Report: How Yale Scholars Helped China Promote Its Xinjiang Narrative

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Introduction

In June 2024, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, longtime Yale University scholars and co-directors of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE), attended the International Forum on the History and Future of Xinjiang, China (HFX), a Chinese academic forum. HFX brought together more than 100 Chinese and foreign experts to discuss Xinjiang's archaeology, history, culture, development, and relationship to Chinese civilization. One of the forum's co-hosts, Kashgar University, and one of the sites on its prearranged tour, the Kashgar Comprehensive Bonded Zone, maintain ties with the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC [新疆生产建设兵团]), a paramilitary organization sanctioned by the U.S. government for its connection to serious human rights abuses against Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities.

In extensive interviews with Chinese state media, and on Yale's website, the two Yale scholars praised the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s policies in Xinjiang. Xinjiang is known for the Chinese government's mass surveillance and internment campaign against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim minorities, which, beginning in 2021, the U.S. government and multiple human rights organizations began identifying as genocide. Xinjiang has been the focus of extensive international scrutiny and U.S. and European sanctions over documented human rights abuses against Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim minorities. Tucker and Grim traveled around Xinjiang — one of the world's most heavily policed regions — without mentioning anything remotely negative about surveillance, police presence, or human rights.

Pan Yue (Pan [潘岳]), then deputy head of the United Front Work Department (UFWD) and a longtime acquaintance of Tucker and Grim, played a prominent role in the conference. The United Front is a CCP-led network of groups, individuals, institutions, and activities used to build support, manage constituencies, and advance Party objectives. The UFWD is a specific CCP department that coordinates and implements much of the United Front's work.

Chinese government materials show some of the foreign scholars participating in a prearranged tour of sites in Xinjiang. Tucker and Grim subsequently made public statements praising the preservation of minority culture in the region, using language that closely echoed Pan's framing of Xinjiang as culturally "diverse" but unified within Chinese civilization. Chinese state media then amplified those remarks in coverage defending Beijing's policies in Xinjiang.

Strategy Risks found no evidence that Tucker or Grim were paid or instructed by Chinese authorities; rather, the findings show how their longstanding intellectual affinity with Pan and participation in a government-organized forum provided independent academic credibility to narratives promoted by the Chinese government that whitewash human rights abuses in Xinjiang.

The composition of HFX further underscores the politically sensitive context of Tucker and Grim's participation. Among the experts in attendance was the Russian archaeologist Andrey Vladimirovich

Polyakov.[1] In April 2026, the European Union (EU) and several other European national government bodies sanctioned him for his work in occupied Crimea, which the EU said contributed to the "cultural appropriation and institutional normalisation" of Russia's presence there.

Although Tucker and Grim published details about their trip on Yale's website and gave interviews to the Chinese media, Strategy Risks identified no prior non-Chinese media coverage of Tucker and Grim's Xinjiang trip during its review. Tucker, Grim, Yale, and FORE did not respond to requests for comment.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, it has been very rare for Americans to visit Xinjiang. A controversy erupted in 2025 after Princeton University Press (PUP) staff joined a Xinjiang tour involving a Xinjiang propaganda department. PUP later acknowledged that the tour was "curated," rather than comprehensive, and said footage of its staff had been "repurposed and mis-contextualized" by Chinese media.[2] State-media footage circulated remarks by PUP Director Christie Henry describing Xinjiang as a place where cultures could "peacefully coexist," prompting criticism from Uyghur advocates and China scholars.[3] But the Yale trip, by scholars, is different. The Yale trip stands out in both prominence and tone: Tucker and Grim were among the first scholars from a U.S. university to participate in an officially organized Xinjiang forum since COVID, and FORE's own public accounts of the visit contained no criticism of conditions in the region.

Pan's emphasis at HFX on "diverse unity" and the integration of ethnic minorities into a broader Chinese civilizational identity also closely resembles concepts later codified in China's 2026 Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress [中华人民共和国民族团结进步促进法]. The law drew significant criticism from U.S. lawmakers and human rights organizations. The bipartisan Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) warned that the legislation would institutionalize forced assimilation,[4] Representatives Chris Smith (R-NJ) and Jim McGovern (D-MA) introduced a resolution condemning the law and calling for sanctions against officials responsible for implementing it.[5]

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[1] Polyakov's name is also spelled Poliakov; Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, "Agenda of Forum," *Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology*, observed September 30, 2026 at https://fore.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Xinjiang-conference.pdf, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20260930165113/https://fore.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Xinjiang-conference.pdf

[2] Shaun O'Dwyer, "Princeton University Press Stumbles Into a Xinjiang Tour Debacle," *The Diplomat*, July 21, 2025, observed September 30, 2026 at https://thediplomat.com/2025/07/princeton-university-press-stumbles-into-a-xinjiang-tour-debacle/, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001221606/https://thediplomat.com/2025/07/princeton-university-press-stumbles-into-a-xinjiang-tour-debacle/

[3] Ibid.

[4] Congressional-Executive Commission on China, "Draft Ethnic Unity Law Intensifies Language and Cultural Repression of Uyghurs and other Ethnic Groups," *Congressional-Executive Commission on China*, December 17, 2025, observed September 30, 2026 at https://www.cecc.gov/sites/evo-subsites/cecc.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/draft-ethnic-unity-law.pdf, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20260614221556/https://www.cecc.gov/sites/evo-subsites/cecc.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/draft-ethnic-unity-law.pdf

[5] U.S. House of Representatives, "H. Res. 1400, 119th Congress, 2d Session, Condemning the People's Republic of China's Law on the Promotion of Ethnic Unity and Progress and the Chinese Communist Party's campaign of forced assimilation against ethnic and religious minorities," *U.S. Government Publishing Office*, June 30, 2026, observed September 30, 2026 at https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-119hres1400ih/pdf/BILLS-119hres1400ih.pdf, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20260810062616/https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-119hres1400ih/pdf/BILLS-119hres1400ih.pdf

This report is based on open-source research using primary and secondary sources in English and Mandarin Chinese, including government, university, academic, media, and institutional records.

