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From Empire to Nation? Nationalist Waves and Colonialism in China

A Case Study of Chinese Policies in Xinjiang in Connection to Internal Colonialism

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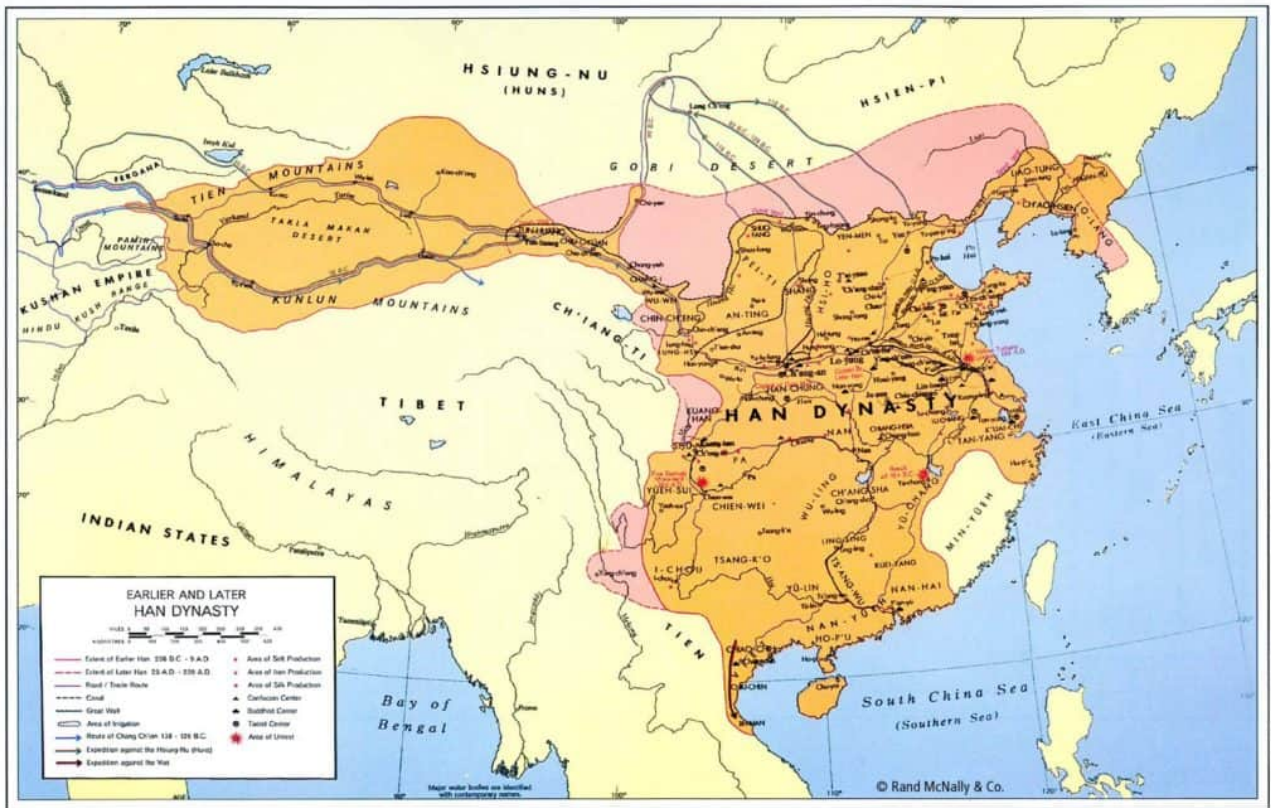
I could not have embarked on this journey without the support from my family and friends. So, to have had such support, love, and encouragement, I feel incredibly fortunate.

Abstract

The Uyghurs, who are one of the 55 minority groups of the People's Republic of China (PRC), have for decades experienced strict policies in the region of Xinjiang, in which they are the majority population. These policies have focused heavily on encouraged migration of the Chinese ethnic majority, the Han, to Xinjiang where the percentage of the Han in the region rose from 6.2% in 1945 to 39.2% in 2008. During Mao's rule, the initial reasoning behind the policies was that Xinjiang was of significance to Chinese security, as it e.g., served as a buffer zone between the PRC and the Soviet Union. Throughout time, however, the policies have become more restricting on freedoms of the local populations, such as religious freedoms targeting the Muslim religion of the Uyghurs through closing down multiple mosques, banning certain religious practices, and "re-educating" Uyghurs at 'Vocational Skills Education and Training Centers' that teach Chinese language and culture.

This thesis aims to study these regional policies in connection to theories on internal colonialism, to challenge the traditional understanding of colonialism as simply an overseas phenomenon. In connection to colonialism, this study examines the measures against the Uyghurs to seek to determine whether these can be defined as genocidal, in relation to the concept of cultural genocide.

The study shows that the case of Xinjiang is not a singular unique issue of ethnic discrimination in the PRC, but rather another example of how the Chinese government does not tolerate cultures that do not align with the government's idea of the state. This highly relates to the rise of Han-Centrism in the aftermath of the fall of the Chinese empire, as the Chinese Communist Party has struggled to create a unified nation. In line with theories on internal colonialism, this thesis argues that policies in Xinjiang are indeed of colonial character, and that these policies are resulting in a transformation and destruction of the indigenous culture and identity of the Uyghurs.



¹ Photo of Han Dynasty 206 B.C. – 220 A.D.



² Photo of present-day China and the region of Xinjiang

¹ Stephanie Schoppert, “The 6 Greatest Empires to Exist in the Years B.C.,” September 7, 2016, Accessed May 6, 2024, <https://historycollection.com/6-greatest-empires-exist-years-christ/#4-han-dynasty-206-b-c-220-a-d->

² “Britain Cuts Business Links to Chinese Province Xinjiang,” VOA News, January 12, 2021, Accessed May 6, 2024, https://www.voanews.com/a/europe_britain-cuts-business-links-chinese-province-xinjiang/6200632.html

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1 Introduction

1.1 General overview

Since China established itself as a communist republic, there have been strict policies regarding the region of Xinjiang, which according to Maoist views was ‘liberated’ by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).³ This point of view was based on the nationalist view that Xinjiang had always been part of China. At first, the policies in the region were based on national security, as China sought to protect itself after many years of foreign influences, and Xinjiang was seen as an important buffer zone between China and the Soviet Union (USSR). The policies throughout time have, however, evolved to become more and more focused on the integration and assimilation of Xinjiang’s majority population, the Uyghurs. This population group is simply one of China’s many ethnic minority groups, and within Xinjiang, other minorities such as the Hui are also affected by the assimilation policies. Chinese minority groups have throughout time been perceived negatively, and the Han Chinese, who are the majority of the Chinese population have been seen as superior to these other ethnicities. This can be traced back to Confucianism where minorities were perceived as ‘barbarians’ contrary to the civilized Han Chinese.⁴ In 1955, Xinjiang was declared an autonomous region, however, they continue to struggle for the autonomy they were promised due to the continuation of restricting policies.⁵

Already during Mao’s rule, Han migration to Xinjiang was initiated through Xiafang, which was in part an economic project sending Han Chinese to rural areas to work, as well as it was a way of reinforcing socialist ideas to those citizens who did not follow the political line of the state. The Xiafang would then provide jobs and teach traditional values and practices, which ended up partaking in the Sinicization of Xinjiang.⁶ Throughout the years, the focus of the regional policies has shifted from mainly revolving around economic development and integration towards policies also targeting the increasing waves of separatism in the region. The following two leaders, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin, initiated multiple policies to combat these very separatist movements.⁷ Both leaders, however, also initiated policies seeking to combat poverty in the region as this was thought to

³ Mahesh Ranjan Debata, “Chinese Assimilationist Policies in Xinjiang: From Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping,” *International Studies* 50, no. 3 (2022), 200

⁴ Fawad Aslam, “Confucian Philosophy and Chinese Ethnic Minority Policy: A Case Study of Xinjiang,” *Journal of Historical Studies* 2, no. 2 (2016), 41

⁵ Debata, “Chinese Assimilationist Policies in Xinjiang: From Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping,” 202

⁶ Jan S. Prybyla, “Hsia-Fang: The Economics and Politics of Rustication in China,” *Pacific Affairs* 48, no. 2 (1975), 153

⁷ Debata, “Chinese Assimilationist Policies in Xinjiang: From Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping,” 204

increase the risk of call for separation. It was not only the Uyghur protestors or separatists that were targeted during Jiang's policies, as cultural and religious freedoms were also starting to become restricted with the closing of some mosques in Xinjiang and arrests of religious leaders. However, Jiang's presidency was during the attacks of 9/11, so there was some international support to be gained when creating policies in the name of anti-terror or national security.⁸ Unrest continued in the region, and in 2009, around 200 people died in Ürümqi after clashes between protesters and the police.⁹ As an attempt to shift blame away from the government, the president Hu Jintao and the CCP blamed the incident on negative influences from external actors of the diaspora, which resulted in a temporary shutdown of international communication in Xinjiang.¹⁰ It was, however, truly during the current president Xi Jinping that the policies intensified after multiple violent attacks, such as a terror attack in 2013 where a Uyghur was held responsible.¹¹ Afterwards, new laws and policies were created, and Xi called for no mercy. It has been during his presidency that the international community started reacting to human rights violations in Xinjiang after e.g., the introduction of re-education camps, that were created under the guise of providing patriotic education and other training. Some have compared these to concentration camps as they have targeted a specific ethnicity – that of the Uyghurs. Surveillance and GPS tracking of private vehicles have also been a huge part of the security campaign in Xinjiang.¹² Unlawful detainment, forced sterilization, and restrictions on religious freedom are just some of the accusations that the Chinese government is facing regarding human rights violations in Xinjiang.¹³

1.2 Research objective and question

Scholars have continuously investigated the policies in Xinjiang from various different angles. Some claim that the policies in Xinjiang are a result of rising global Islamophobia, whereas others focus on e.g., theories of nationalism and particularly hypernationalism. The Chinese state itself has, as mentioned, moved from explaining the policies as taking part of the economic development of China, and later as a response to the rising waves of separatism and extremism. These different perspectives, of

⁸ Debata, "Chinese Assimilationist Policies in Xinjiang: From Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping," 205

⁹ Trédaniel and Lee, "Explaining the Chinese Framing of the "Terrorist" Violence in Xinjiang: Insights from Securitization Theory," 185

¹⁰ Ibid, 186

¹¹ Debata, "Chinese Assimilationist Policies in Xinjiang: From Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping," 206

¹² Ibid, 207

¹³ James Waller and Mariana Salazar Albornoz, "Crime and No Punishment? China's Abuses Against the Uyghurs," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 22, no 1 (2021), 101

both scholars as well as the Chinese government, will be further elaborated on in the literature review. However, this ambiguity of the topic is what makes for an interesting case to study.

Few scholars have started analyzing the case of Xinjiang as an example of internal colonialism, which can then bring a whole new perspective to the issue. Claiming, and proving, that China is guilty of internal colonialism would further accentuate the current accusations of human rights violations. Furthermore, an analysis of a potential case of internal colonialism would provide with even more knowledge to the already existing theory. The theory of internal colonialism challenges the traditional notion of colonialism as being only an ‘overseas’ phenomenon, so any case study of potential internal colonialism has the potential to strengthen the knowledge and understanding of the different elements of colonialism. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following question:

To what degree can the measures against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang be defined as cultural genocide, and how can a colonial theoretical approach be applied to understand Chinese policies in the region?

1.3 Statement of motivation and relevance to peace studies

What initially sparked my interest in this particular topic was the fact that I find it problematic that one of the biggest providers of consumer goods in the world for years have been facing accusations of human rights violations, and that there is not brought enough attention or action to the issue. Furthermore, the Chinese government seeks to override any international debate on the political status of Xinjiang, as well as other Chinese regions facing similar issues such as Tibet. Ultimately, it seems that the international commitment to trade is given greater importance than the commitment to international human rights. This, along with the lack of scholarly consensus on the topic, led me to want to investigate this particular case. Both the concept of cultural genocide and internal colonialism are difficult to prove, but it is of high importance to future peace and conflict studies that these are not dismissed.

2 Literature review

In this chapter, I will present and review the existing literature on the issue of Chinese policies in Xinjiang and the debates that are taking place. Throughout time, the policies in Xinjiang have been in the name of development and security. Today the Chinese state, under Xi Jinping's rule, justify the policies in Xinjiang as a tool against terrorism and extremism. Scholars have continuously investigated the issue by various different approaches such as in connection to centre-periphery theory, religion, anti-terrorism, nationalism, and colonialism.

From a centre-periphery theoretical point of view, the policies in Xinjiang are about nation building of China, and not about undermining minorities through Han settlements. With regards to Xinjiang, the relation between the centre (or core) and the periphery becomes very clear, in the sense that e.g., extractions of natural resources in the region, are to benefit not Xinjiang but rather Beijing, or the core. Often connected to discussions on centre-periphery relations is dependency theory, which highlights how the periphery becomes dependent on the core, ruling out the possibility of independence.¹⁴ However, some scholars, such as Yueyao Zhao, have also argued that Xinjiang has the potential to move from periphery towards semi-periphery or core, as it increasingly plays a role for the Chinese economy.¹⁵ However, this potential movement towards partaking in China's economic semi-periphery, or even core, does not automatically result in more political rights.

The regional policies can also be analyzed in connection to values of religion. The assumption is often that the strict policies in Xinjiang are rooted in the inarguable differences between the Uyghur Muslims and the mostly atheist Han Chinese. Ali Caksu argues that Islamophobia is key to the regional policies, and that it is becoming a permanent part of state policy. The argument is that so many of the policies target Uyghur identity and religion, as mosques are being closed, religious clothing prohibited, and Islamic symbols and décor destructed. Caksu highlights that the intention of de-radicalizing the region through these policies will end up having the opposite effect, and the risk of escalation of extremism is rapidly increasing.¹⁶ Whilst the issue of religion is an unavoidable factor in the conflict, it is not always the main factor in the research of the region. Nationalism, and particularly hypernationalism, is also one of the more researched angles to the issue. One can also discuss

¹⁴ Truls Winje, "Xinjiang: A centre-periphery conflict in display: An analysis of the Chinese state- and nation-building machinery in Xinjiang and the mobilization of Uyghur counter-cultures", University of Oslo (2007), 112

¹⁵ Yueyao Zhao, "Pivot or Periphery? Xinjiang's Regional Development," *Asian Ethnicity* 2, no. 2 (2001), 221

¹⁶ Ali Caksu, "Islamophobia, Chinese Style: Total Internment of Uyghur Muslims by the People's Republic of China," *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 5, no. 2 (2020), 192-193

issues of Han-nationalism (or Centrism), and Uyghur nationalism. Amongst those who highlight Han-centrism, as a huge contributor to the escalations of the policies, are John M. Friend and Bradley A. Thayer, who stress that the dominant Han narrative is one of the main challenges. Although there have sporadically been attempts by the Chinese state to advertise China as a prospering multiethnic state, authors like Friend and Bradley highlight that essentially being Chinese means to be Han, which therefore, makes for the Uyghurs to be considered almost as foreigners. Friend and Thayer suggest that nationalism further escalates when minority regions, such as Xinjiang, riot against the government and call for independence.¹⁷ Simultaneously, some scholars have also looked at how the accelerating Han-nationalism increases the level of Uyghur nationalism. The two nationalisms therefore reinforce each other, as explained by Ablet Kamalov.¹⁸ Regarding nationalism, scholars have different views on to which degree it influences the policies, as well as which types of nationalism exist. Mostly, there is agreement that nationalism has played a continuous role in China, however, some, such as Alastair Iain Johnston, argue that Han-nationalism is declining, whilst others consider it to be rising.¹⁹

Lastly, some scholars have also analyzed the policies in the region through a colonial lens. Different debates take place within this approach. Scholars, such as Tom Cliff, have argued that the policies in Xinjiang are not colonial, but rather “[...] the unintended results of inappropriate policies driven by material-oriented modernization goals of the Chinese central government.”²⁰ This aligns with the perspective of the Chinese government, as explanations to the policies are often based on economic modernization goals, which further relate to securitization as the government seeks to secure and stabilize the region. Cliff argues that Han settlement in Xinjiang is also largely due to the individual Han that seek advancement and make use of the opportunities in the rural areas as a means of becoming “powerful pioneers”.²¹ Barry Sautman also argue that if certain regional policies did not exist, the tensions between the minority and the Han majority would not necessarily be lower, but in fact, they might be even higher due to the lack of opportunity for growth in the rural areas.²²

¹⁷ John M. Friend and Bradley A. Thayer, *How China sees the world: Han-centrism and the balance of power in international politics* (Lincoln: Potomac Books, an imprint of the University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 10

¹⁸ Fawad Aslam and Yu Wenjie, “Confucian Philosophy and Chinese Ethnic Minority Policy: A Case Study of Xinjiang,” *Journal of Historical Studies* 2, no. 2 (2016), 39

¹⁹ Friend and Thayer, *How China sees the world: Han-centrism and the balance of power in international politics*, 11

²⁰ Chien-Peng Chung, “Evaluating Xinjiang and Tibet as “Internal Colonies” of China: Evidence from Official Data,” *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 5, no. 2 (2018), 118

²¹ Eric T. Schluessel, “Oil and Water: Being Han in Xinjiang”, by Tom Cliff. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. ix+252 Pp. US\$90.00 (Cloth), US\$30.00 (Paper), US\$10.00 (eBook),” *The China Journal (Canberra, A.C.T.)* 78, no. 7 (2017), 210-211

²² Barry Sautman. “Preferential Policies for Ethnic Minorities in China: The Case of Xinjiang,” *Nationalism & ethnic politics* 4, no. 1–2 (1998), 104-105

On the other hand, there are also the scholars who argue that it is indeed appropriate to speak of Xinjiang as an example of internal colonialism, and to investigate it further. The definitions of internal colonialism will be discussed in the following theory chapter. Among the scholars, arguing that one can perceive the policies as colonial, are e.g., Chien-Peng Chung, Joanne Smith Finley, and Lachlan McNamee to some degree, who all provide different focus points. Chung does not dismiss Cliff's findings as unnoteworthy, however, he does believe that the explanation is incomplete.²³ Chung argues that even though the Uyghurs hold certain political positions in Xinjiang, the positions of power are reserved for Han people, and the Uyghurs therefore lack political influence in their own region.²⁴ The fact that the Uyghurs are granted some political representation, but not the important positions, can be compared to traditional comprador classes in other forms of colonialism. A comprador is someone who is part of assisting the supremacy and are 'middle-men' in serving the empire.²⁵ McNamee's views on colonialism in China differ in the explanations provided. His research of Xinjiang's demography "[...] run contrary to past predictions that the Sino-Soviet split led to the cleansing or colonization of China's Kazakh and Uyghur minorities."²⁶ He indeed highlights the period of the Sino-Soviet split, the 1960s, as crucial to the understanding of the offset of Chinese regional policies but underlines that the initial intention was to secure northern Xinjiang against the Russians by encouraging Han migration. Local Russians living in the region were deported from Xinjiang and Han settlers moved to the border area. He argues that the original intent was not the cleansing of Kazakh or Uyghur minorities, but rather to target the Russians. However, he ultimately highlights that this migration of Han "[...] subjected the Muslims in Xinjiang to colonization [...]"²⁷.

