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Xiyuan (Marvin) Xia
University of Manitoba

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Why China Cares about Canada's Indigenous Residential Schools: From Whataboutism to Internal Denial

Marvin Xiyuan Xia

*University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*

Introduction

Since 2017, the international community has taken various actions to urge China to stop the persecution of Uyghur Muslims. As a part of this effort, several countries' governments and parliaments, including Canada's House of Commons, have labeled China's internment camps and re-education system in Xinjiang as genocide. Meanwhile, in China, 2021 witnessed intensive media coverage on Canada's Indian Residential School (IRS) system and the recently found unmarked graves of Indigenous children. Most reports were made by state-owned media and published on different platforms, ranging from traditional TV news to social media. While some articles are in English and made for a Western audience, the majority of the reports are in Chinese and are aimed at domestic readers. In Canada, many academics, Indigenous activists, and human-rights advocates see the IRS system as a component of the settler colonial genocide against Indigenous people;¹ however, the Chinese media's intensive coverage of this issue, primarily when China is accused of committing genocide, raises questions about the true intention behind the media campaign.

This article examines how China's media coverage of Canadian Indigenous people serves different political goals at home and abroad. Internationally, this media campaign is launched to implement the strategy of *whataboutism*, which allows the Chinese government to evade some Western countries' criticism. Whataboutism is a mirroring rhetoric that uses an accuser's framework and discourse to reject an accusation. By telling the stories about the settler colonial genocide against Indigenous peoples, what the Chinese government want to achieve is the moral disqualification of Canada's criticism of China's ethnic policies. Domestically, the media deliberately spotlights Canada's IRS system to take a stand against colonialism, although their true aim is to divert public attention from rumors about the internment camps in Xinjiang. This media campaign is an example of the Chinese government's *yu lun dao xiang* (public opinion orientation) propaganda, which works together with internet censorship, aiming to hide the Chinese government's genocidal policies from the domestic audience and to deny accusations from abroad.²

In what follows, I briefly provide background about the Uyghur genocide, including how it gradually became of concern to the international community and how the Chinese government reacted to allegations of genocide. Next, I offer examples of the Chinese media's coverage of Indigenous peoples in Canada and the IRS system, illustrating how this campaign serves distinct purposes in the diplomatic and internal contexts.

¹ Tricia Logan, "Settler Colonialism in Canada and the Métis," *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 4 (2015), 433–452; David B. MacDonald: *The Sleeping Giant Awakens: Genocide, Indian Residential Schools, and the Challenge of Conciliation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019); John S. Milloy: *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System 1879 to 1986* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2017); Andrew Woolford, *This Benevolent Experiment: Indigenous Boarding Schools, Genocide, and Redress in Canada and the United States* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015); Andrew Woolford and Jeff Benvenuto, "Canada and Colonial Genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 4 (2015), 373–390.

² Several years ago, I worked for a Chinese academic agency related to media and public opinion studies and this experience provided me with an understanding as to how the system of public opinion orientation works.

Timeline

According to Joanne Smith Finley, the mass internment and re-education system in Xinjiang (so-called vocational training centers) was first noted by Western observers in 2017, as the Chinese government's document "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Regulations on De-Extremification" was disclosed by the press.³ Soon, more evidence came to light. For example, satellite photos revealed newly built prison-like buildings at different locations in Xinjiang; meanwhile, several detainees' relatives spoke out against the cruel policy of forced internment and called for help to find their missing family members.⁴ In the two years that followed, the international community's concerns over the Chinese government's systemic oppression of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities continued to grow, with more academics, politicians, and journalists joining the discussion about the disturbing evidence of the internment-camp-related abuses, such as beatings, maltreatment, and forced labor. Nonetheless, the word "genocide" was not widely used in the initial reports and discussions.

On October 5, 2019, a *Washington Post* article reported the experiences of several ex-detainees of the camps. The survivors revealed the reproductive interference against the Muslim women interned in the camps, which included forced abortion, sterilization, and sexual humiliation.⁵ Given the seriousness of the atrocities, some advocates for Uyghur human rights argued that what the Chinese government was doing in the camps amounted to the crime of genocide. In June 2020, an *Associated Press* report disclosed more evidence of China's systematic birth restrictions on the Uyghur population. The report is based on Adrian Zenz's research and some ex-detainees' testimonies. Due to these new findings, many scholars, human rights advocates, and lawyers started to worry that not just cultural genocide, but genocide as per the legal definition, was happening in Xinjiang.⁶

From 2020 to early 2021, the United Kingdom (UK) and United States (US) governments, the European Parliament, and Canada's House of Commons all denounced China's genocidal practices in Xinjiang. The denouncements raised tensions that had already existed between China and some Western countries. For example, China had been in a trade war with the US for almost a year; there was also a diplomatic dispute between Beijing and Ottawa because Canada followed its extradition agreement with the US and detained the Huawei CFO (Chief Financial Officer), Meng Wanzhou, in late 2018. The US was the first country to officially label China's actions in Xinjiang as genocide. In a statement on January 19, 2021, the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, concluded that the Uyghur were being

³ Joanne Smith Finley, "Why Scholars and Activists Increasingly Fear a Uyghur Genocide in Xinjiang," *Journal of Genocide Research* 23, no. 3 (2021), 351.

⁴ Nathan Ruser, "There is Now More Evidence than Ever that China is Imprisoning Uighurs," *Guardian*, September 24, 2020, accessed February 10, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/sep/24/china-imprisoning-uighurs-satellite-images-xinjiang>; Chris Buckley, "China Is Detaining Muslims in Vast Numbers. The Goal: 'Transformation'," *New York Times*, September 8, 2018, accessed February 10, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/08/world/asia/china-uighur-muslim-detention-camp.html>.

⁵ Amie Ferris-Rotman, "Abortions, IUDs and Sexual Humiliation: Muslim Women who Fled China for Kazakhstan Recount Ordeals," *Washington Post*, October 5, 2019, accessed February 10, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/abortions-iuds-and-sexual-humiliation-muslim-women-who-fled-china-for-kazakhstan-recount-ordeals/2019/10/04/551c2658-cfd2-11e9-a620-0a91656d7db6_story.html.

