

# **Researchers Spot Deep Fake Profile Photos Linked to Pro-China Twitter Accounts**

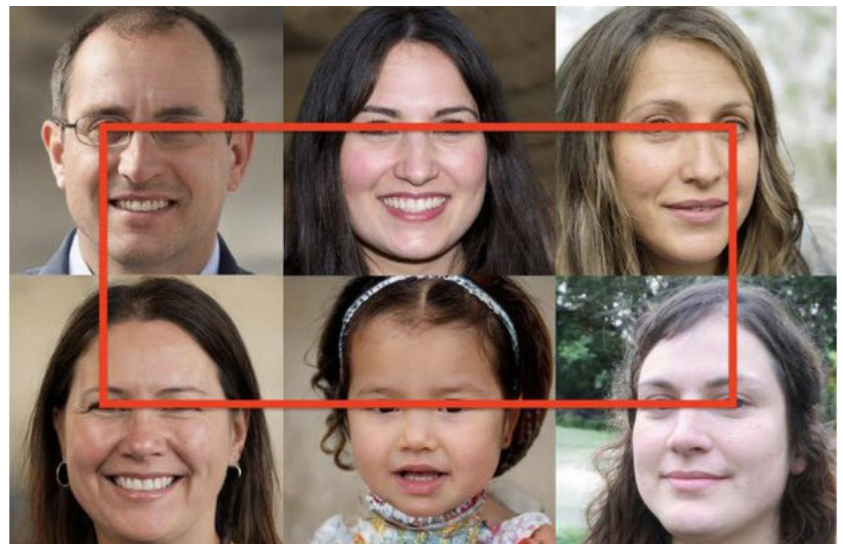
*RFA, By Jane Tang, 2021-08-12*

**Pro-China accounts are also re-emerging on Facebook and YouTube, according to the Centre for Information Resilience.**

Researchers in the United Kingdom have discovered a coordinated network of “deep-fake” social media accounts pushing the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)’s views in the guise of ordinary account-holders.

The Centre for Information Resilience (CIR) said it had discovered a network of social media accounts that “distort international perceptions on significant issues, elevate China’s reputation amongst its supporters, and discredit claims critical of the Chinese government.”

In a report published on its website, the CIR said pro-China accounts



Images generated by artificial intelligence show suspect eye alignment and other flawed details.

were part of a “coordinated influence operation” on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube that uses a mixture of artificial and repurposed accounts to post CCP propaganda.

"Our research shows evidence of a deliberate effort to distort international perceptions on significant issues - in this case, in favor of China," CIR's director of investigations Benjamin Strick said.

"There appears to be close overlaps in narratives shared by the network, to those shared by the social media accounts of [Chinese] state representatives and state-linked media," Strick said.

Among the topics targeted are U.S. gun laws, COVID-19, overseas conflicts, and racial discrimination in an apparent bid to counter criticism of China, the report found.

CIR co-founder Ross Burley said the influence operation is similar to networks that have already been taken down by social media platforms in the past.

"It is likely that this operation is a continuation of those past efforts," Burley said. "We urge the platforms mentioned in this report to investigate the network, formally offer attribution and take it down."

The accounts identified in the report used machine-generated images as profile pictures, as well as images that appeared to be of real humans, and anime images as profile photos, Burley said.