Lastly, Joanne Smith Finley, however, connects the study of colonialism in China to the concept of genocide, or ethnic cleansing, and argues that the Han settler colonialism also results in genocidal processes.²⁸ James Waller and Mariana Salazar Albornoz support this argument by highlighting that not all five acts of the United Nations (UN) Genocide Convention have to be committed in order to be evaluated as genocidal.²⁹ Joel Slawotsky, however, argue that one cannot speak of genocide of the Uyghurs as both a physical act from the state as well as genocidal intent have to be

²³ Chung, "Evaluating Xinjiang and Tibet as "Internal Colonies" of China: Evidence from Official Data," 135

²⁴ Ibid, 136

²⁵ Pramod K. Nayar, *The Postcolonial Studies Dictionary. 1st ed.* (New York: Wiley, 2015), 35

²⁶ Lachlan McNamee, *Settling for Less: Why States Colonize and Why They Stop* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), 109

²⁷ Ibid, 146

²⁸ Joanne Smith Finley, "Tabula Rasa: Han Settler Colonialism and Frontier Genocide in "Re-Educated Xinjiang," *HAU journal of ethnographic theory* 12, no. 2 (2022), 353

²⁹ Waller and Albornoz, "Crime and No Punishment? China's Abuses Against the Uyghurs," 102

present.³⁰ Slawotsky states that there is no evidence of massacres in Xinjiang, and accusations of Uyghur women going through forced sterilization cannot equate to an intent of genocide.³¹ Lastly, he rejects the concept of ‘cultural genocide’ due to it not being part of international law, but also because he thinks it “[...] degrades the survivors of real genocides.”³²

So, as put forward in this chapter, there are many different views on what the main issue in Xinjiang is, and why and how certain policies have developed. Furthermore, the severity of the Chinese policies is interpreted differently, e.g., in the context of whether it can be considered acts of genocide or cultural genocide. This research positions itself as an extension to the claims that Chinese policies in Xinjiang can be viewed as having colonial tendencies, and this thesis therefore seeks to confirm this and understand the foundation for it. My argument focuses itself on e.g., the developments of Han-Centrism, and China’s history as an empire, as it is my hypothesis that these two factors are crucial to the understanding of the development of colonial tendencies.

³⁰ Joel Slawotsky, “Is China Guilty of Committing Genocide in Xinjiang?” *Chinese journal of international law (Boulder, Colo.)* 20, no. 3 (2021), 630

³¹ *Ibid.*, 631

³² *Ibid.*, 633

3 Theoretical framework

3.1 General overview

This chapter provides a variety of theories and concepts that will be utilized in the analysis of the Chinese policies and history. The main theoretical framework bases itself on different theories of colonialism and nationalism, however, concepts such as genocide and human rights are also discussed. The theories are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary.

3.2 Colonialism and Neocolonialism

Gaining an understanding of colonialism as well as neocolonialism is necessary to lay a foundation for understanding the different dimensions of colonial practices. First off, it is important to shortly cover the historical aspect of colonialism. It dates back to a period from the late fifteenth century to the twentieth century, where European expansionism was dominating the world picture. Multiple different European nations would explore far away countries in the request for e.g., collecting natural resources to achieve self-sufficiency, and thereby have the advantage and ability to withstand foreign economic pressures. These voyages were to different nations within the Americas, Asia, Australia, and Africa, where European colonies were established.³³ Colonialism is sometimes confused with imperialism, however, the two are different in practice, as colonialism refers to one state ruling over another via settlements, whereas imperialism “[...] revolved around the idea and practice of empire-building, most often involving indirect forms of rule.”³⁴ Imperialism also dates further back as seen with e.g., the Roman Empire. Research of colonialism has shown that racism and stereotyping has had a key role in the colonial practice, as the settlers’ image of the local population had a big impact on how things were conducted. The colonizers’ image of the colonized people was affected by a prejudice of them being primitive and uneducated due to different standards of living, which inevitably created a hierarchy, in which the colonizers were perceived to be more ‘civilized’.³⁵ Colonization created parallel societies, with segregation as one of the main colonial tendencies. The degree of segregation could vary, but ultimately, there would be a pattern of structured separation of the

³³ Amy Elizabeth Ansell, *Race and ethnicity: the key concepts. of Routledge Key Guides* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 39

³⁴ *Ibid*, 40

³⁵ *Ibid*, 40

majority population from the minority. Examples of this tendency could be segregated schools, but also housing issues such as the establishment of ghettos and neighborhoods.³⁶

Colonies still exist to this day; however, many have been freed, and the expansionism of colonialism has ended, however, scholars now discuss a new wave of colonialism: neocolonialism. Neocolonialism refers to a source of colonialism that comes from the outside, rather than inside via e.g., settlements. This unfolds in the way that outside nations influence the economy and politics in developing nations, often former colonial holdings, across the world by creating dependency relations. This sort of colonialism no longer only refers to influence from past colonial powers such as Britain or France. This change of perception was prompted by evidence showing that other ‘superior’ nations could also benefit from making deals with the ‘underdeveloped’ nations. Being “[...] unable to free themselves from the shackles fixed by colonialism [...]”³⁷, these states are forced to collaborate with outside powers, which ultimately keeps them in dependency relations, and maintains similar structures to that of colonial times, even after official independence.³⁸ A neocolonial relation can be any wealthier nation that seeks to exploit foreign nations by other means than establishing colonies, whether it be through multinational corporations, international organizations, or “[...] international financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank.”³⁹ The neocolonial theoretical framework emerged mainly during the 1950s and 1960s. The theory originates in how other countries perceived the postcolonial nations in light of modernization in the West. After their independence, postcolonial states were viewed as underdeveloped by the West, and with the assumption that this could only change if these nations followed a similar economic and political model to that of the West. However, this would imply following their previous colonizers.⁴⁰ The neo-colonialist scholar Andre Gunder Frank argued that the so-called underdeveloped countries were not actually underdeveloped, but the development of capitalism caused them to be perceived as so. The neo-colonial theory points towards a world picture where colonialism continues to exist to some extent in many postcolonial nations via heavy economic control or influence that follows a western development and modernization model.⁴¹

³⁶ Robert L. Allen, “Reassessing the Internal (Neo) Colonialism Theory,” *The Black Scholar* 35, no. 1 (2015), 4

³⁷ Charlie McGuire, “Irish Marxism and the Development of the Theory of Neo-Colonialism,” *Éire-Ireland (St. Paul)* 41, no. 3 (2006), 113

³⁸ *Ibid*, 113

³⁹ Ansell, *Race and ethnicity: the key concepts. of Routledge Key Guides*, 41

⁴⁰ Charlie McGuire, “Irish Marxism and the Development of the Theory of Neo-Colonialism,” 111

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 111-112

3.2.1 Internal colonialism

In addition to neocolonialism, scholars have also started discussing the concept of internal colonialism. During the American Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, human rights activist Malcolm X became a central figure of the movement, and even more so after he was shot and killed. He, and others, would often describe the Black community in the United States (U.S.) as an internal colony, and ghettos would be described as economic colonies where social, political, and educational policies maintained the status quo.⁴² The movement lit up the discussion on internal or domestic colonialism, and highlighted that “colonies need not be external, they could also be internal.”⁴³ What is of essence is the structures of domination and subordination that take place in different constellations of colonial rule.⁴⁴ To this day, the concept of internal colonialism has continuously been developed and investigated, as internal colonies still persist to exist in different shapes and sizes.

Pablo Gonzalez Casanova presents colonialism as something that does not only happen between states (internationally), but something that can occur intra-nationally as well.⁴⁵ Casanova argues that “[...] with the disappearance of the direct domination of foreigners over natives, the notion of domination and exploitation of natives by natives emerges.”⁴⁶ One of the reasonings for the continued exploitation in post-colonial states is the idea that the ‘educated’ has the right to govern the ‘uneducated’, which has its roots in past colonialism.⁴⁷ Hence, the upper classes have adopted the colonial structure, and now seek to manage the ‘others’ in similar ways that the foreign colonizers used to.⁴⁸ One of the reasonings for this, provided by Casanova, is monopolization. When a colony exists, whether that be internationally or intra-nationally, “[...] a condition of monopoly in exploiting natural resources, work, the import-export trade, and fiscal revenues”⁴⁹ also exist. In internal colonies, this is done to prevent other countries from exploiting these resources. The colony can be described as taking part as a complementary economy for the colonizer-state, as the periphery then provides the center metropolis with their labor and natural resources, but without the opportunity to run independently. This creates a dependency relationship between the colony and the colonizer. Furthermore,

⁴² Allen, “Reassessing the Internal (Neo) Colonialism Theory,” 2

⁴³ Ibid, 4

⁴⁴ Ibid, 4

⁴⁵ Pablo Gonzalez Casanova, “Internal Colonialism and National Development,” *Studies in comparative international development* 1, no. 4 (1965), 27

⁴⁶ Ibid, 27

⁴⁷ Ibid, 27

⁴⁸ Ibid, 28

⁴⁹ Ibid, 30

the colony is also often heavily dependent on one single market or industry, such as the agricultural sector, which further increases the dependency relation.⁵⁰ Casanova points out that one of the indicators of internal colonialism is also that these single market sectors of the colony tend to have workers who are underpaid, and the standards of life are lower in the specific region.⁵¹ In his work, Casanova also claims that “[...] colonial societies tend to be plural societies.”⁵² The rationale behind this is that in colonial rule, you see different societal groups that are separate from each other but all living within the same singular political rule. As mentioned, an economic dependency is established which highlights the colonial relation, but in many cases, racism and discrimination of the colonized group also comes to show. John A. Hobson claims that the tendency in the relation between the colonizer (the superior) and the colonized (the inferior) is that the inferior tend not “[...] to die off but rather come to constitute a servile class”⁵³, when invaded by the settlers.

In order to understand the differences and similarities between past colonial approaches of foreign rulers and the concept of internal colonialism, psychology of colonialism is crucial. Scholars of colonial psychology found *dehumanization* of the colonized people to be one of the key phenomena. Dehumanization, or ‘othering’, is a way to justify one’s own actions by creating a reality in which the colonizer is superior to the colonized. As mentioned, the colonizers would often perceive the colonized as a less civilized people, and even compare them to animals. Casanova argues that this behavior is also visible in internal colonialism, but that there has simply been a lack of emphasis on this issue.⁵⁴ Michael Hecter describes the colonizers and the colonized as respectively the advanced and the less advanced people.⁵⁵ Hecter’s rationale for this is the link to the “[...] unequal distribution of resources and power between the two groups.”⁵⁶ The ‘superior’ group seeks to establish industrialization and growth in the areas of the ‘inferior’, but the roles within these newly established institutions are reserved for members of the ‘superior’ community, which creates a system where the ‘inferior’ become less advanced as they are denied access to the developments. What is often seen is that the industrialization in the colonized area is created for export that will benefit the non-colonized. The less advanced group in the periphery, therefore, become ‘complementary’ to the core.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Gonzalez Casanova, “Internal Colonialism and National Development,” 30

⁵¹ Ibid, 31

⁵² Ibid, 31

⁵³ Ibid, 31

⁵⁴ Ibid, 32

⁵⁵ Michael Hecter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1975), 9

⁵⁶ Ibid, 9

⁵⁷ Ibid, 9

Lastly, Robert Blauner made a significant contribution to studies of colonialism with his model called the *colonization complex* in which he identified five elements that are common to external as well as internal colonialism:

*“(1) compulsory entry of the colonized into a dominant civilization; (2) transformation and destruction of indigenous culture by the colonizing power; (3) management and manipulation of the colonized by dominant power representatives; (4) racism, whereby a population seen as biologically inferior is dominated, abused, and subjugated socially and psychologically by a more powerful population group; and (5) division of occupations between the dominant and subordinate populations.”*⁵⁸

To sum up, internal colonialism has the same psychological elements of past colonialism, and essentially within all aspects and types of colonialism, power relations and identity politics are at the center.

3.3 Nationalism and Han-Centrism

To understand China and the Chinese state’s actions, it is important to have some basic knowledge on movements of nationalism, and in this connection; Han-Centrism in China. Nationalism can be seen as a product of the shared culture and history of a community, and it revolves around maintaining a certain national identity and homogeneity of a population. It also takes part in creating an idea of ‘them’ and ‘us’, as the national identity differentiates peoples.⁵⁹ Scholars studying various types of nationalist movements have noted that a national common history binds people together in creating a sense of ‘self-same’.⁶⁰ Stephen Van Evera has for decades worked on breaking down the causes of nationalistic violence and has listed proximate and remote causes. As for proximate causes, Van Evera lists “[...] political status, relationship with national diaspora, perception of other nationalities, and respect for national minority populations [...]”⁶¹, as some of the leading causes for violence. For remote causes, he highlights structural, political/environmental, and perceptual factors. A structural factor could be that of geography such as recognition of borders, and the importance of demographics

⁵⁸ Charles Pinderhughes, “Toward a New Theory of Internal Colonialism,” *Socialism and Democracy* 25, no. 1 (2011), 246

⁵⁹ Friend and Thayer, *How China sees the world: Han-centrism and the balance of power in international politics*, 17

⁶⁰ John M. Friend and Bradley A. Thayer, “The Rise of Han-Centrism and What It Means for International Politics: The Rise of Han-Centrism,” *Studies in ethnicity and nationalism* 17, no. 1 (2017), 91

⁶¹ Friend and Thayer, *How China sees the world: Han-centrism and the balance of power in international politics*, 19

such as the amount of contact between various populations. With regards to political or environmental factors, it is important to look into how past traumas have been either resolved or left undealt with, which effects the perceptual factor of how images of ‘the self’ and ‘the other’ are established. Van Evera also notes how some types of nationalism have a more violent face than others, such as hyper-nationalism, which revolves around the idea that one’s own nation is allowed to dominate other nations due to a perceived ‘superior-inferior’ relationship. Hypernationalism can be utilized to legitimize certain wars as noble, if they protect the superior nationality against the inferior. This closely links to historical memory in which scholars, such as Jacques Bertrand, highlight that group fears that are embedded in a shared experience of past trauma can further separate the ingroup and the outgroup.⁶² When there have been past issues of violence between different groups in the population, these scars are passed down through generations which makes it extremely difficult to reject biases even after peace has been restored.⁶³

Just as in other countries, there have been many different waves of nationalism in China throughout the years. One of the major influences has been the wave of nationalism that occurred during Mao Zedong’s rule, which was based on the past grievances and humiliation that China faced during imperialism where they were oppressed by foreign actors during the 19th century, in conjunction with the erosion of the Qing Dynasty. When foreigners came from the West to extract and benefit from the natural resources of Asia, this affected China heavily as it was seen as the center of these resources. The foreigners forcibly entered the Chinese markets. During Mao’s rule, a sense of xenophobia was instilled and became noticeable in the educational system, where the humiliation of the Chinese was taught in history lectures, with a focus on how ‘others’ had harmed the Chinese. The narrative of Mao saving China from imperialism was the focal point, however, more brutal parts of Chinese history, such as the many deaths during e.g., the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution were omitted from education.⁶⁴ The Sino-centrism during Mao’s time can be described as xenophobic towards foreign nationals, however, there was not yet an emphasis on specific ethnic groups within the country.

Today, however, there has been a new wave of nationalism that is more ethnocentric, which is Han-Centrism. Sino-centrism refers to being part of the Chinese state, whereas Han-centrism goes into depth about what is required to be ‘real’ Chinese. Both Sino-centrism and Han-centrism

⁶² Friend and Thayer, *How China sees the world: Han-centrism and the balance of power in international politics*, 19

⁶³ *Ibid*, 20

⁶⁴ Friend and Thayer, “The Rise of Han-Centrism and What It Means for International Politics: The Rise of Han-Centrism”, 95

revolve around the idea that issues come from foreigners, however, they differ in who they see as a threat. As mentioned, Sino-centrism focused on the West's negative influence on China, however, Han-centrism emphasizes the negative influences from within China as well, such as other minority groups in the country.⁶⁵

3.4 Concept of Genocide

To thoroughly examine the policies in Xinjiang and its consequences, it is crucial to gain an understanding of genocide and what can be considered genocide, as it is deemed to be one of the main threats against the Uyghur population.