⁶ "China Cuts Uighur Births with IUDs, Abortion, Sterilization," *Associated Press (AP)*, June 29, 2020, accessed February 10, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/ap-top-news-international-news-weekend-reads-china-health-269b3de1af34e17c1941a514f78d764c>; Adrian Zenz, *Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control: The CCP's Campaign to Suppress Uyghur Birthrates in Xinjiang* (Washington, DC: The Jamestown Foundation, June 2020), accessed February 12, 2022, <https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Zenz-Internment-Sterilizations-and-IUDs-REVISED-March-17-2021.pdf?x99647>; Finley, *Uyghur Genocide in Xinjiang*, 356–363; see also Rukiye Turdush and Magnus Fiskesjö, "Dossier: Uyghur Women in China's Genocide," *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 15, no. 1 (2021), 22–43, accessed February 10, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.15.1.1834>.

subject to genocide.⁷ In Canada, the federal government, led by Justin Trudeau's Liberal cabinet, seemed to want to avoid further agitating China and therefore refused to accuse the latter of committing genocide. However, Trudeau's Conservative rivals in the House of Commons successfully pushed a non-binding motion that recognized Xinjiang's mass internment and re-education system as genocide. The motion was passed with a 266 to 0 vote on February 22, 2021, which made Canada the second country to label the systematic abuses against Uyghurs as genocide.⁸ Although the motion was ultimately vetoed by the Senate in June 2021, it communicated Canada's grave concerns over the human rights crisis in Xinjiang. Unsurprisingly, the Chinese government denied all charges and claimed that the US and Canada's accusations of the Uyghur genocide were nothing but a "shameful anti-China farce."⁹

In China, thanks to the information blockade of the Great Firewall, the mass internment system in Xinjiang was not known by most people before the spring of 2021. Beginning February of that year, the Xinjiang regional officials held a series of news conferences in Beijing to refute the *rumors* in Zenz's report, and to deny related charges. Nonetheless, it was not until late March 2021 that the majority of Chinese internet users heard the term "Uyghur genocide" and learned of the wider crisis, as some state-owned media covered Better Cotton Initiative (BCI)'s decision to suspend their cooperation with Xinjiang's cotton suppliers.¹⁰ The Chinese media also called on the public to boycott foreign fashion companies that endorsed BCI's decision, which include many famous clothing manufacturers such as H&M, New Balance, and Nike. Since the boycotted brands are well-known to Chinese consumers, some curious internet users started to probe the reason for BCI's withdrawal and learned that China was being criticized for implementing genocidal policies in Xinjiang. As usual, the propaganda organ of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) tried to convince people that Uyghur genocide is simply slander by foreign anti-China forces. Since the US and Canada had labeled China's actions in Xinjiang as genocide a few weeks earlier, the Chinese government's propaganda machine naturally described the two countries as the main representatives of the anti-China forces and seized on the topic of European colonialism to fight back.

Whataboutism

As early as February 19, 2021, China's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Hua Chunying, used examples of European colonialism to respond to Western countries' requests for an independent investigation of the re-education system in Xinjiang. When it came to Canada, Hua mentioned its past IRS system, Indigenous people's overrepresentation in prisons, and the violent crimes targeting Indigenous women. Hua stressed that Western politicians should explain their countries' oppression of Indigenous people first, rather than inventing "lies"

⁷ Michael R. Pompeo, "Determination of the Secretary of State on Atrocities in Xinjiang," *U.S. Department of State* (press statement), January 19, 2021, accessed July 1, 2023, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/determination-of-the-secretary-of-state-on-atrocities-in-xinjiang/>.

⁸ "Vote No. 56, 43rd Parliament, 2nd Session," *House of Commons, Canada*, February 22, 2021, accessed July 1, 2023, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/members/en/votes/43/2/56>.

⁹ Robert Fife and Steven Chase, "Parliament Declares China is Conducting Genocide Against its Muslim Minorities," *Globe and Mail*, February 22, 2021, accessed February 12, 2022, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-parliament-declares-china-is-conducting-genocide-against-its-muslim/>.

¹⁰ Due to concerns over the issue of forced labor, BCI stopped cooperation with Xinjiang cotton suppliers in October 2020. In March 2021, BCI's decision was disclosed to the Chinese domestic audience by several state media, such as *Global Times* and *China Daily*. Reportedly, the Communist Youth League (CYL) played an important role in this campaign, as it wanted to incite wide nationalism among civilians, though, at this moment, the party's central authorities were not fully prepared for the questions about the allegations of genocide yet. See Manya Koetse, "'Support Xinjiang MianHua!'—China's Social Media Storm over Xinjiang Cotton Ban," *What's on Weibo* (webpage), March 28, 2021, accessed March 8, 2023, <https://www.whatsonweibo.com/support-xinjiang-mianhua-chinas-social-media-storm-over-xinjiang-cotton-ban/>. I am also indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers for the valuable information about CYL's role in the boycott of H&M.

about China's ethnic policies.¹¹ China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, also employed anti-colonialist rhetoric to defend the Chinese government's policies in Xinjiang. In a press conference held on March 7, 2021, he said: "When it comes to genocide, most people would think of the sixteenth-century North American Indians, the nineteenth-century African slaves, the twentieth-century Jews, and today's Australian Aboriginals who are still struggling." Wang denied the existence of the systematic abuses in Xinjiang, saying that the charge of the Uyghur genocide is Western politicians' fabrication.¹² On March 10, 2021, Zhao Lijian, another spokesman of the Foreign Ministry, mentioned how westward expansion in the nineteenth-century caused tragedy for American Indians; he suggested that "the hat of genocide" suits the United States more.¹³ In other news conferences related to the Xinjiang issue, officials and spokespeople likewise used the examples of European colonialism to strike back against accusations of genocide. At this point, Canada had not stood out as China's main target, though its House of Commons had just passed the motion to recognize the Uyghur genocide.