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The Broader Yale-China Institutional Context

Yale's institutional relationship with China dates back more than 170 years. In 1854, Yung Wing became the first Chinese citizen to graduate from an American university when he graduated from Yale;[6] his later donations helped establish Yale's Chinese-language collection and contributed to the creation of the first professorship in Chinese studies at an American university.[7] Yale's relationship with China has since expanded across academic exchanges, research partnerships, medical and educational programs, and a substantial Chinese student population. In fall 2024, Yale reported 3,913 international students, with China the largest country of origin.[8]

In 2016, Joseph Tsai, co-founder and current chairman of e-commerce and technology company Alibaba, donated $30 million to Yale Law School's China Center, which was renamed the Paul Tsai China Center in honor of his father, a Yale Law School alumnus.[9] Joseph Tsai has publicly defended the CCP and called Hong Kong pro-democracy protests a "separatist movement."[10] Alibaba has invested in facial recognition companies Megvii Technology Limited (Megvii [旷视科技有限公司]) and SenseTime Group Inc. (SenseTime [商汤集团有限公司]),[11] which the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) sanctioned in October 2019 for allegedly supporting the "repression, mass

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[6] Asian Network at Yale, "Historical Spotlight – Yung Wing, first Asian Yale Graduate," *Asian Network at Yale*, September 21, 2026, observed September 30, 2026 at https://asiannetwork.yale.edu/posts/2026-09-21-historical-spotlight-yung-wing-first-asian-yale-graduate, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001222315/https://asiannetwork.yale.edu/posts/2026-09-21-historical-spotlight-yung-wing-first-asian-yale-graduate

[7] Tricia Carey, "'From East to West' traces 170-year history of Yale's Chinese Collection," *YaleNews*, November 1, 2019, observed September 30, 2026 at https://news.yale.edu/2019/11/01/east-west-traces-170-year-history-yales-chinese-collection, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20260308180140/https://news.yale.edu/2019/11/01/east-west-traces-170-year-history-yales-chinese-collection

[8] Yale Office of International Students and Scholars, "International Students at Yale: Fall 2024," *Yale Office of International Students and Scholars*, June 12, 2025, observed October 1, 2026 at https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/sj1Se/1/, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001222655/https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/sj1Se/1/

[9] Yale Law School, "China Center Receives $30 Million Gift in Honor of Dr. Paul Tsai," *Yale Law School*, March 21, 2016, observed September 29, 2026 at https://law.yale.edu/yls-today/news/china-center-receives-30-million-gift-honor-dr-paul-tsai, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001222813/https://law.yale.edu/yls-today/news/china-center-receives-30-million-gift-honor-dr-paul-tsai

[10] Pan Jiaqing and Xi Wang, "US Senator Calls on NBA to Cancel China Games Amid Hong Kong Protest Row," *Radio Free Asia*, October 8, 2019, observed September 29, 2026 at https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/nba-hongkong-10082019090733.html, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001222948/https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/nba-hongkong-10082019090733.html

[11] Rebecca Fannin, "China's Race To Lead AI Gets Hotter With IPO Of First Facial ID Startup Face++, Next Up SenseTime?," *Forbes*, August 27, 2019, observed September 29, 2026 at https://www.forbes.com/sites/rebeccafannin/2019/08/27/chinas-race-to-lead-ai-gets-hotter-with-ipo-of-first-facial-id-startup-face-next-up-sensetime/, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001223142/https://www.forbes.com/sites/rebeccafannin/2019/08/27/chinas-race-to-lead-ai-gets-hotter-with-ipo-of-first-facial-id-startup-face-next-up-sensetime/

arbitrary detention, and high-technology surveillance" of minorities in Xinjiang.[12,13,14,15] In June 2026, the U.S. Department of War designated Alibaba as a Chinese military company under Section 1260H, citing its affiliations with Chinese state and industrial authorities; Alibaba denied the allegations, stating they "had no basis in fact or law."[16,17]

Yale maintains extensive academic ties with China. The university operates programs with institutions including Tsinghua University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, and Peking University;[18] maintains the Yale Center Beijing;[19] and has longstanding educational and medical ties with the country through the

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[12] Bureau of Industry and Security, "Addition of Certain Entities to the Entity List," *Federal Register*, October 9, 2019, observed September 29, 2026 at https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/10/09/2019-22210/addition-of-certain-entities-to-the-entity-list, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001223320/https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/10/09/2019-22210/addition-of-certain-entities-to-the-entity-list

[13] The U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) added both companies to its Non-SDN Chinese Military-Industrial Complex Companies List, thereby restricting U.S. investments and trading in their publicly traded securities; Office of Foreign Assets Control, "Global Magnitsky Designations; North Korea Designations; Burma-related Designations; Non-SDN Chinese Military-Industrial Complex Companies (NS-CMIC) List Update," *U.S. Department of the Treasury*, December 10, 2021, observed September 29, 2026 at https://ofac.treasury.gov/recent-actions/20211210, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001223531/https://ofac.treasury.gov/recent-actions/20211210; Office of Foreign Assets Control, "Non-SDN Chinese Military-Industrial Complex Companies (NS-CMIC) List Updates; Administrative Updates to the SDN, Consolidated, NS-CMIC, and SSI Lists," *U.S. Department of the Treasury*, December 16, 2021, observed September 29, 2026 at https://ofac.treasury.gov/recent-actions/20211216, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001223652/https://ofac.treasury.gov/recent-actions/20211216

[14] According to OFAC, SenseTime was the sole shareholder in Shenzhen SenseTime Technology Co., Ltd. [深圳市商汤科技有限公司], which allegedly developed facial recognition programs that can determine a target's ethnicity, with a particular focus on identifying ethnic Uyghurs; U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Sanctions Perpetrators of Serious Human Rights Abuse on International Human Rights Day," *U.S. Department of the Treasury*, December 10, 2021, observed September 29, 2026 at https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0526, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001223756/https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0526

[15] Megvii held a stake in Beijing Kuangshi Technology Co., Ltd. [北京旷视科技有限公司], which allegedly developed and created customized software designed to conduct surveillance activities of ethnic minorities, including Uyghurs. The U.S. Department of Defense designated Megvii under Section 1260H as a "Chinese Military Company Operating in the United States," making it ineligible to compete for specific defense contracts. The company was removed from the list in January 2025; U.S. Department of Defense, "Entities Identified as Chinese Military Companies Operating in the United States in accordance with Section 1260H of the William M. ('Mac') Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (Public Law 116-283)," *U.S. Department of Defense*, January 31, 2024, observed September 29, 2026 at https://media.defense.gov/2024/Jan/31/2003384819/-1/-1/0/1260H-LIST.PDF, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001223935/https://media.defense.gov/2024/Jan/31/2003384819/-1/-1/0/1260H-LIST.PDF

[16] U.S. Department of Defense, "Entities Identified as Chinese Military Companies Operating in the United States in Accordance with Section 1260H of the William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (Public Law 116-283, Section 1260H, as amended (codified at 10 U.S.C. § 113, note))," *U.S. Department of Defense*, June 8, 2026, observed September 30, 2026 at https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jun/08/2003945537/-1/-1/1/ENTITIES-IDENTIFIED-AS-CHINESE-MILITARY-COMPANIES-OPERATING-IN-THE-UNITED-STATES-IN-ACCORDANCE-WITH-SECTION-1260H.PDF, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001223431/https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jun/08/2003945537/-1/-1/1/ENTITIES-IDENTIFIED-AS-CHINESE-MILITARY-COMPANIES-OPERATING-IN-THE-UNITED-STATES-IN-ACCORDANCE-WITH-SECTION-1260H.PD

