their global supply chain, ensuring that their global suppliers follow sustainable development agreements such as the OECD Guidelines for Responsible Business Conduct, without the intent of taking a political stance in any way. It continues to say that the H&M group will purchase cotton through licensed third parties, with the aim to support cotton farmers worldwide in adopting sustainable cotton planting methods.

The official Weibo account of the *China Youth Daily* reacted by posting, “Do they expect to make money in China while creating rumors to undermine Xinjiang cotton? Are they delusional?”



This affair can be traced back to a statement by the H&M group. H&M stated that it is deeply concerned by allegations voiced by reports from civil organizations and the media, including allegations of forced labor and religious discrimination in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

In the statement, the H&M group has expressed that they will not work with any textile factories in Xinjiang, and that they will also not purchase any products or raw materials grown or produced in said region.

The statement continues by saying that Xinjiang is China's largest cotton producing region, and that up until now their suppliers have purchased cotton from farms connected to the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI). It says that BCI has already temporarily suspended its BCI cotton licenses for Xinjiang because of the increasing difficulty in performing credible due diligence investigations in the region, meaning that H&M can no longer purchase cotton from its previous suppliers.

CCTV-13 has reacted to H&M's boycott of Xinjiang cotton by claiming: "H&M pretends to be a champion of justice even though they are no stranger to committing underhand tricks of injustice themselves, which is nothing but hypocritical. They make an enormous fortune in China, yet slander China and try to implicate it in crimes they did not commit. A company like this is completely devoid of basic business ethics, and they have crossed the line here. We do not tolerate any infraction of our national sovereignty, so how can we allow these baseless and irresponsible remarks on Chinese affairs? These actions will only cause Chinese consumers to return to "self-defense", who will walk away and boycott companies who do not play by the rules!"

This afternoon, the *China Youth Daily* followed up on their earlier message by posting: "Xinjiang cotton will not take this insult! H&M, take off your colored glasses and cease spreading this fake news immediately."

Representative of H&M in the Greater China region, Huang Xuan has also responded through his office, claiming that he is no longer working with H&M, while adding: "I will vehemently oppose acts of slander against my country and its human rights in any shape or form!" Victoria Song's office has also released a statement, stating that she is presently not working together with H&M in any way, adding that "the state's interests are above everything, and we will oppose any type of slander and defamation directed towards China.

So far, results for H&M products no longer show up on the websites of Taobao and JD.com.

These allegations of so-called "forced labor" and "discrimination of racial minorities are total lies, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has already cleared up misunderstandings and demonstrated the truth on multiple occasions.

On July 22, spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Wang Wenbin said the following in his statement: "What is the truth behind these lies around this so-called "discrimination against minorities? Managing ethnic affairs in Xinjiang correctly has always been the foundation for promoting social harmony and establishing lasting peace, and we are fully committed to adhering to our nation's ethnic policy, which is in full adherence to the Chinese constitution, as well as the Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional National Autonomy. Our laws maintain the full equality of all ethnicities within our

country and earnestly guarantee the equal right to participate in the regulation of national affairs to all ethnicities, as well as the right to autonomous regulation of regional affairs in the relevant autonomous administrative region. We strive to promote unity between the different ethnicities, to prosper and develop together, consolidating and developing socialist inter-ethnic relations based on the principles of equality, unity, cooperation and harmony. In our country there is absolutely no trace of this so-called “discrimination against minorities” or “erasure of ethnic identity.”

On March 16, 2021, Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Zhao Lijian was quoted saying: “This so-called “forced labor” is a complete fabrication, and its goal is to undermine the Chinese parties involved and the development of its industries.”

On March 18, the same year, Zhao Lijian again spoke out, saying: “These allegations of “human right abuses” such as “forced labor” and “forced sterilization” are all deliberately fabricated lies of a “scholar” and institutions with ulterior motives. These allegations spit in the face of justice and good conscience, and the Chinese people express their deep indignation. In his book “Putting an End to Fake News about the Uyghurs”, French author Vivas has clearly uncovered the flimsy attempts of people who have never visited Xinjiang to create and spread fake news about Xinjiang. I recommend everyone involved to give this book a good read, and you will find out what is fact and what is fiction.”

**Off the shelf! The whole internet boycotts you! H&M, no one will pay the bill for your absurdities<sup>21</sup>**

***Keywords: H&M and Nike boycott, social media, public reactions***

Recently, H&M Group, a foreign clothing company, released a statement in which they announced the boycott of all Xinjiang cotton products, inciting public outrage. Currently many domestic e-commerce platforms have removed all H&M related products.

### **The H&M Xinjiang boycott statement**

The H&M statement reads: “H&M Group is deeply concerned about reports from civil society organizations and media reports, including allegations of forced labor and religious discrimination against ethnic minorities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.”

In the statement, H&M Group stated that they will not cooperate with any clothing manufacturing factories located in Xinjiang, nor purchase products and raw materials from this region.

### **The so-called “forced labor” and “discrimination against ethnic minorities” are lies. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has already clarified the facts**

Regarding H&M’s approach, netizens said indignantly: “Do they expect to make money in China while creating rumors to undermine Xinjiang cotton? Are they delusional?”

These allegations of “forced labor” and “discrimination against ethnic minorities” in Xinjiang are complete lies. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has clarified these facts many times.



On March 18, 2021, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian stated: “These allegations of “human right abuses” such as “forced labor” and “forced sterilization” are all lies deliberately fabricated by “scholars” and institutions with ulterior motives. These allegations spit in the face of justice and good conscience, and the Chinese people express their deep indignation. Anyone who is willing to respect and understand China and does hold bad intentions or prejudice against Xinjiang should be vigilant and resist this.”

### **H&M products off the shelves of multiple e-commerce platforms**

Yesterday (March 24), many e-commerce platforms have removed H&M from their shelves. Currently, searching for keywords such as H&M and HM on e-commerce platforms such as Taobao, JD.com, Pinduoduo, and Vipshop, no longer displays related stores and products.

Xiaomi App Store, Huawei App Store, Vivo App Store, and Tencent App Store have also removed the H&M Mall App. In addition, a number of artists issued statements on the 24th, stating that they no longer cooperate with the H&M brand.

### **H&M issued a response and netizens are not having it!**

On the evening of the 24th, H&M responded to the matter. However, this latest statement did not directly mention Xinjiang, nor did it apologize for slandering Xinjiang.

The statement stated that the H&M Group purchases more sustainable cotton through a globally certified third party. The purpose is to support cotton farmers around the world to adopt more sustainable methods to grow cotton. H&M Group does not purchase cotton directly from any supplier. In addition, H&M stated that regarding the management of the global supply chain, the group has always adhered to the principle of openness and transparency and does not represent any political stance.

No one bought their statement. Many netizens criticized this statement for being “unintelligible” and “beating around the bush.”

Other netizens directly called for H&M to “exit the Chinese market.”

### **CCTV Popular Comments:**

#### **Comment 1: “Boycott Xinjiang Cotton”? H&M oversight! unwise! Miscalculation!**

The truth is not difficult to clarify. The spokesperson of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs made it very clear that this so-called “forced labor” in Xinjiang is a deliberate fabrication spread by so-called scholars and institutions with ulterior motives, which spits in the face of justice and conscience!

The facts are there. H&M neither sought verification from China nor went to Xinjiang to conduct field investigations. However, it listened to the facts and just sat on its ass. This is a misobservation.

They can’t tell right from wrong, make blind decisions, put the cart before the horse, wear colored glasses when looking at China, and issue a statement that cannot hold up to scrutiny. This is mismanagement.

They try to play the hero by catering to anti-China forces, winning the enmity of Chinese consumers in exchange for cheap applause, leaving them cast aside by the Chinese market. This is a miscalculation.

**Comment 2: H&M Group has both bet on the wrong horse and made the wrong calculations, and must pay a heavy price for their wrong behavior.**

Respect for facts, Chinese laws, and Chinese consumers should be the basic ethics of multinational companies. You cannot see the truth with colored glasses, and you can make accurate judgments only when you understand the full facts.

### **Why does H&M think Xinjiang is using slaves to pick Cotton? Because that is exactly what America did<sup>22</sup>**

***Keywords: H&M and Nike boycott, cotton harvest, slavery, American history***

There is a Chinese saying that goes: “to gauge the heart of a gentleman with one’s own mean measure.” This saying refers to coming up with despicable ideas to speculate on another’s intent, without a shred of evidence. This is exactly what H&M is doing, fabricating lies of forced labor in Xinjiang at will. They think that Xinjiang is using slavery to pick cotton, but all they are doing is biting the hand that feeds without any evidence.

