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Georg Gesk, Thomas Heberer,
Norman Paech, Monika Schädler,
Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer (eds.)

**Xinjiang – A Region at
the Crossroads of
History and Modernity**

Contributions to a Debate

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Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region

Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Xinjiang_map.png

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Introduction

Today's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, or XUAR for short, has a long and eventful history. Xinjiang (新疆) can be translated as "New Frontier". Located on the northwestern edge of the Chinese empire, the region has always been a point of connection, transit and exchange for trade, culture and religion between the continents of Europe, Africa and Asia, but it has also often been the focus of various imperial and colonial desires. Since the 18th century, with brief interruptions, it has been part of the Chinese Empire under the emperors of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and the subsequent Republic of China. As part of the reorganisation of China after 1949, the Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang was established in 1955.

In recent years, this region has been the subject of a global debate centred on ethnicity and human rights. Accusations of genocide have been made. Knowing that such debates have repeatedly become the starting point for violent conflicts and even wars, the editors of this volume, as academics, aim to broaden the view of Xinjiang and bring historical background as well as more recent findings into the debate.

The genesis of the campaigns against China's policy in Xinjiang

The links between Xinjiang and the Uyghurs, a Turkic people who originally lived on the Mongolian plateau north of the Gobi Desert and who formed a powerful empire between 744 and 840, are complex and shifting. This is explored in more detail in individual papers in this volume.¹ Pointing out these connections is intended to promote a more enlightened view of the region and the debates that are taking place today, particularly in relation to ethnicity.

¹ The articles by Hans van Ess and Thomas Heberer in this volume deal in detail with the history of the Uyghurs.

Since the mid-2010s, Xinjiang has been the focus of increasing international attention due to ethnic and religious unrest. This is likely to be linked to China's New Silk Road policy, in which this vast region plays an important role in linking central China with China's Central and South Asian neighbours. Given the allegations of violations of the Uyghurs' basic human rights, this attention is justified. It is all the more urgent, however, to clarify whether and to what extent this debate should also be seen in the context of a growing geopolitical confrontation and the role played by the creation of enemy images.² This is all the more true as the formation of fronts is also a consequence of China's growing economic strength and the new demands for recognition and participation that this entails.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations at the end of the 1970s, which coincided with the beginning of China's reform and opening-up policy, relations between the world power USA and China have become increasingly close in the first decade of the 21st century. Today, the two powers are closely intertwined economically. Since the beginning of the 2010s, however, there have been signs of a turnaround: In November 2011, the Obama administration's "Pivot to Asia" policy shifted the regional focus of US foreign, security and economic policy to Asia in response to China's growing strength. Around the same time, China, led by Xi Jinping as Party Chairman since October 2012 and as President since March 2013, announced the "New Silk Road" initiative. This was followed by the "Made in China 2025" technology policy in 2015. Since then, China has invested heavily in modernising its military. All these measures are aimed at strengthening China on the global stage.

China's quest for a new multipolar order is pitted against the US's unconditional desire to maintain its global dominance. The conflict is being waged by both sides with a variety of means; many speak of a "new Cold War". The threat of military conflict hangs over everything. A new division of the world into two blocs seems to be emerging: The US, the EU, Canada, Japan, Australia and a few other countries, often

² Cf. the article by Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer in this volume.

grouped together as “the West”, present themselves as champions of democracy and freedom, which they want to defend against dictatorial autocrats. China, on the other hand, sees itself as a representative of the Global South, demanding a greater global voice in line with its growing economic weight and population. In the West, there have been calls for ‘de-coupling’ – and more recently for ‘de-risking’. On the Chinese side, this is perceived as an attempt at economic and technological decoupling, with the aim of curbing China’s further development.³

Experience has shown that the creation of enemy stereotypes plays an important role in such situations: the other party is portrayed in a negative light, and corresponding narratives are taken up and disseminated. In addition, each side accuses the other of deliberately controlling information. This has been the case for the US and China for several years. In the wake of EU decisions, European governments and the media are painting a predominantly negative picture of China, while the Chinese government is trying to present a more nuanced picture of Europe, sometimes accused of pursuing a divisive policy towards the EU. Xinjiang has become a focal point in the construction of China’s bogeyman by Western governments and media. Reports of the Chinese government’s harsh and hardly justifiable crackdown on terrorism between 2017 and 2019, blamed on Uyghur groups and individuals and linked to secessionist efforts in Xinjiang, have prompted the US and its Western allies to launch an intense political campaign against China. This has far-reaching implications for the global economy and global security. These reports must therefore be carefully scrutinised.

