# China Renames Uyghur Villages in Xinjiang to Erase Cultural Identity



In China's Xinjiang region, authorities have systematically renamed approximately 630 Uyghur villages to remove religious and cultural references and replace them with names that reflect Communist Party ideology, according to reports released by Human Rights Watch and Uyghur Hjelp. Conducted over the period from 2017 to 2019, this effort is part of a broader campaign to assimilate Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities.

Terms referencing Uyghur culture and history, such as "hoja" (a Sufi religious teacher), "haniqa" (a Sufi building), and "mazar" (shrine), have been replaced with generic terms like "unity" and "harmony." The move also eliminated mentions of past Uyghur kingdoms and leaders in village names.

The campaign aligns with China’s long-standing efforts to tighten control over Xinjiang, which borders Kazakhstan and is home to about 11 million Uyghurs. The Chinese government initiated a crackdown in 2017, which included mass detentions, indoctrination programs, and forced labor, targeting acts deemed separatist or extremist.

Human Rights Watch and other organizations claim these actions are intended to erase Uyghur cultural identity, an accusation China denies, asserting its policies are counter-terrorism measures. The UN and several governments have designated these acts as potential crimes against humanity or genocide.