[17] Alibaba Group Holding Limited, "Inclusion of Alibaba Group on the CMC List," *U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission*, June 9, 2026, observed September 30, 2026 at https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1577552/000110465926071542/tm2617210d1_ex99-1.htm, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001224020/https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1577552/000110465926071542/tm2617210d1_ex99-1.htm

[18] Yale University, "Yale delegation visits partnering universities across China," *Yale and the World*, December 13, 2023, observed September 29, 2026 at https://world.yale.edu/news/yale-delegation-visits-partnering-universities-across-china, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001224121/https://world.yale.edu/news/yale-delegation-visits-partnering-universities-across-china

[19] Yale Center Beijing, "About," *Yale Center Beijing*, observed September 29, 2026 at https://centerbeijing.yale.edu/basic-page/about, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20260901025059/https://centerbeijing.yale.edu/basic-page/about

Yale-China Association.[20] These relationships demonstrate that Tucker and Grim's engagement with China occurred within a university that already maintains substantial and longstanding institutional connections with the country.

These relationships are not evidence that Yale directed or influenced Tucker and Grim's participation at HFX. They are included here as context for the breadth and duration of Yale's institutional engagement with China, amid which the scholars' own longstanding work in China occurred.

The United Front and Xinjiang

The United Front is a party apparatus designed to consolidate power and support from a vast number of nongovernmental subgroups within and outside China. The United Front recruits and engages with these groups — be they non-CCP-affiliated individuals, public intellectuals, religious organizations, private businesses, or residents of Taiwan and Hong Kong — and incentivizes them to promote or defend China's standing, or influence other organizations.[21] As such, China has greater control over "discourse power" [话语权] and greater influence on the global stage.[22] Moreover, like propaganda, Beijing tasks every CCP ministry with implementing United Front work.[23]Chairman Xi Jinping has described the United Front and its work as "a magic weapon" to "bring about the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."[24]

At the time of the Xinjiang trip, Pan served simultaneously as the deputy head of the UFWD and director of the National Ethnic Affairs Commission (NEAC),[25] placing him in senior positions within both the CCP's United Front system and the government apparatus responsible for ethnic affairs. The NEAC, operating under the UFWD, is a ministerial-level State Council body responsible for China's ethnic-

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[20] Yale-China Association, "What we do," *Yale-China Association*, observed September 29, 2026 at https://www.yalechina.org/what-we-do, and archived at /web/20261001224255/https://www.yalechina.org/what-we-do

[21] "Select Committee Unveils CCP Influence Memo, 'United Front 101,'" *U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on China*, November 27, 2023, observed September 1, 2026 at https://chinaselectcommittee.house.gov/media/press-releases/select-committee-unveils-ccp-influence-memo-united-front-101, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001224438/https://chinaselectcommittee.house.gov/media/press-releases/select-committee-unveils-ccp-influence-memo-united-front-101

[22] Naoko Eto, "The Xi Jinping administration's desire for legitimacy: the strategic implication of its 'new political party system,'" *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, April 5, 2023, observed September 1, 2026 at https://doi.org/10.1080/24761028.2023.2197366, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001224554/https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/24761028.2023.2197366?__cf_chl_rt_tk=VJnYBSfLuxDuB25UQ6xT9hE6flhr.CaK.BLwYP02QLU-1790894754-1.0.1.1-XOv71oZghNzQwYa.6M_5.oW8zK8CjSYB6ARQjrokJ4Q

[23] "Select Committee Unveils CCP Influence Memo, 'United Front 101,'" *U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on China*, November 27, 2023, observed September 1, 2026 at https://chinaselectcommittee.house.gov/media/press-releases/select-committee-unveils-ccp-influence-memo-united-front-101, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001224438/https://chinaselectcommittee.house.gov/media/press-releases/select-committee-unveils-ccp-influence-memo-united-front-101

[24] Ibid.

[25] "List of Appointments and Removals Decided by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress [全国人民代表大会常务委员会决定任免的名单]," *The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China*, September 12, 2025, observed September 30, 2026 at http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c2/c30834/202509/t20250912_447739.html, and archived at https://archive.ph/TzMSE

affairs policy and administration.[26]

Tucker and Grim's remarks echoed themes promoted by Pan and other Chinese officials regarding Xinjiang's ethnic and cultural integration, while providing those themes with the credibility of Ivy League academic voices. This is consistent with a core feature of United Front work: cultivating or incorporating respected non-Party voices to lend greater legitimacy and reach to narratives aligned with CCP priorities.[27]

Xinjiang has been the subject of extensive international scrutiny over the Chinese government's treatment of Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim minorities. The United Nations and human rights organizations have documented arbitrary detention, restrictions on religious and cultural practices, political indoctrination, and other serious abuses in the region.[28,29] In January 2021, the U.S. government formally determined that China had committed genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim minorities in Xinjiang.[30] A 2025 CECC assessment found that the policies underlying those determinations continued, and a May 2026 *Financial Times* investigation found that Xinjiang has the "world's largest detention system relative to population."[31,32] Against this backdrop, Beijing has sought to promote an alternative narrative portraying Xinjiang as stable, prosperous, and protective of minority culture.

Tucker and Grim's itinerary in Xinjiang closely overlapped with tours previously arranged for foreign diplomats and dignitaries, mostly from poorer countries with worse human rights records than the United

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[26] The NEAC is also referred to as the State Ethnic Affairs Commission (SEAC); Xinhua News Agency, "The CPC Central Committee Issues the Plan for Deepening the Reform of Party and State Institutions," [中共中央印发《深化党和国家机构改革方案》], *Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China*, March 21, 2018, observed September 30, 2026 at https://app.www.gov.cn/govdata/gov/201803/21/421808/article.html, and archived at https://archive.ph/haKTY

[27] Alex Joske, "The party speaks for you," Australian Strategic Policy Institute, June 9, 2020, observed October 1, 2026 at https://www.aspi.org.au/report/party-speaks-you/#:~:text=CCP%20regulations%20on%20united%20front%20work%20define,parties.%20individuals%20without%20party%20affiliations.%20non%2DCCP%20intellectuals, and archived at https://archive.ph/mCSH8