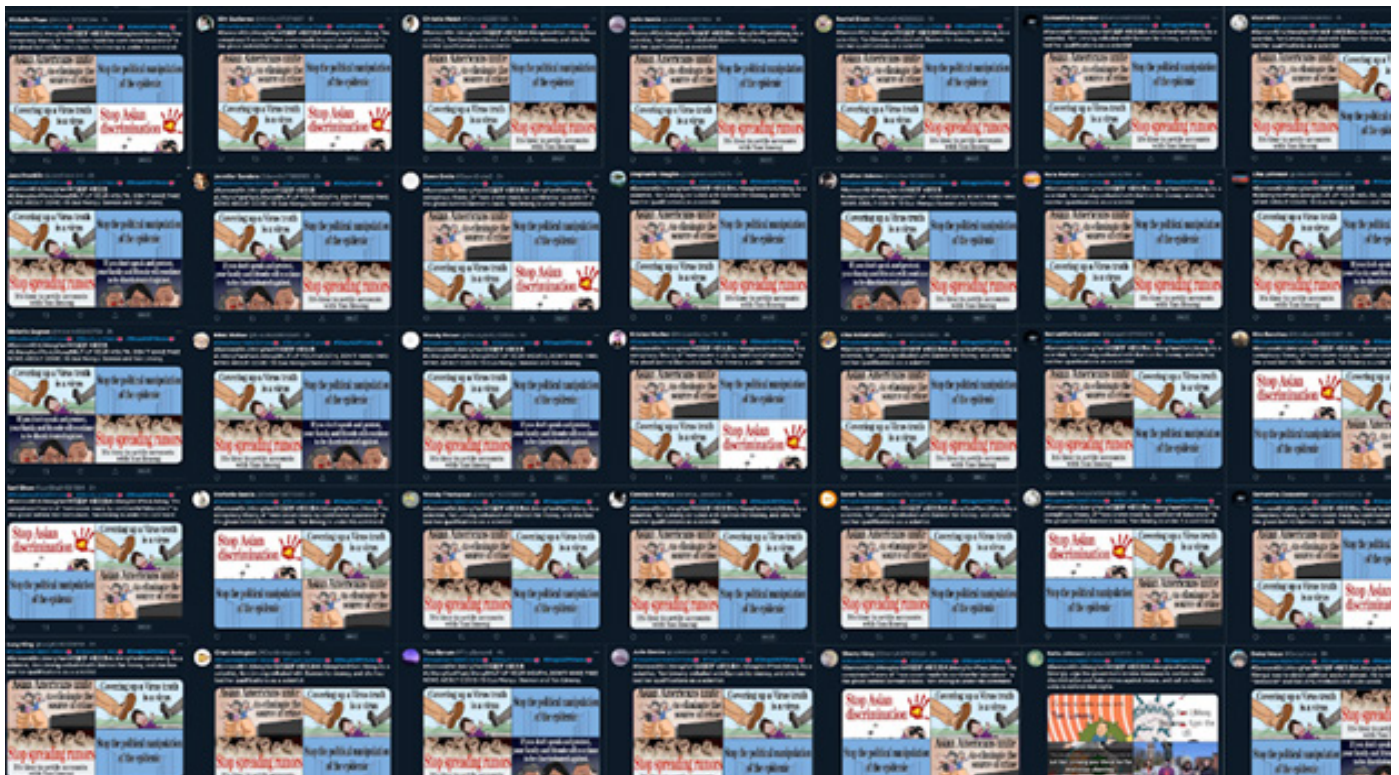
"On Facebook and YouTube, many of the accounts also appeared to be repurposed," Burley said. "There was evidence of previous authentic-appearing ownership of the accounts, indicating that at some point there was a change of ownership."

### 'Deep fake' photos

At first glance, the profile photos in some of the fake Twitter accounts look ordinary enough, but the CIR was able to analyze them and discover that they had been generated by artificial intelligence.

The use of "deep fake" photos attached to pro-China accounts is a relatively new phenomenon, according to the report.

The pictures were made by stealing real-life profile photos and using a machine learning



The report found spam tweets using the same text, tags, and images all uploaded on the same day



framework called StyleGAN.

The deep fake photos are generated by algorithms, so they are composed in a similar way.

For example, the eyes are always in the same position, and there may also be some very subtle defects, such as fuzzy hair, distorted limbs, or curled ears.

The report said it had identified hundreds of such accounts, which typically reuse the same hashtags, text, and photos, posting the same content on the same day.

### **Accounts suspended, removed**

Twitter and Facebook said that most of the accounts reported to their platforms by CIR have been suspended and are being investigated.

In June 2020, Twitter removed 23,750 Chinese accounts linked to the CCP, which in turn fed into another 150,000 accounts that amplified China's preferred narrative.

The tweets were predominantly in Chinese languages and spread geopolitical narratives favorable to the CCP, while spreading disinformation about Hong Kong, the IFJ said.

In August 2020, Google removed 2,500 fake

YouTube accounts linked to China, with Facebook following suit in September 2020, taking down around 180 similar accounts, it said.