Probably the first reports in Western media, first of significantly increased security and surveillance measures in Xinjiang (in December 2016 in *Foreign Affairs* and in April 2017 in the *China Brief* of the US

³ See the insightful analysis on the topic of “de-risking” as well as facts and perceptions: *Riskful Thinking. Navigating the Politics of Economic Security*, published by the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China and China Macro Group, Beijing, 2024, <http://www.europeanchamber.com.cn/en/riskful-thinking-report> (access: 03/2024).

Jamestown Foundation⁴), were written by Adrian Zenz and James Leibold.⁵ This was preceded by the adoption of the Chinese Anti-Terrorism Law (中华人民共和国反恐怖主义法, in force since 1 January 2016) and the associated implementation methods of the XUAR⁶ at the end of July 2016. These were followed in March 2017 by the “XUAR Deradicalisation Regulations” (新疆维吾尔自治区去极端化条例), which identified 14 phenomena of extremist behaviour.⁷

On 1 August 2017, the World Uyghur Congress launched its “Campaign Against Internment Camps”.⁸ According to the campaign, more than one million Uyghurs have been arbitrarily detained, tortured and indoctrinated or disappeared in such camps since 1 April of that year.⁹ This figure was also presented by Gay McDougall at the meeting of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in August 2018¹⁰ and circulated by *Reuters* as a UN statement – even before the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

⁴ On the Jamestown Foundation, see “Washington, D.C.-based think tank associated with right-wing actors that monitors security trends in a host of countries stretching from Eurasia to Africa”, http://militarist-monitor.org/profile/jamestown_foundation (access: 01/2024).

⁵ Adrian Zenz: initially European School of Culture and Theology, Korntal, Germany, now Senior Fellow at the Jamestown Foundation and Director in China Studies at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, Washington, USA (non-resident); James Leibold: Professor, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia.

⁶ <http://npc.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0801/c14576-28601824.html> (access: 01/2024); amended version of 10/2018: <http://cati.nwupl.edu.cn/dtzx/flfg/1079.htm> (access: 01/2024).

⁷ Cf. Art. 2; current, amended version of 10/2018: http://www.guancha.cn/politics/2018_10_10_474949.html (access: 01/2024).

⁸ <http://www.uyghurcongress.org/political-indoctrination-camps/> (access: 01/2024).

⁹ “Since April 2017, over 1 million Uyghurs have been rounded up by Chinese police and detained against their will in large internment camps (called ‘re-education’ camps by the Chinese government) where they have been subjected to arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, political indoctrination, torture, and other serious human rights violations”; <http://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/political-indoctrination-camps/> (access: 01/2024).

¹⁰ OHCHR Press Release, 18 August 2018, <http://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2018/08/committee-elimination-racial-discrimination-reviews-report-china> (access: 05/2024).

(OHCHR) published the press report. In October 2018, education in vocational education and training centres (职业技能教育培训中心; VETCs) was explicitly included as an important measure in the XUAR deradicalisation regulations.¹¹ Western commentators saw this as an attempt to retroactively legalise coercive measures that had already taken place.¹²

In November 2018, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI)¹³, which is largely funded by the Australian Department of Defence, published a study on Xinjiang’s re-education camps using satellite imagery, which was quickly picked up by Western media and is still referenced in reports today. ASPI also launched the *Xinjiang Data Project*¹⁴, initially funded by the US State Department. The project sees itself as a platform for information about Xinjiang.

Other documents referenced by Western media include the so-called *Xinjiang Papers*. In November 2019, the *New York Times* reported on 400 pages of leaked documents – speeches by prominent politicians, including a 2014 speech by Xi Jinping on counter-terrorism in Xin-

¹¹ “Article 14 amended; Articles 17, 21, 33 added”, *Global Times*, cited in <http://www.qiaocollective.com/education/> (access: 01/2024).