The term has its origin in the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1948, which was agreed upon by member states after the atrocities of the second world war. This convention established the very legal side of genocide, however, throughout time it has been criticized as not being specific enough or not accounting for all sorts of genocide, such as cultural genocide. Today, we are of an understanding that there are different kinds of genocide, such as physical, cultural or political genocide, and that there can also be a difference in the severity of them. International law such as the abovementioned convention, however, limits genocide to the very physical form of direct mass killing of a specific people.⁶⁶ The original conceptualization of the term genocide was thought out by the Polish-Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin, and although he emphasized the cultural aspects to it, this did not end up coming across in the final convention. For Lemkin, the cultural aspects were essential to the understanding of genocide, as he saw it as “[...] a systematic attack on a group of people and its cultural identity; a crime directed against difference itself.”⁶⁷ However, although the cultural aspect is highlighted by Lemkin, it is to different degrees in different contexts. Sometimes, as directly linked to the act of genocide, but at other times, he referred to cultural genocide as a step towards physical genocide in terms of mass killing.⁶⁸ Lemkin never actually used the term ‘cultural genocide’, but more so referred to different types of genocide than simply the physical. His view was holistic and more often incorporated the cultural aspect into the general definition of genocide. It was not until the drafting of the UN ‘Convention on the Prevention and

⁶⁵ Friend and Thayer, “The Rise of Han-Centrism and What It Means for International Politics: The Rise of Han-Centrism”, 99

⁶⁶ Leora Bilsky and Rachel Klagsbrun, “The Return of Cultural Genocide?,” *The European Journal of International Law* 29, no. 2 (2018), 379

⁶⁷ Ibid, 374

⁶⁸ Ibid, 378

Punishment of the Crime of Genocide' in 1946, that the U.S. delegation decided, in objection to the holistic definition, to split the concept into two: physical genocide and cultural genocide.⁶⁹ However, the part on cultural genocide ultimately did not make it to the final version of the convention which entered into force in 1951. Afterwards, Lemkin started using the term cultural genocide but never as a separate type of genocide, but as one way of committing genocide. However, this did spark the debate on whether we could speak of different types of genocide – the physical and the non-physical.⁷⁰

In order to even discuss the concept of cultural genocide, it is necessary to first gain a common understanding or definition of culture itself. In his work on genocide studies, Bachman emphasizes the importance of not interpreting Lemkin's writings through a modern understanding of culture, as this would lead to a misinterpretation of his work. Lemkin's view on culture was different somehow to how many would perceive it today. Lemkin believed that it was beneficial for society to have cultures that were adaptable and everchanging, and therefore sometimes cultures would come and go, and it would not necessarily be an issue.⁷¹ To Lemkin, "[...] destroying a culture did not always result in the destruction of a human group and, therefore, attempts to destroy a culture were not always genocidal, and did not always result in genocide."⁷² This clearly illustrates that how we think of culture determines the definition of cultural genocide. Some would view culture as an such an essential part of the specific group, that without it, the group would cease to exist, or be destroyed to the point where it would no longer be the same, without this common denominator of culture. Later scholars, such as Martin Shaw, have pointed out that one of the main issues with Lemkin's view on culture was that he viewed all human beings as being sociologically part of an extended "family." Another viewpoint of his was that "[...] he believed all social groups, including races and religions, were aspects of human consciousness that did not have trans-historical permanence."⁷³

However, how does genocide link to the study of colonialism? What has often been discussed in the conceptualization of genocide is the need for proof of motive or intention. Historians have criticized this, as it can be tricky to show a clear intent to eliminate a certain ethnic group. Lemkin, however, highlights that motive is not to be found in the mind or intentions of the perpetrator,

⁶⁹ Jeffrey S. Bachman, *Cultural genocide: law, politics, and global manifestations*, 1st ed. of *Routledge Studies in Genocide and Crimes against Humanity* (London: Routledge, 2019), 21

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 22

⁷¹ Bachman, *Cultural genocide: law, politics, and global manifestations*, 1st ed. of *Routledge Studies in Genocide and Crimes against Humanity*, 22

⁷² *Ibid*, 22

⁷³ *Ibid*, 29

but rather it shows through a continuous set of actions.⁷⁴ Within these actions are two specific phases, according to Lemkin. The first phase is the “[...] destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group [...]”⁷⁵ and the second phase is then “[...] the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor [...]”⁷⁶ These phases of genocide directly link to colonial practice, in the sense that Lemkin describes the process as actions towards eliminating a people that do not fit into the desired society of the oppressors, whether it be due to religious, cultural, political or ethnic differences.⁷⁷

Within colonial studies, Ben Madley also emphasized the connection between genocide and colonialism in his model of frontier genocide. In this model, Madley identifies three phases in which genocide takes place. The first phase, he defines as *colonial invasion*, in which the oppressor, due to political and economic discord, deny indigenous peoples’ rights by invasion. The second phase, *indigenous guerilla insurgency*, takes place when the local population fight the settlers, and “[...] the state embarks on a military genocidal campaign [...]”⁷⁸ as an end to the fighting. The third and last phase, the *final solution*, Madley describes as the phase when the oppressor incarcerates the local people and the genocidal actions continue in camps or prisons by other means of e.g., inadequate medication, forced labour, or malnutrition.⁷⁹ So, the concept of cultural genocide draws connections to colonial state behavior, and although the concept did not make it into the UN Genocide Convention, it is important to still discuss it. Should it have been part of the convention? For now, cultural rights are to be found in few international treaties, mainly human rights treaties and cultural protection treaties – some of which will be discussed throughout the paper. The concept of cultural genocide, however, goes unpunished, as it is not recognized in these.

3.5 Concept of Human Rights

Also highly relevant to the study of potential genocide and colonial power relations is that of civil and human rights. This section will shortly establish the grounds of human rights and how they aid the analysis. Throughout time, rights of people have been discussed by political figures as well as scholars, and how we humans should treat each other has also consumed philosopher’s thoughts way

⁷⁴ Bilsky and Klagsbrun, “The Return of Cultural Genocide?,” 377

⁷⁵ Bachman, *Cultural genocide: law, politics, and global manifestations*, 1st ed. of *Routledge Studies in Genocide and Crimes against Humanity*, 29

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 29

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 29

⁷⁸ Joanne Smith Finley, “Tabula Rasa: Han Settler Colonialism and Frontier Genocide in “Re-Educated Xinjiang,” *HAU journal of ethnographic theory* 12, no. 2 (2022), 342

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 342

back, such as Immanuel Kant, particularly during the Enlightenment of the 18th century. During this time, human rights were also debated as philosophers had different views on what could be perceived as morally right. Aligned with the view of today's UDHR, Kant emphasized that rights cannot be lost or taken away, and that it is our duty to act morally.⁸⁰ Another main philosopher taking part in these debates was John Stuart Mill who presented the Liberty Principle in 1859, which expressed a need for liberty of thought, expression, and opinion.⁸¹ It is important, however, to emphasize that human rights during these times were very different in the sense that issues regarding religion, gender, or race were left unspoken. Strides such as that between Protestants and Catholics were common, and when speaking of rights, it was the rights of men, and not women. However, it illustrates that, we as humans, have been concerned with questions of morality and the essence of humanity for an extensive period of time. It also highlights that the development of more equal rights has been a gradual process, and that perhaps even today, there is a chance for rights to be further developed.

Human rights, as we know them today, did not exist as an official agreement until after the Second World War where the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was agreed upon in 1948 in the United Nations General Assembly.⁸² However, this did not immediately resolve all issues of discrimination and violations. Towards the end of the Cold War, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) started raising awareness on violations of human rights, and many protests took place during this time.⁸³ The rights that were agreed upon in the UDHR have been violated by states and individuals many times. The aim of the establishment of human rights was to create legal rights that are universal for all human beings to protect individuals from being harmed by the state. Having a universal set of rules allows for individuals as well as NGOs and institutions to raise complaints and seek justice in cases where human rights standards are not met.⁸⁴

Alongside discussions on human rights, there have also been civil rights movements. The distinction between civil rights and human rights is, put simply, that civil rights connects to being a citizen of a state, whereas human rights refers to general rights of any human being. The civil rights movements particularly escalated during the 1950s and 60s in the U.S., as African Americans were still heavily discriminated through the system of racial segregation.⁸⁵ With Europe, movements were mostly seen abroad in the European colonies, where there was a demand for civil rights in the form

⁸⁰ Michael J. Sandel, *Justice: What's the right thing to do?* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2009), 111

⁸¹ Patrick Hayden, *The Philosophy of Human Rights* (Minnesota: Paragon House, 2001), 144

⁸² Michael Freeman, *Human Rights: An Interdisciplinary Approach. 2nd ed* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 4

⁸³ *Ibid*, 3

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 12

⁸⁵ Ansell, *Race and ethnicity: the key concepts. of Routledge Key Guides*, 33

of liberation movements.⁸⁶ Today, it is more common to speak of human rights than civil rights, as we tend to speak of positive rights rather than negative rights. Connected to civil rights is often the idea of the right to be free of something such as free of discrimination (negative rights), whereas human rights, as put forward in UDHR, are mostly positive rights such as the right to residence. With globalization, technological developments, and the increasing influence of social media, there is now more opportunity than ever to reveal injustice around the world, so we also see increasing influence of civil society in the fight for human rights.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Ansell, *Race and ethnicity: the key concepts. of Routledge Key Guides*, 34

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 35

4 Methodology

4.1 Research design and approach

To answer the research question, I conducted a case study on Chinese policies in the region of Xinjiang, with a focus on analyzing these in a colonial context to gain an understanding of the consequences for the Uyghur population living in the region. Through reviewing the existing literature on the topic, I found that scholars approached the issue from different angles, and that there seemed to be a disagreement regarding the claims of cultural genocide and colonialism in Xinjiang. This inspired me to investigate the issue further through a case study of Chinese policies in Xinjiang. In the research, I therefore took a problematization approach and sought to question the existing research. By analyzing the existing literature on the topic, I sought to create a generalization from these observations, which aligns with an inductive approach, as described by Bryman as an approach that creates theoretical ideas as “[...] the *outcome* of research.”⁸⁸ The approach in conducting this research was therefore to gather data, search for patterns, and then develop a generalization or theory of the situation in Xinjiang.

When considering the approach of the research, it is also necessary to look into the ontological and epistemological positioning. Being aware of the ontological positioning is crucial as this explains how the social world is perceived, and what knowledge and reality is. This research is based on a constructivist ontological perspective, which maintains that the social world is subjective and always in motion. It closely links to the idea of relativism, as constructivist research is interested in exploring multiple views or explanations of reality, and acknowledge that new knowledge is produced through interpretation, when the researcher makes meaning of the data.⁸⁹ The epistemology of the research is interpretivism, in which, the researcher interprets “[...] social action in order to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects.”⁹⁰

One of the main considerations when designing this project was the issue of the historical timeframe. At the start-up process, I reflected on which time period to focus on, as it would be impossible to cover the entirety of the historical aspects influencing Xinjiang and the Uyghurs. During the data collection phase, I then came to the conclusion that the most efficient way of structuring

⁸⁸ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods 4th ed.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 26

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 33-34

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29

my thesis would be to provide the reader with a short but detailed historical background covering just the central historical periods. The decision was based on the idea that in order to understand who the Uyghurs are and how the region of Xinjiang has developed, I had to gain a general understanding of the Chinese dynasties and structures of the past. After having laid this foundation, I could then proceed to focusing my analysis on policies of significance from 1949 and up until today. The historical background then provides an understanding of China, in which I could review the policies through that context.

4.2 Data collection methods

In writing this thesis, I had some considerations regarding the types of sources I was to use to answer the research question to the best of my ability. Ultimately, my conclusion was that the best approach for this project was to focus on secondary sources, and document analysis for my case study, due to the limited time frame, as well as safety concerns in e.g., conducting interviews with representatives from the Uyghur community. I also utilize few primary sources, such as official translated Chinese documents from the state council.

The data collection was based on a qualitative methodological approach to provide in-depth analysis and narrow the data scope. When searching for data, my approach was to look for relevance to the specific case study, whilst also focusing on finding sources that would support the colonial context analysis. It was of high priority to use different databases to get the broadest search but utilizing similar terms and keywords in the searches. Furthermore, another search criterion I focused on was to ensure that the utilized sources were written by scholars from different regions, in order to minimize bias. The sources that have been used are mostly secondary sources consisting of scholarly material such as peer-reviewed research articles and journal articles, all derived from the internet, as well as a few books on the topic made by historians, to provide with basic background knowledge on China. The use of secondary sources is beneficial in gaining expert insights into the issue, as the peer-reviewed sources ensure that the data has a credible foundation.⁹¹ As mentioned, a few primary sources of the Chinese government have also been used to get that exact phrasing of the Chinese state in connection to e.g., anti-extremism laws and re-education camps. In a few instances, I found it necessary to also include news articles in the research as I wanted to look into the current developments in the region, and it proved difficult to find published scholarly literature on the most

⁹¹ Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 110

recent events. When utilizing news articles as sources, it is essential to consider media bias as some news outlets are e.g., more left leaning than others. Throughout the thesis, I have mostly steered clear of news articles as sources, however, ultimately ended up using The Economist, VOA News, BBC, and Reuters, in a few different instances. All of these are known for having minimal bias and rating high on factual reporting measures.⁹²

4.3 Research positionality and ethical considerations

As a researcher it is important to always be aware of your own positionality as this will inevitably have influence on the conducted research. This subsection is included so that the reader is aware of my positionality as a researcher, to achieve complete transparency. My background as a white, western, upper-middle-class woman, is very different to that of the studied subject. Inevitably, my view on the world has been shaped by the society I grew up in, which is a small safe community of the Danish welfare state. The experiences, of both the Uyghur people as well as the Han Chinese, are something that I could never relate to, coming from a state-structure and culture very different to that of China. However, one should not stay away from issues that are taking place outside one's own sphere, but it is absolutely necessary to be aware that the understanding that I have of e.g., China is shaped by my experiences in life, and a different, or perhaps, deeper understanding would have arrived if I had lived in China. I could have chosen a topic for my thesis that I had a closer personal connection to, however, there are pros and cons of both approaches. Choosing a topic 'closer to home' would also bring about biases. I think ultimately, the researcher's job is to seek an understanding of what we do not understand. Ultimately, I conduct the research that I am passionate about, and since I wish to contribute to reinstating the importance of keeping up with certain international standards such as the human rights, I chose this particular topic.

During the process of writing my thesis, I particularly reflected on the sensitivity of the researched topic. When conducting research, it is important to always have in mind the ethical implications of the research. As this research does not include participants in the sense of interviews or surveys, any major safety issues are avoided. However, there is always a potential for causing harm, which in this case would be psychological or social harm. The topic is highly sensitive, and the

⁹² Media Bias/Fact Check, Accessed May 7, 2024, <https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/reuters/>

accusations are intense, so when engaging in this research, one has to consider that the outcome will contribute to a certain narrative.⁹³

4.4 Research limitations

As mentioned, one of the criteria for finding sources for this research was to provide a variety of different scholars, to avoid biases in the research. Ideally, it would be preferred to read some research as well as some original policy letters in Chinese, however, this was problematic as I do not understand Chinese, nor do I know people who do. In a different case, where I would have had more time on my hands, it would be beneficial to the research to have a translator on the project. This thesis instead makes use of purely English sources, to avoid any mistakes or gaps in translation and interpretation.

Another limitation to the research is the closedness of the Chinese state, in the sense, that it has proven difficult for scholars over the years to gain access to information about the region and its citizens. It is also increasingly difficult to obtain official China-based documents, e.g., government sources. In line with this, a limitation could be the lack of fieldwork for this research. In designing the project, I chose not to conduct interviews as it would not be possible to go to Xinjiang and conduct interviews, as it would be a potential safety concern to me but in particular the interviewees. Furthermore, the access to Xinjiang is restricted in the sense that it usually requires a separate secondary visa. Another option for fieldwork would be to interview Uyghur refugees, however, there are still safety concerns relating to this. The inclusion of interviews could perhaps have provided more insight into Uyghur culture and the question of whether it is at risk, however, other secondary sources of past interviews was utilized instead.

⁹³ Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 94

5 Historical and contextual background

To lay the foundation for this research, it is necessary to first provide a short introduction to the studied region, as well as a basic Chinese historical background. I will go through some dynastic eras, however, simply some of the milestones of the golden ages as well as important foreign relations, due to the limited space for the thesis. Furthermore, this section will state some of the accusations against the Chinese state regarding their regional policies.

The studied region of Xinjiang is located on the northwestern side of China and is known for its great natural resources such as coal, oil, gas, and many different precious minerals. It is also China's largest region "[...] covering about 617,800 square miles (1,600,000 square km) or 1/6 of the total Chinese territory."⁹⁴ The region is also geographically interesting as it borders a total of eight countries; Russia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan.⁹⁵ The Uyghurs are the largest ethnic group in Xinjiang and belong to the Turkic indigenous group, however, through the years the Han population has also increased heavily after encouraged migration to the region. Besides these two ethnic groups, there are also other much smaller minority groups. Since 1955, Xinjiang has been deemed an autonomous region, however, still under administration of the Chinese government. The region was named the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR); however, most of the local Uyghur population do not use this name.⁹⁶ The name Xinjiang was given to the region in 1884 where it was officially established as a province, whereas previously it was simply referred to as part of the western regions.⁹⁷ The name Xinjiang has a political meaning in the sense that it is the Chinese-given name for the region and means "new frontier" or "new territory."⁹⁸ The name therefore has connotations to colonial relations, whereas the residing non-Han population tend to mostly refer to the region as Eastern Turkestan. Some also use the name Uyghuristan, however, this is mostly not supported by the non-Uyghur people of the regions.⁹⁹

Tracing the history of the region of Xinjiang is complex due to China's history of imperial dynasties, and in fact, the regional boundaries of Xinjiang that we know today have only existed

⁹⁴ Anthony Rogers, "Xinjiang in the Aftermath of Tiananmen: Prospects for Development and Challenges for the New Administration," *International journal of China studies* 5, no. 2 (2014), 415

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 415

⁹⁶ Michael Dillon, *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Far Northwest. 1st ed. of Durham East Asia Series* (Oxford: Routledge, 2003), 4

⁹⁷ Frederick S. Starr, *Xinjiang: China's Muslim borderland. of Studies of Central Asia and the Caucasus* (London: Routledge, 2015), 28

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 28

⁹⁹ Dillon, *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Far Northwest*, 4

since the Qing dynasty started administering it in 1760.¹⁰⁰ Starr argues that previous to the Qing Dynasty, it is difficult and perhaps oversimplified to say that the region of Xinjiang was always part of the Chinese territory, e.g., during the Han dynasty and up till the Qing dynasty, due to the continuous and complex influences from Türks, Arabs, and Tibetans.¹⁰¹ The Han dynasty did expand to central Asia around the Tarim basin which is in the region of today's Xinjiang, however, the constant shift in Chinese territory under different dynasties caused for Xinjiang to always be ruled temporarily. Xinjiang did, therefore, not become a more permanent part of Chinese territory until the Qing dynasty.¹⁰² The Qing dynasty, ruled by the Manchus, invaded China from their homeland, of what is today considered northeastern China, and the rule lasted until 1911.¹⁰³ The Manchus were of non-Han descent, and many scholars trace the origins of Han-centrism back to the Qing dynasty, where nationalist anti-Manchu waves took place.¹⁰⁴

I will now establish a short and simplified timeline of some of the important historical marks in Chinese history with regards to the dynasties as well as foreign influences, to lay a general foundation for understanding the behavior of the contemporary Chinese state. China has been in a constant battle between empires and also influences from the outside, such as the Mongols, and later from the Soviet Union and Japan. China has had several dynasties, the oldest of which can be traced back to the Xia or the Shang dynasty, depending on different historical evidence. The exact timeline of these old dynasties is still being discussed to this day; however, evidence shows that the Shang dynasty ended in 1028 BCE.¹⁰⁵ This makes China one of the oldest civilizations in the world. One of the more significant dynasties in Chinese history is the Han dynasty, which lasted from 206 BCE-220 CE. The Han dynasty has significance to the Chinese state to this day, as it is described as one of the golden ages and has significance to the creation of Chinese identity. To this day, many Chinese will even call themselves “men of Han”. This era installed systems of institutions and policies that would remain in place for much of China's history, and it was also the era in which Confucianism truly became a dominant part of the Chinese belief system.¹⁰⁶ Shortly, Confucianism is based on the thoughts of Confucius (551-479 BCE) who founded ideas on how to act morally.¹⁰⁷ Confucius

¹⁰⁰ Starr, *Xinjiang : China's Muslim borderland. of Studies of Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 27

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 38

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 56

¹⁰³ Dillon, *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Far Northwest*, 17

¹⁰⁴ Friend and Thayer, *How China sees the world: Han-centrism and the balance of power in international politics*, 23

¹⁰⁵ Morris Rossabi, *A history of China*, 1st ed. of *The Blackwell History of the World* (Malden, Mass.: John Wiley and Sons, 2014), 16