This incident may not be entirely blamed on H&M’s statement, because there is another Chinese saying that goes: “If one is bitten by a snake one morning, one will be afraid of the well rope for ten years.” Even as late as 1939, blacks in Mississippi, the United States, were forced to pick cotton as slaves. Although farmers would pay black slaves daily, they used guns to supervise their work at all times. These photos of black slaves picking cotton are preserved by the American photographer Marion Post Wolcott.

In October 1939, Wolcott visited the Mississippi Delta. It was a state with deep-rooted racism, and white cotton was grown everywhere across the region. After the American Civil War, 90% of the land in the Mississippi Delta was still undeveloped, which attracted many black laborers. Wolcott took a series of photographs of black slaves picking cotton and recorded their daily lives.

Until now, the American people still understand that “black people picking cotton” is a notion that includes oppression and racism. At the time, the swift growth of the cotton industry in the southern United States meant that a large number of black people were trafficked there to engage in the extremely hard work of picking cotton. In the United States, the oppression of slaves by the cotton industry is an important chapter in history textbooks. It is also worth mentioning that the world-famous novel “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” is set on a cotton plantation.

So, why does H&M think Xinjiang is using slaves to pick cotton? Perhaps it is because the shadow that the United States has cast on certain people in Western countries still looms large.

## What makes Xinjiang cotton world-class?<sup>23</sup>

**Keywords:** long-staple cotton, mechanization, smart agriculture, cotton harvest

In global cotton, look at China, and in Chinese cotton, look at Xinjiang. Xinjiang's long staple cotton provides exceptional quality and high output, and is in high demand all year round. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, Xinjiang's total cotton output in 2020 reached 5.161 million tons, accounting for 87.3% of the country's total cotton output and more than 20% of the world's cotton output. Why is Xinjiang cotton the best in the world? Let us tell you six reasons!

(Text under image 1) *Chen Xiaojiang, an employee of the Sixth Division of the XPCC, has been planting cotton for 17 years. He planted 8.24 acres last year with a yield of 490 kilograms and an income of nearly 100,000 yuan. Photo courtesy of the Propaganda Department of the XPCC.*

### Climate: unique temperature and light conditions

(Text under image 2) *A mechanical cotton picker swiftly picking bountiful cotton in the white cotton fields at the 82.4-acre cotton fields of the 144<sup>th</sup> Team of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division of the XPCC on October 5th.*

According to Li Xueyuan, a researcher at the Economic Crop Research Institute of the Xinjiang Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Xinjiang is blessed with natural conditions. First of all, there is sufficient sunshine, which can be up to 16 hours or more, and plants can absorb sufficient sunlight. Secondly, the temperature difference between day and night is large. The plants fully photosynthesize during the day, and at night their growth is inhibited, having a positive effect on the growth of the bolls. Thirdly, Xinjiang has a dry climate with scarce rainfall, allowing the plants to evaporate a large amount of water, leading to higher and softer fiber quality. Lastly, Xinjiang has long frost-free period, giving the cotton plants ample time to grow.

Thanks to the unique light and heat conditions, Xinjiang is also the only long-staple cotton producing area in our country. According to Chen Quanjia, a professor and doctoral supervisor at the Agricultural College of Xinjiang Agricultural University, 90705 acres of long-staple cotton was planted in the Aksu area of Xinjiang in 2020, accounting for more than half of the Xinjiang production of long-staple cotton. The softness, gloss, skin-friendliness, breathability, and elasticity of Xinjiang long-staple cotton far exceed those of ordinary cotton.

### Crop growth: Creating a batch of high-quality germplasm resources

(Text under image 3) *On June 30, 2020, in the cotton field of He Zhiyou, employee of the third co-operative in Wutong Town, the 102nd Regiment of the Sixth Division of the Corps, co-operative leader Long Xiaobo explained the cotton topping technology to his employees. Photo by Li Huabei.*

Experts from Xinjiang Agricultural University and other universities have been committed to cotton growth and related activities for a long time, and they have also played a role in improving cotton quality.

Chen Quanjia takes the crop growth promotion and proliferation of cotton variety *Xinnong Damian No. 4* as an example, and says they improved existing cotton varieties, through precise identification, evaluation, and screening in a variety of environments such as disease resistance, drought resistance, and salt-alkali tolerance. A batch of excellent germplasm resources that are resistant to high

temperature, salt-alkali, cold, and suitable for machine harvesting will be strengthened to protect, utilize, and replenish the cotton germplasm resource bank.

### **Planting: Overcoming key technical problems in multiple links**

(Text under image 4) *On April 13, 2020, in a large field, operated by the fourth company of the Communist Youth League Farm in Wujiaqu City, the Sixth Division of the Corps, winter wheat has gradually returned to green and is growing very well. In the adjacent field, a planter equipped with a Beidou navigation automatic driving system is sowing cotton. Photo by Liu Huabei.*

The Xinjiang farming system works on the basis of crop maturity once per year. Early sowing is carried out in accordance with the requirements of the cotton growth process and the rules of the sowing dates, and the cotton yield is increased through cultivation techniques such as dense shoot growth and early growth promotion. At the same time, mulching film is used to achieve drip irrigation under the film to improve the water use efficiency of Xinjiang cotton area.

Xinjiang's cotton planting technology is also making constant breakthroughs. In 2020, Xinjiang's cotton planting patented technology won African Innovation Week's Invention Gold Award. According to Mao Shuchun, a leading expert on Chinese cotton cultivation, the achievements of "Key Technology Innovation and Application for High-yield and High-efficiency Production of Oasis Cotton" submitted by the Economic Crop Research Institute of Xinjiang Academy of Agricultural Sciences has systematically overcome many key technical problems of high-yield and high-efficiency production of oasis cotton. This technology has become the leading global industrial standard.

### **Harvesting: The mechanical harvesting rate has reached 69.83%**

(Text under image 5) *On September 18, 2020, a mechanical cotton picker harvesting cotton from a cotton field in Hongshan Village, Dafeng Town, Hutubi County, Changji Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Xinjiang. Photo by Tao Weiming.*

Xinjiang's cotton fields are concentrated, planted on a large scale, and are highly mechanized. The area of mechanized cotton harvesting has increased at an average annual rate of over 164,736 acres in recent years. According to data released by the Xinjiang Agricultural Department, the picking rate of cotton machinery in Xinjiang has reached 69.83% in 2020. Statistics from the XPCC Statistics Bureau show that the XPCC has 2,760 mechanical cotton pickers, with an area of 1,943,893 acres of machine-picked cotton, and the machine-picking rate stands at 90.9%.

With the transformation of production methods and technological advancement, the scientific and technological contribution rate of Xinjiang's cotton production has increased by 58% from the 38% prior to the reforms and liberalization of the market. Moreover, all links of cotton production, management, and harvest have been fully mechanized.

### **Industry chain: large-scale production has significant benefits**

(Text under image 6) *He Jinshou, an employee of the 14th Company of the 14th Regiment of the Eighth Division of the XPCC, has planted 50 acres of cotton. He Jinshou was smiling from ear to ear as she watched the cotton harvest. (Zhang Xiaoqi, 144th Regiment of the Eighth Division)*

Li Xueyuan tells us that the strategic planning of the national cotton industry and various political policies have already allowed Xinjiang to become China's largest cotton production, processing, and textile and garment export base. The textile capacity has reached more than 20 million spindles, providing more than 1 million jobs in the textile industry. The integrated development of primary, secondary and tertiary industries have allowed the economic contribution of cotton as the backbone of Xinjiang's economy to become more prominent.

According to Chen Quanjia, Xinjiang's cotton industry contributes 70 billion yuan to the economy. More than 65% of the family income of cotton farmers in the main cotton-producing areas comes from cotton. The cotton industry can provide 1 million jobs. Cotton already become the foremost pillar of the Xinjiang economy.

### **Quality: All indicators exceed national standards, both domestically and internationally in “great health”**

*(Text under image 7) On September 22, a forklift unloaded new cotton sold by employees at the cotton processing plant of the Eighth Division 144th Regiment.*

Yu Yu, a researcher at Xinjiang Academy of Agricultural Sciences, explains that there are three main indicators for measuring cotton quality. Color grade refers to the types and grades of cotton color. The standard grade for staple length is 28 mm, and one mm shorter means it drops a grade. The micronaire values are divided into levels A, B and C, which reflect the fineness of cotton fiber and are also an important indicator to measure the maturity of cotton.