¹² Cf. e.g. “China changes law to recognise ‘re-education camps’ in Xinjiang”, *South China Morning Post*, 10 October 2018.

¹³ See “ASPI Corporate Plan 2023-2027”, http://previewapi.transparency.gov.au/delivery/assets/80a82ed1-3e33-027b-b7e0-6493f97f18f8/a9fe7ab2-e3e6-451a-b470-91e829cc32ac/2023-24_australian_strategic_policy_institute_ltd_corporate_plan (access: 01/2024): “ASPI is a company limited by guarantee wholly owned by the Australian Government and governed by the ASPI Council. Council members are appointed by the Minister for Defence and include a nominee of the Leader of the Opposition to reinforce the non-partisan nature of ASPI’s work”. (p. 1) “Government funding, in particular through the Department of Defence, remains the key enabler of ASPI’s operations and accounts for 28% of ASPI’s total income”. (p. 5) Other countries and foreign donors also financed ASPI projects: In the 2019-20 financial year, ASPI received funding from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office – UK Embassy in China for the “Support for ‘Uyghurs for sale’ research project” and from the US Department of Defence (via Alion Science and Technology Corporation) for a “Smart tech project”; see <http://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ad-aspi/2021-03/ASPI%20by%20the%20numbers%2019-20.pdf> (access: 05/2024).

¹⁴ <http://xjdp.aspi.org.au/> (access: 01/2024).

jiang. The documents had been leaked to reporters by a Chinese government official.¹⁵ Just a few days later, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists published the so-called *China Cables*, documents on detention camps, data collection and mass surveillance from 2017, leaked by Uyghur exiles.¹⁶ In December 2020, the NGO Human Rights Watch reported on the “Integrated Joint Operations Platform” (IJOP), where data on all residents is collected and analysed by the police. The *Aksu list*, containing data on 2,000 detainees, and the *Karakax list* of Chinese government sources were leaked.¹⁷

At the same time as the inspection visit to China and Xinjiang by the then UN Human Rights Commissioner Michelle Bachelet in May 2022, a number of media outlets – *Spiegel*, *Bayerischer Rundfunk* and eleven other international press outlets – once again published documents: the so-called *Xinjiang Police Files*. According to Adrian Zenz, they were leaked to him by an anonymous hacker who had apparently penetrated the computer systems of Chinese security authorities.¹⁸ Photographs from inside detention camps, confidential instructions from the authorities and speeches by Chinese officials were intended to document the arbitrary and mass detention of Uyghurs in northwest China in 2017 and 2018.

The allegations of genocide¹⁹, brought to the International Criminal Court in The Hague in July 2020 by the Washington-based “East Turkestan Government in Exile”, marked a high point in the Western campaigns against Xinjiang. In December 2020, the court declined to hear the case. However, in January 2021, shortly before the end of the

¹⁵ Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xinjiang_papers (access: 01/2024).

¹⁶ Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China_Cables (access: 01/2024).

¹⁷ Cf. <http://www.hrw.org/de/news/2020/12/09/china-big-data-program-targets-xinjiangs-muslims> (access: 01/2024).

¹⁸ *Der Spiegel*, 24/05/2024, <http://www.spiegel.de/ausland/xinjiang-police-files-worum-geht-es-bei-der-china-recherche-a-006c68edb722-44bc-b06c-07ffbca85954> (access: 01/2024).

¹⁹ The contributions by Norman Paech, Barry Sautman and Yitzhak Shichor in this volume are fundamental.