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 70

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 42

believed that social order could only be established through proper moral conduct, in which “[...] he identified five basic relationships in society: ruler-ruled, father-son, elder brother-younger brother, friend-friend, and husband-wife.”¹⁰⁸ One of major values in these relations was that of filial piety, the virtue of showing respect.¹⁰⁹ Lastly, the Han dynasty was a golden age as it was the beginning of the Silk Roads, where foreign trade began.¹¹⁰

The many following dynasties had changing shapes, sizes, and rulers. The area saw influences from particularly the Türks and Mongols. An example of this is the Yuan Dynasty (1234-1368) with the Mongol invasion. The next two dynasties, the Ming and the Qing, were very focused on aggressive self-defense. In the Ming dynasty, this came to show through the large additional investments in what is today called the Great Wall, which stretches across northern China.¹¹¹ During the Qing dynasty, Europeans started arriving in Asia, particularly India, but also China. Trade relations were established with the Westerners, however not without challenges. The western nations would come to China to buy tea, silk, and porcelain which they would mostly pay off by silver, however, as the West’s, and especially the British, silver supply started to run low, they had to find other commodities to offer in the trade with China. The British found that the drug opium had great opportunities for growth in India, which they had colonized, and they started increasing the supply and exporting to China, who had banned production of opium within China. The number of Chinese people who were addicted to opium grew at a fast rate, and the Chinese import of opium from the British heavily increased during the beginning of the nineteenth century. This resulted in a ban on opium import.¹¹² The import however did not end, but simply continued illegally, which caused for increased tension between the British and the Chinese. War broke out in 1839, after the Chinese had blocked the trade port of Canton (Guangzhou), destroyed thousands of chests of opium from the British, and threatened Queen Victoria to quit all trade of tea and rhubarb.¹¹³ China ended up fighting two wars during this period, and losing both, ultimately resulting in the loss of the island of Hong Kong to the British, compensation for the destroyed opium, as well as additional payment for losses during the Opium Wars.¹¹⁴ This is one of the examples that illustrates what is now referred to as the

¹⁰⁸ Rossabi, *A history of China*, 43

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 44

¹¹⁰ Qizhi Zhang, “The Golden Ages of the Han, Tang, and Qing Dynasties: A Comparative Analysis. An Introduction to Chinese History and Culture,” in *An Introduction to Chinese History and Culture*, 2015 (Germany: Springer Berlin / Heidelberg, 2015), 48

¹¹¹ Rossabi, *A history of China*, 262

¹¹² *Ibid*, 293

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 294

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 295

Century of Humiliation, which is defined as the period from the Opium Wars and up until the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC).¹¹⁵

After years of facing many losses to foreign rulers, as well as experiencing famine due to a heavy increase in Chinese population and poor harvests and natural disasters, the Qing dynasty severely weakened.¹¹⁶ After the death of the emperor in 1908, revolutionary groups had started to form to rebel against the Qing rule. The revolution escalated in 1911, when even some Qing troops started to join the anti-dynastic forces, and by the end of the year they had overthrown Nanjing. In 1912, the Qing empire collapsed and the leader of the revolution, Sun Yat-sen, took part in gradually establishing the Chinese Nationalist Party (Guomindang).¹¹⁷ Sun had managed to gain support from the general population, however, Sun's capabilities of establishing a solid military force made him unable to compete against the many regional warlords of China, and he was forced to negotiate with the northern military figure Yuan Shikai.¹¹⁸ Yuan had visions of restoring the dynastic structure of China with himself as emperor, however, this eventually turned the provincial warlords against the government, and created a China of numerous states, i.e., the Warlord Era, after Yuan's death in 1916.¹¹⁹ During the following years, increasing influence from both Russia, later the USSR, as well as the U.S., Britain and France left the Chinese uneasy and stirred waves of nationalism. The decentralization of the Warlord Era also brought about corruption in terms of e.g., tax evasion of the upper class, and the weak would be left unprotected in many cases.¹²⁰ The growing instability and concern about outside influences inspired Chinese intellectuals to search for new paths to recover China, and this is where some started studying Marxism. The focus on the class struggle and the opposition to imperialism was appealing.¹²¹

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was established in 1921, and at first, they sought to create a united front with the Chinese Nationalist Party against the warlords. However, after Sun Yat-sen's death in 1925, the alliance between the two started to crumble after Chiang Kai-shek took control of the Nationalist Party and multiple Chinese communists were killed in 1927.¹²² In 1934, the CCP set forth the Long March, in which Mao Zedong took part, that was a long journey across China

¹¹⁵ Friend and Thayer, *How China sees the world: Han-centrism and the balance of power in international politics*, 22

¹¹⁶ Rossabi, *A history of China*, 298

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 336

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 336

¹¹⁹ Yuri Pines, *The everlasting empire: the political culture of ancient china and its imperial legacy* 1st ed (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 166

¹²⁰ Rossabi, *A history of China*, 339

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 343

¹²² *Ibid*, 346-48

in the attempt to recruit more members of the party.¹²³ In 1937, a clash between Chinese and Japanese soldiers led to the Second Sino-Japanese War, which forced the communists and the Nationalist Party to stop fighting each other and instead fight the Japanese.¹²⁴ Eventually, the U.S. started attacking Japan and they eventually surrendered in August 1945.¹²⁵ The Second World War came to an end, it was clear that how the CCP and the Nationalist Party had handled the war had been different. The Nationalist Party was accused of exploiting the weak and forcing people to join the war, and morale was weakened due to this as well as accusations of systemic corruption. The CCP, however, had managed a more efficient army and therefore gained more and more support.¹²⁶ After the Long March as well as the CCP's handling of the war, the party grew from around ten thousand members to having 2.8 million in 1942, and Mao Zedong's contribution to the progress made him the new leader of the party.¹²⁷ The end of the Second Sino-Japanese War, along with the Second World War, did not end war in China. The uncertainty of who should rule the state was still a pressing issue, and civil war broke out between the CCP and the Nationalist Party.¹²⁸ Ultimately, the CCP turned out to be the strongest, and the Nationalist Party eventually retreated to Taiwan, and the PRC was established under Mao's rule the 1st of October 1949.¹²⁹

Throughout the years, the different leaders of the PRC have created policies that have affected the region of Xinjiang. These will be accounted for in the following chapter, along with historical events after 1949. However, to provide a contextual background for the upcoming analysis, I will hereby provide a short overview of some of the accusations that the Chinese state is currently facing, based on James Waller and Mariana Salazar Albornoz's research on the topic.¹³⁰ When investigating the policies that the Chinese government have imposed on the region, one of the things to look into are crimes against humanity. The most recent definition of these crimes is found in the Rome Statute that has been in force since 2002. The statute lists crimes such as: "[...] persecution; imprisonment; torture; enslavement; rape, enforced sterilization, and other forms of sexual violence; and other similar inhumane acts."¹³¹ Although China did not take part in the ratification of the Rome Statute, the crimes put forward in the statute are still part of general international law and are

¹²³ Rossabi, *A history of China*, 356

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 359

¹²⁵ Robert Weatherley and Qiang Zhang, *History and Nationalist Legitimacy in Contemporary China: A Double-Edged Sword*. 1st ed. 2017.ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK: Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 129

¹²⁶ Rossabi, *A history of China*, 363

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 361

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 364

¹²⁹ Pines, *The everlasting empire: the political culture of ancient china and its imperial legacy*, 173

¹³⁰ Waller and Albornoz, "Crime and No Punishment? China's Abuses Against the Uyghurs," 101

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 101

therefore, binding for all states. In order for an investigation to even take place, one of the two main criteria must be met, which means that the crimes must either be *widespread* or *systemic*. Waller and Albornoz, amongst others, argue that the policies in Xinjiang are in fact particularly targeting the Uyghur population, and can be considered both widespread and systemic attacks. Due to the amount of people who have been detained in the Chinese “re-education” camps (over one million since 2017), as well as “[...] an estimated eighty thousand Uyghurs forcibly transferred to factories for forced labor; and sixteen thousand mosques destroyed in Xinjiang”¹³², it is argued that the policies are indeed large-scale. Furthermore, they are deemed systemic (organized) due to the involvement of the Chinese government in continuously developing new and stricter policies in the region. In some of the regulations put forward by the state, it is unquestionable who the policy is directed towards, such as “[...] the 2017 “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Regulation on De-extremification”¹³³, which ordered efforts particularly against Uyghurs and other Turkic population in the region.

Waller and Albornoz exemplify their argument with some specific crimes from the Rome Statute that can be highlighted in this case. First off is *persecution* which is when a specific group of people are being deprived of their fundamental rights. The Chinese government have in the creation of “re-education” camps forced Turkic groups to learn Mandarin along with depriving them of their freedom to practice the Muslim faith which is not in line with the rights of religious, cultural, and social freedoms.¹³⁴ *Involuntary and arbitrary internment* is also highlighted in connection to this, as people are being placed in these camps without legal basis without having committed crimes, and without trials. Throughout the years, there have also been multiple accounts of *physical and psychological torture* where former prisoners have shared experiences of sleep deprivation and violence. The same goes for different means of sexual violence, where inmates have given statements on *forced sterilization* as well as systemic rape. Lastly, Waller and Albornoz the crime against humanity of *enslavement*, as Uyghurs have been deployed to factories and forced to work, whilst being surveilled.¹³⁵ The main issue, regarding the accusations against the Chinese state’s policies in Xinjiang, is the burden of proof. There is a lack of access to the premises of these Chinese “re-education” camps, as well as lack of clear definitions of their purpose, which makes the investigation of crimes impossible, and much research therefore relies on statements by former inmates.¹³⁶ Many scholars,

¹³² Waller and Albornoz, “Crime and No Punishment? China’s Abuses Against the Uyghurs,” 101

¹³³ Ibid, 101

¹³⁴ Ibid, 102

¹³⁵ Ibid, 102

¹³⁶ Ibid, 102

as well as human rights activists, have also accused the Chinese state of genocide, i.e., “[...] the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.”¹³⁷ This as well is difficult to prove, however, international jurisprudence clarifies that in cases where intent is not directly evident, “[...] the intent may still be inferred from the factual circumstances of the crime.”¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Waller and Albornoz, “Crime and No Punishment? China’s Abuses Against the Uyghurs,” 102

¹³⁸ Ibid, 102

6 Analysis

6.1 Uyghur culture versus Han-Chinese culture

In order to analyze the cultural clash between the Han-Chinese and the Uyghur population, it is of essence to first look at who the Uyghurs are and what makes them different to the Han-Chinese. This subchapter will therefore provide insight into the two populations, and thereby aid the further analysis of whether Uyghur identity is at risk.

Ethnically, you can divide Xinjiang's population into two categories: Turkic and non-Turkic. The Uyghurs belong to the Turkic population and make up about 45,2% as the largest ethnic group in Xinjiang. The other Turkic populations are much smaller, such as "[...] the Kazakhs (6.7 per cent), Kirghiz (0.86 per cent), Tajiks (0.7 per cent) and Uzbeks (0.6 per cent)."¹³⁹ Significant to the Turkic populations is that the majority are Muslims and all speak different variations of Turkic language, with the exception of the Tajiks who also speak Persian. Although the Uyghurs are the majority population in Xinjiang, they do not only reside here, but can also be found in different parts of Central Asia such as parts of Russia, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The Uyghurs as an ethnic group originates from the Mongolian core lands, and the group were under Türk ruling until year 744 where the tribes established their own base that extended into e.g., the northwest of China.¹⁴⁰ As mentioned previously, the region of the Uyghurs (Xinjiang) was not established as the entity that we know today, until during the Qing Dynasty.¹⁴¹

Through time, the Uyghurs have been living in the region, and many in the rural deserted areas, keeping occupied with agriculture and craftsmanship, but also engaging in trade as being located along important trade ways as the Silk Roads.¹⁴² Not only is the Uyghur's religion of Islam different to the Chinese way, but the culture in general is also a whole other. China is generally known to be an Atheist country, so the pure existence of religion in Xinjiang, and the level of it, is quite different to the "regular Chinese". Uyghurs strongly identify with the Muslim world in many ways e.g., through clothing such as colored hats, headscarves, and veils that are distinctive to their identity.

¹³⁹ Rogers, "Xinjiang in the Aftermath of Tiananmen: Prospects for Development and Challenges for the New Administration," 415

¹⁴⁰ Starr, *Xinjiang: China's Muslim borderland. of Studies of Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 40

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 27

¹⁴² Dillon, *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Far Northwest*, 23

Furthermore, their music and arts are different to the Chinese and refer to old Uyghur tales.¹⁴³ As mentioned, the Uyghurs also have their own language, which is a Turkic language. Most Uyghurs speak Uyghur as well as Chinese, but this is only due to the requirement at most workplaces to speak Chinese.¹⁴⁴ In everyday interactions, their preferred language is their native Uyghur language, however, for practicalities, it is necessary to learn Chinese, as the Han Chinese do not speak Uyghur. Joanne N. Smith argues that the Uyghurs indeed only speak Chinese, “[...] as a means of survival.”¹⁴⁵ However, the Uyghur language still takes a big part in Uyghur life and culture, as the people still prefer reading the news in their own language or watching the local television-channels.¹⁴⁶ Before the increased Han migration, the Uyghurs had also operated in a different time zone, as the region’s geographical position would entail a two-hour time difference to that of Beijing. However, as the Han Chinese use “Beijing time”, the Uyghurs have seen a change in their way of life, as they have had to either convert to Beijing time permanently, or to always recalculate between their own time and Beijing time. The reason for this is that many Uyghurs work for companies run by Han Chinese, which therefore utilizes Beijing time. The Uyghurs who have lived in the region for centuries prefer to use their own time, and the majority have kept this practice. This, Smith argues, is a symbolic rejection of the Han settlement.¹⁴⁷

Other differences between the two populations would be cultural differences in e.g., the attitude towards family planning and birth control. Many Uyghurs, particularly in the more rural areas, see children as a blessing from Allah and therefore also strongly condemn the CCP’s many years-long one-child policy. Initially, the Uyghurs were exempted from the one-child policy, in force between 1979 to 2015.¹⁴⁸ However, after the creation of the three-child policy, this also includes the Uyghurs. Those who have more than three children will have to pay fines of 8000-10.000 yuan, which is more than the average yearly income in the rural families. The ‘extra’ children are then also sent away to either live with relatives, or to be given to a childless woman.¹⁴⁹ The strict policies on family planning have become another symbol of the distinct differences between the Uyghur and the Han, as the Uyghurs treasure big families. Due to the heavy importance of Islam for many Uyghurs, other

¹⁴³ Dillon, *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Far Northwest*, 27

¹⁴⁴ Joanne N. Smith, “‘Making Culture Matter’: Symbolic, Spatial and Social Boundaries between Uyghurs and Han Chinese,” *Asian Ethnicity* 3, no. 2 (2002), 159

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 160

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 160

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 161

¹⁴⁸ Chung, “Evaluating Xinjiang and Tibet as “Internal Colonies” of China: Evidence from Official Data,” 133

¹⁴⁹ Smith, “‘Making Culture Matter’: Symbolic, Spatial and Social Boundaries between Uyghurs and Han Chinese,” 162

Islamic practices are seen as inseparable from their culture, such as the avoidance of pork and alcohol.¹⁵⁰ Social interaction is also very different for the Han and the Uyghurs, where stereotypically, the Uyghurs are known to be more extroverted than the Han. This is linked to popularity of e.g., public dancing and singing performances which are a huge part of Uyghur culture and festivities. A way to honor guests in Uyghur culture is e.g., to ask them to sing or dance, however, this would be imaginably be very uncomfortable for most Han.¹⁵¹

If we look into the historical aspect of Confucianism, certain narratives of the different communities are also to be found. Historically, the Han has been described as “descendants of the dragon”¹⁵², and would be defined by their shared physical traits of having so-called yellow skin and black hair and eyes. The non-Han Chinese population, however, used to be described by the term ‘barbarians’ in contrast to the other ‘civilized’ population. Initially, this was not related to the issue of race but rather culture, as these people did not have the civilized cultural practices connected to Confucianism.¹⁵³ This narrative was created by Han leaders throughout time. The ‘barbarians’ had cultural practices of their own, however, in order to be perceived as civilized, these had to be in line with ‘Chinese’ practices. There were also different levels of ‘barbarians’ according to degree of adaptability. However, the narrative that the degree of ‘civilization’ merely depended on cultural practices was proved insufficient by multiple studies, such as Abramson’s study of the Tang Dynasty, in which he found that physical features were also present in the evaluation of ‘barbarianism’. Physical traits such as non-brown eyes or a different shape of nose would be used as an indicator for someone’s level of morality or literacy.¹⁵⁴ In some instances, the ‘barbarians’ were even dehumanized in the sense that in Confucian tradition ‘barbarians’ were seen as “animals in human form [...]”¹⁵⁵ Through the Chinese dynastic period, many policies for governing the minorities also referred to the governing of the “loose rein”, which implicates a connection to, or picture of, these peoples as animals.¹⁵⁶

The different cultural practices and religion of the Uyghurs to that of the Han Chinese creates a very distinct Uyghur identity. This identity is based on both cultural factors such as the

¹⁵⁰ Smith, “‘Making Culture Matter’: Symbolic, Spatial and Social Boundaries between Uyghurs and Han Chinese,” 164

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 168

¹⁵² David O’Brien and Melissa Shani Brown, *People, Place, Race, and Nation in Xinjiang, China: Territories of Identity* (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 50

¹⁵³ Ibid, 32

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 33

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 34

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 34

importance of Islam, but also ethnic factors with regards to the shared common history and Türkic heritage. Having identified the differences between the two populations is important to the analysis of whether the Uyghur identity is at risk of extinction. It is not uncommon for ethnic conflicts to arise within nations, and in fact, these internal conflicts between different ethnic, religious, or cultural groups, by far outnumber those that take place between states.¹⁵⁷ However, being a multiethnic country does not automatically put ethnic minority groups at risk of extinction via e.g., cultural genocide. However, an issue has occurred in more modern times with nationalist aspirations of uniting people under one nation with one ideal of how to exist within that nation.¹⁵⁸ Today, “one study has determined that at the start of this century there were approximately 275 “minorities at risk” in the world”¹⁵⁹, with Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Arab countries having the highest numbers.¹⁶⁰ Handelman and Brynen argue that the issue is not multiethnicity in itself, but the creation of nations in which the ethnic minorities “[...] fail to coincide fully with boundaries for states (self-governing countries).”¹⁶¹ Through continuous migration and years of imperial rule in China, the Chinese state has spilled over to areas of other ethnicities such as the Uyghurs in central Asia. The creation of China as a state has changed the conditions for the Uyghurs through policies created after becoming a nation-state. Having illustrated the differences between the Han and the Uyghurs in this section, the following sections will then continue to discuss how Chinese policies affect the culture of the Uyghurs, and how the creation of the nation-state has had consequences for minority identities.