Yu Yu explains, “Xinjiang's cotton planting, with high-quality varieties, mature technology, and large-scale operation, provide one clear advantage, uniform and regular production of cotton. The three main indicators mentioned before are very well coordinated and help guarantee the high quality of Xinjiang cotton.”

Li Xueyuan also explains, “Xinjiang cotton is “complete on the outside and the inside.” By outside I refer to product grade, bright luster and white color, good mercerization, and by inside I refer to high product quality, long fibers, fiber strength, and suitability for spinning high-count yarn. Especially in the case of Xinjiang's unique long-staple cotton, the quilt is warm, breathable and comfortable.”

According to Chen Quanjia, Xinjiang long-staple cotton is of good quality. Its fiber is flexible and long, generally between 33 and 39mm, and the longest can reach 64mm. Its quality exceeds Egyptian cotton and its fibers are stronger. All of its quality indicators exceed the national standards.

This is the kind of Xinjiang cotton I support!

## **“Forced labor” is a lie, Xinjiang cotton is as pure as can be<sup>24</sup>**

***Keywords: accusations of forced labor, mechanization, social harmony, Western accusations***

Recently, anti-Chinese forces in the West have been smearing the human rights situation in Xinjiang, fabricating outright lies such as that “China forced hundreds of thousands of ethnic minority workers to pick cotton in Xinjiang through forced labor transfer and poverty alleviation programs”. The European Union, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada have responded to these allegations by imposing sanctions on China. H&M and other companies have issued statements claiming to stop using Xinjiang cotton, arousing both international attention as well as the indignation of Chinese consumers.

These allegations of “forced labor” are all lies. In August 2018, former U.S. Secretary of State Powell’s Office Director and former Army Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson pointed out in a speech at the Ron Paul Institute that there are 20 million Uighurs in Xinjiang, and the CIA’s intent is to destabilize China, therefore they need to think of every way to make good use of these Uyghurs to create turmoil in China. After repeated slandering of the human rights situation in Xinjiang, the United States and several Western allies have recently reached out their grimy hands towards the snow-white cotton of Xinjiang, trumping up false charges of “forced labor” in Xinjiang. Xinjiang is the main cotton producing area of our country, and its cotton industry has achieved high rates of mechanization, smart technology usage and large-scale planting in recent years. The mechanical picking rate of cotton in Xinjiang has reached 75.5%, and 95% in northern Xinjiang. Since a long time ago, all relevant departments in Xinjiang have consistently fully respected and protected the rights of employees of all ethnic groups, and fully protected their rights of labor remuneration, rest and vacation, labor safety and health protection, and the right to obtain social insurance benefits. Cotton pickers also choose cotton growers of their own accord, and in accordance with our laws and regulations sign labor contracts on the basis of equality, free will and mutual consensus, and obtain corresponding remuneration. They also have complete freedom in choosing cotton picking locations. The production and development of cotton in Xinjiang ensure the livelihoods of Xinjiang cotton growers, cotton weavers and their family members, and have helped them improve their lives. As an important part of the local textile and garment industry, Xinjiang’s cotton textile industry has made great contributions to the elimination of local poverty. As we can see, these accusations of “forced labor” are malicious lies concocted by anti-China forces. They do not really have the people of Xinjiang’s best interests at heart, their purpose is to smear China’s image, undermine Xinjiang’s security and stability, and obstruct China’s development.

Xinjiang has unique natural conditions. It is not only China’s largest high-quality cotton production base, but also China’s only long-staple cotton production area, and one of the world’s most important high-quality cotton production bases. It occupies a pivotal position in China and the world. The annual output of cotton in Xinjiang is about 5 million tons, accounting for more than 80% of the domestic cotton output. The cotton in Xinjiang is one of the best in the world, and there is no need for these companies to miss out on our cotton. When Western countries and companies swing their sanctions bat at Xinjiang Cotton, they also end up hitting themselves. No matter how hard the Western anti-China forces try to smear and slander Xinjiang, they cannot stop the pace of Xinjiang’s prosperity and development, nor can they change the unity, friendship, mutual help, and common sense progress found among the people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang.



The Chinese people are friendly and open, they attach very special importance to the honor and dignity of their country, and they firmly oppose all anti-China rumors and lies. The great door that China has opened will not be closed, it will only open even wider. The Chinese government has always welcomed and supported normal business activities of multinational companies in China and their efforts to build an industrial chain and supply chain. China sincerely and openheartedly welcomes foreign companies and personnel to operate, live and work in China. Overseas brands and multinational companies in the textile supply chain system should go to Xinjiang to personally see the vigorous development of Xinjiang's cotton industry, understand the development of Xinjiang's cotton planting and cotton spinning industry, understand the employment and poverty alleviation of the people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang, and conduct business and make decisions based on objective facts. International companies should keep their eyes open, distinguish right from wrong, and should not politicize economic problems, correct their wrongdoings, and stop excluding Xinjiang cotton and its products from their own supply chains.

A lie will not become a fact, even if it is repeated a thousand times. These balls of cotton are embedded with the hope of the people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang to achieve prosperity through hard work, and tell us the dynamic story of the Chinese government's protection of the labor rights and development rights of the people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang. Those foul-hearted Western politicians who spin tales to deceive the masses cannot hope to tarnish our pure white Xinjiang cotton.

## Seeing the real Xinjiang<sup>25</sup>

***Keywords: documentary, anti-terrorism, Xinjiang society, Western accusations***

On April 16, the cultural documentary “North and South of Mt. Tianshan: Life in Xinjiang,” produced by China International Television Station (CGTN), was broadcasted, and quickly aroused enthusiastic responses on the Internet.

“North and South of Mt. Tianshan” is the successor to four Xinjiang-related anti-terrorism documentaries, namely “Frontiers of Anti-Terrorism in Xinjiang,” “Behind the Scenes: the ‘East Turkestan Islamic Movement’ and Xinjiang Violent Terrorism,” “The Great and Lofty Mt. Tianshan: Memory of Anti-terrorism in Xinjiang, China” and “A Dark Undercurrent Surges: China After Its Xinjiang Anti-Terrorism Challenge.” It is the first cultural documentary on Xinjiang in recent years to comprehensively reflect the current living conditions of the people of all ethnic groups living in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. The film is divided into 4 parts: “Changes of the Times”, “Enriching the People and Rejuvenating Xinjiang”, “A Generation of Youth”, and “Harmonious Coexistence”. Through 17 vivid examples, the documentary tells us the story of people from different ethnicities from both north and south of Mt. Tianshan who love their home, pursue their dreams, and live together in harmony. It shows us the story of the common development of Xinjiang and the motherland, and shows the audience scenes of government help and individual struggles, Xinjiang's development and its linkage to China Proper, the transmission of traditional culture and innovative development and the harmonious coexistence between man and nature. The documentary reveals the beauty of the diverse cultures and natural landscapes north and south of Mt. Tianshan , and provide its viewers with a view of the real Xinjiang.

In the documentary, high-definition cameras depict the magnificent natural scenery of Xinjiang, such as grasslands, deserts, mountains, and rivers. “During the filming process were enthusiastically searching for beautiful footage of both man and nature, because these represent the true splendor of the beautiful jadestone that is Xinjiang,” said Han Bin, the chief director of the documentary.

Social changes have changed the lives of ordinary people, and the changes in everyone’s lives have in return also collectively changed society. Mulaihan Aisha, a villager in Kuqa County who left home for the first time, took a 32-hour slow train to work in a factory in Bole City because he had no money, and on his way there he witnessed beautiful landscapes that he had never seen before. Through his own efforts he was able to earn money, and now his family’s life is getting better and better every day. “I am very grateful to the factory for helping me learn so much. My dream is to work in the factory for two more years, and then go home and open a clothing store,” Mulaihan said.

The documentary features many ordinary people like Mulaihan. Students, winery managers, musicians, botanists, although their genders, ethnicity, age and region might be different, they all share the same love for Xinjiang. “What they have in common is that they have found a way to realize the value of life, which is the epitome of the harmonious development of Xinjiang society. This documentary truly shows people from all walks of life in Xinjiang to realize the value of life and create social value through their efforts, thereby embodying the essence of how Xinjiang ought to be governed in the New Era,” said Zhou Weiping, a researcher at the China Border Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

The film uses facts to refute the mistaken beliefs some people in the United States and the West harbor about “genocide” and “forced labor” in Xinjiang, and presents a real and diverse Xinjiang to the world. “Contemporary Xinjiang is actually as dynamic and vibrant as the rest of China. “Above all we want to reproduce the authentic Xinjiang. Eliminating prejudice and clearing up misunderstandings about Xinjiang was the first thing on our mind when creating this documentary,” Han Bin said.

