

## **East Turkistanis and Forced Organ Harvesting**

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by David Matas

I want to talk about the mass killing in China of East Turkistanis, particularly Uyghurs, for their organs. It is impossible to talk about that without first talking about the slaughter of practitioners of the spiritually based set of exercises Falun Gong for their organs. It is impossible to talk about that without first talking about the systematic sourcing of organs in China from prisoners sentenced to death.

Everywhere else in the world organs for transplants are sourced from voluntary donors. In some countries, there are black markets where poor individuals sell one of their two kidneys for transplants. Only in China has the sourcing of for transplants from the very beginning been institutionalized by the state through the killing of prisoners.

China has had and still has a high death penalty volume. The Government of China considers the number of those executed a state secret. But informal estimates can be made, from media reports and case loads of defense counsel. The executions number in the thousands every year, a multiple more than that of any other country.

There is significant cultural reluctance in China to organ donations. China did not even have an organ donation system until 2014. This official system now generates tiny numbers. The cultural reluctance to donations has been reinforced by the transplant systems already in place, where the selling of organs is a big business for hospitals, earning them billions of dollars every year. Donors are reluctant to make donations which serve no altruistic purpose and just line the pockets of those profiting from the sale of organs.

Without a system of donations until 2014, the only viable source of organs for transplants in China was prisoners. Yet, the Government of China for many years, until 2007, denied

that organs were coming from prisoners, claiming that instead they were all coming from donations, even though China at the time did not have a donation system.

The system of killing of prisoners for their organs expanded quickly with the start of the repression of the spiritually based set of exercises Falun Gong. The Chinese Communist Party shift from socialism to capitalism under Deng Xiaoping meant that state funds were withdrawn from the health sector. Hospitals had to charge patients in order to keep their doors open. The selling of organs for transplants, especially to foreigners, became a primary line of profit.

Yet, prisoners sentenced to death are not that reliable as a source for organs. Chinese law requires those sentenced to death to be executed within seven days of sentence. That makes scheduling transplants of organs sourced from prisoners sentenced to death awkward. Hepatitis B is rife within the Chinese criminal population, making many criminal prisoner organs unusable. And there is a global legal push to reduce in China the vast number of persons sentenced to death, a push to which the Government of China has responded by cutting down the number of death penalty offences and increasing appeals available to those sentenced to death. Death penalty prisoners became a shrinking source for transplants.

The Chinese Communist Party initially tolerated and even encouraged the practice of Falun Gong as beneficial to health. The practice began, with that tolerance and encouragement, from a standing start in 1992 to 100 million practitioners by 1999. At that point, the Party flipped, alarmed by the popularity of the practice and by its belief system, which, though not political, is spiritual, unlike that of the Party, which is atheist. In 1999, the Party, without orchestrating a legal ban of the practice of Falun Gong, decided to repress it.

The official announcement of the Party repression decision in July 2009 did not have the

desired effect, leading to protests by Falun Gong practitioners, rather than cessation of the practice. The Party in November 2009 shifted to forced conversion to Communism, torturing those who did not renounce the practice and maintaining in arbitrary indefinite detention those who refused to condemn Falun Gong even after torture.

100 million is a large number of people even by Chinese standards. With the announcement of repression, many Falun Gong abandoned the practice. Many more did so after detention and torture. Yet, even after all that, there remained hundreds of thousands of practitioners in arbitrary indefinite detention. This population became a vast forced organ donor bank. They were everywhere in China. Every hospital in China which engaged in transplants, and there were eventually about 1,000 of them, could source organs locally, originally from prisoners sentenced to death and later from arbitrarily and indefinitely detained Falun Gong practitioners.

In 2007, the Chinese Government changed their organ sourcing narrative, acknowledging that organs were not coming from donors, but instead were coming from prisoners. However, this acknowledgement was no more honest than their previous denial. The Chinese Communist Party official line in 2007 became that organs were coming from prisoners sentenced to death who donated their organs before death as penance for their crimes. Yet, by 2007, the bulk of organs for transplantation were coming from arbitrarily, indefinitely detained Falun Gong practitioners who were guilty of nothing, convicted of nothing, sentenced to nothing, who consented to nothing and were told nothing before being organ harvested and killed through organ extraction.

