# Uighur woman reveals forced marriage amid China’s oppression in Xinjiang



Gul, a 31-year-old Uighur woman originally from Xinjiang in western China, has shared a harrowing account of being forcibly married to a Han Chinese man under pressure from the Chinese Communist regime, which seeks to suppress the culture and religion of the Uighur Muslim minority. Speaking from Switzerland, where she fled last year with her daughter, Gul described her wedding day as among the darkest of her life, remarking, “When I had the wedding, it felt like a funeral to me; and when I signed the marriage certificate, it felt like I was signing my death certificate.”

At 23, Gul was a model living in Shanghai, having left her native Xinjiang—a region described as under a “reign of terror” with widespread surveillance and brutal repression since Xi Jinping became China’s leader in 2012. The regime has imposed a campaign to promote ‘ethnic unity’ by encouraging or coercing mixed marriages between Uighurs and Han Chinese, the country’s majority ethnic group, amid broader efforts to dilute Uighur identity.

Gul explained that police pressured her to marry a Han man, promising that doing so would save her and her mother from imprisonment in Xinjiang’s notorious ‘re-education’ camps—facilities estimated to hold around one million Uighurs, according to survivors. The conditions in these camps include forced labour, sexual abuse, torture, and widespread human rights violations such as mass sterilisation of women and the destruction of mosques.

The ordeal that followed her coerced marriage was brutal. Gul recalled being violently beaten by her intoxicated husband, which left her unconscious with a broken jaw and nose, and then raped in her own home. “He was very smelly and did not clean himself or his clothes,” she said of her husband, adding that he became more aggressive when she resisted his advances.

Her refusal to accept the marriage initially resulted in her mother being detained instead, illustrating the regime’s use of collective punishment to compel compliance. To secure her mother’s release, Gul acquiesced to the sham marriage, though when authorities discovered it was not genuine, they insisted that she live with her husband. The situation deteriorated further over the years, leaving Gul trapped in a fearful and abusive relationship.

Before the forced marriage, Gul had been a successful model in Shanghai, working for clothing companies, attending events, and even appearing in minor film roles. However, even in the city, she faced constant police harassment and was subjected to restrictions that prevented Uighurs from owning property or living comfortably in major urban centres.

The turning point came in 2022 when, following a failed suicide attempt, she established contact with a Uighur activist based in the United States, who guided her on how to escape China. Using the passport obtained due to her marriage, Gul was able to leave the country via Dubai, ultimately settling in Switzerland—a country she chose inspired by childhood memories of the film Heidi.

Gul’s testimony includes detailed descriptions of the intensifying surveillance in Xinjiang, including facial recognition technology, checkpoints, and permits required for even local travel. She lamented the disappearance of friends and elderly neighbours into camps, stating, “I wondered, how can that be? What can he do at 90 against the government? I felt very angry for him.” Her story is among the first public accounts by a Uighur woman subjected to forced marriage as a state policy.

Her revelations come amid growing international awareness of human rights abuses in Xinjiang, leading to political debates in countries such as the UK. The Daily Mail reports that the Chinese state’s use of forced labour linked to solar panel production contributed to political pressure resulting in a government reversal on imports tied to such practices. Concerns also extend to Chinese influence on critical infrastructure, such as recent developments regarding British Steel’s Scunthorpe plant.

Gul has stated her desire that the world understands “the evil of their system,” and now embraces her identity with pride, saying, “I have learned about our history, that we once had our own land and country—and about all that the Chinese government is doing to the people in Xinjiang. Now I am proud to be Uighur.”

Her account underscores the complex and severe methods used by the Chinese government to assimilate and control Uighur populations, including coercion through marriage, imprisonment of relatives, and violent suppression of cultural and religious practices. Gul’s story contributes an important personal dimension to what human rights organisations describe as one of the most severe campaigns against a minority group in the world today.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/12/uyghur-women-and-forced-marriages-in-china/> - This article corroborates the claim that Uyghur women in Xinjiang are being coerced or forced into marriages with Han Chinese men as part of Beijing's strategy to dilute Uyghur identity and promote ethnic unity, including reports of intimidation and abuse linked to these forced marriages.
2. <https://uhrp.org/report/forced-marriage-of-uyghur-women/> - This report from the Uyghur Human Rights Project provides detailed evidence that the Chinese government has been systematically imposing forced interethnic marriages on Uyghur women since 2014, framing these acts as state policies aimed at assimilation and ethnic unity.
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Uyghurs_in_China> - The Wikipedia entry details the use of state programs like 'Pair Up and Become Family,' where Han Chinese men cohabit with Uyghur women forcibly, including accounts of rape and forced marriage, aligning with Gul's story of coercion and abuse under state pressure.
4. <https://www.walkfree.org/global-slavery-index/country-studies/china/> - This source documents forced labor and human rights abuses in Xinjiang, including the detention of around one million Uyghurs in re-education camps where abuses such as forced labor and torture occur, supporting the article’s claims about the camps’ brutal conditions.
5. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/china-bride-migration-trafficking> - This article highlights how women, including Uyghur women, are coerced or trafficked into marriages in China, reinforcing the information about forced marriages and the broader context of gender-based coercion faced by women in Xinjiang.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/01/china-uighur-muslim-minority-surveillance-repression> - This Guardian report explains the intense surveillance measures in Xinjiang, including facial recognition technology, travel restrictions, and the forced disappearance of Uyghurs into camps, corroborating Gul’s account of the oppressive environment and surveillance she described.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14640915/I-brutally-raped-man-Id-forced-marry-save-mother-just-start-horror-survivor-reveals-chilling-truth-gang-rape-torture-Chinas-death-camps.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data