### **“For you, a little boll of cotton.” Xinjiang’s specialized cotton products are taking on the global market<sup>26</sup>**

***Keywords: consumer expo, Xinjiang cotton industry, promotion***

The Xinjiang booth at the China International Consumer Products Expo is place where many unique regional products come to the fore and become star products, dazzling participants. These products do not just attract business proposals from expo-goers, even more so they are instrumental in helping Chinese products attain an even wider global market.

“For you, a little boll of cotton.” Under this slogan, the Expo has given away a free unique Xinjiang-made cotton souvenir to its many visitors. This spotless white, high-grade cotton has become an important “business card” for Xinjiang during this Expo, and made sure that many of the participating companies in the Xinjiang booth had all of their orders sold out.

Yusup Bextiyar, an employee of Teyi of Clothing Studio in Hotan, Xinjiang has said, “Our Xinjiang cotton is of exceptional quality, particularly in terms of durability, softness and breathability. Many clients actually take the initiative in approaching me, and our sales are increasing every day, and we cannot keep up with demand.”

Xinjiang cotton production was the equivalent of 516 million tons in 2020, accounting for 87% of domestic cotton production, amounting to 62% of domestic cotton consumption. The most distinctive type of cotton is high-quality Xinjiang long-staple cotton, highly favored by consumers. In the Xinjiang exhibition area of the Expo, five representative Xinjiang textile companies cover the entire production chain, from raw materials to finished garments. They hope to use this occasion as a way to promote Xinjiang cotton to a broader market.

A participating textile company explains, “All our orders are pretty much accounted for at this stage, and this will continue until June. Participating in this expo has given us the opportunity to learn from colleagues both in and outside of China, allowing us to focus on constantly improving our core competitiveness, propelling us on our way towards an even grander stage.”

# Mechanization as a Response to Forced Labor Accusations

Chinese state media has actively defended local, regional, and central governments from forced labor allegations, particularly in the wake of the H&M and Nike boycott of March 2021. Advanced mechanization is one of the arguments that Chinese state actors employ to argue for an absence of forced labor. For example, on March 25 Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Hua Chunying posted a video to Twitter of a tractor harvesting cotton, asking how forced labor could be possible in such a mechanized industry; media stories followed repeating those claims including in state-run *The People's Daily*.<sup>27</sup> Both spokesperson Hua Chunying and the *People's Daily* specifically mention mechanization rates for harvesting, pointing to mechanization reaching 69.83% for Xinjiang as a whole and 95% for northern Xinjiang. In June 2021, the Human Rights Institute of the Southwest University of Political Science and Law in Chongqing, China, published a research report with the titled “We will not allow Xinjiang cotton to be defamed: Investigation report on whether forced labor exists in Xinjiang cotton production.”<sup>28</sup> This report cited high degrees of mechanization in the region as one of the reasons why forced labor cannot have taken place in the XUAR. As Xinjiang cotton has come under domestic and international scrutiny, the Chinese state and its affiliated media have increasingly adopted the argument of advanced mechanization in the region to refute Western claims of forced labor in the industry. (Online Annex A—Chinese Media Reports Regarding Forced Labor Accusations” includes an extended discussion of Chinese media responses to accusations of forced labor as well as a selection of relevant media articles translated into English.)

There are many aspects of the cotton growing process that can indeed be mechanized. Tilling, sowing, crop protection, irrigation, fertilization, mulching, and harvesting are all increasingly mechanized. Out of all these processes, however, it seems that harvesting is the most challenging to fully mechanize. Based on the statistics Hua Chunying and the *People's Daily* provided, mechanical harvesting in the northern Xinjiang region is on its way to complete mechanization. However, these numbers clearly suggest that the ratio must be lower for southern Xinjiang, since the XUAR's average mechanization ratio is 69.83%, compared to the northern Xinjiang ratio of 95%. Indeed, official governmental data suggests that southern Xinjiang's harvest mechanization is significantly lower than northern Xinjiang. In her 2020 brief on forced labor in the Xinjiang region, Amy K. Lehr shows, on the basis of data from the Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook (XSY) and the XUAR Agricultural and Animal Husbandry Ministry and Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook (2019), that the mechanical harvest ratio for southern Xinjiang in 2019 was only 20%, as opposed to 90% for northern Xinjiang.<sup>29</sup> The official website of the Chinese Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Affairs of the People's Republic of China corroborates these statistics, claiming that the mechanical harvest ratio in southern Xinjiang rose from 18% to 20% between 2013 and 2018.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, in October 2019 the official website of the government of the People's Republic of China reported that in 2019 the mechanical harvest ratio for the entire XUAR was only expected to grow from 38% to 40%, with certain regions in northern Xinjiang exceeding 90%, which also illustrates different degrees of cotton harvest mechanization

between northern and southern Xinjiang.<sup>31</sup> The XUAR's 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), officially released in February 2021, states that one of its objectives is to reach a mechanized cotton harvest ratio of 80% in Xinjiang by the end of the Five-Year Plan's term, showing that while Xinjiang is clearly intent on mechanizing the cotton harvest, the process is far from complete.<sup>32</sup> On March 25, 2021, one day after the H&M and Nike controversy erupted, Xinhua posted to its Xinhua Viewpoints account on Weibo that mechanical harvest ratios in 2020 were as high as 60% for southern Xinjiang and 97% for northern Xinjiang, based on information the author received from the cotton supply chain analysis service provider China National Cotton Exchange.<sup>33</sup> Not only are these statistics not listed on the China National Cotton Exchange's website, they are also 40% higher than the statistics for 2019 provided by the XSY, which casts doubt on these numbers, especially considering the fact that mechanization ratios for southern Xinjiang only grew by 2% in the preceding year.

It is important to make a geographical distinction between northern Xinjiang and southern Xinjiang when it comes to cotton. For Hua Chunying and the *People's Daily* to mention northern Xinjiang's high mechanical harvest ratios, but not mention southern Xinjiang's much lower ratio underplays that the majority of cotton grown in the XUAR is still hand-picked because the majority of cotton is grown in southern Xinjiang. Furthermore, the long-staple cotton that is most valuable for the export market is primarily grown in southern Xinjiang. In 2017, southern Xinjiang produced at least 99.4% of the high quality long-staple cotton.<sup>34</sup> By 2019, the northern Bortala Mongol Autonomous Prefecture had begun growing long-staple cotton, but the southern Xinjiang production nonetheless amount to at least 73%.<sup>35</sup> That still means that the majority of long-staple cotton is grown in the southern region, where mechanization is limited. Long-staple cotton refers to a cotton with a fiber length greater than 33mm, and is often used in high-quality items such as sheets, towels, and luxury clothing, and this is the type of cotton that people think of when they think of Xinjiang cotton. Climate conditions in northern Xinjiang generally do not allow for long-staple cotton to grow there. In fact, in 2019 a group of agricultural researchers pointed out that cotton grown in northern Xinjiang generally does not meet the quality standards for international demand, and that attempts to grow varieties of long-staple cotton have been mostly unsuccessful thus far.<sup>36</sup> American luxury bed linen manufacturers even suggest that the Uyghur Regions's long-staple cotton is of such good quality because it is hand-picked, which means the cotton strands can be preserved in the longest possible threads and contamination of the crop is less likely.<sup>37</sup> Considering the fact that Xinjiang's total cotton output in 2020/2021 was about 6 million tons, and a large part of that cotton was grown and harvested in the relatively less mechanized southern Xinjiang region, it is reasonable to assume that cotton is still picked by hand in the Uyghur Region on a large scale.

We have demonstrated that labor transfers for cotton picking in the past decade have been taking place in an increasingly coercive environment, particularly since 2016. Particularly since the H&M and Nike boycott led to increased international and domestic attention for Xinjiang cotton, the Chinese state and its media have been pointing towards high levels of mechanization in the Xinjiang cotton industry to refute the possibility of forced labor. However, the numbers that they put forward show unrealistic increases compared to previous years and focus on the highly mechanized cotton farms of northern Xinjiang, often leaving out or obscuring the data on southern Xinjiang, where the vast majority of the desirable long-staple cotton is grown and mechanization levels are much lower.<sup>38</sup> As we have seen, government statistics of the past years indicate that at least until 2019, as much as 80% of cotton in southern Xinjiang was likely still picked by hand.