6.2 Chinese policies during past leaders

This chapter will provide an overview of some of the political and legal frameworks that were put forward and track the continuous development of these regional policies during past Chinese leaders. This is necessary to do, in order to gain an understanding of why the policies were created and what the consequences were. All of the subchapters will then form the background for the analysis and contribute to the discussion of whether the policies can be viewed as colonial and whether a cultural genocide is perhaps taking place in Xinjiang.

¹⁵⁷ Howard Handelman and Rex Brynen, *Challenges of the Developing World* (Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Incorporated, 2019), 156

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 156

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 157

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 158

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 161

6.2.1 Policies during the 1950s-70s

During Mao's rule from 1949, the first waves of encouraged Han-migration took place. The transfer of Han-Chinese people to remote regions with ethnic minorities took off in the 1950s as part of Xiafang. Initially, the transfer of Han-Chinese was an attempt by the Communist regime to utilize all of the Chinese land and to expand e.g., the agricultural industry. However, many of the young people that were sent to these faraway regions were met with facilities that did not live up to their expectations. Many experienced being sent to areas with barely any infrastructure, heavy annual rainfall, and long freezing winters, which made for poor conditions for agricultural advancements. Furthermore, the integration of the Han settlers also proved to be difficult, as the local people and the Han did not always see eye to eye.¹⁶² The settlement program was criticized for not taking religious freedom into account, as the local population saw that their own customs were not respected.¹⁶³ Many Han were sent to Xinjiang, or Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, as established in 1955. The autonomy of the region was based on the idea of providing the culturally very different region with some autonomy to sustain their own practices of e.g., cultural and religious form, however, this autonomy is later argued to be very limited.¹⁶⁴ The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), also called Bingtuan, was created in in the 50s as a paramilitary unit, in which Han population was recruited to work at these state farms, and in the event of a Soviet attack, they were expected to protect the region.¹⁶⁵

It was not until Mao's Great Leap Forward in 1958 that the migration of Han settlers significantly increased, and the challenges of the economic plans became even more visible.¹⁶⁶ The Great Leap Forward was an industrialization attempt that eventually resulted in the deaths of over 10 million people due to one of the worst famines in history.¹⁶⁷ The aim was to create a modern industrial and agricultural base to create economic growth in China. The economy did grow, however, not without severe consequences. In 1958, the GDP was 22% higher than in 1957 and production in the construction sector grew by 70.3%.¹⁶⁸ The agricultural sector grew slightly, by 2.4%, however, by

¹⁶² June Teufel Dreyer, "Go West Young Han: The Hsia Fang Movement to China's Minority Areas," *Pacific Affairs* 48, no. 3 (1975), 354

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 355

¹⁶⁴ Matthew D. Moneyhon. "China's Great Western Development Project in Xinjiang: Economic Palliative, or Political Trojan Horse?" *Denver journal of international law and policy* 31, no. 3 (2003), 512

¹⁶⁵ McNamee, *Settling for Less: Why States Colonize and Why They Stop*, 102-103

¹⁶⁶ Dreyer, "Go West Young Han: The Hsia Fang Movement to China's Minority Areas," 357

¹⁶⁷ Hu, Guangyu, and Angang Hu. *The Great Leap Forward, 1957-1965* (Honolulu, HI: Enrich Professional Publishing (S) Private Limited, 2013), 88

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 95

1959, agriculture had seen an extensive “[...] decline to a level lower than in 1955.”¹⁶⁹ The Chinese economy was in the following years on a constant rollercoaster of intense economic leaps followed by dramatic downfalls. A combination of natural disasters along with lack of agricultural labor force intensified the increasing lack of food supply in the state. Food supplies were allocated to the nation’s biggest cities, and the rural population therefore suffered more during the famine.¹⁷⁰ During these years, millions of people were moved around. From 1961-63 around twenty million Han-Chinese moved to rural areas as part of Xiafang.¹⁷¹ Among many rural places, such as Qinghai, Gansu, and Ningxia, Xinjiang was one of these regions where settlers were sent.¹⁷² However, as mentioned, the attempt of creating a bigger and stronger Chinese economy turned into a great humanitarian disaster, and the economy saw a dramatic fluctuation with a variation in GDP growth, between 1957-1965, as high as 285%.¹⁷³

Xiafang was not only an economic project, but it also had cultural motivators such as reducing the differences between people in the city and the countryside. It was also used as a form of “punishment” of some Han-Chinese that were opposing the thoughts of the regime, however, it was not referred to as “punishment” but rather “correction.” People who deviated from the national socialist line would be sent to the rural areas to do physical labor.¹⁷⁴ The goal was to ensure that people were of the right ideology according to the state. There were different levels to this ideological education through labor, where some were milder, and others were direct corrective forced labor. Part of the rationale of Xiafang was also that separating people from their families would further loyalty to the regime and its goals, as there would be a shift from loyalty to your blood relatives to a more controlled social group, e.g., the production team that the individual was placed in.¹⁷⁵ However, after the disastrous results of the Great Leap Forward and critique against Mao, he launched the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in which the Red Guards, a student-led paramilitary movement, fought for the preservation of communism. The revolution started in 1966, and the Red Guards travelled around China on Mao’s call.¹⁷⁶ During this time, Xiafang was temporarily paused as many young people moved towards the cities to take part in the revolution, however, it resumed again in

¹⁶⁹ Hu and Hu, *The Great Leap Forward, 1957-1965*, 96

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 97

¹⁷¹ Prybyla, “Hsia-Fang: The Economics and Politics of Rustication in China,” 153

¹⁷² Dreyer, “Go West Young Han: The Hsia Fang Movement to China’s Minority Areas,” 354

¹⁷³ Hu, *The Great Leap Forward, 1957-1965*, 112

¹⁷⁴ Prybyla, “Hsia-Fang: The Economics and Politics of Rustication in China,” 153

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 154

¹⁷⁶ Starr, *Xinjiang : China's Muslim borderland. of Studies of Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 95

1969.¹⁷⁷ The cultural revolution was significant to Xinjiang and the Uyghurs, as during this time, the state strongly targeted any outliers that did not follow communist policies. The communist leadership strongly cut back on religious freedom, and “[...] imprisoned and even killed Uyghur religious leaders, abolished Muslim holidays and festivals like Ramadan, halted Haj pilgrimage, and desecrated mosques and cemeteries.”¹⁷⁸

When analyzing the background for Xiafang, some highlight that it was not about economic growth and “correction” of unruly citizens, but that one of the main purposes was the strengthening of Chinese borders.¹⁷⁹ As mentioned in the theory section on Sino-nationalism, there were strong waves of nationalism after many years of humiliation from foreign nationals. Making sure that the rural areas were densely populated would provide a sense of security to the nation. In his research on colonial relations in China, Lachlan McNamee highlights the importance of viewing the first development policies in Xinjiang in relation to the context of the past world order with the USSR. Securing the borders were therefore not only against western influences. During the 1950s, after the Chinese Communist victory in 1949, the relationship with the USSR increasingly strained, which ultimately resulted in the Sino-Soviet split.¹⁸⁰ This was due to many different factors such as geopolitical disagreements, where the USSR e.g., had an interest in establishing joint forces as well as placing military equipment on Chinese land, which Mao strongly dismissed. Furthermore, the USSR was seeking more peaceful co-existence with the US, but this did not suit Mao as the PRC was seeking to gain control of Taiwan which was defended by the US. In 1958, the PRC attacked the Taiwanese island of Quemoy and Matsu without informing the USSR, which caused increased tension between the USSR and the US, as the USSR had been providing China with nuclear assistance. The Quemoy incident became the last straw, and the trust between the PRC and USSR broke down.¹⁸¹ The shift in China’s relationship with the USSR came to inspire a new focus on the Chinese border regions. More than 100.000 Russians lived in Xinjiang alone, which was a concern to Mao after the now more tense relation to the USSR, as he feared that the border regions could detach from China. Mao therefore engaged in expelling these residents from Xinjiang, and by the end of 1959, 88% had been forced back to the USSR. After this, the resettlement of the Han Chinese escalated.¹⁸² Statistics of Han resettlement reveal that the increase in Han population was particularly extreme in the northern part of

¹⁷⁷ Prybyla, “Hsia-Fang: The Economics and Politics of Rustication in China,” 157

¹⁷⁸ Debata, “Chinese Assimilationist Policies in Xinjiang: From Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping,” 203

¹⁷⁹ Dreyer, “Go West Young Han: The Hsia Fang Movement to China’s Minority Areas,” 353

¹⁸⁰ McNamee, *Settling for Less: Why States Colonize and Why They Stop*, 100

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 101

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 102

Xinjiang bordering the USSR.¹⁸³ An example would be the Shawan county in Xinjiang, which “[...] increased by over 2000% in little over a decade, rising from 16,000 persons in 1952 to over 330,000 in 1963 of whom approximately 250,000 were XPCC members.”¹⁸⁴ The heavy focus on Han resettlement, and particularly participation in the XPCC, in e.g., Shawan exemplifies McNamee’s argument that the colonization of Xinjiang had more to do with insecurities regarding the USSR than it had to do with ethnic cleansing of Uyghurs.¹⁸⁵

When looking at Mao’s policies, the intent was to secure China from imperialism and outside influences of e.g., the U.S. and USSR, however, ultimately, I would argue that Mao took the first step of initiating internal colonialism. During period of the Chinese empires, the political system was different, so even if empires wished to further incorporate Xinjiang into the ‘core’ of the empire, this was not possible. Mao’s intense focus on saving China from imperialists, after years of humiliation, turned into policies that caused heavy Han migration. When considering Lemkin’s model on genocide, as well as Ben Madley’s model of frontier genocide, I would argue that this state-initiated wave of Han migration can be considered a first step of colonial invasion, in the sense that to the local population, the Uyghurs, they saw the beginning to the destruction of their national pattern and culture, as the Han moved to the area. The first step in Blauner’s identification of colonialism is that of “forced entry into a territory and its population”¹⁸⁶, but does this theory work when the territory is internal? In a multicultural nation as China, having such an intense wave of non-Uyghur people moving to the majority-populated Uyghur region, will inevitably change the circumstances for the local population. Due to the extent of the migration, this wave was indeed perceived as invasive by the locals, and protests did start to arise against it, which will be further examined throughout the thesis.

6.2.2 Policies during the 1970s-90s

After much critique of Mao’s methods in the rural areas of China, and particularly after the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping took over direct leadership of the CCP.¹⁸⁷ Deng sought to reform and rethink CCP’s policies in order to ‘win back’ the minorities and mend previous wrongdoings to save the party-state and the national economy.¹⁸⁸ He had the ambition to create a ‘economic liberalization

¹⁸³ McNamee, *Settling for Less: Why States Colonize and Why They Stop*, 107

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 108

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 109

¹⁸⁶ Pinderhughes, “Toward a New Theory of Internal Colonialism,” 246

¹⁸⁷ Starr, *Xinjiang: China's Muslim borderland. of Studies of Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 94

¹⁸⁸ Mahesh Ranjan Debata, CHINA'S UYGHUR POLICY IN THE POST-COLD WAR PERIOD, *Himalayan and Central Asian studies* 24, no. 1/2 (2020), 160

programme' for China, but in order to do so, it was of necessity to gain more stability in China's western regions as these were deemed crucial for the economic modernization due to the natural resources. Xinjiang is of high importance as it contains "[...] coal deposits (38% of China's total), petroleum and gas reserves (25% of China's total) in addition to huge reserves of 122 precious minerals."¹⁸⁹ As China was rising into a medium-large global economic power, maintaining autonomy over Xinjiang was of high priority. In 1984, Deng created the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law which sought to ease some of the socio-economic issues in Xinjiang such as providing more freedom for religious practices, education, and family planning. However, this new law did not address the still-continuing Han migration and Xinjiang was still politically unstable. Although, Deng was supposedly reformist, he did not manage to settle the disputes in the rural regions. The focus of Deng's economic programme was highly unequal as it focused mainly on the coastal regions in eastern China. Deng's strategy of developing the coastal regions, initiated in the late 80s, caused criticism as it created a wealth gap, where the east was far more integrated into the Chinese, as well as the international, economy than the West.¹⁹⁰

In 1989, student demonstrations broke out in Tiananmen Square, and many scholars such as Rogers have pointed out some connections between protests at Tiananmen Square and in Xinjiang. The demonstrations in 1989 were demanding that the economic developments in China should be more democratic. People were unsatisfied with lack of attention to the increasing unemployment in China and demanded that the government fulfill "[...] the rights enshrined in China's Constitution 1982."¹⁹¹ The government, however, did not appreciate the demonstrations and saw it as offensive that the public did not have faith in the state. The protests intensified and on May 15th, 1989, thousands of people participated in a hunger strike. As the public still did not gain the appeal that they were seeking, students from all over the country started traveling to Beijing to participate in the strike. Only a few days later, the crowd was at about one million people. Simultaneously, strikes were also taking place at party headquarters in Hubei, Fujian, and Xinjiang.¹⁹² In Xinjiang, the strike gathered 3000 students who protested against a new publication by the CCP that they found insulting to Islam.¹⁹³ Ultimately, the strike at Tiananmen Square ended on June 4th when the government

¹⁸⁹ Debata, "Chinese Assimilationist Policies in Xinjiang: From Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping," 204

¹⁹⁰ Moneyhon, "China's Great Western Development Project in Xinjiang: Economic Palliative, or Political Trojan Horse?" 495

¹⁹¹ Rogers, "Xinjiang in the Aftermath of Tiananmen: Prospects for Development and Challenges for the New Administration," 419

¹⁹² *Ibid*, 419

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, 420

cracked down on the protests and violently cleared the square.¹⁹⁴ To this day the exact death toll is still unknown, but the international Red Cross has estimated that around 2600 people were killed.¹⁹⁵

After the uprising against the government's economic development policies, the party rather hardened than softened its stance on political reforms, as they saw the Tiananmen Square strikes as an anti-government movement to overthrow the socialist rule.¹⁹⁶ Deng who claimed to seek reformation of the Chinese policies did not end up with that reputation, but rather a reputation of being ruthless as Mao. The lack of response to nation-wide protests rather intensified the protests against the government, made people more hopeless, and reinstated potential for internal unrest.¹⁹⁷ Deng eventually decided to discontinue the policy plans for developing the western regions. During the 90s, waves of separatist movements started to occur in Xinjiang, presumably as a reaction to the dissolution of the USSR, and the creation of Central Asian states. The goal was not necessarily a creation of a Uyghur nation, but perhaps more so a unification with the other Central Asian and Turkic republics.¹⁹⁸ The separatist movements turned violent in many cases and this led Deng to launch a military campaign called "Strike Hard, Maximum Pressure", in 1996, which resulted in the arrests of thousands of people in Xinjiang – some of whom were even executed. Estimations, made by Amnesty International, claim that more than 1000 people were executed as a consequence of Deng's campaign against the separatist movements.¹⁹⁹

Worth noting regarding this period is that the ruthlessness did not target ethnic groups in particular. Deng was unwilling to take any criticism against the regime, whether it was from Han Chinese students or Uyghur students. However, even though, Deng's rule showed violence towards any resistance, it is still worth recognizing that this period became the beginning of the separatist and extremist-narrative, that still affect policies in Xinjiang up until today. I would argue that this is the exact moment where signs of colonialism start to deepen. If one looks into colonial psychology, the idea of *dehumanization* is used as a way to justify one's own actions through creating a generalized reality and image of the other, which in this case were actions of violent arrests and executions. Xinjiang was no longer only affected by Han migration as part of economic development, but the region

¹⁹⁴ Rogers, "Xinjiang in the Aftermath of Tiananmen: Prospects for Development and Challenges for the New Administration," 421

¹⁹⁵ Jerry A. Varsava, "Tiananmen Fictions Outside the Square: The Chinese Literary Diaspora and the Politics of Global Culture," *Studies in the Novel* 45, no. 4 (2013), 718

¹⁹⁶ Rogers, "Xinjiang in the Aftermath of Tiananmen: Prospects for Development and Challenges for the New Administration," 421

¹⁹⁷ Debata, "Chinese Assimilationist Policies in Xinjiang: From Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping," 204

¹⁹⁸ Moneyhon, "China's Great Western Development Project in Xinjiang: Economic Palliative, or Political Trojan Horse?" 499

¹⁹⁹ Debata, "Chinese Assimilationist Policies in Xinjiang: From Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping," 204

and its people were set as a specific target of the policy. It is not uncommon to dehumanize one's enemy, however, I would argue that the creation of anti-separatist-targeted policies will only further escalate the number of separatist movements, which will be further elaborated throughout.