[28] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "OHCHR Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China," *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, August 31, 2022, observed September 29, 2026 at https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/2022-08-31/22-08-31-final-assesment.pdf, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20260929223800/https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/2022-08-31/22-08-31-final-assesment.pdf

[29] Human Rights Watch, "'Eradicating Ideological Viruses': China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims," *Human Rights Watch*, September 9, 2018, observed September 29, 2026 at https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/10/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs, and archived at

[30] Michael R. Pompeo, "Determination of the Secretary of State Atrocities in Xinjiang," *U.S. Department of State*, January 19, 2021, observed September 30, 2026 at https://2017-2021.state.gov/determination-of-the-secretary-of-state-on-atrocities-in-xinjiang/, and archived at /web/20261001225109/https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/10/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs

[31] Congressional-Executive Commission on China, "Congressional-Executive Commission on China Annual Report 2025," *U.S. Government Publishing Office*, December 10, 2025, observed September 30, 2026 at https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CPRT-119JPRT58857/pdf/CPRT-119JPRT58857.pdf, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001225316/https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CPRT-119JPRT58857/pdf/CPRT-119JPRT58857.pdf

[32] Alison Killing, "How China is breaking apart a people and its culture," *Financial Times*, May 28, 2026, observed September 29, 2026 at https://www.ft.com/content/119d8c3a-e10f-4bf7-a198-90507293054b, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001225410/https://www.ft.com/content/119d8c3a-e10f-4bf7-a198-90507293054b

States. In the spring and summer of 2023, consuls general from countries including Brazil, Indonesia, Senegal, Myanmar, and Pakistan visited Kashgar, with some visiting the same sites later toured by Tucker and Grim, including Id Kah Mosque and Kashgar Old City, and participating in similar cultural activities.[33] The Id Kah Mosque is the largest mosque in China, and local authorities have reportedly staged prayers and street scenes for visiting delegations in an apparent attempt to create the impression of an open religious atmosphere.[34]

On the day HFX began, China's NEAC announced that participating foreign scholars would travel to places including Kashgar University, the Mo'er Temple ruins, Id Kah Mosque, Kashgar Old City, the China Xinjiang Ethnic Musical Instrument Village, the Kashgar Comprehensive Bonded Zone, the Jiaohe ruins, and Xinjiang University.[35][36] The announcement indicates that at least the core of Tucker and Grim's itinerary was organized in advance as part of the HFX program, rather than independently selected sightseeing.

Several institutions connected to HFX and its accompanying tour maintain documented cooperative ties with the XPCC, a CCP-subordinate paramilitary organization that plays a major role in Xinjiang's internal control and economic development.[37] The U.S. Treasury sanctioned the XPCC under Global Magnitsky authorities in 2020[38] for its connection to serious human rights abuses against Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities, and the XPCC and its subordinate and affiliated entities are also included on the U.S. government's Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA) Entity List.[39]

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[33] Zheng Zhuo [郑卓], "Consuls General of Several Countries in Guangzhou, Chengdu and Chongqing Visit Xinjiang [部分国家驻广州、成都、重庆总领事参访新疆]," *Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Development and Reform Commission*, April 26, 2023, observed September 29, 2026 at https://xjdrc.xinjiang.gov.cn/xjfgw/c112381/202304/3e5f8c91267043f0810a325cc1dfc764.shtml, and archived at https://archive.ph/6N4mS

[34] Nathan VanderKlippe, "'Like a movie': In Xinjiang, new evidence that China stages prayers, street scenes for visiting delegations," *The Globe and Mail*, November 4, 2019, observed September 30, 2026 at https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-like-a-movie-in-xinjiang-new-evidence-that-china-stages-prayers/, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20260217150952

[35] National Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China, "'The History and Future of Xinjiang, China' International Forum Held in Kashgar ["中国新疆的历史与未来"国际论坛在喀什举行]," *National Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China*, June 12, 2024, observed September 29, 2026 at https://www.neac.gov.cn/seac/xwzx/202406/1173837.shtml, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20240723013212/https://www.neac.gov.cn/seac/xwzx/202406/1173837.shtml

[36] Hu Jiachen [胡嘉琛], "A Record of the 'History and Future of Xinjiang, China' International Forum," ["中国新疆的历史与未来"国际论坛纪实], *China News Service*, June 20, 2024, observed September 29, 2026 at https://www.xj.chinanews.com.cn/xinjiang/2024-06-20/detail-ihecnkzk2010771.shtml, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20260606102547/https://www.xj.chinanews.com.cn/xinjiang/2024-06-20/detail-ihecnkzk2010771.shtml

[37] U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Sanctions Chinese Entity and Officials Pursuant to Global Magnitsky Human Rights Executive Order," *U.S. Department of the Treasury*, July 31, 2020, observed September 30, 2026 at https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1073, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001225656/https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1073

[38] Ibid.

[39] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Entity-Specific Information," *U.S. Department of Homeland Security*, July 31, 2026, observed September 30, 2026 at https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2026-07/26_0731_plcy_uflpa-entity-specific-information.pdf, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001225755/https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2026-07/26_0731_plcy_uflpa-entity-specific-information.pdf

Xinjiang University, which served as a supporting organizer of HFX and was later visited by participating foreign scholars, signed a strategic cooperation framework agreement with the XPCC's 3rd Division and Tumxuk city in 2022.[40] The agreement called for cooperation in areas including scientific research, talent cultivation, cultural development, and industrial development.[41]

Kashgar University, one of HFX's three co-hosts, also has documented ties to the XPCC's 3rd Division. In 2024, the Media Convergence Center of the 3rd Division and Kashgar University jointly established an industry-academia-research demonstration base to train journalism and communications professionals.[42] In 2026, the Shule County People's Government — located within the operational jurisdiction of the 3rd Division — signed a strategic cooperation framework with Kashgar University to "deepen collaboration" in talent cultivation, internships and employment, scientific research, and industrial technology development.[43] Because of the high degree of XPCC-local integration, this strategic agreement deepens Kashgar University's engagement with the 3rd Division.

The Kashgar Comprehensive Bonded Zone, another stop on the HFX delegation's tour, has likewise cooperated directly with XPCC entities. In 2022, the zone introduced a collaborative co-construction model, with the XPCC Kashgar Division Management Committee among the signatories to the strategic cooperation agreement.[44] In 2026, the XPCC Kashgar Division and the Kashgar Comprehensive Bonded Zone jointly inaugurated and operationalized the "Bonded R&D + Bonded Training: Industry-Education Integration Innovation Base," facilitating collaboration across R&D innovation, talent cultivation, industrial project implementation, and trade.[45]

The overlap with earlier diplomatic tours, together with the NEAC's preannounced itinerary, demonstrates that the forum's Chinese organizers curated Tucker and Grim's exposure to Xinjiang. Rather than independently selecting the sites from which they formed their impressions of the region, the

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[40] "Xinjiang University and the XPCC 3rd Division/Tumxuk City Sign Strategic Cooperation Framework Agreement [新疆大学与兵团第三师图木舒克市签署战略合作框架协议]," *China Education Online*, February 14, 2022, observed September 30, 2026 at https://news.eol.cn/dongtai/202202/t20220214_2208045.shtml, and archived at https://archive.ph/qIXWV

[41] Ibid.