The Oxford Internet Institute (OII) has also published a report on Twitter accounts that supported the CCP line, although it was unable to prove any financial ties to the CCP.

Many of the accounts support the work of public figures engaged in pushing the CCP's new brand of "wolf warrior" diplomacy on Twitter.

China's ambassador to London, Liu Xiaoming, for example, had nearly 27,000 fake accounts following his account on Twitter, which had retweeted Liu's tweets nearly 200,000 times before being deleted by the platform, the OII reported.

It said a batch of fake accounts pretending to be British citizens appeared on Twitter and started to promote CCP-friendly content, generating more than 16,000 retweets before being deleted by Twitter at the end of April 2021.

**Translated and edited by Luisetta Mudie.**



# Let's Boycott the Genocide Games in Beijing

*Benedict Rogers, August 10, 2021*

“Three days ago the Olympic Games in Tokyo ended, with athletes celebrating their medals and nursing their losses. Now, all eyes turn to the next Olympics—the Winter Games next year—and increasingly the question of the legitimacy of the host city: Beijing.”

*It is extremely rare for two successive host cities for the Games—Summer and Winter—to have their credentials questioned, though for two entirely different reasons. Tokyo's ability to host the Olympics was held in doubt by some not because of any wrongdoing by Japan, but because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed it was postponed by a year, and earlier this year speculation grew that the Games could be canceled. In the end, Tokyo went ahead, and—despite pandemic complications—proved a success.*

*In contrast, the questions surrounding Beijing 2022 are far more profound. COVID-19 is a consideration, given that the virus emerged first in China and turned into a pandemic in large part as a consequence of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) cover-up and lies. Instead of suppressing the virus, the regime initially suppressed the truth, threatening, intimidating and disappearing whistleblowers, including doctors and citizen journalists who tried to warn the world. Instead of alerting the World Health Organization (WHO) immediately, the CCP dela-*



*Exiled Tibetans use the Olympic rings as a prop as they protest against the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, in Dharamsala, India, on Feb. 3, 2021. (Ashwini Bhatia/AP)*

*yed and denied. And instead of allowing a transparent inquiry into the origins of the virus, the regime has refused to co-operate and launched a trade war against those, like Australia, which called for an investigation. So on public health grounds alone, does Beijing deserve to host the Winter Games? But the moral illegitimacy of Beijing 2022 goes much deeper than public health and logistics. This is a regime that increasingly stands accused of the worst crimes under international law—genocide and crimes against humanity—and flagrant violations of international treaties. Is this a regime that deserves the prestige of hosting the Winter Olympics?*

*Both the previous and current U.S. administrations, the Canadian, Dutch, Lithuanian, Belgian, Cze-*



ch, and British parliaments, and a growing number of international legal experts and scholars now conclude that the Uyghurs are facing genocide. An independent tribunal chaired by the man who prosecuted Slobodan Milosevic, British lawyer Sir Geoffrey Nice, is assessing this claim and will publish its judgment toward the end of the year, but in its public hearings, truly harrowing evidence has already been presented. Beijing 2022 is increasingly becoming known as the #GenocideGames.

A previous independent tribunal also chaired by Sir Geoffrey Nice concluded beyond doubt that forced organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience in China has occurred, and continues, on a widespread scale. The China Tribunal's judgment in 2019 argued that this amounts to crimes against humanity and that anyone engaging with the Chinese regime must be made aware that they are dealing with a "criminal state."

Xi Jinping's regime has completely destroyed Hong Kong's promised freedoms, democracy, the rule of law and autonomy over the past year, in total and repeated breach of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, a treaty registered at the United Nations. British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab says China is in "a state of ongoing non-compliance"—an understated diplomatic euphemism to mean that Beijing has torn up and trampled on an international treaty.

On top of all this, there is the continuing repression in Tibet, the worst persecution of Christians since the Cultural Revolution, ongoing assaults on Falun Gong practitioners, the crackdown on civil society, human rights defenders, citizen journalists, bloggers, and dissidents throughout China, as well as the CCP's increasing aggression toward its critics well beyond its borders. Should a regime whose leader threatens overseas critics with

having "their heads bashed bloody against a Great Wall of Steel" if they dare to oppose the CCP be rewarded with the Winter Olympics?