In the light of these facts, China's active campaign to convince both the domestic and international public that Xinjiang cotton is harvested by machines rather than by hand shows that there is ample reason to suspect widespread forced labor in the cotton-picking process in the Uyghur Region.

**This appendix contains a variety of Chinese-language media articles and research reports on the mechanization process in the cotton industry. These translations are meant to give an indication of how mechanization of the cotton industry is portrayed by Chinese state media, cotton professionals and researchers. The translations and summaries are given in chronological order, and keywords are attached below the title. These articles are presented in chronological order. Keywords have been added to the beginning of each article. Images in the articles have been omitted from the translations due to potential copyright issues, these can be consulted through the original article URL provided in the footnotes.**

### **Machine harvest rates for cotton on the rise, “the grand cotton picking army” is dropping in numbers<sup>39</sup>**

***Keywords: mechanical harvest, seasonal labor, governmental reforms***

As XPCC employee Hao Xiangdong remembers it, in the past, every time when the large cotton fields were ready to spit out their flowers, there would always be an uncountable amount of “special trains” carrying cotton pickers from all over the country bringing them to these cotton fields. However, from a certain point in time, this “grand cotton picking army” began to dwindle in size. Nowadays, these “battles” are fought by machine pickers, who make “roaring” sounds as they swallow the white cotton into their “bodies”, leading to the birth of a cotton “egg” soon after.

At the moment, cotton crops in various parts of Xinjiang are gradually entering their harvest periods. On October 14, this reporter learned from the XUAR Administrative Bureau for Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Machinery that the mechanical cotton harvesting area in the autonomous region is expected to reach 1,980,000 acres in 2019, an increase of nearly 198,000 million acres from the same period last year, and the mechanical cotton harvesting rate is expected to exceed 40%.

“In the past two years, the sown area of cotton in Xinjiang has stabilized at nearly 6,260,000 acres. As the main cotton producing area of our country, Xinjiang can grow cotton almost anywhere, with the sole exception of areas with high altitudes and lower temperatures. During the cotton harvest season, cotton pickers from all over the country come to Xinjiang.” Kong Jie, an associate researcher at the Economic Crop Research Institute of Xinjiang Academy of Agricultural Sciences, explains to us that the large-scale adoption of mechanical cotton pickers in the Xinjiang cotton fields around 2012 has caused a gradual decrease in the number of manual pickers coming to the region. In many cotton-growing areas in northern Xinjiang, machine harvest rates have exceeded 80%. Several areas, such as Manas County in the Changji Hui Autonomous Prefecture, and the sixth and eighth divisions of Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps have even reached 100% mechanization ratios. Currently many areas in Xinjiang are in the process of undertaking large-scale mechanization of the cotton harvest.



According to data from the XUAR Administrative Bureau for Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Machinery, the mechanical harvesting rate of cotton in the northern Xinjiang cotton growing areas has increased from 41% to 92% between 2013 and 2018, and these rates have increased from less than 2% to 20% in southern Xinjiang. It is estimated that in 2019, the southern Xinjiang region will achieve a machine harvested area of more than 823,684 acres.

“The working efficiency of a mechanical cotton picker is much higher than that of manual laborers. A manual picker can pick just over 100 kilograms of cotton in a day, and fields like mine produce 400 kilograms of cotton per 0.16 acres, which would take a manual picker four days to pick. Mechanical pickers on the other hand can harvest an 82.4-acre field in one day,” Hao Xiangdong said with emotion as he watched his mechanical cotton pickers “toil away” in front of him.

Hao Xiangdong did the math for us. A manual cotton picker costs 2 yuan for every kilogram of cotton, which means a 400-kilogram harvest per 0.16 acres of land costs 800 yuan to pick, while harvesting this mechanically only costs 145 yuan for the same amount.

The super-high work efficiency and relatively low “wages” of mechanical pickers have allowed them to gradually replace the position of manual pickers in just a relatively short period of time, earning them much popularity among cotton farmers.

In addition to the popularization and application of mechanized cotton harvesting technology, in 2019, the XUAR will continue to promote structural reforms for cotton suppliers. Moreover, it has made successful efforts to consistently optimize the layout of cotton planting, increase the quality of appropriately scaled crop growing standards, and increase the proliferation areas for advanced agricultural techniques such as precision sowing, efficient water saving, and mechanical harvesting. As a result the overall standards of cotton production are increasing in a stable manner.

Recently, 1,812 acres of cotton fields in Bostan Village, Upper Reservoir Area of Awati County, Aksu Prefecture, have entered the harvest season. Seeing the vast expanse of white before eyes, Bostan resident Juman Kader felt a kind of indescribable joy.

“In 2019 we planted 5 acres of cotton and we carefully managed our cotton fields in accordance with the advice given by my technicians. We have already started harvesting, and we estimate that our cotton yield per 0.16 acres may increase by 50 kilograms compared to last year,” Juman said that he participated in cotton planting field meetings and agricultural technology training classes organized by the village in 2017, and has mastered many professional planting techniques. Compared with 2018, the quality and yield of cotton in 2019 have been greatly improved.

“Our income from cotton has increased, we are very happy. Based on the current market price, we expect that we can earn more than 50,000 yuan from just planting cotton. I am very satisfied,” Juman said.

## **Xinjiang's cotton harvest mechanization rates have already reached 80%! Soon they will no longer need to rely on manual harvesting!<sup>40</sup>**

**Key words:** *harvest mechanization ratio, smart agricultural technology, cotton industry chain*

On the 25th, our journalist learned from the China National Cotton Exchange, a comprehensive cotton supply chain service platform affiliated with the China Co-op Group, that as of March 24, the proportion of machine-picked cotton in Xinjiang in 2020 has reached 80%. In northern Xinjiang machine-picked cotton counts for 97% of the total output for northern Xinjiang, and 60% for southern Xinjiang. This year, China's largest comprehensive cotton industry service provider, China National Cotton Group, a subsidiary of the China Co-op Group, also plans to purchase tractors equipped with Beidou navigation systems and large-scale automatic packaging cotton pickers, and introduce mechanized operations throughout Xinjiang to comprehensively improve agricultural service levels. Ordinary farmers in Xinjiang have also started using these advanced technologies, and the China Cotton Group has adopted the so-called ginner + cooperative + farmer order model. The company provides cotton farmers with agricultural materials and supplies, agricultural machinery services, agricultural technical services, and weather forecast services. It also provides a bottom-line to farmers in the form of acquisitions, dividends, and land equity assistance. These full industry chain services help cotton farmers combat market risks and ensure an increase income.

## **How high is the mechanization rate of Xinjiang cotton? Hear a Huinong merchant explain<sup>41</sup>**

**Keywords:** *Cotton mechanization, e-commerce, Xinjiang local products*

Is there something wrong with Xinjiang cotton? In the past few days, more and more people have come to realize the awe and pride inspiring story behind this plain and simple little cotton.

The latest data from the China Grain Reserve Management Group show that our country's cotton production in the 2020/2021 fiscal year was about 5.95 million tons, total demand was about 7.8 million tons, and the annual deficit was about 1.85 million tons. Xinjiang's cotton output is 5.2 million tons, accounting for 87% of domestic output and 67% of domestic consumption, and its cotton output has ranked first in the country for 26 consecutive years now.

### **Human labor or machine labor? Efficiency and low costs as the answer**

The long-staple cotton that widely flourishes in Xinjiang is considered a king among cotton, and it is considered one of the best cotton varieties in the world. It has been in short supply for many years now. Whether it is production, processing or consumption, China leads the pack in every aspect of the cotton industry chain. This vigorous development of the cotton industry is not just the pride and joy of China's textile industry, but an also an instrument in bettering the lives of Xinjiang cotton farmers.

"We don't have enough to sell ourselves!" Peng Bei, a Huinong.com merchant, tells us proudly. "At present the entire region has trouble keeping up with demand, and the ex-factory price has risen by

several thousand per ton. Quilts made of Xinjiang cotton are of such good quality, I will never have to worry about not selling out.” Peng Bei’s store mostly sells lint and quilt products, and he produces around 500 blankets a day.

To the question of whether Xinjiang uses mechanically produced cotton or not, Peng Bei presents us with convincing facts: “The cost of manual picking can reach two yuan per kilogram, and machine picking only costs seven to eight cents. Moreover, a machine can harvest 50 acres of land per day, something even 1,000 workers cannot accomplish.”