[42] Feng Zhengyun [奉正云], Tian Xinxin [田欣欣], Zhang Yuanqin [张远琴], Pang Ying [庞莹], Yu Cheng [喻成], Xu Fan [徐凡], and Wang Junlong [王俊龙], "Observations on the Integrated Development of the 3rd Division Media Convergence Center at Five Years: Breaking Through with Reform, Moving Forward with Integration," [第三师融媒体中心成立五周年融合发展观察：改革破局 融合向新], *Bingtuan Huyang Net*, April 14, 2025, observed September 30, 2026 at https://www.huyangnet.cn/content/2025-04/14/content_1969742.html, and archived at https://archive.ph/SE22J

[43] "Shule County and Kashgar University Sign University–Locality Cooperation Framework Agreement," [疏勒县与喀什大学签署校地合作框架协议], *Shule County People's Government*, May 16, 2026, observed September 30, 2026 at http://www.shule.gov.cn/slx/c107651/202605/8c7a8402846347d6b8c30fb311055e1a.shtml, and archived at https://archive.ph/i81IX

[44] Chen Zhaolin [陈昭淋] and Chen Xi'an [陈喜安], "Xinjiang Kashgar Comprehensive Bonded Zone Launches Cooperative Co-construction Model [新疆喀什综合保税区开启合作共建模式]," *China National Radio*, April 21, 2022, observed September 30, 2026 at https://xj.cnr.cn/xjfw_1/dzxw/20220421/t20220421_525801790.shtml, and archived at https://archive.ph/PSYtl

[45] "Kashgar Comprehensive Bonded Zone and XPCC Jointly Build and Unveil 'Bonded R&D + Bonded Training: Industry-Education Integration Innovation Base' [喀什综合保税区兵地共建"保税研发+保税培训·产教融合创新基地"揭牌]," *Kashgar Economic Development Zone*, May 13, 2026, observed September 30, 2026 at https://www.kstq.gov.cn/kashi/tqdt/202605/baa3ff15420c49ed80eafcc2d12ecefc.shtml, and archived at https://archive.ph/3hklD

scholars were routed through a predetermined set of cultural, religious, educational, and economic sites previously shown to foreign delegations. Tucker and Grim subsequently cited what they observed during the trip in favorable public descriptions of Xinjiang that Chinese state media then amplified.

Tucker and Grim: A Long Relationship with Pan, and Spiritual Kinship with China

Tucker and Grim have spent decades studying religion, ecology, and East Asian philosophical traditions, particularly Confucianism.[46,47] In 1998, they co-founded the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE), through which they have promoted the role of religious and philosophical traditions in addressing environmental challenges.[48] FORE does not appear to publish a current staff or membership count, but it describes itself as an international project with a newsletter reaching more than 12,000 people, roughly 300 featured religion-and-ecology projects, and online courses viewed by about 35,000 people;[49] its founding 1996-1998 conference series involved more than 800 scholars and practitioners worldwide.[50]

Their work has brought them into longstanding engagement with China. Tucker has said that she identifies with China "in a very deep way," while she and Grim have described themselves as "citizen diplomats" seeking to foster dialogue and friendship between China and the United States.[51]

Tucker and Grim's relationship with Pan dates to 2008, when they met him in Beijing while he was serving as a vice minister of environmental protection. Tucker later recalled that she and Grim had already been following Pan's work on connecting environmental policy with Chinese philosophical traditions, particularly Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism.[52] What was initially scheduled as a short

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[46] The Curriculum Vitae of Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg,* observed August 25, 2026 at https://www.evrel.phil.fau.de/files/2024/07/Tucker_Mary_CV.pdf, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001230114/https://www.evrel.phil.fau.de/files/2024/07/Tucker_Mary_CV.pdf

[47] Wang Zonghan [王宗汉], Bai Zuxie [白祖偕], and Pei Xinyu [裴心语], "Mary Evelyn Tucker: Safeguarding the 'Rights' of Nature to Better Protect Human Rights," [玛丽·伊芙琳·塔克：保障自然的"权利"从而更好保障人权], *China Human Rights*, November 24, 2024, observed August 25, 2026 at https://www.humanrights.cn/2024/11/24/c0361a96b01840179260d663cc1ec47c.html, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20260610002043/https://www.humanrights.cn/2024/11/24/c0361a96b01840179260d663cc1ec47c.html

[48] The Curriculum Vitae of John Allen Grim, *Yale School of the Environment*, observed August 25, 2026 at https://environment.yale.edu/sites/default/files/2021-10/grim-cv_0.pdf, and archived at /web/20261001230247/https://environment.yale.edu/sites/default/files/2021-10/grim-cv_0.pdf

[49] "Mission and Vision," *Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology*, observed September 30, 2026 at https://fore.yale.edu/About-Us/What-We-Do/Mission-and-Vision, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001230440/https://fore.yale.edu/About-Us/What-We-Do/Mission-and-Vision

[50] "History," *Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology*, observed September 30, 2026 at https://fore.yale.edu/About-Us/What-We-Do/History, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001230604/https://fore.yale.edu/About-Us/What-We-Do/History

[51] J.P. Harpignies, "China, the U.S., and the Hope for an Emerging Ecological Civilization: A Conversation with Mary Evelyn Tucker," *Bioneers*, September 24, 2025, observed September 1, 2026 at https://bioneers.org/china-the-u-s-and-the-hope-for-an-emerging-ecological-civilization-a-conversation-with-mary-evelyn-tucker/, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001230719/https://bioneers.org/china-the-u-s-and-the-hope-for-an-emerging-ecological-civilization-a-conversation-with-mary-evelyn-tucker/

[52] Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, "Confucianism as Grounding in Community: Ecological Ethics for China," *Ecology and Religion* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2014), pp. 109–125, observed September 17, 2026 at https://file.caixin.com/file/topic/yale/ppt/download/Chap_7_Confucianism_Ecology_and_Religion.pdf, and archived at

meeting reportedly lasted roughly two hours, and Tucker has said that she and Grim remained in contact with Pan in the years that followed.[53]

Besides being co-founders and co-directors of FORE, Tucker and Grim are also affiliated faculty with the Yale Center for Environmental Justice at the Yale School of the Environment.[54] From 2006 to 2023, both served as senior lecturers and research scholars at Yale, with appointments spanning the School of the Environment, Yale Divinity School, and the Department of Religious Studies, and taught in Yale's joint master's program in religion and ecology.[55] Although they retired from teaching in spring 2023, they remain active with FORE.[56]

HFX and Its Content

HFX has direct institutional links to China's ethnic-affairs apparatus. The NEAC operates under the United Front system and administers Minzu University of China (MUC), which co-hosted the event.[57] Chinese government and university materials also identify Pan as a coordinator of the forum, and the NEAC itself publicized the forum through its official channels. Tucker and Grim participated in a roundtable on the conference's final day.