The situation changed dramatically after hundreds of unmarked residential school graves were found in the Canadian provinces of British Columbia and Saskatchewan in May and June 2021. The discoveries left the country in shock and led the world to focus its attention on this dark page of Canadian history. China reacted swiftly and made Canada's IRS system an important subject in news reports and political propaganda. On June 28, 2021, the Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations, Zhang Jun, gave a speech in the Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict. Zhang said the recently exposed abuse and violence against Indigenous children in Canada at boarding schools were horrific; he urged the Canadian government to "let the world know the truth" and "give justice to the victims."¹⁴ However, the ambassador did not make any comments on his own country's mass internment and re-education system, though the related practices in Xinjiang have also separated children from parents.¹⁵ On the same day, at the 47th session of the UN Human Rights Council, Chinese delegate Jiang Duan also mentioned Canada's IRS system, saying that the 150,000 Indigenous children who were sent to the residential schools, and the 3,200 students who died from abuse, are "only the tip of the iceberg in the number of Indigenous people who died of genocide in Canada."¹⁶ Meanwhile, China also mobilized its governmental spokespersons, ambassadors to different countries, and state-owned media to

¹¹ People.cn's Official Account 人民网官方账号, "Wàijiāobù: 'zhǒngzú mièjué' zài zhōngguó shì shìjì huǎngyán, zài jiā měi ào shì céngjīng de xiànrú cúnzài: 外交部: '种族灭绝'在中国是世纪谎言, 在加、美、澳是曾经的现实存在" [Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "Genocide" is a Big Lie in China, But it Did Exist in Canada, The United States and Australia], *Baijiahao.baidu.com*, February 19, 2021, accessed February 13, 2022, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1692132187209353058&wfr=spider&for=pc>. Baijiahao.baidu.com is a social media platform run by Baidu Netcom. While the state-owned media usually use their official accounts on multiple social media platforms to publish, only the articles uploaded on Baijiahao.baidu.com can be accessed through normal internet browsers instead of needing to install apps first and read on mobile devices.

¹² Chinanews' Official Account 中国新闻网官方账号, "Wángyì: suǒwèi xīnjiāng dìqū cúnzài 'zhǒngzú mièjué' de shuōfǎ huāngmiù juélún: 王毅:所谓新疆地区存在'种族灭绝'的说法荒谬绝伦" [Wang Yi: The So-Called "Genocide" in Xinjiang is Absolutely Absurd], *Baijiahao.baidu.com*, March 7, 2021, accessed February 13, 2022, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1693559959765573331&wfr=spider&for=pc>.

¹³ China Youth Daily Official Account 中国青年报社, "Zhàolijīān: zhǒngzú mièjué de màozi, yǒu gèng shìhé de rén dài: 赵立坚:种族灭绝的帽子, 有更适合的人戴" [Zhao Lijian: The Hat of Genocide is More Suitable for Some People to Wear], *Baijiahao.baidu.com*, March 10, 2021, accessed February 13, 2022, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1693836230765884016&wfr=spider&for=pc>.

¹⁴ Zhang Jun, "Remarks by Amb. Zhang Jun at Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict," *Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN* (webpage), June 28, 2021, accessed February 13, 2022, http://un.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/chinaandun/securitycouncil/thematicissues/children_ac/202106/t20210628_9127427.htm.

¹⁵ "China Sending Children of Exiled Uighur Parents to Orphanages, Says Amnesty," *BBC*, March 19, 2021, accessed February 20, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-56454609>.

¹⁶ "Chinese Diplomat Criticizes Crimes of Genocide by U.S., Other Western Countries," *Xinhua Net*, June 29, 2021, accessed February 13, 2022, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-06/29/c_1310032897.htm.

make similar comments on the news about the residential school graves and to call for Canada to reflect on the genocidal policies it imposed on Indigenous people. It is unusual for the Chinese propaganda machine to attack Canada so intensively, as CCP's mouthpiece media often describes the US as China's archenemy. Obviously, China was angered by the Canadian parliament's motion of recognizing the Uyghur genocide.

A few English media based in North America noticed China's criticism of Canada's IRS system and interpreted this action as diplomatic sophistry used to evade the charges of the Uyghur genocide. For example, Canada's *National Post* published a report about this issue on June 4, 2021, in which the author analyzes a selection of editorials of China's English-language media outlets and concludes that the Chinese government's propaganda machine is using the strategy of whataboutism to disqualify Canada for criticizing China's human rights violations.¹⁷ The author also argues that whataboutism is not a new strategy, as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and South Africa's former apartheid regime also used similar tactics in their diplomatic disputes with Canada. Likewise, in an article published on the website, "Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab," Hans Hanley claims that China weaponizes the topic of Indigenous residential schools and tries to undercut Canada's moral high ground when alleging Uyghur genocide.¹⁸

To a significant degree, I agree with these Canadian and American journalists' arguments pertaining to China's whataboutism. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary's definition, whataboutism is the political rhetoric that one uses to discredit an accuser by arguing that he or she is guilty of the same offence or committing some worse crimes.¹⁹ The users of whataboutism usually avoid clarifying the truths of the original charge and only try to turn the accusation against the accuser. However, whether the original accuser is guilty does not undermine the value of the truth related to the allegation that the accuser has made in the first place. Therefore, the logic behind the rhetoric of whataboutism is often considered fallacious.²⁰ China's sophistry is whataboutism, in that it sets inconsistent moral standards for itself and other countries. When deploying topics of Canadian Indigenous people and the residential school system, the Chinese diplomats and foreign-language media outlets never dare to confront the international queries about similar human rights violations in today's Xinjiang, nor do they want to associate the Indigenous students in the residential schools with the Muslim minorities in the internment camps.

As a student of genocide studies, I, by no means, want to defend the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries North American settler regimes' colonialist oppression of Indigenous people. I am also aware that today's Indigenous people are still facing social inequality, discrimination, and trauma due to various legacies of European colonialism. Given the residential school designers' intention to destroy Indigenous people's traditions and the agonies that the Indigenous students endured, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) concludes that the IRS system amounted to "cultural genocide" in a report published in 2015.²¹

¹⁷ Tom Blackwell, "Chinese Media See a Propaganda Opportunity in 215 Children's Graves, Say Canada Shouldn't Criticize Others," *National Post*, June 4, 2021, accessed February 13, 2022, <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/unfit-to-preach-residential-school-graves-show-canada-has-no-right-to-criticize-others-chinese-media-say>.

¹⁸ Hans Hanley, "China Weaponizes Discovery of Graves at Canadian Residential Schools to Avoid Xinjiang Criticism," *Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab*, July 21, 2021, accessed February 13, 2022, <https://medium.com/dfrlab/china-weaponizes-discovery-of-graves-at-canadian-residential-schools-to-avoid-xinjiang-criticism-6bf618a6e954>.