6.2.3 Policies during the 1990s-00s

After the death of Deng Xiaoping, in 1997, Jiang Zemin stepped in as successor and promised to continue the “[...] so-called pragmatist approach in Xinjiang.”²⁰⁰ One of Jiang's first creations was the ‘Great Western Development Programme’ which was established in 1999. Significant to this development strategy is that there was an increased focus on the external market, and it was developed during a time where the Chinese government was also negotiating its participation in the World Trade Organization (WTO).²⁰¹ The government had certain considerations regarding China's accession to WTO, as the domestic economy would undoubtedly be affected if the market opened up for international competition. Industries such as agriculture was at even higher risk due to the constant instability in the sector. Opening up the market would particularly affect the rural regions where the agricultural sector was the biggest, and therefore, people in these regions would potentially suffer from the WTO accession.²⁰² The Chinese leadership was under immense pressure by the worried citizens of the rural provinces to come up with a strategy to deal with the changes that would follow the accession.²⁰³ During the negotiations, the chief negotiator Long Yongtu addressed the issue and stated that it was of key importance to the development of the Chinese western regions that the market opened up internationally. In his statement, he claimed that it would “[...] establish an adequate development mentality [...]”²⁰⁴ and increase the “[...] overall quality through global exchange of information.”²⁰⁵

The Great Western Development Programme was established on the promise to “help” the interior western regions achieve economic growth, in similar ways that the coastal parts had during Deng's presidency. The western development programme focused on “[...] infrastructure construction; ecological protection; industrial restructuring; and the development of science and

²⁰⁰ Debata, “Chinese Assimilationist Policies in Xinjiang: From Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping,” 204

²⁰¹ Heike Holbig, “The Emergence of the Campaign to Open up the West: Ideological Formation, Central Decision-Making and the Role of the Provinces,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 178 (2004), 342

²⁰² *Ibid*, 342

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 343

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 343

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 343

technology (S&T), education, and human resources.”²⁰⁶ Some of the bigger projects consisted of building railways to ease transportation of local goods, establishing airports, and building water and gas pipelines in the western regions. These developments would indeed create more economic opportunities for the regions, as lack of shipping and transportation options had been a major challenge to industries. It could take a longer time for goods from Xinjiang to reach Beijing, than from California to Beijing.²⁰⁷ However, scholars such as Moneyhon also argue that there was a hidden agenda behind the development policies. The new transportation links would also provide better opportunity for the government to maintain some control, and it would also create increased options for the Han settlers.²⁰⁸ Furthermore, there was a dissymmetry in who actually benefited from the policies. An example could be the oil industry in Xinjiang where the Han were running the big companies, and the Uyghurs were simply employed at the factories. In this case, the expansion of projects would disproportionately benefit the Han rather than the Uyghurs, as the positions of power within these companies were almost always given to a Han.²⁰⁹ The issue was not only seen in this sector, but in many others, Han workers generally had higher chance of getting picked for a job, rather than the indigenous population.²¹⁰

In Xinjiang, clashes between ethnic minorities and the Han did not ease, and those Uyghurs who would take part in the movements would be deemed separatist by the Chinese government. As mentioned, some argue that the “Go West” development plan had ulterior motives of increased regional control, however, the government ensured that the policy should only bring about more social stability in the region and boost the feeling of unity between the populations.²¹¹ However, after continuous clashes between Uyghurs and Han in Xinjiang, the government ultimately initiated a 100-day ‘Strike Hard’ campaign in 1999 to fight separatists in the region. The campaign was focused on Ürümqi and served as a warning that public security organizations would increase monitoring and arrests of separatists. This campaign was not exceptional, but just one example of many. During 1999, according to the leader of the Association of Uyghurs, “China executed a total of sixty-one people charged with crimes related to separatism.”²¹² During Jiang’s time as president, the 9/11 terror attacks

²⁰⁶ Holbig, “The Emergence of the Campaign to Open up the West: Ideological Formation, Central Decision-Making and the Role of the Provinces,” 347

²⁰⁷ Moneyhon, Moneyhon, “China’s Great Western Development Project in Xinjiang: Economic Palliative, or Political Trojan Horse?” 502

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 503

²⁰⁹ Ibid. 503

²¹⁰ Ibid, 504

²¹¹ Ibid, 506

²¹² Dillon, *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Far Northwest*, 127

also took place, which caused shock waves to spread worldwide. After this, the Chinese rhetoric changed, and the narrative turned from referring to waves of separatism to acts of terrorism. A new Chinese discourse emerged where officials started referring to *Sangu shili* ('three gangs of forces' or 'three evils') which were "[...] (ethnic) separatism, (religious) extremism, and terrorism [...]"²¹³ Particularly one group was often mentioned by Chinese officials, and that was the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), who were accused of many of the violent uprisings in Xinjiang. After 9/11, the Chinese government even accused them of "[...] having ties with Osama bin Laden and the Taliban [...]"²¹⁴, in an attempt to have them placed on the international terrorism watchlist. During this time, religious freedom became more restricted, and Amnesty International reported of violations such as "[...] banning religious practices during Ramadan, closing mosques, increasing official controls over Islamic clergy and detaining or arresting religious leaders deemed to be unpatriotic or subversive."²¹⁵ China used the "war on terror" as a way to legitimize these actions, but simultaneously, this would also help the extremist groups legitimize the violence and resistance against the Chinese government.²¹⁶

During this period in time, the narrative of the state therefore moved from referring the movements in Xinjiang as separatist to referring to them as extremist, and as part of terrorism. Here the dehumanization escalated in the sense that the violent separatists would be accused of having links to Islamic jihadists without proof to these accusations.²¹⁷ This, I would argue, undermines the issue in the sense that now violent separatism was blamed on, and compared to, global Islamic terrorism, rather than recognizing that the issue was there before 9/11, and was due to non-external factors and actors.

6.2.4 Policies during the 2000s-10s

In 2002, Hu Jintao stepped in as president and stayed in line with the already established measures of the previous presidencies. Unrest and violence still persisted in Xinjiang during Hu's presidency, and in fact, it was where one of the worst attacks took place. In Ürümqi in 2009, around 200 people died

²¹³ Marie Trédaniel and Pak K. Lee, "Explaining the Chinese Framing of the "Terrorist" Violence in Xinjiang: Insights from Securitization Theory," *Nationalities papers* 46, no. 1 (2018), 183

²¹⁴ Trédaniel and Lee, "Explaining the Chinese Framing of the "Terrorist" Violence in Xinjiang: Insights from Securitization Theory," 183

²¹⁵ Debata, "Chinese Assimilationist Policies in Xinjiang: From Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping," 205

²¹⁶ Trédaniel and Lee, "Explaining the Chinese Framing of the "Terrorist" Violence in Xinjiang: Insights from Securitization Theory," 185

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, 190

after clashes between police forces and protesters. Initially Uyghurs had gathered at the People's Square in Xinjiang's capital to protest peacefully, as a response to a recent clash between Uyghur and Han workers where two Uyghurs had died, and many were severely injured.²¹⁸ The protest in Ürümqi, however, evolved violently when police forces interfered, and resulted in the deaths of 137 Han Chinese and 46 Uyghurs. The government was criticized not only by the Uyghurs but also by the Han Chinese for not being able to prevent the riots.²¹⁹ Following the riots, Hu Jintao and the government took an interesting approach as the blame was not placed on internal organizations such as ETIM, as would have been the case previously. In fact, the Chinese government mainly focused on the influence of external actors of the diaspora, which Trédaniel and Lee highlight as an attempt by the government to remove their responsibility for the escalation of violence. The government handled the situation by shutting down international communication in Xinjiang both via calls and access to the internet for ten months. The justification for this was that it would prevent the outside diaspora from influencing any more future attacks.²²⁰

Eventually, Hu initiated more policies and control in Xinjiang, e.g., with the 'Stability First'-policy, where the CCP Secretary in Xinjiang was to use any measures necessary to maintain order.²²¹ Furthermore, in 2010, he proceeded to establish the 'Leapfrog Development'-policy in which he made references to Mao's policies, and vowed to compel the Uyghurs to "[...] identify with the great motherland, the Chinese nation, Chinese culture and a socialist development path with Chinese characteristics."²²² Development policies during this presidency were not very different to those of previous presidencies, and still promised to invest in things such as transport and infrastructure to boost the opportunities in the region.²²³ However, developments are still overshadowed by continuous unrest in Xinjiang, and this presidency period is no exception. As mentioned previously, the time after 9/11 was severely affected by the 'war on terror', and also in China. Some scholars argue that China "[...] needs instability in order to justify its hardline policies in the region"²²⁴, and the 'war on terror' became another way to legitimize the continuous strict policies targeted at Xinjiang. In fact,

²¹⁸ Trédaniel and Lee, "Explaining the Chinese Framing of the "Terrorist" Violence in Xinjiang: Insights from Securitization Theory," 185

²¹⁹ Ibid, 186

²²⁰ Ibid, 186

²²¹ Debata, "Chinese Assimilationist Policies in Xinjiang: From Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping," 206

²²² Ibid, 206

²²³ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Iraq, "Facts and Figures: China's Efforts to boost 'leap-frog development' in Xinjiang," July 4, 2010. Accessed May 5, 2024

²²⁴ Trédaniel and Lee, "Explaining the Chinese Framing of the "Terrorist" Violence in Xinjiang: Insights from Securitization Theory," 186

the introduction of the ‘war on terror’ could be seen even as a “diversionary strategy”²²⁵ to deflect domestic issues and instead blame global circumstances of terrorism, as argued by Trédaniel and Lee.

6.3 Chinese Policies under the current rule (2010s – present day)

During Xi Jinping’s current rule, the policies in Xinjiang have further intensified with the purpose of fighting extremism and terrorism. This chapter will go through some of the policies targeting terrorism, as well as the impact of initiatives for economic development such as the Belt and Road initiative. Furthermore, an overview of the regional leadership in Xinjiang since its establishment will be provided and discussed in relation to the political autonomy of the region. The last section will then proceed to discuss the recent wave of encouragement of tourism to Xinjiang, and the potential impact of this.

6.3.1 Anti-Terrorism and the Belt and Road Initiative

Xi Jinping has been known for intensifying the policies in Xinjiang. This particularly escalated after the first major terrorist attack in 2013, where a Uyghur drove a car of explosives into a crowd at Tiananmen Square.²²⁶ The attack took place shortly after the establishment of the One Belt, One Road Initiative, also called Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and was believed to be connected to this, as the attack occurred at a time “[...] where a meeting of the plenary session of the CCP was planned.”²²⁷ As mentioned previously, Xinjiang has always had a geographically significant position in the sense that it has been very central to trade via the Silk Roads, however, after the introduction of BRI, it has become even more important for the government to secure and stabilize the region.²²⁸ BRI can be closely connected to Xi Jinping’s idea of the ‘China Dream’, which shortly can be identified as the desire to create a China that is “[...] a fair, corruption-free, safe, secure, orderly and rich society.”²²⁹ The wish is to achieve great power status and global influence that will eventually exceed that of the U.S. However, Xi also refers to this dream as sort of a ‘Chinese renaissance’, which connects this dream to ideas of nationalism. The idea behind the ‘renaissance’ is to restore Chinese pride, however,

²²⁵ Trédaniel and Lee, “Explaining the Chinese Framing of the “Terrorist” Violence in Xinjiang: Insights from Securitization Theory,” 186

²²⁶ Debata, “Chinese Assimilationist Policies in Xinjiang: From Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping,” 206

²²⁷ Ibid, 207

²²⁸ Anna Hayes, “Interwoven 'Destinies': The Significance of Xinjiang to the China Dream, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Xi Jinping Legacy,” *The Journal of contemporary China* 29, no. 121 (2020), 31

²²⁹ Ibid, 32

this is not necessarily a new idea, as it has been a focus of the former leaders as well to have China redeem itself after the Century of Humiliation.²³⁰ As mentioned, the BRI is part of realizing this ‘China Dream’ as it can be viewed as “[...] China’s greatest international economic ambition”²³¹, where China seeks to rejuvenate the Silk Roads and connect links to a vast area extending from Central Asia through the Middle East to Europe, and also North Africa.²³² Just like the ‘China Dream’, the BRI also has some nostalgia and nationalism attached to it, as the prime of the Silk Roads are viewed as having been very open and work as a symbol of peace and co-existence, until the world was abruptly by European colonialism.²³³

The BRI has been received quite differently in the international community with some viewing it as China being more willing to cooperate economically on a global level, whereas others criticize it and fear that excessive Chinese export will disturb the national economies of many countries.²³⁴ As mentioned, some believed the 2013 terror attack to be connected to the initiation of the BRI, and there definitely have been mixed perceptions on the BRI in Xinjiang as well. O’Brien and Primiano’s fieldwork provide viewpoints from different people living in Xinjiang, both Han and Uyghur. One man of Han ethnicity expressed that the BRI would have positive impacts for the region, as it is still extremely affected by poverty. He highlights the positive developments made so far, such as establishing roads and hospitals, and state that “[...] big investment can solve the problems”²³⁵. Another interviewee agreed with this position that the BRI would bring more money to the region, however, is slightly more hesitant as the money may not be distributed evenly amongst the population. The Uyghurs feelings about the BRI are far more fearful, as they highlight that their region is constantly developing without their say. One interviewee describes it as: “We have been crushed and the world does not care. The world does not care because they want the Chinese money, the money from this BRI.”²³⁶ So, although, the BRI can bring about positive change for the region, it also comes with concerns about the future of Uyghur lives.

²³⁰ Hayes, “Interwoven 'Destinies': The Significance of Xinjiang to the China Dream, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Xi Jinping Legacy,” 32

²³¹ Yiping Huang, “Understanding China's Belt & Road Initiative: Motivation, Framework and Assessment,” *China economic review* 40 (2016), 314

²³² Hayes, “Interwoven 'Destinies': The Significance of Xinjiang to the China Dream, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Xi Jinping Legacy,” 35

²³³ Hayes, “Interwoven 'Destinies': The Significance of Xinjiang to the China Dream, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Xi Jinping Legacy,” 35

²³⁴ Huang, “Understanding China's Belt & Road Initiative: Motivation, Framework and Assessment,” 314-315

²³⁵ David O’Brien and Christopher B. Primiano, “Opportunities and Risks Along the New Silk Road: Perspectives and Perceptions on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region,” in *International Flows in the Belt and Road Initiative Context*, Palgrave Series in Asia and Pacific Studies, Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore (2020), 137-138

²³⁶ *Ibid*, 138

The 2013 terrorist attack was not a unique incident, as many other violent attacks continue to occur. Another attack took place in March 2014, known as the Kunming attack, which led Xi Jinping to initiate a strengthening of Chinese security infrastructure, and thereby began the ‘Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism’ as part of China’s People’s War on Terror in May 2014, which called for ‘no mercy’-policies against the Uyghurs.²³⁷ This ‘War on Terror’ also resulted in the creation of a comprehensive anti-terrorism law in 2016, which resulted in increased surveillance as well as the use of re-education camps, which will be further discussed.²³⁸ All of this fits into the established narrative that generalizes the region as a problem, which can only be fixed if the ‘others’ can manage to “merge religious doctrines with Chinese culture”²³⁹, as Xi has stated.

6.3.2 Forced Labor and Re-education

Throughout time, the many different rulers of China have made different development plans for the rural regions of the state, and particularly the western regions. Since the early 1990s, the Chinese government sought to particularly focus on turning Xinjiang into China’s main cotton-producing region. The initiative was partly supported by the state initiated XPCC (bingtuan) that had been in charge of labor developments in Xinjiang since the 1950s. The plan of growing the Chinese cotton sector did in fact succeed, and “[...] Xinjiang’s share of China cotton production grew from 27.4% to 89.5% [...]”²⁴⁰ from 2001 to 2021. The region’s production made up about 20% of the total cotton supply globally, in 2021. The cotton production used a mix of different laborers, ranging from Han to different minority groups, as well as prisoners from eastern China. During the 1990s, the region expanded its production team and started using school children for the harvests due to an insufficient number of workers.²⁴¹

Although the goal of establishing Xinjiang as the largest Chinese cotton producer was set before Xi Jinping’s rule, the enforcement of labor has become increasingly coercive after his accession. One of the reasonings for this was the focus on anti-terrorism efforts, and Xi argues that

²³⁷ Debata, “Chinese Assimilationist Policies in Xinjiang: From Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping,” 207

²³⁸ Christophe Paulussen and Martin Scheinin, “‘Killing Rats in the Street’ for the Paramount Human Right of Security: The Law and Policy of China’s People’s War on Terror, In *Human Dignity and Human Security in Times of Terrorism*, (Germany: T.M.C. Asser Press, 2020), 183

²³⁹ O’Brien and Brown, *People, Place, Race, and Nation in Xinjiang, China : Territories of Identity*, 55

²⁴⁰ Adrian Zenz, “Coercive Labor in the Cotton Harvest in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and Uzbekistan,” *Communist and Post-communist studies* (2023), 6

²⁴¹ *Ibid*, 6

“[...] unemployed persons are liable to ‘provoke trouble’,”²⁴² so employment in e.g., cotton fields would provide the Uyghurs with jobs but also bring about interaction with the Han, which would benefit their integration into Chinese culture and help them resist religious extremism.²⁴³ In 2016, the government sought to “Win the Battle Against Poverty”, as poverty and insecurity was continuously linked in the Chinese political narrative. The government then created a plan for Targeted Poverty Alleviation work, which set a goal for how many people should be employed through e.g., labor transfers.²⁴⁴ Many Uyghurs refused the labor transfers, and were labelled as lazy, close-minded, or even accused of religious extremism due to their lack of cooperation.²⁴⁵ However, the different counties of Xinjiang did succeed in increasing the number of Uyghur workers in the cotton fields, although some counties more than others. The state encouraged the local employers to replace the Han with Uyghur workers to ensure that the plan for targeting poverty would succeed. By 2018 “[...] Xinjiang is estimated to have mobilized at least 570,000 surplus laborers from predominantly Uyghur regions into cotton picking.”²⁴⁶ As mentioned, the means of ensuring enough labor in the cotton fields changed during Xi’s rule, mainly due to the heavy focus on anti-extremism. One of the ways that labor would be enforced on Uyghurs was through the threat of being perceived as a religious extremist if refusing the labor transfer. The government had, in 2014, created a list of actions that they considered connected to extremism, and one of those would be “[...] refusal to accept government management.”²⁴⁷ Although, the labor transfer program is not connected to the establishment of the Vocational Skills Education and Training Centers (i.e., re-education camps), Uyghurs who would refuse the labor transfers could be at risk of internment due to the extremism laws.²⁴⁸

So, what exactly are the premises of these re-education camps? The Chinese government describes these centers as “[...] vocational education and training centers in accordance with the law to prevent the breeding and spread of terrorism and religious extremism [...], protecting the rights to life, health, and development of the people of all ethnic groups.”²⁴⁹ In its White Paper, the government also highlights the issue that a large part of the population in Xinjiang have no knowledge

²⁴² Zenz, “Coercive Labor in the Cotton Harvest in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and Uzbekistan,” 9

²⁴³ Ibid, 9

²⁴⁴ Adrian Zenz, “Coercive Labor in the Cotton Harvest in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and Uzbekistan,” 10

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 10

²⁴⁶ Zenz, “Coercive Labor in the Cotton Harvest in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and Uzbekistan,” 11

²⁴⁷ Ibid, 12

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 12

²⁴⁹ The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, “Vocational Education and Training in Xinjiang,” August 17, 2019, Accessed May 6, 2024

of principles of Chinese law and the Chinese language. The centers are free-of-charge and provide a certificate after completion and ‘graduation’.²⁵⁰ The camps appeared in the package of laws under the counter-terrorism law in 2016, after concerns over the continuing attacks, which Xi responded to with the statement that the state should seek for “[...] ‘walls made of copper and steel’ and ‘nets spread from earth to the sky’ to capture these terrorists.”²⁵¹ As mentioned, refusal of government management could lead to internment in a re-education camp, but what does this entail? It could be e.g., “[...] refusal to let one’s children study Chinese or attend (state-run) school”²⁵², or opposition to existing political system. To this day, there is still no exact number on how many people in total have been detained in the re-education camps.²⁵³ However, many scholars estimate that the number is as high as between 1-2 million people.²⁵⁴ Initially, at the introduction of the re-education camps, the Chinese state denied the existence of them, however, this did not last very long as satellite photos would reveal the camp sites, and official government sources showed spending budgets on such facilities.²⁵⁵ Government reports later also revealed numbers regarding the detainees, as statistics were kept on how many people ‘graduated’. One of such reports for example revealed that from the summer of 2017 to the end of the year, some “[...] townships had detained up to 10% of the entire population.”²⁵⁶ The reports were also there to provide knowledge about positive changes in attitudes of the detainees. One paper from Xinjiang’s Ürümqi Party School for example stated that “[...] prior to re-education, 68% of respondents were unaware of their ‘mistakes’, afterwards 99% were able to ‘distinguish illegal religion’”²⁵⁷.