FORE also describes the event and Pan's coordination (though it omits Pan's previous position as deputy head of the UFWD when mentioning his roles in the CCP).[58]

Among the more than 100 international experts who attended was Polyakov, director of the Institute for the History of Material Culture at the Russian Academy of Sciences. Polyakov participated on a roundtable titled "The Silk Road and Mutual Exchange between Eastern and Western Civilization,"[59] placing his archaeological expertise directly within the forum's broader discussion of Xinjiang's

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[53] Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, "Introduction: Retrospective and Prospective Observations of Religion and Ecology," *The New Ecozoic Reader*, No. 9, Center for Ecozoic Studies, September 2025, pp. 5–18, observed September 17, 2026 at https://fore.yale.edu/sites/default/files/NER.N9_Text_and-Covers.Final_.Web%20Version.pdf, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001231136/https://fore.yale.edu/sites/default/files/NER.N9_Text_and-Covers.Final_.Web%20Version.pdf

[54] "Our Team," *Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology*, observed September 30, 2026 at https://fore.yale.edu/About-Us/Who-We-Are/Our-Team, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001230946/https://fore.yale.edu/About-Us/Who-We-Are/Our-Team

[55] Ibid.

[56] Wayne D'Orio, "A Field of Study and a Moral Force," *Yale School of the Environment*, May 16, 2023, observed September 30, 2026 at https://environment.yale.edu/news/article/field-study-and-moral-force, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001231447/https://environment.yale.edu/news/article/field-study-and-moral-force

[57] "Introduction to the Research Center for Human Rights at Minzu University of China," *China Human Rights*, August 24, 2026, observed September 30, 2026 at https://en.humanrights.cn/2026/08/24/3459183b41204235baf8c0fc727ebd6b.html, and archived at https://archive.ph/OQ4Bd

[58] "Ecological Civilization," *Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology*, observed September 23, 2026 at https://fore.yale.edu/Ecological-Civilization, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001231703/https://fore.yale.edu/Ecological-Civilization

[59] "Agenda of Forum," observed September 30, 2026 at https://fore.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Xinjiang-conference.pdf, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20260930165113/https://fore.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Xinjiang-conference.pdf

historical role in trans-Eurasian cultural exchange. Strategy Risks did not locate a transcript of Polyakov's remarks. However, photos from HFX show Tucker and Grim seated beside him during the conference's opening ceremony. His attendance does not establish any direct connection with Tucker and Grim, but it illustrates the range of foreign scholars recruited to participate in a forum centered on history, culture, and Xinjiang's relationship to China.

(Left) Polyakov[60]; (Right) Polyakov, Grim, and Tucker, from left to right, at HFX's opening ceremony.[61]

Tucker and Grim participated in a roundtable discussion titled "Development of Xinjiang and Chinese Path to Modernization."[62] The moderator was Guan Kai [关凯], dean and professor at the School of Ethnology and Sociology, MUC. Other dialogue guests included Turgunjan Tursun [吐尔文江·吐尔逊], distinguished professor at Zhejiang Normal University; Huang Dayuan [黄达远], executive dean and professor of the School of Russian Studies and the Institute of Regional and National Studies at Xi'an International Studies University; Meng Nan [孟楠], dean and professor of the School of History at Xinjiang University; Jan Turowski, chief representative of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in China; and Barry Sautman, a distinguished professor at Tsinghua University.[63]

Tucker and Grim focused their remarks on how Confucianism calls for an environmentally conscious future and how it can spread globally. Grim explained that Confucianism "advocates that humans and

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[60] "Institute for the History of Material Culture Director Andrey Poliakov: '80 percent of Russia's archaeological monuments remain unidentified,'" *St. Petersburg State University*, November 26, 2024, observed September 30, 2026 at https://english.spbu.ru/news-events/news/institute-history-material-culture-director-andrey-poliakov-80-percent-russias, and archived at https://archive.ph/OsNhO

[61] Wang Yanxin [王颜欣] and Li Bai [李白], "The International Forum on 'History and Future of Xinjiang, China' Held in Kashgar [北大参与主办的"中国新疆的历史与未来"国际论坛在喀什举行]," *Peking University*, June 18, 2024, observed September 30, 2026 at http://news.pku.edu.cn/info/2921/159071.htm, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20260930155214/http://news.pku.edu.cn/info/2921/159071.htm

[62] "International Forum on 'The History and Future of Xinjiang, China,'" ["中国新疆的历史与未来"国际论坛], *China.org.cn*, June 12, 2024, observed August 12, 2026 at http://www.china.com.cn/app/template/amucsite/web/webLive.html#3573fullText, and archived at https://archive.ph/Q2Iqg

[63] Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, "Agenda of Forum," *Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology*, observed September 30, 2026 at https://fore.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Xinjiang-conference.pdf, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20260930165113/https://fore.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Xinjiang-conference.pdf

nature live harmoniously. […] This concept is not only an important source of China's environmental theory but also a source for a new global theory."[64] When touching on Islam, Grim said, "Islam in Xinjiang also provides similar and important functions," while Confucianism plays "the key role."[65]

Grim's argument centered on China and Confucianism forging a paradigm shift for the world:

> Within Chinese culture, this embodies an ideological shift where a human-centered worldview becomes an anthropo-cosmic worldview, meaning that the human being is a part of the world and cosmos. This means a continual existence, not relying on God [or Gods], and becoming a new contrast against the Western theological worldview.[66]

However out of place this presentation may seem for the topic of the roundtable discussion, it nonetheless synchronizes well with Pan's speech at the start of HFX.

Pan's "Diverse Unity" and How Xinjiang Is Irrevocably Tied to China

Pan repeatedly presented Xinjiang's ethnic and religious diversity as part of a broader, unified Chinese civilization, a concept he described through the framework of "diverse unity." Tucker and Grim's remarks at HFX echoed this framing, particularly their emphasis on Confucianism as a binding cultural force. The overlap became more consequential when Chinese state media subsequently used Tucker and Grim's comments to support the same narrative.