¹⁹ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary (Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.), s.v., "whataboutism," accessed February 4, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/whataboutism>.

²⁰ "What about 'Whataboutism'?" Merriam-Webster, accessed January 30, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/whataboutism-origin-meaning>.

²¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), *Honoring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Winnipeg: National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2015), 1, accessed February 15, 2022, https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf.

However, the Chinese government's deeds related to this agenda are worrying for me because its whataboutism is essentially using the anti-genocide discourses to defend genocide. We can call this a mirroring strategy. In *The Human Right to Dominate*, Nicola Perugini and Neve Gordon describe a similar tactic used in the political arena concerning human rights. Using a mirror as a metaphor, the authors illustrate the scenario that opposite organizations deploy the same strategy to ascribe meanings to innocence and guilt. More specifically, they want to disclose how some Israeli settler NGOs borrow human rights discourses to advance their political objectives, as those organizations claim that the evacuation of Jewish settlements is also a violation of human rights. In this sense, the settler NGOs mirror the political discourses of pro-Palestine NGOs and use the excuse of protecting human rights to advocate colonization.²² The Chinese government's whataboutism is a mirroring action as well, for it tries to use a genocide discourse to make China an accuser of other countries' genocides, thereby claiming the moral high ground of anti-colonialism and diverting international observers and media's focuses from the abuses in Xinjiang.

Internal Denial

The Chinese government's mirroring strategy is unlikely to yield any substantial results within the international community, as human rights activists, scholars, and journalists would not neglect the evidence that points toward the existence of a mass internment, re-education, and forced labor system in Xinjiang simply because China tries to draw their attention to the issues of the Canadian Indigenous people. While some Canadian and American journalists have noticed how China uses whataboutism as a weapon against criticism from the international community, Western observers did not realize that a similar mirroring strategy is also employed by China's domestic media to influence the audience at home. By mirroring the discourses related to genocide, the Chinese government's mouthpiece media manages to discredit Western accusers of the Uyghur genocide, making their allegations sound ridiculous and malicious to the domestic audience. Since most in the Chinese public are not permitted access to foreign news sources, the government can easily cover up its wrongdoings and manipulate public opinion through media campaigns.

In the field of diplomacy and international politics, the Chinese media's campaign against Canada tapered off as the Canadian Senate vetoed the Uyghur-genocide motion in June 2021 and the US Department of Justice dismissed the charges against Meng Wanzhou and let Canada release her that September. However, the easement of Sino-Canada relations has not reduced the Chinese domestic media's coverage of Canada's IRS system and the problems concerned. On baidu.com, the most popular Chinese search engine, there are more than five million results relevant to the Chinese keywords of "Canadian Indigenous residential schools." Except for a few old academic papers about Canadian history, most articles focusing on the IRS system are posted on the websites of state-owned news agencies after the discoveries of the unmarked graves. In 2021, China Central Television (CCTV) also sent journalists to Canada to interview local Indigenous leaders and IRS survivors, and produced a short documentary called "The Children Who Cannot Go Home."²³ The newsreel

²² Nicola Perugini and Neve Gordon, *The Human Right to Dominate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 109–116.

²³ "Huí bú qù jiā de hái zǐ men: 回不去家的孩子们" [The Children Who Cannot Go Home], aired December 23, 2021, CCTV-13, tv.cctv.com video, 00:07:04, uploaded on December 23, 2021, accessed February 14, 2022, <http://tv.cctv.com/2021/12/23/VIDEW3GobqdhMCAzp5B9EYdZ211223.shtml>.

was initially released on TV at the end of the year and then circulated on several online video platforms.²⁴

Domestically, the Chinese media's reports about Canada's colonialism and the oppression of Indigenous people are delivered through various media outlets. While these news organizations are all state-controlled, they are allowed to focus on different aspects of the stories and select the reporting styles and genres that are consistent with the media's market positioning, which enables the propaganda campaign to influence different social strata. While some reports are written in plain language, targeting the general audience, some articles are organized in the form of research papers, aimed at readers with higher education. Most online reports are released by news agencies' official accounts on primary social media platforms, such as Weibo and WeChat, which facilitates the spread of information because more and more people now browse the internet through apps on mobile devices. The selection of several media articles below illustrate this campaign's common reporting themes.

On July 10, 2021, a social media account belonging to the Central Committee of the Communist Young League published a news article titled "How Residential Schools Became Canadian Indigenous Children's Graveyards." This article focuses on the unmarked graves of Indigenous children as well as the history of the IRS system; the author traces Canada's national policies of assimilating Indigenous people back to *The Indian Act* and explains how the residential schools were designed to fulfil the goal of forced assimilation. Most examples in the report are from existing materials, such as the testimonies of IRS survivors and clips from some old newsreels. This article did not disclose the exact reasons why the dead children were buried inappropriately but concentrated on Indigenous students' deplorable living conditions in the schools, suggesting that those children's deaths were associated with the school staff's long-term abuses and negligence.²⁵ Similarly, CRI Online, the social media account of the China Media Group, covered the discoveries of the unmarked graves and the related colonial history in a news article titled "The Elegy of Residential Schools: Why the 'Reconciliation of Indigenous Schools' is so Hard." Other than presenting more survivor testimonies, the report's author also discusses how the Canadian federal government's hypocrisy hinders the advance of social reconciliation. For instance, the article mentions that while two Canadian prime ministers have apologized for the colonial oppression inflicted on Indigenous people, the federal government still refuses to recognize the IRS system as genocide.²⁶

²⁴ This media campaign seems to be long-term; so far, there is no sign that it will come to an end. As I am writing this article, similar media reports continue to appear every week. The Chinese government realizes that the Indigenous children's graves offer a perfect opportunity for anti-Western propaganda and therefore invests unprecedented efforts into disseminating it. However, this is not China's first attempt to use a mirroring strategy. For a long time, the CCP regime sees Falun Gong as a major threat to its governance and tries very hard to paint the faith as an *evil cult*, thereby justifying the persecution inflicted on the religious group. One of the propaganda tactics is putting this typically peaceful religious practice on a par with some controversial sects and deadly cults, such as the Branch Davidians and the Solar Temple. This is a mirroring strategy in that it tries to convince people that Western governments also crack down on dangerous religious sects. The most recent application of this strategy happened right after Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's assassination. Reportedly, the murderer's motive was out of a grudge against a religious sect connected with Abe. China's major state media promptly covered this story to show the risk of getting involved with *evil cults*. Wu Xiejun 无邪君, "Ānbèi Jīnsān yùcì shēnwáng, bèihòu xiàn xiéjiào mèiyǐng: 安倍晋三遇刺身亡, 背后现邪教魅影" [An Evil Cult's Shadow is Behind Shinzo Abe's Assassination], *chinafxj.cn*, July 10, 2022, accessed March 11, 2023, <http://wap.chinafxj.cn/n47/c802846/content.html>.