Xinjiang cotton may be soft, but the resources of cotton farmers are hard and tangible. In order to protect the rights and interests of cotton farmers, the state has begun to reform the cotton industry on the supply side since 2014, introducing a target price subsidy policy, while at the same time promoting mechanized cotton harvesting to reduce costs.

Farmers have subsidies for planting cotton, their income is guaranteed, the market is more stable, and the prosperity of the entire industry follows. According to the data for 2020 released by Xinjiang’s agricultural department, the mechanical picking rate of cotton in Xinjiang has reached 69.83%, of which it is as high as 95% in northern Xinjiang. Xinjiang cotton production has already been highly mechanized.

### **Locals and newcomers as one family, building a prosperous future for Xinjiang**

Xinjiang is not just cotton. It has vast terrain and rich resources, with the sweet fragrance of melons and other fruits hanging everywhere. The e-commerce sales of various special agricultural and sideline products are increasing day by day, and many products have become online favorites. With the help of the e-commerce express, batches of Xinjiang agricultural products have been exported out of Xinjiang and sold to all parts of the country, to better the lives of the people in Xinjiang.

According to data from Huinong.com platform, the number of people engaged in agricultural e-commerce in Xinjiang has been increasing year by year and increased by 25% on a monthly basis in 2020, with dry goods being most popular, followed by fresh fruit products. The product categories include 17 major categories and nearly 4000 subcategories. Among them, apples, walnuts, gray dates, apricots, and others are particularly popular. Xinjiang’s total supply of raisins accounts for more than 60% of the country.

Lei Chengguo is a honey merchant in Altay, Xinjiang. His family has been engaged in beekeeping for generations. In recent years, he has adapted to new channels of trade such as e-commerce and turned his store online for the sake of his honey. Lei Chengguo said, “E-commerce has not only brought us orders from all over the world, but also helped us optimize the supply chain. In a good year, honey’s online and offline sales can reach millions of yuan.”

Agriculture has not just brought fortune to the locals, businesses from other regions are also willing to come to Xinjiang to start their own businesses. During a trip many years ago, Huang Jinzhi, who was engaged in the dry goods business at home, instantly fell in love with Xinjiang. “The grapes and cantaloupes I ate in Xinjiang are delicious. I decided to stay in Aksu and start a business of Xinjiang specialty products.”

Today, Huang Jinzhi has her own company and brand in Aksu, and business is booming. Riding the wave of e-commerce, she also brought her business online. “I opened a store on Huinong.com to sell special products such as red dates, walnuts, and raisins. There’s a remarkable uptick in order volume and my turnover already stands a four to five hundred thousand yuan.”

More and more agricultural professionals like Lei Chengguo and Huang Jinzhi are opening their own online stores. With the popularization of information technology and the improvement of infrastructure construction, rural e-commerce has blossomed on this fertile soil in Xinjiang. According to research data, as of the end of 2020, e-commerce in Xinjiang reached 222.26 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 1.29%. Among them, the transaction volume of bulk commodities and B2B commodities was 180.745 billion yuan, and the online retail sales were 41.681 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 12.14%.

The rising popularity of e-commerce is strong evidence that Xinjiang is rapidly realizing modern development. Since the “Digital Village” project of introducing internet technologies to rural areas has been implemented, more and more young people have tried their hands at agricultural e-commerce. On the Huinong.com platform, the proportion of post-80s users in Xinjiang has reached 40.19%, and that of post-90s users has reached 27.60%. Proliferation of information technologies and increased mechanization in agriculture show us that Xinjiang agriculture has long shed its traditional image.

A string of exciting data portrays the real picture of Xinjiang’s industrial and economic prosperity. The society develops steadily, the people live and work in peace and contentment, and the lives of the people of Xinjiang are as pure and spotless, as tenacious and long-lasting as their cotton!

## **The Agricultural Industrial Park at Changji, Xinjiang: Creating a State-of-the-Art Production Facility for Cotton<sup>42</sup>**

***Keywords: northern Xinjiang, smart agricultural technology, model cotton production area***

The past few days, large-scale cotton producer Zhao Yuezhong of the Xinjiang Changji National Agricultural Science and Technology Park in model district Laolonghe has started preparations for sowing cotton. He has been implementing a series of new and innovative production techniques, such as integrated irrigation and fertilization, and mechanical harvesting, netting him an income of more than 3 million yuan on a 165-acre field.

In accordance with several national scientific platforms such as the West China chapter of the Chinese Center for Agricultural Research, the Chinese Cotton Research Institute (CAAS) and the China Cotton Industry Alliance (CCIA), the Xinjiang Changji National Agricultural Science and Technology Park has adopted the “one facility, one product” strategy this year. The park will primarily grow cotton varieties zhongmian 113 and xinluzao 57, and has established a 16,500-acre high quality cotton production base to create a world-class cotton production park. This world-class cotton production park adopts singular sowing, singular harvest, singular ginning and singular storage methods, and adheres to the principle of high quality for a competitive price.

Faced with several international standards, the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences in 2016 took the initiative in uniting all 208 enterprises and institutions of our country's cotton industry into an industry-wide integrated cooperative national cotton industry union, making sure that production zones grow the type of cotton that textile mills want.

In the only four years since it has been founded, the China Cotton Industry Alliance has achieved considerable success in promoting technological cooperation and innovation, building up high-quality cotton production bases, establishing a complete quality control chain and tracing system, as well as fostering Chinese cotton under a single CCIA brand and integrating machinery to give cotton a level of "tertiary sector" depth.

Xinjiang Changji National Agricultural Science Park's Industrial Committee Secretary and CCIA Vice Executive Director Zhang Mingqing explains, "The model high-quality long-staple cotton series zhongmian 641, introduced and developed the CCIA, was first tested at the Changji. Test results have indicated that the staple length and strength levels of zhongmian 641 approach 32, which is 4 points higher than the main Xinjiang cotton product, and also completely exceeds the standards for Australian cotton, making every 0.16 acres of field more efficient by over 500 yuan."

In the past years, the park has implemented several advanced technologies to efficiently lower the costs of growing cotton, such as unmanned vehicles led by navigation satellites, precision sowing, drones, chemical inching and mechanical harvesting. Since 2015 the park has also begun the process of mechanizing the entire chain of production, from field management all the way to harvesting. Seven cooperatives specialized in agricultural equipment possess over 400 machines of all different types, and agricultural machinery services are spreading throughout Xinjiang. Four ginning factories are able to annually process around 30,000 tons of ginned cotton, allowing planters to plant 31,300 acres of cotton, providing the prerequisites for affordable, high-quality cotton.

In the era of the thirteenth Five-Year Plan, the park has maintained a surface of around 24,000 acres to grow cotton, and the yield per unit has increased from 336 kilos to 460 kilos, an increase of around 30%. The staple quality has increased from a "double 28" to a "double 30", resoundingly creating a new template for high-quality Xinjiang cotton.

In 2020, the first batches of the CCIA-selected high quality cotton types zhongmian 113, zhongmian 641, zhongmian 96A have been grown in over 110,000 acres of field across Xinjiang (the entire zhongmian series sits at around 165,000 acres). The person in charge of the CCIA explains, "from here on, we will use the CCIA brand as an opening to penetrate the entire cotton production chain and establish a traceable system that goes all the way from

'CCIA seeds' to 'CCIA clothing', which will result in the development of 5 million acres of field for planting cotton and 1.7 million acres for our high-quality cotton industry. Through cotton, our country will make the change from a large player in textiles to a textile giant."

## **XPCC 5th Division's integrated till, sow, harvest mechanization ratio exceeds 99%<sup>43</sup>**

***Keywords: Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, northern Xinjiang, integrated agricultural technology***

Following recent increases in temperature, farms in 5th XPCC division-controlled Shuanghe have started sowing cotton. There is something different from preceding years though, and that is that this year a large batch of smart agricultural equipment has been put to work in the cotton fields, showing marked increases in the expansion and intensification of XPCC cities produced cotton. The mechanization ratio of the so-called “till, sow, harvest” integrated machinery has already exceeded 99%.

On April 13th, the author of this article witnessed with his own eyes the marvelous view of a Beidou satellite-controlled seed drill shuttling the cotton fields at the XPCC 9th division. This year, the XPCC controlled cities are planning to sow 127,000 acres of cotton. Since the start of planting in mid-April, cotton farmers have used large quantities of smart agricultural machinery for sowing, greatly increasing sowing mechanization rates, helping them guarantee better incomes.