**The case against Beijing 2022 is clear. The question is what do we do about it?**

Ideally, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) should move the Games, even at the eleventh hour, from Beijing to another city capable of hosting at short notice. There are plenty of candidates with experience and facilities for hosting winter sports—Canada, parts of the United States, various parts of Scandinavia, and Switzerland are just a few. If the IOC had the political will, it could be done.

Unfortunately, the IOC seems to already be too far into Beijing's pocket to budge. It has already tied itself to China's line on Taiwan, for example, insisting on describing Taiwanese athletes as representing "Chinese Taipei" and refusing to play the Taiwanese national anthem or display Taiwan's flag at medal ceremonies.



Activists, including members of the local Hong Kong, Tibetan, and Uyghur communities, hold up banners and placards calling on the Australian government to boycott the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics over China's human rights record, in Melbourne, Australia, on June 23, 2021. (William West/AFP via Getty Images)

*When Chinese athletes wore Chairman Mao badges in Tokyo, the IOC did warn them that their gesture could be a breach of the Olympic Charter, which bans political statements, but we should not hold our breath for any disciplinary action to be taken.*

*Assuming, therefore, that the IOC does not respond to pressure to move the 2022 Games, what then? Surely what is needed is as full, coordinated, and comprehensive a boycott as possible.*

*At an absolute minimum, there must be a diplomatic boycott. No foreign government representatives, diplomats, ministers, royalty, or dignitaries should attend. Of course, there will be those who won't sign up for this, but if as many like-minded countries as possible co-ordinate this effort, it will make a difference. Beijing hates being snubbed, and loathes being embarrassed. When the United States boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, over 60 countries followed suit. Let's try the same approach with Beijing.*

*But we should do more. We need a consumer boycott. Spectators should not go to Beijing, and should put pressure on corporate sponsors to withdraw. Consumers should boycott those companies that still have their logos on the stands in the Beijing Games.*

*And, if the Games go ahead, we should use the platform it gives us to generate maximum attention on China's human rights violations. Talk about the Uyghur genocide, Tibet, Hong Kong, religious persecution, torture, forced organ harvesting, disappearances, the surveillance state, and the increasingly totalitarian nature of the CCP at every opportunity on the airwaves. Turn Beijing 2022 from a propaganda victory for the CCP into a publicity coup for the cause of freedom and human dignity.*

*As to the athletes, I leave it to them to wrest-*

*le with their consciences. I know that competing in the Olympics is every sportsman's dream, and they will have spent years training for it. It's not for me to tell them whether or not to compete. But if they do compete they should do so with their eyes and ears wide open, and should use the opportunity they have—on the ground, if they're brave enough, or immediately upon departure from Beijing—to highlight the brutality and criminality of China's barbaric dictatorship.*

*One thing we can be sure about is that if brave sports men and women from other dictatorial states take a stand in Beijing the way Belarusian sprinter Krystina Timanovskaya did in Tokyo, against their own regimes, they're unlikely to receive the protection they found in Japan. That in itself could put quite a few off from participating.*

*Some argue that boycotts don't work. I disagree. History shows they play an important role. And at the very least what is certain is that if Beijing 2022 goes ahead unchallenged, the regime will be emboldened, behave with even more repression at home and aggression abroad, and ultimately it won't only be the peoples of China whose rights we will have failed to defend, but our own freedoms at stake as well.*

*So let's work now to turn Beijing 2022 into a nightmare for Xi Jinping and a light in the darkness for those suffering under his regime. Let's boycott the Genocide Games.*



# A Sister's Plea for Her Brother's Freedom

by Juliet Isselbacher, 8.12.21

**BEFORE HE WAS PLACED IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT in January 2019, Ekpar Asat cut the nails of fellow detainees in a Xinjiang concentration camp for Uyghurs, an ethnic minority based in Northwest China. The elderly prisoners' hands shook too much to do it themselves, according to Ekpar's sister, Rayhan Asat, L.L.M. '16, who lives in the United States and is fighting for the release of her brother, a political prisoner of the Chinese government.**

With gestures of kindness like these, she said, her brother remains a source of hope and comfort to those around him. "He's apparently uplifting people, he's helping people even while incarcerated," continued Asat, the first Uyghur student to attend Harvard Law School (HLS). "I don't know if it's because of that, that [the Chinese government] realized that they needed to isolate him from everybody. His charismatic personality, charm, and positive energy always inspire people." A tech entrepreneur who developed a social-media platform for Uyghurs, Ekpar's "dedication to philanthropy" and "continuous effort in cultivating ethnic harmony" earned him an invitation to the State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program in 2016. Upon returning home to China, however, he was detained and shuttered away in the country's network of nominal "re-education centers."