²⁵ Central Committee of the Communist Young League 共青团中央, "Jìsù xuéxiào rúhé chéngwéi jiānàdà yuánzhùmín értóng de fénchǎng: 寄宿学校如何成为加拿大原住民儿童的坟场" [How Residential Schools Became Canadian Indigenous Children's Graveyards], *Baijiahao.baidu.com*, July 10, 2021, accessed February 13, 2022, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1704858735965435135&wfr=spider&for=pc>.

²⁶ CRI Online's Official Account 国际在线官方账号, "Jìsù xuéxiào bēigē, 'yuánzhùmín xuéxiào héjiě zhī lù' yīnhé rú cǐ jiānnán: 寄宿学校悲歌, '原住民学校和解之路' 因何如此艰难" [The Elegy of Residential Schools: Why the "Reconciliation of Indigenous Schools" is so Hard], *Baijiahao.baidu.com*, June 7, 2021, accessed February 13, 2022, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1701898508437530133&wfr=spider&for=pc>.

The two news articles above represent the Chinese media's typical reporting style when covering Canada's colonial oppression of Indigenous people and most media primarily focuses on the history of the IRS system and the plight of today's Indigenous communities. However, there are also a handful of media outlets that specialize in investigative journalism and therefore try to analyze Canada's colonialism through quasi-academic angles. For example, on June 9, 2021, *Pengpai News (ThePaper.cn)*²⁷ published a column titled "Canadian Indigenous Residential School: Genocide, Truth and Reconciliation, Politics of Citation;"²⁸ this commentary introduces not only the history of the IRS system but also the development of genocide studies. Drawing on the viewpoints from the UN's Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Raphaël Lemkin's *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, and the recent works of a few Canadian genocide scholars,²⁹ the column's author demonstrates how carceral conditions allowed colonialist perpetrators to inflict both mental and physical harm on Indigenous students. Each school was a camp-like space that isolated the Indigenous children from their traditional living environment; in the prison-like environment, students often needed to endure brainwashing indoctrination and physical punishments. All of these daily abuses gradually destroyed Indigenous peoples' future. The author concludes that genocide may take the form of internment and Canada's IRS system was genocide.

The discoveries of the unmarked graves of Indigenous children are certainly newsworthy, and anyone who has a conscience will feel obligated to criticize the IRS system and ponder on the trauma it brought to Indigenous people. When this history is presented by the Chinese state media, one should not simply assume that their coverage is driven by true concerns over the sufferings of Canadian Indigenous people or ethnic minorities in other countries. It should not be forgotten that these media reports were intentionally published in the same moment when the international community was asking the Chinese government to explain the mass internment system in Xinjiang and the systematic oppression of Uyghur Muslims. However, no report, commentary, nor column has tried to respond to the questions. It thus begs the question: If these media really care about the minorities in different countries, then why have the journalists not mentioned a single word about the current controversies over Xinjiang's re-education system in their news reports and commentaries about the history of the residential schools in Canada? In light of this unusual silence on the Uyghur issue, one can conclude that the Chinese state media's coverage of the colonial genocide against Indigenous people is hypocritical. The media's hypocrisy is best demonstrated by the previously discussed column from *Pengpai News*. The columnist focuses on how camp-like spaces and imprisonment experiences wreak both physical and mental harm on genocide victims. Yet, the entire article avoids any mention of the re-education camps designed to control Uyghurs.

So, why do the state-owned media bother to manufacture so many Chinese articles about Indigenous people in Canada and circulate them among domestic readers? The main reason is that the government tries to influence the public's understanding of foreign news about the Uyghur genocide. In China, all state-owned media are required to play the role of

²⁷ *Pengpai News (ThePaper.cn)* is a marketized CCP mouthpiece media. This online news platform belongs to Shanghai United Media Group, and the latter is supervised by the CCP Shanghai committee.

²⁸ Pengpai News' Official Account 澎湃新闻官方账号, "Jiānádà yuánzhùmín jùsù xuéxiào: zhǒngzú mièjué, zhēnxiàng yǔ héjiě, yǐnyòng zhèngzhì: 加拿大原住民寄宿学校: 种族灭绝、真相与和解、引用政治" [Canadian Indigenous Residential School: Genocide, Truth and Reconciliation, Politics of Citation], *Baijiahao.baidu.com*, June 9, 2021, accessed February 13, 2022, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1702065869557567369&wfr=spider&for=pc>.

²⁹ Below are the Canadian scholars' studies cited in the column. David B. MacDonald and Graham Hudson, "The Genocide Question and Indian Residential Schools in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 45, no. 2 (2012), 427–449; Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010); Zoe Todd, "An Indigenous Feminist's Take on the Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' Is Just Another Word for Colonialism," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29, no. 1 (2016), 4–22; Piotr Wilk et al., "Residential Schools and the Effects on Indigenous Health and Well-Being in Canada—A Scoping Review," *Public Health Reviews* 38, no. 8 (2017), 1–23; Andrew Woolford and James Gacek, "Genocidal Carcerality and Indian Residential Schools in Canada," *Punishment & Society* 18, no. 4 (2016), 400–419.

public opinion orientation, which means they need to carefully select agendas, rhetoric, and standpoints, guiding public opinion and sentiment to the directions favorable for governance by state authorities.³⁰ Usually, China's vast system of censorship draws more attention from overseas observers, for this work operates through the information blockade of the Great Firewall and the huge army of human censors. China's information control relies on both censorship and the media's work in public opinion formation. While the former is mainly the duty of *wang xin ban* (office for cyberspace affairs), central, provincial, and municipal governments have oversight on the internet censorship divisions; the latter is primarily a task supervised by the CCP propaganda departments at different administrative levels. The task of manipulating public opinions are often performed by some loosely organized networks composed of officials, scholars, and journalists, such as panels, associations, and WeChat groups. The cadres in charge of propaganda will usually ask certain experts, professionals, or senior journalists to play the role of *opinion leaders* and to create model articles that indicate the positions of the authorities. Then, other members of the networks are encouraged to produce more similar articles according to the models. The original authors usually do not mind this kind of plagiarism, as it is a reciprocal process. With more people copying the ideas espoused in the model articles, the propaganda of those opinion leaders spread wider. Meanwhile, for the copycats, taking part in propaganda work means a shortcut to publication and completion of political missions. This mechanism explains why CCP's propaganda campaigns often result in articles that have inconsistent qualities. While there are always a handful of reports that seem to be carefully crafted, most stories with similar theses are nothing but copies.