Cotton is the leading agricultural industry in the XPCC cities, and furthermore it is also an important source of income for the workers employed by the XPCC cotton farms. In recent years, XPCC controlled cities have consistently made vigorous investments in technology, resulting in a steady increase in the total production volume of cotton and the yield per unit. In 2020, the XPCC controlled cities produced 125,000 acres of cotton, and the yield per unit of unginned cotton was 417.5 kilograms per 0.16 acres, showing an increase of 12.5% compared to the year before. The total production of unginned cotton was 318.000 tons, showing a year-on-year increase of 3.6%.

Head of the XPCC Bureau for Agriculture and Rural Areas Liu Xinjun explains, “This year the XPCC cities have determined a strict policy for cotton. Under the “one main, two auxiliaries” growing model, they have continued to implement different types of intelligent agricultural machinery such as mechanical harvest pickers, residual film recovery machines, fertilizer spraying machines, and other equipment, thereby contributing to the expansion, mechanization, standardization, intensification and industrialization of cotton, and facilitating the development of a high quality cotton industry.”

In 2021, the XPCC-controlled cities are taking the next step in expanding their application of information technology in the field of agriculture, and the Beidou satellite guidance system, unmanned crop protection machinery, large-type intelligent sowing machinery and intelligent harvesting machinery have already found widespread use in their array of agricultural equipment. Flow sensor monitoring technology, wireless communication technology and the IOT are used to enable parts of the production process such as precision fertilizer distribution, precision sowing and intelligent harvesting, realizing the XPCC-controlled cities' goal of technology assisted agriculture.

With these improvements in agricultural machinery, the quality of the crop types cannot fall behind either. In recent years, the XPCC cities have insisted on technology to push the agricultural sector forward in an innovative way and have pushed for new methods and technologies across the entire board, giving impetus to a rapid change in technology and R&D results. During the 13th Five Year Plan



period (2016-2020), the XPCC Cities Bureau of Agricultural Technology has established twelve new technological projects and has succeeded in their application for a “workspace for talented researchers involved in cotton crop breeding”, and in 2020 they received a project from the XPCC Bureau of Technology to form an “XPCC innovation team for the research of cotton crop quality resources,” laying the foundations for further development of the XPCC cotton industry.

The director of the Cotton Research Department of the XPCC Cities Bureau of Agricultural Technology Cao Yang adds, “This is the first year of the 14th Five Year Plan and we are setting a new course yet again, so we have applied for the government and the XPCC’s technological projects. The “5th Division Innovation and Improvement of Transmission of the Technology System for Mechanical Harvesting and the Development of New Cotton Crop Types” project has already received initial approval from the XPCC cities and will prove a great driving force to the development and improvement of XPCC cotton.

Liu Xinjun explains, “On the basis of the delineation of important agricultural product protection areas in Xinjiang and the Corps and the regional layout plan of cotton varieties in the region, and led by the market and the needs of cotton spinning enterprises, based on the results of previous trials and demonstrations, and comprehensive screening, the XPCC City Party Committee has formulated and released a catalog of recommended cotton varieties. In the catalogue the XPCC cities will promote four main cotton varieties. Their disease resistance, yield, and crop quality have been greatly improved compared to previous varieties. Regional climate conditions, worker wishes and production realities have been united to select main and auxiliary varieties, which will heighten the core competitiveness of the region’s cotton industry.”

## **Viewing Xinjiang in high speed: A view of China and Xinjiang through the lens of cotton harvesting technology<sup>44</sup>**

***Keywords: mechanical cotton pickers, Chinese agricultural technology, smart agricultural technology, Boshiran***

In the past two years, the mechanization ratio in the Xinjiang cotton industry has drastically increased, and this is no small part thanks to the contribution of the mechanical cotton picker industry. Xinjiang Boshiran Intelligent Agricultural Machinery Ltd. faced the difficult task of challenging a domestic mechanical cotton picker market dominated by foreign brands, but responded to this challenge by focusing on innovation, producing a piece of key technology to call their own.

In 2019 Boshiran’s cotton picking machines sales amounted to 45.2% of the domestic market, and these technological pioneers were the first Chinese company to produce cotton picking machinery that was self-developed, self-produced, and also intellectually their property. The company was founded in 2009 in the Chemical Park in Wusu, Xinjiang, and their core business is producing agricultural equipment, with a special focus on the harvest of cotton. They are a manufacturing firm of modern “smart” agricultural machinery, in which R&D, production, sales and service are all integrated.

“After more than 20 years of market domination by Johan Dier, we entered the market of cotton mechanization with the aim of becoming a large cotton enterprise. In 2013 our first cotton picker entered

the market, and our products can now be found all across Xinjiang, and they are entering the Central Asian markets too,” corporate expansion manager Liu Shuai told us.

The secret to the success of Boshiran’s cotton pickers is the fact that the parameters of the different elements in the cotton-picking process are extremely well optimized. The frame of the picker heads is furnished with high-quality metal plates, and because the basic structure of a picker head resembles that of a cog, the construction is an exact process that requires an extremely stable environment, a perfect task for smart machinery. In addition to stable operation of the picker heads, tractor movement stability is also essential to the effectiveness of the picking process. In order to guarantee stable movement, the rear wheels have a wide body and use low pressure tires, allowing it to deal with all sorts of complicated picking environments.

Liu Shuai explained to us that at the back of the three rows of balers there is a baling unit which allows the cotton to enter from the front, and after the cotton has gone through the first round of baling, the machine uses liquid pressure to apply a thin plastic film to the baled cotton, which protects the cotton from fire and water damage. In addition, a bar-code is applied to the film as well, allowing for tracking information such as the cotton type and classification.

“In order to consummate our dominant position in the market, we have established ten sales and service centers across Xinjiang, as well as a 24/7 hotline and a 24/7 service team. Right now, cotton harvest periods are become increasingly shorter. At first it took 52 days to finish picking the harvest, but thanks to an increase in agricultural machines and more time for farmers to focus on crop growth, this has been reduced to 45 days, and last year we managed to break the barrier of 35 days for the first time, with the possibility of breaking 30 this year. If that happens, we can pretty much say that cotton all across Xinjiang can be picked within just 30 days,” sales manager Zhang Hailong explains.

Boshiran plans to sell 500 machines this year, and the 4S service centers for the over 10 types of machinery that they construct, direct retail stores, and sales and service networks are also starting to take shape, fully coordinating their efforts to produce smart technology that can further propel the entire cotton industry. The next step for Boshiran is to combine their efforts in accordance with national agricultural development strategic planning, seize opportunities, continue to take advantage of its own strengths, maintain technical research efforts, continuously improve independent research and development and production capabilities, move toward high-end smart products, and become a stronger and larger Chinese private enterprise. By doing so it can contribute to the high-quality development of Xinjiang’s agricultural modernization.

## Summary of Chinese research report by Southwest University of Political Science and Law (June 2021)<sup>45</sup>

In June 2021, the Human Rights Institute of the Southwest University of Political Science and Law (西南政法大学人权研究院) published a research report titled “We Will Not Allow Xinjiang Cotton to be Defamed: There is no Forced Labor in the Production of Xinjiang Cotton.” The report lists no authors, but it does provide the contact info of the person in charge of the institute, Shang Haiming. The report is 31 pages long, and the main body of the text can be divided into three parts:

- The current state of mechanization in the cotton industry in south Xinjiang
- An analysis of the causes of the increased mechanization ratio in cotton production
- An investigation into the working conditions of cotton pickers in south Xinjiang

The report starts off by stating that in March 2021, the non-traditional security studies research lab of Southwest University of Political Science and Law visited Aksu, Kashgar and Hotan to conduct fieldwork on the social development of Xinjiang. During their fieldwork, the H&M and Nike forced labor statements were published, and according to the report, this caused a part of Western media to criticize the situation in Xinjiang by making allegations of forced labor in the cotton production chain, particularly in south Xinjiang. In face of these allegations, the research team decided to promptly allocate some of their resources to uncover the truth behind this situation.