Pan's opening remarks and the content of the entire HFX conference primarily centered on one subject: Xinjiang's historical ties to China as its territory.[67] Pan argued that Chinese culture and Confucian traditions had shaped the region over centuries and presented Xinjiang's religious and ethnic diversity as components of a broader, unified Chinese civilization.[68] This concept of "diverse unity" became a recurring theme throughout the conference.[69] Pan invoked the ancient Mo'er Temple ruins in Xinjiang as a historical example. Mo'er originally reflected Indian Buddhist architectural influences, but its architecture changed as Chinese Buddhism began to spread.[70] Tucker and Grim's photo tour also

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[64] "International Forum on 'The History and Future of Xinjiang, China,'" ["中国新疆的历史与未来"国际论坛], *China.org.cn*, June 12, 2024, observed August 12, 2026 at http://www.china.com.cn/app/template/amucsite/web/webLive.html#3573fullText, and archived at https://archive.ph/Q2Iqg

[65] Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, remarks at "Roundtable 4: Development of Xinjiang and Chinese Path to Modernization," International Forum on "The History and Future of Xinjiang, China" ["中国新疆的历史与未来"国际论坛], *China.org.cn*, June 12, 2024, observed August 12, 2026 at http://www.china.com.cn/app/template/amucsite/web/webLive.html#3573fullText, and archived at https://archive.ph/Q2Iqg

[66] Ibid.

[67] Pan Yue [潘岳], opening remarks, International Forum on "The History and Future of Xinjiang, China" ["中国新疆的历史与未来"国际论坛], *China.org.cn*, June 12, 2024, observed August 12, 2026 at http://www.china.com.cn/app/template/amucsite/web/webLive.html#3573fullText, and archived at https://archive.ph/Q2Iqg

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

highlights this.[71][72]

Following the conference, the English-language edition of the CCP mouthpiece *China Daily* published an article titled "Minority groups respected in autonomous region."[73] The article praises cultural preservation in Xinjiang, denies accusations of maltreatment in Xinjiang, and compares the situation of Uyghurs in Xinjiang against that of Native Americans in the United States: "the gap between the life expectancy of Han and Uygur communities in Xinjiang is only four years, a stark contrast to the 11-year gap between white Americans and Native Americans in the US."[74]

The article quotes Tucker as saying, "What is exciting in Xinjiang is the respect for minority people. Clearly, the music, dance and culture have been well-preserved here in Xinjiang."[75] Tucker added, "The culture of Xinjiang is diverse, but also in unity with the elements of Chinese culture," a statement closely matching the notion of diverse unity, invoked by Pan in the media around the conference.[76]

Similarities Between Pan's Ideas and the Ethnic Unity Law

Pan's emphasis on "diverse unity" at HFX closely resembles themes later codified in China's 2026 Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress. The law describes the Chinese nation as a "diverse yet unified family" composed of all of China's ethnic groups and calls for strengthening a shared Chinese national identify.[77] While the law prohibits discrimination and oppression against any ethnicity, it emphasizes a shared Chinese national identity and gives legal force to policies promoting linguistic, cultural, and political integration among China's ethnic groups.[78]

Pan's earlier writings show that his emphasis on national integration, Mandarin use, and reducing ethnic

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[71] See the 10th and 11th photographs; Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, "Photo tour: The Silk Road in Xinjiang Province," *Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology*, observed August 5, 2026 at https://fore.yale.edu/Ecological-Civilization/Mary-Evelyn-and-John-in-China/2024-Trips/Photo-tour-The-Silk-Road-Xinjiang, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001233304/https://fore.yale.edu/Ecological-Civilization/Mary-Evelyn-and-John-in-China/2024-Trips/Photo-tour-The-Silk-Road-Xinjiang

[72] "International Forum on 'The History and Future of Xinjiang, China,'" ["中国新疆的历史与未来"国际论坛], *China.org.cn*, June 12, 2024, observed August 12, 2026 at http://www.china.com.cn/app/template/amucsite/web/webLive.html#3573fullText, and archived at https://archive.ph/Q2Iqg

[73] Zhao Manfeng, "Minority groups respected in autonomous region," *China Daily*, June 14, 2024, observed September 30, 2026 at https://govt.chinadaily.com.cn/s/202406/14/WS6673eabf498ed2d7b7eb0cba/minority-groups-respected-in-autonomous-region.html, and archived at https://archive.ph/47tiH

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

[77] "Authorized Release from the Two Sessions | Law of the People's Republic of China on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress," [两会受权发布 | 中华人民共和国民族团结进步促进法], *Xinhuanet*, March 13, 2026, observed August 6, 2026 at https://www.news.cn/politics/20260313/748e7a2db7764d82b4259c9e1256082e/c.html, and archived at https://archive.ph/ByKd2

[78] The UFWD and Ethnic Affairs Department are responsible for the "overall planning, supervision, and implementation of ... strengthening the collective consciousness of the Chinese people and promote ethnic unity and progress across the nation." This includes families educating their children to "love the Communist Party of China, love the Motherland … and establish the idea that the Chinese people are a single family"; all Chinese citizens must learn and use a common language, being Mandarin, and all education must be done in Mandarin, though government bodies can use local scripts "to issue documents in accordance with laws and regulations; Ibid.

distinctions predates HFX by decades.[79] He calls this *túnkěn* [屯垦], which traditionally meant to garrison troops to the frontier.[80] However, Pan employs it as allegory for Han Chinese emigration to cultivate land and urbanize rural areas.[81] Pan makes little to no mention of the indigenous peoples and their displacement in any part of his work: economic development, along with creating more hospitable environments, is paramount.[82,83]

Environmentalism and the concept of "ecological" have been central to Pan's public work for differences rather than a shared Chinese cultural identity.[84] The overlap between Pan's ecological and ethnic thinking helps explain why Tucker's environmental praise of his work can intersect with broader Party-state narratives about cultural unity.