The volume of arbitrarily and indefinitely detained Falun Gong practitioners was so large that they seemed initially to be an inexhaustible resource. After the repression of Falun Gong began, hospitals, to take advantage of this resource, expanded transplant capacity by building transplant hospitals, transplant wings of existing hospitals and training and hiring

large numbers of new transplant staff. The selling of organs became for Chinese hospitals an international business. They advertised organs for sale, with listed prices, in a wide variety of languages, including Arabic, around the world. Patients could book transplants in advance, at the convenience of the patients, even for vital organs. Transplant volume ramped up to 100,000 organs transplanted a year.

The Falun Gong population in arbitrary indefinite detention, as large as it was, eventually depleted through the mass killing for their organs. Newly detained Falun Gong practitioners were nowhere near as numerous as those who were destroyed through the mass industrialization of the Chinese transplantation system. A large new source of organs became necessary. That source became the Uyghur population, detained in large numbers since 2017.

By 2017, sourcing organs from Uyghur prisoners of conscience became both necessary and possible. Initially, the survival time of organs outside the body, ischemic time, was short. Organs for transplants were sourced locally because they had to be. There was not enough time while the organs were viable after harvesting to take them long distances.

That changed with the development of ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation) technology and machine perfusion both of which are now widely used in China. Organs no longer need to be sourced locally. Through the development of technology, organs can now survive long enough outside the body to be sourced anywhere in China and be transported anywhere else in China. The repression of the Uyghurs as well as the depletion of the arbitrarily, indefinitely detained Falun Gong population through organ extraction and the increased portability of organs because of ECMO and machine perfusion has led to a substantial movement in organ sourcing from local Falun Gong detained to repressed Uyghurs in Xinjiang province.

The Kashgar airport, an airport near a mass detention camp, has a dedicated lane with signage in Chinese, English and Arabic. The sign, in green, pasted on the floor, states "Special passenger Human organ transport channel", meaning presumably that the lane is both for special passengers and human organ transports. The reference to special passengers would explain the signage in English and Arabic. Pictures of the signs are publicly available on the internet. See

<https://twitter.com/jimmillward/status/1151552387850604544?lang=en>

According to a Radio Free Asia report from January 2017, there are similar signs throughout Xinjiang at its various airports. The same media report states that China Southern Airlines has reported more than 500 air shipments of living organs out of Xinjiang to the rest of China up to the date of the news story. See

<https://www.rfa.org/cantonese/news/organ-10062017075527.html>

The Chinese Communist Party narrative about sourcing of organs in 2014 mutated again. The narrative the Party had put forward, that prisoners voluntarily donated their organs as penance for their crimes, was rejected by the transplantation profession outside of China, mostly not because they acknowledged that the narrative was false, not because they recognized that the organs were being sourced elsewhere, but rather because the narrative itself was unacceptable. With notable exceptions, the global transplantation profession was prepared to say nothing against the Chinese government claims that organs in China were being sourced from prisoners sentenced to death but asserted that donations from this population were not truly voluntary because of the coercive environment of prison life.

The Government of China in 2014 went back to its original, pre-2007 narrative, and announced that, starting from 2015, all organs would be sourced from voluntary donations. This remains their official position today, despite the tiny numbers that donation centres generate.

These donation centre numbers are augmented by accident victims, whose families are often paid large sums to consent to organ sourcing from their accidented relatives. Yet, accident victims themselves do not explain transplant volumes, partly because accidents are not booked in advance and, at least in China, transplants are, and also partly because accidents which are so severe as to lead to the brain death which is necessary to justify the extraction of vital organs, in many cases, also damages these organs.

Uyghurs in mass detention camps in Xinjiang are systematically blood tested and organ examined. These tests are not done for their health, since they are commonly mistreated in detention. The tests are necessary for organ transplantation, since transplants need healthy organs, blood type compatibility and, ideally, tissue type compatibility and roughly matching organ sizes.