### **The current state of mechanization in the cotton industry in south Xinjiang**

The first chapter of the report deals with mechanization in southern Xinjiang. It states that mechanization in the cotton production process has found increasing adoption, and mentions typical examples such as precision sowing, integrated irrigation and fertilization, soil surveillance guided fertilizing and high-efficiency cotton picking technologies. It claims that the number of mechanical cotton pickers in Aksu was 834 in 2020, and that these machines were used for 71.3% of the total cotton growing areas. In Yopurga county, one of their fieldwork regions, the ratio of mechanical cotton pickers was over 50%. The report claims that many cotton growers have stated that they have already achieved full mechanization of their cotton production, including unmanned vehicles, such as satellite-guided tractors and drones. The rest of the chapter is a collection of interviewed statements by Xinjiang cotton growers where they explain the advantages of the technology and equipment they use on their farms or the farms they work for. The final five pages of the chapter are devoted to photographs of these farmers posing with their machinery.

### **An analysis of the causes of the increased mechanization ratio in cotton production**

The report suggests that the socialized service system in cotton cooperatives has led the widespread adoption of machinery and that the government has facilitated this by offering subsidies to purchase equipment. More importantly, cotton growers want to reduce labor costs through mechanization. To show this, they show excerpts from their interviews (who happen to be the same interviewees as in the first section.) One of the interviewees, Umut, explains that before the mechanization process was initiated, they required around 700 to 800 pickers to come pick the cotton every year, and now they only need 60 to 70 to take care of the fields. He goes on to explain that he had trouble finding enough laborers, and that he would have to offer them very high salaries to get them to accept the job. The

pickers would often tell the growers: “For every six ‘peaches’ of your cotton, we take two.” Nowadays, he claims, pickers call him for jobs instead, and they offer him much more reasonable prices. Another interviewee, Hazritiali Sawan, virtually says the same, the amount of workers he needs has gone from between 100 and 200 to between 10 and 15 workers. He alludes to the same saying about ‘peaches’ as well, saying that it was a typical saying before mechanization. As a result of mechanization, his picking costs per 0.16 acre of cotton have dropped between 500 and 600 yuan.

Another cause is attributed to the proliferation of cotton cooperatives throughout the region and the increased scale and organization that came as a result. Through this structure, small cotton farmers can join their lands with a cooperative and get paid dividends in return. Another interviewee, Azmat Tursun, describes how his village has two cotton cooperatives, and that he has joined one of them. He says the manager of his cooperative is Uyghur, and that of the 10 cotton farmers who are a part of the cooperative, two are Han and the rest are Uyghur. They receive a salary every day, and the end of the year dividends based on cotton production, and they can also work elsewhere in the meantime. A second interviewee, Kaim Ushur, explains that his life became much better since he joined a cooperative. He now owns three vehicles (a pick-up truck, a Great Wall, and a BYD, both Chinese cars,) 750 sheep, 40 cows, his daughter goes to a good school in Shenzhen and he was able to buy a house for his father. He adds that some people are jealous of his wealth, but that they can talk nonsense all they like. He concludes that the cooperative model has helped end land fragmentation in south Xinjiang, which in turn facilitated the adoption of mechanized equipment, as well as an increase in cotton production.

A third factor that is named is the rise of a so-called socialized service industry in southern Xinjiang. The socialized service system refers to a network system formed by social and economic organizations related to agriculture to meet the needs of agricultural production and provide various services for agricultural production operators. In the context of cotton, this can refer to companies and organizations who are specialized in tilling, sowing, crop protection, harvest, etc. The report claims this system benefits professionalization in the industry, helps lower costs and raise production efficiency. Bulay Yasin, an interviewee from Kashgar, works for a construction company that provides leveling, cotton management, cotton picking and agricultural equipment installation in the cotton industry, and he explains that throughout the year he travels all across the region to work at all sorts of different cotton farms. Abdurishit Imit, also from Kashgar, is a cotton buyer, and every year around picking season he hires a group of workers to go to the cotton farmers to pick up the harvest. He claims to make over 300,000 yuan (47,000 US dollars) per year, and does not ask for any pay from the elderly and sick cotton farmers in his community.

The fourth factor is the increase of subsidies from the government. One of the farmers mentioned before, Hazritiali Sawan, claims that he received 500,000 yuan of the total 2,000,000 yuan he spent to buy five cotton pickers as a subsidy from the government. According to the report, the XUAR already issued 1 billion yuan worth of subsidies in the first four months of 2021, and will continue to do so until at least 2023.

## **An investigation into the working conditions of cotton pickers in south Xinjiang**

This chapter starts off with the claim that high income is “undoubtedly the biggest motivation” for migrant workers all across the country to come to Xinjiang to pick cotton. The report divides three types of cotton pickers: transregional long-term professional cotton pickers, with food and lodging provided by their employer, full-time cotton pickers who do not receive food and lodging, and part-time pickers. The average cotton picker will pick between 100 and 160 kilograms of cotton per day, and a minority of cotton pickers can pick up to 200. A harvesting period of 50 days provides them a total income of at least 10,000 yuan, which in some cases can be as high as 20,000 yuan. Cotton pickers can also choose to be paid daily, weekly or monthly. The report contrasts this to the average XUAR resident’s yearly income of 23,103 yuan (13,122 for countryside, 346,44 for city) and concludes that just working in the harvest would be enough to surpass the average XUAR income. It continues with several excerpts from pickers’ diaries and testimonies, indicating that they do not have to work everyday and sometimes finish the day very early too. The few Uyghur interviewees mention that they usually employ friends, relatives and other villagers to help them pick cotton, and that they are treated well and amicably, or that they make a good income from picking cotton. Qin Jinzhong, a Han farmer, however says that labor is too expensive now, and that it costs at least 800 to 1,000 yuan to harvest 0.16 acres of land manually, whereas the cost of renting a cotton picker for the same area is 180 yuan at most.

The second point that the report makes is that there is a widespread phenomenon of factory workers taking leave to go pick cotton during the harvest season. It claims that factory workers can make from twice up to three times the income that they would earn at their factories in September and March. Factories apparently agree to their leave requests out of fear of an outflux of workers. It adds that due to the increased mechanization in the region, cotton picking salaries have dropped and this phenomenon is steadily decreasing. They support this claiming by showing factory workers’ attendance in 2020 in weaving factory in Kashgar, and September and October in particular show many workers taking the entire month off. One Uyghur interviewee corroborates the story and says that factories offer rewards to the workers who do not take absence for a certain period of time. The factory does not stop you from leaving to pick cotton, he says, but the reward system is enough to entice enough workers to stay.

Finally, the report claims that a lack of demand for the position of cotton picker has made the job more competitive. They have calculated that in Aksu, the costs of hand-picked cotton are between 800 and 1000 yuan per 0.16 acres, whereas machine-picked cotton only costs 120 to 180 yuan per 0.16 acres. This had led to a lack of demand for manual cotton pickers. They claim that in Aksu and Kashgar, manual cotton pickers are usually used for the following jobs: picking residue cotton after the mechanical pickers have harvest, picking long-staple cotton plots, and picking small and scattered cotton fields unsuitable for machine pickers. This had led to two major changes: firstly, a lack of demand for manual pickers has caused changes to the average cotton picker’s contract. Farmers usually hire separate workers to perform the day-to-day land management, but many of these workers are afraid that they will miss out on cotton picking work because of mechanization, so many of them are demanding that farmers leave a certain area for them or others to harvest. This had led to the second phenomenon, more and more land-management workers have started to double as brokers for cotton pickers. This means that land-management workers have started actively looking for manual cotton pickers, particularly in their group of friends and acquaintances. The report includes several images of Uyghur SNS users looking for people to come pick cotton, as well as testimony from such a broker, who claims to mostly look for pickers using his phone or WeChat.

The report's conclusion is as follows (translated):

“The survey found that the Western accusations on cotton picking in Xinjiang are seriously lacking.

According to the facts, there is no sign of forced labor in any link of the cotton production process in Xinjiang. Southern Xinjiang today has achieved considerable mechanization in the cotton production process through the establishment of advanced cotton fields, land transfer to cooperatives and government support and subsidies. This has greatly reduced the demand for labor. Compared to other professions, picking cotton is an incredibly lucrative job for the people of southern Xinjiang. Due to the increasing mechanization of the industry in the region, demand for the position is becoming lower and lower, and many of these pickers will have no choice but to move other industries. While they pick cotton, cotton workers have the right to choose their profession, to an income, to breaks and vacations and to the protection of their labor safety and hygiene. Western countries are intentionally misreading the working situations of Xinjiang cotton pickers, and they do not adhere to basic logic. Their image of Xinjiang cotton pickers is tainted by an image straight out of their own history, the image of the desolate cotton fields in the American South of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where black slaves were forced to pick ‘blood cotton’ with their in their eyes from the constant whipping.”



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