As propaganda departments are essentially an organ belonging to the party, they cannot indoctrinate the public as they normally do within the party organizations. Therefore, a local CCP propaganda department usually cooperates with state-owned media and guides the news production, thereby influencing public opinion. This propaganda tactic is applied to online news platforms as well. According to the government regulations regarding news organizations, the media controlled by "non-state-owned capitals" are forbidden to edit and produce news about politics and current affairs; they can only republish the reports issued by state-owned news agencies, newspapers, and TV networks.³¹ Although most internet portals are operated by private companies, their political news sections are completely dominated by reports from state media. Sometimes, state-owned media also use their social media accounts to publish articles, and then the articles may be republished on those privately-operated websites. Since state-owned media monopolize political news' production and publishing, the CCP propaganda departments naturally see them as the perfect tool through which to orient public opinion.

Though executed by different agencies, the work of censorship creates significant room for the control of public opinion. In the case of the accusations of the Uyghur genocide, most Chinese audiences and internet users initially know very little about the international community's pressure on the Chinese government to explain the abuses in Xinjiang, thanks to the blockade from the Great Firewall. Few people have the chance to carefully examine the evidence collected by foreign media, scholars, and human-rights advocates. However, no news can be completely blocked in the age of the internet. While some people can *climb over the wall* using VPN technologies, internet users within the Great Firewall may also get wind of the news about the Uyghur genocide through the impact of the events like BCI's decision to stop using Xinjiang cotton, and some countries' diplomatic boycott of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics.

³⁰ This media role is formalized in the CCP's official document *The Resolution of the CCP Central Committee on Strengthening the Party's Governing Ability*. Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, *Zhōnggòng zhōngyāng guānyú jiāqiáng dǎng de zhízhèng nénglì jiànshè de juédìng*: 中共中央关于加强党的执政能力建设的决定 [The Resolution of the CCP Central Committee on Strengthening the Party's Governing Ability], September 19, 2004.

³¹ State Council of China, *Guānyú fēi gōngyǒu zīběn jìn rù wénhuà chǎnyè de ruògān juédìng*: 关于非公有资本进入文化产业的若干决定 [Regulations on Non-State-Owned Capitals' Entry into Cultural Industry], April 13, 2005; Cyberspace Administration of China, *Hùliánwǎng xīnwén xīnxī fúwù guǎnlǐ guīdìng*: 互联网新闻信息服务管理规定 [Regulations on the Administration of Internet News and Information Services], May 2, 2017.

These incidents may make people realize that they are in a bubble created by censorship and therefore become curious about information beyond the Great Firewall. In this kind of scenario, the propaganda departments would take actions to fill the blank space with some deliberately selected and processed news reports, which can influence the audience's perception of the rumors from outside, guiding them to interpret the news and incidents in ways favorable to the Chinese government.

When defending policies criticized for violating human rights, the Chinese government's usual strategy is denouncing the international criticism as some anti-China forces' slander, which we have seen in the speeches of the Foreign Ministry spokesmen. The discoveries of the IRS graves give the Chinese government opportunity to discredit Canada, distracting the public from the facts associated with the allegations of the Uyghur genocide. The media campaign serving this goal is comprised of two aspects. Firstly, the state media tries to misguide the Chinese audience to believe that Canada and other Western countries use the rumor of the Uyghur genocide to defame China because they want to cover up their own colonialist oppression of Indigenous people. Usually, the message related to this propaganda only hides beneath the media's historical narratives; however, some of the low-quality propaganda articles' language is too blunt and therefore reveals the purpose of the media campaign, for instance, the report posted on *Ifeng.com* titled "Irrefutable Evidence of Genocide is Found in Canada After it Slanders China."³² This kind of propaganda tries to tell people that Canada is the one who committed genocide and this offender's accusation against China is certainly fabricated. In an environment where external information is tightly controlled, this strategy can significantly undermine the credibility of the charges from foreign countries. As long as the propaganda departments are *still playing this game*, the majority of the Chinese audience will not take the rumors about Xinjiang seriously.

Secondly, the CCP propaganda organ attempts to link the concept of genocide, especially "cultural genocide," to the European colonialist regimes' oppression of Indigenous people, whereby it can create a genocide stereotype that excludes the examples of events in China. For a long time, when it comes to genocide, most Chinese people would think of the massacres by Nazi Germany and during the Rwandan civil war. Due to this narrow understanding of genocide, even the notion that the European colonial invasion was genocidal is new to them, let alone the accusation of genocide in China. The Chinese government wants to solidify this stereotype and prevent people from expanding their understanding of genocide. Therefore, it feeds the public with the view that genocide is a crime committed by fascists, racists, European colonialists, and other so-called bad guys in history, and the idea that this kind of crime has nothing to do with formerly colonized countries like China. This is why most media reports merely cover the IRS system in Canada but do not mention the disputes over the internment camps in Xinjiang. Those articles' authors do not even try to refute the Western countries' accusations of the genocide against Uyghur Muslims lest the readers should know more details about the re-education system in Xinjiang and make associations with the concept of genocide.³³

While China's whataboutism is ineffective in diplomacy, the similar mirroring strategy employed by the domestic media is not completely useless for manipulating public opinions. Again, I must emphasize that this propaganda campaign is designed for an environment with systematic censorship. Except for a few netizens who have heard about the allegations of the Uyghur genocide, most people know nothing or merely receive limited information about the

³² Zheng Jieju 正解局, "Xuéxiào wāchū 215 jù értóng yíhái: jiānádà wūmiè zhōngguó, quèbèi pùchū zhōngzú mièjué tiězhèng: 学校挖出215具儿童遗骸: 加拿大污蔑中国, 却被曝出种族灭绝铁证" [215 Children's Bodies Exhumed at School: Irrefutable Evidence of Genocide is Found in Canada After it Slanders China], *Ifeng.com*, May 31, 2021, accessed February 13, 2022, <https://i.ifeng.com/c/86gu3eeOg8p>.