Implications

Tucker and Grim appear to genuinely believe in the cause. Their concerns about climate change appear heartfelt and honest, and Tucker's devotion to studying East Asian religions, especially Confucianism, has led her to conclude that China is the way toward a new civilization. Tucker's views of China are not wholly uncritical. She has acknowledged the country's environmental degradation, the social costs of rapid development, and authoritarian aspects of Confucianism.[85] Yet these criticisms generally sit within a broader argument that China's embrace of "ecological civilization"[86] and its Confucian intellectual traditions position it to play a leading role in addressing the global climate crisis. Tucker has repeatedly praised China's environmental ambitions and Pan's contribution to them, describing China as "the most

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[79] Pan Yue [潘岳], "Research on the History and Reality of Migration and Land Reclamation in Western China," [中国西部移民屯垦历史与现实研究] (doctoral dissertation, Central China Normal University, 2002), *National Library of China*, pp. i–ii, observed September 16, 2026 at http://find.nlc.cn/search/showDocDetails?docId=-2312527652218931991&dataSource=ucs01,bslw,wfxw&query=%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E8%A5%BF%E9%83%A8%E7%A7%BB%E6%B0%91%E5%B1%AF%E5%9E%A6%E5%8E%86%E5%8F%B2%E4%B8%8E%E7%8E%B0%E5%AE%9E%E7%A0%94%E7%A9%B6 i-ii, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001233522/http://find.nlc.cn/search/showDocDetails?docId=-2312527652218931991&dataSource=ucs01,bslw,wfxw&query=%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E8%A5%BF%E9%83%A8%E7%A7%BB%E6%B0%91%E5%B1%AF%E5%9E%A6%E5%8E%86%E5%8F%B2%E4%B8%8E%E7%8E%B0%E5%AE%9E%E7%A0%94%E7%A9%B6%20i-ii

[80] Ibid., p. 6.

[81] Ibid., p. i.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Pan Yue [潘岳], "The 13th Junma Award Announced; Pan Yue: Diversity in Unity and Ethnic Literature," [第十三届骏马奖揭晓，潘岳：多元一体与民族文学], *The Paper*, August 2, 2024, observed September 16, 2026 at https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_28283843, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001233633/https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_28283843

[85] J.P. Harpignies, "China, the U.S., and the Hope for an Emerging Ecological Civilization: A Conversation with Mary Evelyn Tucker," *Bioneers*, September 24, 2025, observed August 15, 2026 at https://bioneers.org/china-the-u-s-and-the-hope-for-an-emerging-ecological-civilization-a-conversation-with-mary-evelyn-tucker/, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001230719/https://bioneers.org/china-the-u-s-and-the-hope-for-an-emerging-ecological-civilization-a-conversation-with-mary-evelyn-tucker/

[86] Ibid.

important country in the world" for the planet's future.[87,88] Whatever criticisms she has of China, they are almost always outweighed by the goals China pursues for a greener and more just world. Indeed, Tucker and Grim's longstanding scholarship suggests that their favorable views of China's ecological-civilization project are genuinely held.

Strategy Risks found no concrete evidence that Pan, the CCP, or any other Chinese government entity paid Tucker and Grim for their participation or directed their remarks. Public filings for the Thomas Berry Foundation, where Tucker serves as a managing trustee, report more than $80,000 in 2024 expenses for "travel, conferences, and meetings," although the filings do not specify whether those funds covered the Xinjiang trip.[89]

A September 11, 2024, FORE Instagram post announces that the conference was "sponsored by the Chinese Ministry of Ethnic Peoples," although the post does not specify what sponsorship entailed.[90] A June 27, 2024, FORE blog post refers to Pan as the "Minister of Minority Peoples" and "one of the top leaders and advisonrs [*sic*] to President Xim [*sic*]."[91] FORE's Instagram account also posted a "Journey to China" graphic whose background appears to depict the Korean Peninsula rather than China.[92] Taken together, the apparent misidentification of Pan's title, the misspelling of Xi's name, and the use of an unrelated map suggest that Tucker, Grim, and FORE may have had limited familiarity with China and Xinjiang.

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[87] "World Insight with Tian Wei," *China Global Television Network*, July 2024, observed August 4, 2026 at https://www.cgtn.com/tv/replay?id=BdICfAA, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001233838/https://www.cgtn.com/tv/replay?id=BdICfAA

[88] J.P. Harpignies, "China, the U.S., and the Hope for an Emerging Ecological Civilization: A Conversation with Mary Evelyn Tucker," *Bioneers*, September 24, 2025, observed August 15, 2026 at https://bioneers.org/china-the-u-s-and-the-hope-for-an-emerging-ecological-civilization-a-conversation-with-mary-evelyn-tucker/, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001230719/https://bioneers.org/china-the-u-s-and-the-hope-for-an-emerging-ecological-civilization-a-conversation-with-mary-evelyn-tucker/

[89] Thomas Berry Foundation, "Full Text of 'Form 990PF' for fiscal year ending Dec. 2024," *ProPublica*, October 16, 2025, observed August 12, 2026 at https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/522149696/202512899349100111/IRS990PF, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001234013/https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/522149696/202512899349100111/IRS990PF

[90] There is no "Ministry of Ethnic Peoples" in China; presumably, the post intends to refer to the NEAC, which Pan headed at the time; Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology (@yaleforumreligionecology), Instagram post, *Instagram*, September 11, 2024, observed August 12, 2026 at https://www.instagram.com/p/C_x4lzoIWVi/?img_index=9, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001234131/https://www.instagram.com/p/C_x4lzoIWVi/?img_index=9

[91] Tara C. Trapani, "Mary Evelyn & John Across China," *Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology*, June 27, 2024, observed September 30, 2026 at https://fore.yale.edu/blogs/entry/1719505205 and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001234229/https://fore.yale.edu/blogs/entry/1719505205

[92] Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology (@yaleforumreligionecology), Instagram post, *Instagram*, undated, observed October 1, 2026 at https://www.instagram.com/yaleforumreligionecology/, and archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20261001234530/https://www.instagram.com/accounts/login/?next=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.instagram.com%2Fyaleforumreligionecology%2F&is_from_rle

A screenshot from FORE's Instagram account appears to depict the Korean Peninsula in the background.[93]

Conclusion

These findings sit within broader institutional and conference-level contexts. Yale maintains extensive and longstanding academic and financial ties to China, although Strategy Risks found no evidence that those relationships directed Tucker and Grim's participation at HFX. HFX itself brought together an international group of scholars that included Polyakov, whose archaeological activities in Crimea were subsequently sanctioned by the EU. Neither fact establishes coordination or wrongdoing by Tucker and Grim, but both illustrate the reputational risks that can arise when academic institutions and scholars participate in state-organized forums whose research and public statements are subsequently incorporated into official political narratives.

Academic engagement with China can be incorporated into official narratives in ways that participating scholars may not intend. Tucker and Grim's experience at HFX illustrates that risk: They participated in a government-organized forum and tour, made favorable statements about Xinjiang that closely overlapped with themes advanced by senior Chinese officials, and were subsequently quoted by Chinese state media in coverage defending the region's treatment of minority cultures.

Participation in such forums can create reputational risks for scholars and their institutions, when their statements are subsequently used to support policies criticized by the U.S. government, human rights organizations, and the United Nations.

[93] Ibid.