However, what exactly is ‘taught’ at the camps to ensure the abovementioned positive changes? The re-education based itself on a schedule that includes patriotic singing, introduction to different laws such as criminal or marriage law and writing reflection statements. Through the past years, many past detainees have come forward with their experiences and described the camps as

²⁵⁰ The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, “Vocational Education and Training in Xinjiang,” Accessed May 6, 2024

²⁵¹ Adrian Zenz, “‘Thoroughly reforming them towards a healthy heart attitude’: China’s political re-education campaign in Xinjiang,” *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 1 (2019), 104

²⁵² Adrian Zenz, “Innovating Penal Labor: Reeducation, Forced Labor, and Coercive Social Integration in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region,” *The China Journal (Canberra, A.C.T.)* 90, no. 1 (2023), 39

²⁵³ Zenz, “‘Thoroughly reforming them towards a healthy heart attitude’: China’s political re-education campaign in Xinjiang,” 122

²⁵⁴ Adrian Zenz, “Innovating repression: Policy Experimentation and the Evolution of Beijing’s Re-Education Campaign in Xinjiang,” *Journal of Contemporary China* (2024), 1

²⁵⁵ Zenz, “‘Thoroughly reforming them towards a healthy heart attitude’: China’s political re-education campaign in Xinjiang,” 102

²⁵⁶ Zenz, “‘Thoroughly reforming them towards a healthy heart attitude’: China’s political re-education campaign in Xinjiang,” 102

²⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 116

harsh, as they had to “[...] confess their ‘faults’, criticize their religious traditions and denounce fellow internees.”²⁵⁸ Those who failed to do as such would face punishments of different kinds, as also mentioned in the contextual background, which could be sleep deprivation, beatings, or other forms of violence.²⁵⁹ By the end of 2019, the regional leadership in Xinjiang announced that the detainees at all the re-education camps had ‘graduated’.²⁶⁰ However, the end to the re-education campaign did not necessarily solve the issue, as many of the former detainees were simply transferred to real prisons or to conduct forced labor. Few people were also sent home, but one former Uyghur detainee found information through a local government worker who stated that “[...] well over two-thirds of VSETC detainees in that city had been sentenced to prison.”²⁶¹

When analyzing the policies in Xinjiang in relation to internal colonialism, it has previously been shown that the physical invasion of the space of Xinjiang, through initiating Han migration, began before Xi Jinping’s presidency. Initially, the migration of the Han was to secure the outer borders of China, as well as take part in developing the Chinese economy e.g., via the agricultural industry in the region. This migration became the beginning to the Uyghurs’ struggles, but over the years the region has then seen increasing control from Beijing. One of Casanova’s indicators of internal colonialism is the exploitation of natural resources to benefit the colonizer and not the colonized, which creates an unequal relationship and spoils the colonized people’s chances to independently support themselves. The market that is exploited is also often based on one single market, which is Xinjiang’s case has been agriculture. As shown in this section, the cotton industry in Xinjiang grew massively and the share of China’s total production increased to almost 90%, which shows the focus on a singular market. The issue, however, as Casanova puts it, is when the economic growth benefits the colonizer and not the colonized. In this case, the general population of Xinjiang did not escape poverty, the labor conditions were poor, and the standards of life were significantly lower in the region, which fits the indicators of internal colonialism. The next sub-chapter will further investigate some of these very socio-economic inequalities.

Lastly, another thing to note is that the developments of the anti-terrorist campaigns and re-education camps significantly changed the narrative regarding Xinjiang and the Uyghurs. There

²⁵⁸ Zenz, “‘Thoroughly reforming them towards a healthy heart attitude’: China’s political re-education campaign in Xinjiang,” 113

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 113

²⁶⁰ Zenz, , “Innovating repression: Policy Experimentation and the Evolution of Beijing’s Re-Education Campaign in Xinjiang,” 2

²⁶¹ Zenz, “Innovating repression: Policy Experimentation and the Evolution of Beijing’s Re-Education Campaign in Xinjiang,” 16

had always been an awareness of separatism and later extremism, however, during Xi Jinping's presidency, the campaigns tightened, and the general Uyghur became more of a target. Previously, the campaigns had been seen to hit religious leaders particularly, however, now, any obvious signs of religiousness or disobedience to the state would get one punished. The extensive numbers, of people targeted, are also indicator of the heightening of the issue. When looking at Blauner's components of colonization, I would argue that the second step, of alteration or destruction of the indigenous culture, is taking place through the re-education camps. As Zenz puts it, the state started to almost frame the entire Uyghur population "[...] as a biological threat to society."²⁶²

6.3.3 Socio-Economic Inequality and the Issue of Political Representation

One of the features to look at when evaluating a colonial presence is that of political representation, or lack thereof. As Hecter and others have highlighted, with internal colonialism, an unequal relation exists between the advanced (superior) and less advanced (inferior) groups, which comes to show in different ways, e.g., political institutions.

In Xinjiang, the election of the CCP party secretary of the region is just one example that shows an unequal distribution of power. Out of the nine party secretaries, there have been in Xinjiang since 1949, eight have been of Han ethnicity and only one Uyghur.²⁶³ China does have rules regarding representation in minority regions, e.g., the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional Ethnic Autonomy* which was created in 1984. This law states that "in ethnic autonomous regions where the population of an ethnicity takes up more than half of the total population of the region, the ethnic ratio of government officials in the region should be the same as the population ratio of the ethnicities."²⁶⁴ However, Chung argues that the types of positions this law covers are vaguely defined, and often the ethnic population of the autonomous regions end up in less powerful positions. Although most mayors in Xinjiang are Uyghurs, which means that the law is kept, this particular position of mayor is far more administrative than for example the regional CPP party secretary which entails more decision-making. Chung therefore argues that even though the Uyghurs are

²⁶² Zenz, "'Thoroughly reforming them towards a healthy heart attitude': China's political re-education campaign in Xinjiang," 103

²⁶³ Chung, "Evaluating Xinjiang and Tibet as 'Internal Colonies' of China: Evidence from Official Data," 119

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 121

represented in different political positions, they are not chosen for the highest-ranking regional positions of power.²⁶⁵

Not only do the Uyghurs seem to lack political representation, statistics have also shown that it is not only in political institutions that Uyghurs are not hired, but there is a general inequality in job opportunities and wages. Multiple studies have looked into the wage gap between the Uyghurs and the Han in Xinjiang, one of these being Anthony J. Howell who did a survey of this. When comparing Uyghurs with Han, the pay gap showed that Uyghurs earn “[...] 29 per cent less, on average, compared to their Han counterparts.”²⁶⁶ Howell also discusses different sectors of jobs, and argues that more and more Uyghurs gravitate towards informal jobs, due to a shortage of jobs in the formal sector, which have increasingly worsened with the continuous Han migration to the bigger cities of Xinjiang, such as Ürümqi.²⁶⁷ The distinction of informal and formal jobs was based on proof of work permit or contract, which indicates whether the job is regulated by the state and contributes to the formal economy.²⁶⁸

Ultimately, these statistics on lack of political representation along with unequal pay and opportunity, contribute to the argument of internal colonialism. When looking at e.g., Blauner’s *colonization complex*, these actions correspond to step 3 and 5, I would argue. Step 3 indicates a management of the colonized by the dominant society, which comes to show through the lack of political representation along with the strict policies. Step 5, which is the unequal distribution of occupations, goes hand in hand with this, but also the evidence of unequal pay and opportunity. When examining how to assess the circumstances in Xinjiang, perhaps the most sufficient way to evaluate it, is to consider the outcome of the regional policies rather than the intent. The arguments that go against considering the circumstances in Xinjiang as internal colonialism or cultural genocide, are often rooted in the lack of proof of intent. Furthermore, the concept of cultural genocide is also, in fact, not part of international law and is therefore often dismissed. Those who argue that cultural genocide cannot be punished without proof of actions as well as intent, neglect the unbelievably difficult task that it is to prove intent. Furthermore, I think it is problematic that with other crimes, one can be punished if you harm someone, even without it being the intention, however, with crimes as

²⁶⁵ Chung, “Evaluating Xinjiang and Tibet as “Internal Colonies” of China: Evidence from Official Data,” 121

²⁶⁶ Anthony J. Howell, “Chinese Minority Income Disparity in Urumqi: An Analysis of Han-Uyghur Labour Market Outcomes in the Formal and Informal Economies,” *China (National University of Singapore. East Asian Institute)* 11, no. 3 (2013), 21

²⁶⁷ Howell, “Chinese Minority Income Disparity in Urumqi: An Analysis of Han-Uyghur Labour Market Outcomes in the Formal and Informal Economies,” 22

²⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 13

brutal as genocide, one cannot. If someone harms someone else, even without it being the intent, should that not still be punished? That is the case with other crimes.

The issue of intent does not stand alone. Other scholars also argue that one cannot make claims of internal colonialism, on the basis that many Han settlers also have arrived on their own initiative and as part seeking advancement in line with a China in continuous rapid development. However, this point of view lacks to address how the circumstances, behind the migration to exactly Xinjiang, arrived. The Chinese government have continuously forced people but also provided benefits of moving to e.g., Xinjiang. This was already evident during Mao's rule, where authorities were known to offer people bounties ranging from "[...] 800 to 1,000 yuan [...]"²⁶⁹ to those who could persuade someone to go to Xinjiang. Also, when looking at Han migration in a broader perspective, one will notice that Xinjiang is not an exceptional case, as similar events are occurring in e.g., Tibet and Inner Mongolia. Like Xinjiang, Tibet is also an autonomous region within China, however, many protests have taken place there as well as the Tibetans feel their local culture and religious practices being limited by state policies as well.²⁷⁰ Today, the Chinese region of Inner Mongolia has more Mongol residents than there are Mongols in Mongolia, and this region has also sporadically had protests due to restrictions on their native language.²⁷¹ So, the assimilation policies are indeed not unique to Xinjiang, but rather a 'trend' of the Chinese nation-state.

Sautman, who argues that without the regional policies, there would still be tension between the Han and the Uyghurs, fail to notice that these two populations lived within the same realm for centuries, and sporadically under the same rule. However, this rule was different to the current constellation of the Chinese nation-state, and regional differences were more common, and more welcome. The rising Han-centrism, particularly after the creation of the nation-state, I would argue, has worsened the conditions for the Uyghur population, as the urge to solidify the Chinese nation heightened. Emerson describes this process by claiming that in a state's failure to solidify the idea of the nation, it "[...] is not unlikely to exploit nationalism in order to divert attention from domestic inadequacies."²⁷² Friend and Thayer argue that Han-centrism entails racism as it seeks to "[...] erase, deny, and homogenize competing narratives and identities that threaten the nation-

²⁶⁹ Dreyer, "Go West Young Han: The Hsia Fang Movement to China's Minority Areas," 362

²⁷⁰ Victor Louzon, "Is China behaving like an empire? (and if not, is it good news?)" *Yale Fox International Fellowship 2014-2015 policy briefs series* (2015), 5

²⁷¹ "China's push to create a single national identity," *The Economist*, September 14, 2023, Accessed May 5, 2024.

²⁷² Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 370

state.”²⁷³ So, nationalism, in particular Han-centrism, is important to the understanding of Chinese regional policies, and the relation between the Uyghurs and the Han. Contrary to Sautman’s argument, this study has found that the tension is indeed rising in Xinjiang, and policies are escalating in strictness. To argue that tensions would exist no matter what is to undermine how significantly better it could be as well. Tensions have indeed increased with the policies. Furthermore, it dismisses the historical aspect, as the region is not known to have had endless fights between Uyghurs and Han in the past. Conflicts had been between e.g., Han, Mongols, and Manchus. For decades, the Uyghurs had lived very separate lives to those of the rest of the Chinese empire, so it was not until 1884, during the Qing dynasty, that the region faced more Chinese-style administration – in connection to the official establishment of the region of Xinjiang.²⁷⁴

6.3.4 Changing the Narrative through Tourism

Something that has not received a lot of attention by scholars in the field yet are the recent tourism developments in Xinjiang. Only few have written about this, so this subsection will analyze the potential consequences of the regional tourism and seek to highlight its significance to internal colonialism.

Over the past few years, the Chinese state has initiated tourism campaigns to visit Xinjiang, but only “[...] friends who are objective and impartial are welcome to visit.”²⁷⁵ It was not until recently that this tourism boom began, and it particularly rose in 2023 where the industry’s investments were around 700 million yuan, corresponding to around 90 million euros.²⁷⁶ In many ways, Xinjiang is an obvious place to invest in tourism as it is a historically important place in China due to the silk road, but also as it is culturally very different, and therefore interesting for Han Chinese tourists to visit.²⁷⁷ However, considering the current political situation in the region, it seems highly inappropriate. For many years, during Xi Jinping’s rule, the Uyghurs have been encouraged to be more like the Han Chinese, but now the state wants to profit off of the ‘exoticness’ of the Uyghurs’

²⁷³ Friend and Thayer, *How China sees the world: Han-centrism and the balance of power in international politics*, 28

²⁷⁴ Starr, *Xinjiang : China's Muslim borderland*, 57

²⁷⁵ Melissa Shani Brown and David O’Brien, “Making the Past Serve the Present”: The Testimonial Tourist Gaze and Infrastructures of Memory in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), China,” *Journal of current Chinese affairs* 52, no. 2 (2023), 257

²⁷⁶ Agence France-Presse, “State-Backed Tourism Booms in China’s Troubled Xinjiang,” *VOA News*, September 9, 2023, Accessed May 5, 2024

²⁷⁷ Brown and O’Brien, “Making the Past Serve the Present”: The Testimonial Tourist Gaze and Infrastructures of Memory in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), China,” 258

region. This closely relates to the commodification of culture, where modern societies choose different aspects of a local culture or practice and use it for profit.²⁷⁸

As mentioned previously, Uyghur language was discouraged, and the practiced religion of Islam was heavily affected in the region as mosques were shut down and religious practices such as wearing headscarves were banned.²⁷⁹ It is “[...] estimated that 30 per cent of Xinjiang’s mosques and other religious sites such as graveyards or shrines have been destroyed in the recent years.”²⁸⁰ Even some common Muslim names, such as Mohammad, have been banned as an effort against religious extremism. When the government started allowing tourism to Xinjiang, some of the destroyed sites were reconstructed, but for tourism purposes. In 2009, it was decided that 85% of the Old City of Kashgar should be rebuilt with the purpose of establishing new high-rise apartments, similar to those established in Ürümqi, for citizens to be resettled in. One of the arguments was that the old buildings were not earthquake-proof, however, critics question this, as the buildings had indeed proved to be stable enough for earthquakes as they had remained for hundreds of years.²⁸¹ In Brown and O’Brien’s conversations with local Uyghurs, concern was raised amongst them as they fear that Kashgar will see an increase in the Han population, similar to that in northern Xinjiang. Furthermore, the fear that their culture will vanish is also strong, as kids see their relatives go through re-education whilst the cultural heritage sights are turned into souvenir shops, which will increasingly make Uyghur culture more foreign to them.²⁸² Not only does the tourism industry distance Uyghurs from their culture, but many have also fled China due to the strict policies, and this is leaving the culture vulnerable to extinction. The demography of Xinjiang has continuously changed after the encouraged Han migration. The percentage of Uyghur population in Xinjiang has dropped significantly from 82.7% in 1945 to 46.1% in 2008, where the Han simultaneously rose from 6.2% in 1945 to 39.2% in 2008.²⁸³ Many of those Uyghurs who have left China have felt it unsafe to return, however, also not felt safe abroad. Researcher David Tobin highlight how Uyghurs in the diaspora are victims of transnational repression, as the Chinese state is still controlling them by e.g., being in charge of the access to call family members still living in Xinjiang.²⁸⁴

²⁷⁸ Robert Shephard, “Commodification, Culture and Tourism,” *Tourist studies* 2, no. 2 (2002), 194

²⁷⁹ Brown and O’Brien, “Making the Past Serve the Present”: The Testimonial Tourist Gaze and Infrastructures of Memory in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), China,” 258

²⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 258

²⁸¹ *Ibid*, 263

²⁸² *Ibid*, 270

²⁸³ Anthony Howell, and C. Cindy Fan, “Migration and Inequality in Xinjiang: A Survey of Han and Uyghur Migrants in Urumqi,” *Eurasian geography and economics* 52, no. 1 (2011), 123

²⁸⁴ Sam Judah, “China using families as hostages to quash Uyghurs dissent abroad,” BBC, July 31, 2023, Accessed May 9, 2024

Although tourism is not the central issue in Xinjiang, I would argue that it is indeed partaking in creating a better image of the conditions in the region, whilst actually exploiting the ‘exoticness’ of the local culture, which the state, for so many years, have repressed. Capitalizing on ‘exoticness’ is not specifically unique to Chinese tourism in Xinjiang, however, as it is a general trend of the tourism industry. Exoticness becomes something that “[...] can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream ... culture.”²⁸⁵ In the case of Xinjiang, however, it becomes particularly problematic though, as the government has previously sought to limit this exact ‘exotic’ culture. The *Global Times*, a Chinese newspaper, often post articles with pictures of the blossoming tourism industry with Uyghurs dancing in colorful traditional dresses, which Brown and O’Brien argue to be an attempt of the state to show that the Uyghurs are thriving and uses it as a discourse illustrating prosperity in the region.²⁸⁶ One local described the business of local dance performances as a way in which “Uyghurs are used as clowns to entertain people.”²⁸⁷ Creating a beautiful image of Xinjiang and the Uyghurs not only provide an exotic experience for the tourists, but scholars, such as Gregory Fayard, that the tourists then serve as ‘information filters’ which then bear witness to the circumstances in the region.²⁸⁸ The potential consequence of this is that the Han Chinese tourists will only see the staged performances and beautiful buildings, and dismiss the chances of human rights abuses taking place.²⁸⁹

As mentioned previously, the region of Xinjiang has been very closed off from the public, but this new boom in tourism has become a way for the government to state that they have nothing to hide. If one assumes that China is in fact colonizing Xinjiang, and seek to limit local Uyghur culture, this new wave of tourism can be perceived as a cover-up. If the state did in fact wish to conserve and celebrate Uyghur culture, why has the previous policies showed differently? If the goal is to let the Han Chinese travel to the far-away region and experience the beauty of life there, why are old mosques and meaningful cultural sites being torn down?