³³ Even though these reports do not mention the controversies over the re-education system in Xinjiang, some readers still get the implication related to the external allegations of the Uyghur genocide. For example, below the article "How Residential Schools Became Canadian Indigenous Children's Graveyards," a reader comments: "This (the IRS system) is a blatant genocide. Seize this thing and repay Canada badly." Article was first mentioned in note 23.

debates regarding Xinjiang. This environment of public opinion allows the state media to intensively cover Canada's residential schools without worrying that the audience could learn more about the internment camps in their own country. In terms of political intentions, this campaign aims to discredit Canada and make the domestic audience unaffected by the rumors about the persecution in Xinjiang. In this respect, the CCP propaganda machine's mirroring strategy is not as absurd as it appears, for it embodies the inoculation theory in communication studies.³⁴ In other words, the authorities deliberately reveal to the public an argument unfavorable to the government and then demonstrate its logical weakness or the moral flaw of those who made this point of view, thereby immunizing the public against similar arguments in the future. Next time, when exposed to more news about the atrocities in Xinjiang, the audience will automatically dismiss those stories as disinformation from untrusted sources. Ultimately, the audience is misled to discount all external accusations of the Uyghur genocide. In this sense, the media are helping the Chinese government cover up state atrocities in Xinjiang from the public. Since this media campaign mainly targets the domestic audience, we can conclude that this operation is an internal denial of the government's genocidal practice.

The strategies that China uses to deny its crimes fall into two classic types of official denials analyzed by Stanley Cohen. Firstly, the diplomatic whataboutism and the domestic propaganda to cover up genocide both belong to the tactic of "condemning the condemners," for their common strategy is to question the accusers' qualifications and argue that countries like Canada do not have the right to judge.³⁵ Secondly, the propaganda campaign attempts to solidify the genocide stereotype and exclude China's examples from it, which constitutes an "interpretive denial."³⁶ Specifically speaking, China never denies the existence of the large residential institutions in Xinjiang but calls them "vocational training centers,"³⁷ painting the re-education system as a benevolent practice. Since the genocide stereotype that China tries to solidify mainly includes the examples of physical destruction, calling some employment-promoting facilities genocide naturally sounds ridiculous; this is the information that the Chinese diplomats and state media try to convey. The ultimate message is that *the vocational training centers are designed to help the minorities, not to kill them or destroy their traditions; therefore, the re-education system is neither physical genocide nor cultural genocide*. Unlike its diplomatic sophistry, the Chinese government's internal denial is not necessarily ineffective in that the domestic audience has no access to examine the evidence related to the repression of Uyghurs and therefore cannot identify disinformation. This information asymmetry allows the government to feign innocence and discredit any accusers from whom the public could accidentally hear rumors of genocide.

Some Discussion

Although China employs genocide-related discourses in both diplomacy and domestic propaganda, this mirroring strategy serves two different goals. Internationally, the tactic of whataboutism allows Chinese diplomats to dodge questions and allegations from other countries. At home, the media campaign is designed to decrease the credibility of foreign news

³⁴ The social psychologists who founded this theory notice that pre-exposure to a persuasive argument's weakened versions may make an attitude or belief more resistant to this argument's future and stronger versions, a mechanism like inoculation in medical science. Josh Compton, "Inoculation Theory," in *The Sage Handbook of Persuasion: Developments in Theory and Practice*, eds. James Price Dillard and Lijiang Shen (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2013), 220–236.

³⁵ Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 111–112.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 105–106.

³⁷ Murray Brewster, "No Concentration Camps in China Just 'Vocational Training Centres,' Says Envoy," *CBC News*, March 4, 2020, accessed March 1, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/china-concentration-camp-uyghurs-1.5485658>; Mimi Lau and Linda Lew, "China Defends its 'Vocational Training Centres' in Xinjiang White Paper," *South China Morning Post*, September 17, 2020, accessed March 1, 2023, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3101986/china-claims-vocational-training-given-nearly-13-million-people?module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article&campaign=3101986.

about the systematic abuses in Xinjiang, guiding domestic audiences to dismiss the idea that the government is performing genocide against minorities. Nonetheless, the two kinds of mirroring action are both morally disturbing as the Chinese government turns the genocide of Indigenous people and the victims' sufferings into a rhetorical tool so that it can defend and cover up another genocide against ethnic minorities. In both international and domestic contexts, the Chinese authorities do not have any intention to really protect the rights of Indigenous people. The CCP propaganda organ just wants to exploit the topic of Indigenous residential schools and use those school survivors' traumatic experiences to attack Canada's credibility, thereby weakening the pressure brought by the international criticism of the genocidal policies and practices in Xinjiang. Since the Chinese government's mirroring strategy instrumentalizes genocide agendas and victims, what it ultimately harms are not only Xinjiang's Muslim minorities but also Canada's Indigenous people, as well as the residential school survivors.

Whataboutism and a mirroring strategy allow perpetrators to use an accuser's weakness to dodge accusations, which pose a challenge to the diplomatic and academic work that aims to prevent genocide. The discussion about the strategies that we may use to tackle this challenge is beyond this article's scope, but I believe that the development of specific strategies should depend on different circumstances. Generally speaking, if a country's politicians, intellectuals, and the public can fully reflect on their state and government's past and current genocidal practices and help survivors to heal their traumas, this nation would not give its international opponents any opportunity to seize on its moral defects and implement whataboutism. However, I notice that most Canadian media and journalists do not touch upon the history of Indigenous residential schools when covering Xinjiang's re-education camps, though many Canadian academics and activists have disclosed the genocidal effects that the IRS system brought to Indigenous communities and their members. I also mentioned the Canadian federal government's reluctance to accept the TRC investigation's conclusion that the IRS system was cultural genocide; this ambiguous attitude hinders Canada from keeping a flawless image in diplomacy, creating a condition for foreign governments' use of whataboutism.