Human-rights groups estimate that at least one million Uyghurs are being held in these



Rayhan Asat with her brother Ekpar  
Photograph courtesy of Rayhan Asat

camps, which are sites of torture and enforced sterilization, according to a 2021 report from the U.S. State Department. The report concluded that China "is committing genocide and crimes against humanity."

**"Uyghurs became synonymous with the concentration camps, and it's just simply so sad," Asat said. "The word Uighur actually means 'united'.... There's just this beautiful community of togetherness, and I think that is the foundation of the Uighur culture."**

Asat has not been united with her family in five years. They were set to attend her Law School graduation in 2016, but abruptly called off the trip, citing illness. Asat didn't know then about Ekpar's arrest—the real reason for the cancellation. But she had a feeling something was awry, especially after she wasn't able to get in touch with her brother.



As she heard more about the worsening plight of Uyghurs in the region, his fate came into focus.

Years later, in January 2020, Beijing officially confirmed the picture Asat had pieced together. In response to a letter from seven senators urging Ekpar's release, the Chinese government stated that he had been sentenced to 15 years in prison for "inciting ethnic hatred and ethnic discrimination." In a tweet, a division of the State Department deemed them "sham charges": "No trial, no lawyer, no evidence, no due process, no justice. His crime? Being [Uyghur]."

*Asat said she felt anguished over whether to go public with her story. Her quiet, behind-the-scenes efforts to secure her brother's release were proving fruitless, but she didn't want to endanger her family by speaking out.*

"We talked it through backwards and forwards and inside and out for a long time," said her friend and classmate Amy C. Woolfson, L.L.M. '16. The pair took a class in negotiation theory, Woolfson added, but best practices were difficult to translate across "a whole different culture." She and Asat deliberated the central question "again and again and again": "Do you call out the Chinese government, or do you try to find a way to make it easy for them to change their position?"

Cohen professor of law William Alford, director of the East Asian legal studies program, who met Asat when she was a student in 2016, helped guide her through this crossroads. "I did, indeed, initially counsel that she try back channels to secure information about her brother's detention. She did that assiduously and with the assistance of several people with deep knowledge of and strong contacts in China," he wrote in an email. "Those efforts were largely unsuccessful and so, understandably, she made the difficult decision to take a more public approach."

Alford moderated the March 2020 event at which Asat went public with the story of her brother's imprisonment. At the forum, hosted by HLS Advocates for Human Rights and entitled "Surveilled, Detained, Disappeared: Repression in Xinjiang," Asat embarked on her still-accelerating advocacy journey.

"It was a really momentous decision," Woolfson said. Asat described speaking out at the forum as a "defining moment" in her life: "I felt like every person in that classroom was trying to take away some of the pain," she said. "It was that moment I realized that I have a community that I could lean on—that would support me no matter what."

Asat has continued to receive support from across the University. In January 2021, more than 70 Harvard student organizations signed onto a statement calling for the release of her brother; that February, almost 200 affiliates across the University signed a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken '84 calling attention to Ekpar's plight.

"The ability to showcase individual stories is so important when it comes to these really wide-ranging tragedies," said Tzofiya M. Bokstein '23, who heads the Harvard Human Rights Working Group—an activist organization for undergraduates run out of the Committee on Ethnicity, Migration, Rights. The working group partnered with HLS Advocates for Human Rights to draft the statement and letter to Blinken. In April, they also hosted a virtual event commemorating the five years that had passed since Ekpar's disappearance.





ce, where U.S. Senator Chris Coons and 300th Anniversary University Professor Martha Minnow delivered opening remarks.