Ethan Gutmann, a fellow researcher into organ transplant abuse in China, and a co-founder with me and the late David Kilgour of the NGO, the International Coalition to End Transplant Abuse in China, went to Kazakhstan in 2020 to interview Kazakhs who had been detained with Uyghurs in the Xinjiang mass detention camps and later deported to Kazakhstan. One witness, who had access to printouts of blood tests, stated that pink check marks had been added to certain names. Other witnesses stated that certain individuals, after testing were forced to wear colored bracelets or vests. Approximately a week after the tests, the color-coded individuals vanished in the middle of the night.

Every year about 2.5 to 5 percent of healthy individuals in the camps disappeared in the middle of the night. On average, they were age 28 or 29 - the age that the Chinese medical establishment prefers for organ harvesting. From this evidence of disappearances, Gutmann estimates that 25,000 to 50,000 people are killed every year in Xinjiang for their organs. See

<https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/MAGAZINE-china-s-xinjiang-xxx-files-thousands->

[uighur-disappear-organs-harvested-1.9340106](https://www.humanrightscommission.house.gov/sites/humanrightscommission.house.gov/files/documents/GUTMANN%20-%20Witness%20Testimony%20Template.pdf)

<https://humanrightscommission.house.gov/sites/humanrightscommission.house.gov/files/documents/GUTMANN%20-%20Witness%20Testimony%20Template.pdf>

There were, of course, others forcibly removed from the camps - labourers being moved to their forced work locations. But these movements were daytime, those moved were younger, about aged 18, and the movements were officially announced at camp luncheons as graduations.

The tell-tale signs of organ transplant abuse of Uyghurs, in addition to

- 1) the blood testing and organ examination followed by colour coding of some of those tested,
- 2) the disappearances of the colour coded,
- 3) the increased portability of organ through the development of transplant technology, allowing for the transportation of organs from Xinjiang to the rest of China,
- 4) the organ transplant lanes at Xinjiang airports,
- 5) the media report of organs transported out of Xinjiang,
- 6) the depersonalization and dehumanization of Uyghurs through Chinese Communist Party propaganda,
- 7) the genocide of Uyghurs in other ways through imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group, See <https://uyghurtribunal.com/>
- 8) the huge institutional Chinese transplant infrastructure which needs another source of organs to sustain it after the depletion of the arbitrarily and indefinitely detained Falun Gong population,
- 9) the absence of any other plausible explanation for the sourcing of organs, includes also
- 10) the construction of crematoria near Uyghur detention camps throughout Xinjiang. One such crematorium advertised locally job openings for fifty security guards.

The Parliament of the European Union earlier this month passed a lengthy resolution on "Reports of continued organ harvesting in China" which

"Expresses its serious concerns about the reports of persistent, systematic, inhumane and state-sanctioned organ harvesting from prisoners in the People's Republic of China, and, more specifically, from Falun Gong practitioners and other minorities such as Uyghurs, Tibetans and Christians"

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0200\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0200_EN.pdf)

The resolution also

"Calls for the EU and its Member States to raise the issue of forced organ harvesting in its engagement with third countries, especially with its partners in the Gulf region, where Chinese transplant centres have advertised 'halal organs' from Uyghurs and Muslim minorities in China;"

That this abuse of forced organ harvesting of prisoners of conscience for their organs is happening has been established beyond a reasonable doubt. The only question that arises is what can be done about it.

Changing the behaviour of the Government of China is not easy, because their primary concern is not what benefits the people of China but rather what benefits the Chinese Communist Party. The Chinese Communist Party will stop the industrialized killing of prisoners of conscience for their organs only when the political cost to them outweighs the political and financial benefit they think they gain from the abuse. In order for that to happen, outsiders must increase that political cost, by taking every opportunity at every relevant forum to express our concerns about this abuse.

Needless to say, the Government of China does not like to hear these concerns and

denounces them vigorously. Outsiders must convince the Government of China that they can not stop the expression of these concerns through their statements, no matter how vociferous, that they do not want to hear these concerns. Outsiders must convince the Government of China that the only way they can stop the expression of these concerns is to stop the mass killing of innocents for their organs. Only then can we hope that the killings will stop.

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