Aside from playing on Canada's ambiguous attitude toward its colonial history, China also takes advantage of the conceptual difference between physical and cultural genocides. When Lemkin coined the word "genocide" to describe the systematic destruction of Armenians and Jews, he saw damage to culture as an important component of genocidal events. However, due to compromises made during the political negotiations, genocide's legal definition in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide only contains acts that may physically destroy a group. As cultural genocide is omitted in the international legal framework, atrocities aiming to systematically destroy cultures are excluded from the crime of genocide.³⁸ The scholars who defend China's ethnic policies in Xinjiang and Tibet often rely on this legal framework, arguing that those controversial practices are not genocidal because the massacre of minorities is not happening.³⁹ The Chinese government's whataboutism is also muddying the waters. It mentions the systematic persecution against Uyghurs and the forced assimilation of Canadian Indigenous people in the same breath, limiting the controversy over Xinjiang's internment system in the scope of cultural genocide. This attempts to downplay the seriousness of the crimes and ostensibly distances the government's wrongdoings from the legal category of genocide. China implements its persecuting policies against Uyghurs with

³⁸ Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 23–27; Ciara Finnegan, "The Uyghur Minority in China: A Case Study of Cultural Genocide, Minority Rights and the Insufficiency of the International Legal Framework in Preventing State-Imposed Extinction," *Laws* 9, no. 1 (2020), 3–4; Leo Kuper, *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 30–31.

³⁹ Barry Sautman, "Colonialism, Genocide, and Tibet," *Asian Ethnicity* 7, no. 3 (2006), 243–265; Joel Slawotsky, "Is China Guilty of Committing Genocide in Xinjiang?" *Chinese Journal of International Law* 20, no. 3 (2021), 625–635.

both physical and cultural means.⁴⁰ The two aspects of repression serve the same goal of weakening a group's ability to reproduce its population and tradition, which leads observers to label the abuses in Xinjiang as genocide; thus, none of the two should be ignored. Unlike legal scholars, sociologists usually understand genocide as a process including both biological and cultural dimensions. They contend that cultural genocide is also devastating because it can significantly impair a group whose collective identity is culturally constructed.⁴¹ Some scholars, especially those who focus on Indigenous Peoples and ethnic minorities, further argue that biological and cultural genocides are inseparable in the real world.⁴² For example, the IRS system inflicted both mental and physical harm on Indigenous people and therefore extended the damage to the fields beyond culture. Recent studies also reveal that forced sterilizations of Indigenous women were widely practiced in Canada.⁴³ In a word, though the legal definition offers a clear and concise framework to identify genocide, its simplicity also makes it inapplicable to many complex situations, which allows the perpetrators to find loopholes to exploit and acquit themselves.

In addition, the genocide-accusing tactic also needs an adjustment. Canada and US's labeling approach is fundamentally a kind of concept application, as it focuses on how to use the term "genocide" to define related actions. This approach enables the accused to borrow the labels, concepts, and definitions to make similar allegations against the accuser, especially when the latter is not historically and morally flawless either. This whataboutism may result in a pointless and endless war of words, which will do nothing good for the improvement of the situation of the victims. To prevent this scenario from happening, the focus of the allegation should be shifted to the actual harms that the perpetrator brings to a victim group and its members. In other words, instead of simply labeling and defining atrocities, the accuser should make more descriptions of the sufferings that the victim group and individuals are undergoing, filling the label and charge with plenty of examples and holding the perpetrator to account for the consequences of their practices, not just for the definition of their actions. Under this context, if the accused country wants to mirror the allegation, a simple countercharge is insufficient, concentrating instead on the situations of the genocide victims in other countries, comparing the damage levels and recovery processes of different cases. Ultimately, the debate between countries can lead to the discussion on the issue of how to heal the wounds of genocide. Although this approach cannot prevent a perpetrator from using whataboutism, at least it can transform the dispute about *whose crime is worse* into the comparison of *whose remedy is better*, which may help reconciliation and the recovery of the survivors.

Conclusion

In the above discussion, I have demonstrated how the Chinese government and the CCP propaganda departments use anti-colonialist and anti-genocidal discourses to fulfil different political purposes at home and abroad. By criticizing Western colonialist regimes' assimilation policies, especially Canada's IRS system, Chinese diplomats apply the rhetoric of whataboutism to dodge the international community's questions about China's systematic persecution of

⁴⁰ David Tobin, "Genocidal Processes: Social Death in Xinjiang," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 45, no.16 (2022), 93–121; Adrian Zenz, "End the Dominance of the Uyghur Ethnic Group: An Analysis of Beijing's Population Optimization Strategy in Xinjiang," *Central Asian Survey* 40, no. 3 (2021), 291–312.

⁴¹ Helen Fein, *Genocide: A Sociological Perspective* (London: Sage, 1991), 23–25.

⁴² Some scholars argue that the saying "cultural genocide" may hinder decolonization and reconciliation because the category of culture represents the body-mind duality in the Western mindset, which goes against many Indigenous worldviews that emphasize the indivisibility of humans and their environment. For example, see Andrew Woolford, "Ontological Redress: The Natural and the Material in Transformative Justice for 'Cultural' Genocide," in *Cultural Genocide: Law, Politics, and Global Manifestations*, ed. Jeffrey S. Bachman (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 272–273.

⁴³ Erika Dyck, *Facing Eugenics: Reproduction, Sterilization, and the Politics of Choice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013); Karen Stote, *An Act of Genocide: Colonialism and the Sterilization of Aboriginal Women* (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2015).

Uyghur Muslims. Domestically, the CCP propaganda organ and the state-controlled media intensively cover Canada's IRS system and the colonial genocide against Indigenous people, trying to distract the audience from state atrocities in Xinjiang and mislead the public into distrusting Canada and other countries' the motives for accusing China of committing genocide. This mirroring strategy covers up a genocide that is happening at home and it turns the residential school survivors' trauma into a tool to defend a genocidal system that likewise takes the form of education. Therefore, not only does the mirroring practice encourage the current abuses and atrocities committed against the Uyghur Muslims, but it also, once again, victimizes Canadian Indigenous people in a sense of morality. I suggest that Canadian politicians, the press, and the public should fully reflect on the harms caused by the IRS system and accept the TRC report's conclusion; I also argue that the focus of genocide accusation should be shifted from simply defining and labeling genocidal actions to the detailed account of the consequences and actual harms of atrocities.

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