“Rayhan’s courage, knowledge, and tenacity have brought global attention but as yet no success to the detention of her brother,” Minnow wrote in an email. “It is gratifying to see so many in the Harvard community joining in her efforts.”

As a result of her efforts, Ekpar’s story has appeared in the *The New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and on CNN, NBC, the BBC, and a number of other outlets. Meanwhile, administrator of the United States Agency for International Development, and former United Nations ambassador Samantha Power, the Tom-Lantos Human Rights Foundation, the China Congressional-Executive Commission, and politicians on both sides of the aisle have called for Ekpar’s release. In March, a group of senators invoked Ekpar in a resolution condemning the China for its treatment of Uyghurs, and in July, members of the U.S. House of Representatives named him in a bill that aims to protect the ethnic group’s human rights.

When Asat speaks to her parents, however, she’s limited to small talk; it’s too dangerous to discuss her advocacy. “That really breaks my heart because I want them to know that their son is revered not just at home in Xinjiang, but also internationally,” she said. “Members of Congress are talking about him, and his name has been written into U.S. bills.” Though her parents are blind to the spotlight on their son, Asat’s work has won them two calls with Ekpar—a three-minute video in late January, and a 10-minute follow-up in late July. Her brother may have “looked like a shadow of his former self,” Asat said, but his words were true to his lifelong ethos: “Be kind,” he told his parents. “Be kind to everybody.”

Asat—who describes herself as the “perfect target” for the “re-education” camps—cannot return home to see or support her parents. The separation is especially difficult now that her father has been diagnosed with lung cancer: “The Chinese government not only took away my brother but also took away this beautiful relationship of us as a family.”

Still, Asat is pushing on. She has been named a 2021 World Fellow at Yale, and has also joined the Strategic Litigation Project at the Atlantic Council, where—according to a June press release—she will “lead a portfolio of strategic legal work to seek redress and bring an end to the mass atrocities currently perpetrated against her brother...and millions of other Uyghurs.”

Beyond her legal work, Asat hopes to dispel misconceptions about the Uighur people. “The Chinese government has been portraying Uyghurs as backward—people who need to be ‘re-educated,’” she said. “The very fact that I’m a highly educated person destroys this narrative that they have been presenting to the world.”

“When people know that I actually studied at Harvard, one of the finest institutions in the world, I think the perception totally changes in the minds of people—they no longer look at Uighur people as distant, exotic, in the far reaches of China,” she said. “Suddenly it [is] as if this is their next-door neighbor; this is happening to somebody they know. It could happen to any Harvard graduate.”



happening to somebody they know. It could happen to any Harvard graduate.”

“She is really a teacher to us,” said Joshua Moriarty '21, a member of the Harvard Human Rights Working Group. He and his fellow students are hoping to hold an in-person rally for Ekpar's freedom on or near campus this coming semester.

Asat said it's incumbent upon alumni to take action, too—especially those in the policy-making world. Alumni in business might have an even greater responsibility to step up, she said. “The business community, they think that they need the Chinese economy. But the Chinese economy needs them as much. Corporations are uniquely positioned

to change the Chinese government's behavior and end this unspeakable human tragedy.”

When Ekpar is released, Asat said, she plans to take him “home” to Harvard—the place pivotal to the success of her activism. “Although I launched my public campaign only a little over a year ago, commentators refer to me as a prominent and influential voice for the Uyghur cause,” she said. “I attribute my success to my Harvard education.”

Asat also wants Ekpar to meet all those who have championed his cause. “I really hope that he gets to see this much love. Because right now, he thinks he's forgotten. He doesn't have any idea what's happening. One day, he will!”

**The Chinese regime has been refusing to let EU diplomats conduct a visit to East Turkistan, because of the EU demands to meet jailed Uyghur scholar Ilham Tohti.**



**EAST TURKISTAN PRESS AND MEDIA ASSOCIATION**  
شەرقىي تۈركىستان ئاخبارات ۋە مەدېيا جەمئىيىتى

**Contact Us:**

Adres: Kartaltepe Mah. Geçit Sok. No: 6 Dükkan: 2  
Küçükçekmece / İSTANBUL

Tel: +90 212 540 31 15 Gsm: +90 553 895 19 33  
+90 541 797 77 00 info@turkistanmedia.com