²⁸⁵ Brown and O’Brien, “Making the Past Serve the Present”: The Testimonial Tourist Gaze and Infrastructures of Memory in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), China,” 261

²⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 259

²⁸⁷ Brown and O’Brien, “Making the Past Serve the Present”: The Testimonial Tourist Gaze and Infrastructures of Memory in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), China,” 279

²⁸⁸ Gregory Fayard, “Sun, Sand and Submachine Guns: Tourism in a Militarized Xinjiang, China,” *China Quarterly* 248, no. 1 (2021), 1146

²⁸⁹ Brown and O’Brien, “Making the Past Serve the Present”: The Testimonial Tourist Gaze and Infrastructures of Memory in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), China,” 282

7 Discussion

7.1 Empires versus Nations

One thing that has stood out whilst conducting this research has been the impact of China's dynastic past on its current perception of the state of China. Faraway regions, such as Xinjiang, that are ethnically and culturally very different from the Han Chinese way of life, are argued to be part of China with reference to the Qing dynasty. The argument for the creation of the modern Chinese state of the PRC is the 'One-China'-idea, that perceives China as a nation of majority Han with 55 minority groups.²⁹⁰ The One-China policy, however, is expansionist in the sense that it revolves around the idea that China is not complete until it has united with Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau. This policy therefore has some of the same elements of the early PRC, with a unitary policy that is rooted in the fear of 'splittism'.²⁹¹

Whilst, the increasing sense of Han-Centrism has indeed impacted the Chinese regional policies, I would also argue that this is rooted in something deeper which could connect to the dynastic past. Perhaps, the issue is that China has not succeeded in truly establishing one unified nation. The first development policies in Xinjiang were grounded in a desire to strengthen the border region, in fear of foreign influence. Today, the policies are mainly based on anti-extremism and-separatism, which indicates that there has been a continuous fear of losing the land. Different strategies have been employed to do what it takes to keep the rural regions in control. Xinjiang is also not a singular exclusive case, as China also face similar issues with e.g., Tibet. Like Xinjiang, Tibet has also been an on-off part of the different Chinese dynasties and have a particular distinct culture and religion different to that of majority China. Buddhism is closely tied to Tibetan identity and the region has throughout time been heavily monitored by the Chinese state, due to concerns of Buddhism being mobilized for political unification and separatist movements in Tibet.²⁹² With Xinjiang not being a singular unique case, it seems that China's past as an empire haunts the modern nation of China, as the securitized regional policies are signs of the fear of separation. So, perhaps the issue is that China has not fully succeeded in establishing itself as a nation-state.

All of this led this led me to think of how to correctly define China, as a unit that seems to be neither an empire nor a "regular" nation-state, in the sense that it has a unitary government with

²⁹⁰ Victor Louzon, "Is China behaving like an empire? (and if not, is it good news?)", 5

²⁹¹ Pines, *The everlasting empire: the political culture of ancient china and its imperial legacy*, 162

²⁹² Chung, "Evaluating Xinjiang and Tibet as "Internal Colonies" of China: Evidence from Official Data," 121

heavily centralized power, but also regions with so-called autonomy. In the analysis of the development of the Chinese policies in Xinjiang, it became evident that there has indeed been a clear intensification of these policies, but what is the reasoning for this? As mentioned in the previous section, nationalism, both Uyghur and Han, seem to have continuously reinforced one another, and this could be part of the explanation for the intensification of the policies. However, in my research, I stumbled across the term ‘imperialization’ by Chen, which he describes as “[...] a form of self-identification where one positions oneself as part of an empire, espousing the hierarchies and identity positions ascribed by that empire.”²⁹³ This could be when some distinct groups of people are viewed as ‘less’ than the people in the core (in this case, the Han). In the analysis of Xinjiang, we found that the Uyghurs have always been viewed as different to the Han, and in some cases even referred to as animal-like barbarians. Chen argues that a population is truly colonized, when their only way of escaping colonization is through cultural assimilation.²⁹⁴ Whilst some scholars have been hesitant to accuse China of internal colonialism, this concept brings about new perspective, where colonization is less about territorial domination or invasion, and more about a majority population seeking to force transformation of the minority.²⁹⁵

As noted, there has been a shift in the approach to the Uyghurs and their land, which has become more intrusive as an effect of increased focus on securitization. The shift from imperial rule to rule of the nation-state in China has inevitably changed the level of autonomy of the different regions. During the different dynasties, the western region of Xinjiang was only lightly administered and ruled, however, after the creation of the Chinese nation-state, administration has massively increased, and the locals have less influence.²⁹⁶ After becoming a nation, rather than an empire, China is perhaps struggling with its self-identification. A nation-state is usually defined as “[...] the idea of a single people in a single territory constituting itself as a unique political community”²⁹⁷, whereas an empire would base itself on the idea of a unit comprising of different large political units that maintain some distinction from each other.²⁹⁸ An issue therefore arises in post-imperial states that are e.g., multiethnic or multicultural, when becoming a nation-state. In China’s case, I would argue that the long past of different constellations of dynasties has made it difficult to create one unified nation today. Many claim that there are no empires today, and no colonialism, and instead scholars, such as

²⁹³ O’Brien and Brown, *People, Place, Race, and Nation in Xinjiang, China: Territories of Identity*, 53

²⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 53

²⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 53

²⁹⁶ Victor Louzon, “Is China behaving like an empire? (and if not, is it good news?)”, 4

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 2

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 2

Hardt and Negri with their concept of Empire, have started discussing new types of empires based on economic power or soft power such as the global influence of the U.S.²⁹⁹ Anand, however, argue that this idea, of empires only existing on economical basis, undermines the threats that some communities in e.g., China and India are facing against their collective identity.³⁰⁰ Anand therefore suggests to not dismiss ideas of ‘new imperialism’ where liberated nation-states target “[...] ethno-nationalist peoples subsumed within their boundaries.”³⁰¹ China does not exactly fit this mold as it was technically never colonized during European colonization, however, it was still were much threatened by it. Anand extends the concept of ‘new imperialism’, in connection to China and India, to an idea of Postcolonial Informal Empires (PIE). Since China is officially a nation-state, which recognizes its 55 minorities as equal to the majority, it cannot be defined as truly, or formally, an empire, so Anand instead defines it as an informal empire.³⁰² What are the defining factors of PIE, according to Anand, and does China fit the description? Anand’s definition of PIEs are as follows:

“They have, at the core of their polity, center-periphery relations of power that minoritize borderland ethno-nationalist communities within the large nationalist project, that reluctantly accept cultural difference and autonomy but reject any compromise on military and political control and deny political agency to the borderland minorities.”³⁰³

In addition to this, Anand elaborates and identifies some related features of the so-called PIEs. First off, the PIEs claim to be against imperialism, as a product of their past encounters with western imperialism, but simultaneously deny any accusations of their own imperial acts towards their periphery.³⁰⁴ In Tibet, this ‘self-denial’ comes to show through blaming former foreign imperialists, like Britain, for supporting separatist movements in the region, rather than recognizing that perhaps Tibetans saw a different outcome of the autonomy of the region.³⁰⁵ Historical memory is another big factor that Anand highlights, where the PIEs praise the long history of great empires. However, Anand claims that the historical memory of the PIEs is schizophrenic in some cases. In China, nationalists had long criticized the former Qing dynasty for not being able to protect China enough against foreign

²⁹⁹ Dibyesh Anand, “China and India: Postcolonial Informal Empires in the Emerging Global Order,” *Rethinking Marxism* 24, no. 1 (2012), 70

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 71

³⁰¹ Anand, “China and India: Postcolonial Informal Empires in the Emerging Global Order,” 71

³⁰² *Ibid*, 73

³⁰³ *Ibid*, 73

³⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 74

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 74

imperialists. Furthermore, the negative connotations were also rooted in a disapproval of the empire being run by the foreign Manchus. The Manchus were responsible for officially making Xinjiang part of the Chinese territory, however, are still being looked down upon by the Chinese state even though they now continue to claim these territories as part of Han Chinese heritage.³⁰⁶

From this context, I believe it can be argued that colonialism did not necessarily happen when dynasties of the past invaded and took control of Xinjiang, but more so now when seeking to transform and assimilate the Uyghurs into a forced imagined nation. The policies and approach of China has changed, from the rural autonomous regions having enjoyed more self-rule in the past in form of shared political control through e.g., overlordships or rural religious leaders, to now facing more administrative control from Beijing run by Han Chinese. The official political designation of Xinjiang as an autonomous region has had a different reality than what it seemed to promise. China created autonomous regions within China as a way of recognizing bigger minority groups within, however, the autonomy is actually very little. One example, such as provided in chapter 6.3.3., is that of recruitment for regional CCP leadership, where Han Chinese are chosen instead of Uyghurs, which symbolizes this lack of local autonomy, as it is less likely that the Han Chinese would seek to protect and maintain Uyghur culture. After being deemed an autonomous region within China, I would argue that Xinjiang has in fact become less autonomous. The designation of the region was simply a necessity of the Chinese state to show recognition of the very different population, however, it has not given up any power, but rather begun a state integration project.³⁰⁷

7.2 International Responses and Accountability

To wrap up my thesis, I think it is of high importance to discuss the options of the international community. As mentioned throughout, some scholars have provided strong arguments that the Uyghur culture is at risk, due to the harsh assimilation policies of the state, whereas others find claims of cultural genocide to be exaggerated. This thesis has sided with those that argue that colonial practices and genocidal acts are indeed taking place, however, with the sidenote that the underlying causes are more complex than simply racism and cultural differences. But what can, has, and should be done in cases of human rights violations, such as those China is accused of in Xinjiang? On the global level, we find the concept of ‘the responsibility to protect’ (R2P) which is an international norm that

³⁰⁶ Anand, “China and India: Postcolonial Informal Empires in the Emerging Global Order,” 76

³⁰⁷ Chung, “Evaluating Xinjiang and Tibet as “Internal Colonies” of China: Evidence from Official Data,” 136

seeks to ensure that states protect their citizens from crimes against humanity, and it also encourages other states to hold each other accountable.³⁰⁸ As mentioned in the contextual background, along with evidence provided throughout, many scholars pinpoint particular human rights violations and crimes against humanity taking place in Xinjiang. The one with most proof would be that of *persecution* as it has become clear that fundamental religious and cultural rights are restricted for the Uyghurs. Other accusations are more difficult to prove such as the eyewitness statements accusing the state-run re-education camps of utilizing both physical and psychological violence on the detainees.³⁰⁹

Although scholars highlight international responses to the crimes as disappointing and very limited, there have been some level of action globally. Global response has, so far, mainly been verbal (vocal) than actional, such as the UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk calling on China to end the violations of fundamental rights.³¹⁰ So, on the more disappointing side are these simple threats of political and economic sanctions from multiple nations, as many of these threats have not actually resulted in any bigger sanctions – and the same goes for this ‘raised finger’ from the UN. A few more specific areas actions have been done, however, with minimal effect. The U.S. has e.g., boycotted imports from Xinjiang over time, as a result of the speculations of forced labor in for example the Chinese cotton industry that take part in global clothing production. The U.S. began with blacklisting multiple companies in 2019 but has since then adopted The Uyghurs Forced Labour Prevention Act which is to ensure that no goods made with forced labor in Xinjiang enter the U.S. market.³¹¹ However, this US action, amongst others, is often overshadowed by the U.S.-China trade war where some claim that the actions are with ulterior motives and not based on humanitarian concerns but rather self-serving motivations. This, in particular, relates to the Trump presidency where the rhetoric around China was to warn the international community about the “[...] dangers of “Communist China” to the future of the “free world.”³¹² This narrative came to show in many actions during the Trump presidency such as referring to the COVID-19 pandemic as the ‘Chinese virus’, closing diplomatic ties such as consulates in the U.S., and ending exchange programmes, and creating suspicions of Chinese spies within the U.S.³¹³ The U.S., however, has not been alone in its accusations against China but they have simply been more under the radar. During the Winter Olympics of 2022, many

³⁰⁸ Waller and Albornoz, “Crime and No Punishment? China’s Abuses Against the Uyghurs,” 104

³⁰⁹ Waller and Albornoz, “Crime and No Punishment? China’s Abuses Against the Uyghurs,” 102

³¹⁰ Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber, “UN rights chief says China committing violations in Xinjiang, Tibet,” *Reuters*, March 4, 2024. Accessed May 5, 2024

³¹¹ H.R. 1155 – Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, 2022 (The Senate of the United States). Accessed May 5, 2024.

³¹² Joanne Smith Finley, “Why Scholars and Activists Increasingly Fear a Uyghur Genocide in Xinjiang,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 23, no. 3 (2020), 367

³¹³ *Ibid*, 367

nations took part in a diplomatic boycott that resulted in top officials not attending the games as a symbol of the disapproval of Chinese policies.³¹⁴

Seemingly, global attention to the issue is rising, however, there has still been very limited specific sanctions and actions to pressure China into easing its policies. One of the main difficulties is, of course, China's significant position in global politics and the global economy, as evident by their permanent seat in the UN Security Council.³¹⁵ Furthermore, China has through the years created strong bonds and influence on many developing countries of the world. Developing countries that have been in need of capital has often found support from Chinese investments, as the West, i.e., the World Bank, seek not to support countries that are not in line with international human rights and norms. China, however, have granted loans to countries, which has ultimately benefited the state's political agenda.³¹⁶ This for example came to show when 22 countries in 2019 issued a statement to the UN Human Rights Council accusing China of "[...] mass detention, surveillance and restriction of freedom of movement in Xinjiang."³¹⁷ A grand number of 37 nations came forward to defend China, as they sent a letter expressing support of the regional policies. Amongst these countries were e.g., Russia, North Korea, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. The fact is that amongst these 37 nations supporting China, are multiple nations that are benefiting from financial support from China, as well as those who are to benefit from the BRI.³¹⁸ Inevitably, China has a strong hold on many nations as they provide opportunities for them through loans that cannot be granted elsewhere, and this, along with China's permanent position in the UN Security Council, results in China ultimately having the upper hand in the voting system.³¹⁹

³¹⁴ Debata, "Chinese Assimilationist Policies in Xinjiang: From Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping," 208

³¹⁵ Security Council Report, "UN Security Council Working Methods: The Veto," February 13 2024, Accessed May 7, 2024

³¹⁶ O'Brien and Primiano, "Opportunities and Risks Along the New Silk Road: Perspectives and Perceptions on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region," 139

³¹⁷ Debata, "Chinese Assimilationist Policies in Xinjiang: From Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping," 208

³¹⁸ O'Brien and Primiano, "Opportunities and Risks Along the New Silk Road: Perspectives and Perceptions on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region," 140

³¹⁹ Ibid, 140

8 Conclusion

Understanding why certain policies are being implemented in Xinjiang is crucial to the forward engagement with China regarding the issue. What was revealed in this study is the major importance of China's past as an empire and its struggle to solidify and secure the Chinese nation. Past studies of regional policies have sometimes speculated the issue of the restricting policies in Xinjiang to be connected to the rising global phenomena of Islamophobia. This, however, is to oversimplify the case. When analyzing the regional policies in a broader historical context, it becomes apparent that the regional policies are not necessarily based on disapproval of a specific religion or culture but has more to do with the fact that the said culture is different to that of the Han Chinese and does not align with the government's idea of a uniform state. This is obvious when looking at Xinjiang in the context of other regions such as Tibet, or in connection to China's desire to reunite with Taiwan. Although, at the establishment of the PRC, the state recognized the nation as multiethnic, comprising of 55 minorities, the regional policies, not only in Xinjiang but also e.g., Tibet, have shown very little room for any deviances to the line of the state policies. This study found that, although the Chinese state explains its regional policies through aims to economically develop the rural areas, the policies highly relate to the rise of Han-Centrism and the idea of creating a unified China – comparable to that of an empire, if one considers the urge to also regain Taiwan. In line with different theories on internal colonialism, I would argue, that it is indeed necessary to consider Xinjiang as an example of such. The Chinese government's main argument against this is their claim that Xinjiang has always been part of China, however, this is highly oversimplified, as the region has only been an on-off part of the past Chinese empires, and integration into the Han Chinese culture and political system had been almost non-existent before the establishment of the PRC.

The policies in Xinjiang can be defined as colonial, not due to a sudden recent physical invasion, but due to the CCP's policies over time, that have gradually overtaken the region with heavy administration and monitoring, despite promises of regional autonomy. Following e.g., Blauner's model on the *colonization complex*, which is useful for both external as well as internal colonialism, the first step of compulsory entry of the colonized into the dominant civilization, occurred at the establishment of China as a nation-state, I would argue. Although Xinjiang was part of the Qing empire as well, the actual heavy migration of Han Chinese as well as administrative changes did not occur until after the establishment of the PRC. Blauner's second step of transformation and destruction of indigenous culture has been continuously happening in Xinjiang with e.g., the destruction of

most of Old Town Kashgar and of mosques around Xinjiang, along with the limitations to religious practices in the region and expectation of assimilation to Chinese language and culture. The third aspect of Blauner's model is about management and manipulation of the colonized, which e.g., comes to show by how heavily monitored the region and its population is. The fourth aspect of racism is also highly visible in multiple ways. Although some are easier to prove than others. The racism can be most evidently seen in the mere fact that the so-called anti-extremism efforts of the state target a specific ethnic group. Other indicators of racism, in accordance with Blauner's model, can be unequal treatment in terms of physical or psychological violence, however, these are more difficult to prove. Uyghurs who have fled have, however, revealed many different cases of violence in for example the re-education facilities. Lastly, Blauner highlights the division of occupations between the colonizer and the colonized as a sign of colonialism, which is evident in Xinjiang by the differences in job opportunities and inequality in wages between the Han and the Uyghurs, as well as the lack of representation of Uyghurs in positions of power in the region. Casanova's criteria for internal colonialism, such as exploitation of natural resources and job opportunities, are also highly relevant, and have proven to be illustrated in the case of Xinjiang with e.g., the development of the cotton industry which disproportionately benefited the state over the local Uyghur population. This goes hand in hand with Hecter's description of the relation between the colonizers and the colonized as respectively the advanced and the less advanced people. Conclusively, my argument is that Xinjiang can indeed be analyzed as an internal colony within the modern Chinese nation. Previous to the establishment of the Chinese nation, the region was more of simply another territorial space, but it has now transformed into a colony.³²⁰

In answering the question of whether the case of Xinjiang exemplifies a case of cultural genocide, I would also argue that the circumstances in Xinjiang align with theories on the concept. The Uyghurs' culture is targeted in many ways, as mosques are torn down, religious practices forbidden, cultural practices made into tourism entertainment, Chinese language and culture being taught by force at re-education camps, as well as entire cities being torn down and rebuilt to match Chinese perceptions of what a modern well-functioning city should be. The amount, and extent, of all these measures, are simply too many factors to be coincidental. The biggest issue with the concept of cultural genocide is, as mentioned in the theory section, that it can be extremely difficult to prove intent. However, I would argue that, when speaking of this many different measures which target culture

³²⁰ Mushtaq A. Kaw, "Traversing Xinjiang: A Chinese Colonial Space," *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst: A Bi-weekly Briefing on Current Affairs* (March 9, 2022), Accessed May 5, 2024.

and religion, that one cannot dismiss that, there is a level of intent to at least harm and restrict a specific culture, namely that of the Uyghurs. Whether it is the intention of the Chinese state to completely destroy their culture, however, is harder to prove.

Having analyzed the policies in Xinjiang in the context of internal colonialism contributes to the debate on the theory of internal colonialism, and underlines that colonialism is not to be only understood in the context of overseas imperialism. Lastly, this study also contributes to current studies of Chinese politics and aids the understanding of the behavior of the Chinese state.

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