Trump administration, then US Secretary of State Pompeo officially adopted the genocide allegation against China; his designated successor, Antony Blinken, followed suit. Resolutions to this effect were passed by the Canadian House of Commons and the Dutch Parliament in February 2021, by the British Parliament in April 2021 and by the French National Assembly in January 2022.²⁰ In June 2020, a report by Adrian Zenz in a publication by the Jamestown Foundation²¹ on forced sterilisations and forced birth planning measures against the Uyghur population had also contributed to the accusation of genocide. While this report was rapidly disseminated in the Western media, a number of Chinese counter-reports (including by the Human Rights Institute School of the Southwest University of Political Sciences and Law²²) were largely ignored or dismissed as unreliable.²³

In addition to genocide allegations, Western governments have also imposed sanctions against individual XUAR politicians and organisations as well as economic sanctions. The US also took the lead here: a law passed in June 2020, the *Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act*²⁴, sanctions foreign individuals and organisations responsible for human rights violations in the XUAR by confiscating assets and denying visas. It requires presidential reports to Congress on human rights abuses in Xinjiang, the protection of US citizens and residents from harassment

²⁰ See the chronology of the Xinjiang debate on the website of the Qiao Collective: <http://www.qiaocollective.com/education/xinjiang> (access: 01/2024); see also Wissenschaftlicher Dienst des Bundestag, 12 May 2021, <http://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/842080/36cc70595f4d20a03e609de00eabce4d/WD-2-027-21-pdf-data.pdf> (access: 01/2024).

²¹ <http://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Zenz-Sterilizations-IUDs-and-Mandatory-Birth-Control-FINAL-27June.pdf> (access: 01/2024).

²² See 西南政法大学人权研究院：郑国恩所谓新疆维吾尔族强制绝育种族灭绝独立报告的分析, *Globe Net*, 16 September 2020, <http://c.m.163.com/news/a/FML395P60514R9OJ.html> (access: 01/2024); see also “Six lies in Adrian Zenz’s Xinjiang report of ‘genocide’”, <http://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-09-14/Six-lies-in-Adrian-Zenz-s-Xinjiang-report-of-genocide--TMIv2qWemA/index.html> (access: 01/2024).

²³ For detailed information on this topic, see the article by Barry Sautman in this volume.

²⁴ <http://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/3744> (access: 01/2024).

and intimidation by the Chinese government, and the acquisition and development of technology for detention and mass surveillance in the region. In July 2020, the US also announced sanctions against the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps²⁵ and the then Communist Party leader of XUAR, Chen Quanguo. The European Union, Canada and the UK followed suit in March 2021 with sanctions against XUAR officials.²⁶ China responded with counter-sanctions against individuals and institutions, which in turn led the EU to halt negotiations on the long-prepared Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) with China.

The allegation of forced labour as a human rights crime in the XUAR has increasingly become a central argument in the Western debate. One of the first reports in this regard was published by the *Associated Press* in December 2018²⁷ about the Chinese company *Hetian Taida Apparel*, a supplier to the US sportswear manufacturer *Badger Sportswear*. The textile company would cooperate with the camps, i.e., the so-called vocational education and training centres, and employ inmates who would have to work in factories for little or no pay. Zenz and the West-

²⁵ The Production and Construction Corps (PAK) was founded in 1954 by the Chinese central government with the task of reclaiming and securing the border region; for the history of the organisation in the context of regional history, see Hauke Neddermann (2010), *Sozialismus in Xinjiang. Das Produktions- und Aufbaucorps in den 1950er Jahren*. Münster: Lit. The PAK is responsible for administrative and legal matters and is subject to dual leadership by the central government and the Xinjiang government. In the mid-2010s, its units comprised around 11.9 per cent of the Xinjiang population, 4.3 per cent of the total area of Xinjiang and 20 per cent of the cultivated area. Together with the People's Liberation Army and the Armed Police Force, the PAK is said to play an important role in resisting separatist sabotage and infiltration attempts from home and abroad and in maintaining stability and security in the border region; State Council Information Office of the PRC (2014), *The History and Development of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps*, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2014/10/05/content_281474992384669.html (access: 04/2024). The 2.7 million inhabitants (2014) of the PAK include around 250,000 Muslims (2003); see <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20030526/9.htm> (access: 04/2024).

²⁶ <http://www.qiaocollective.com/education/> (access: 01/2024).

²⁷ *AP*, 19 December 2018, <http://apnews.com/article/99016849cddb4b99a048b863b52c28cb> (access: 01/2024).

ern media also consider the transfer of labour to be forced labour: while China sees it as a tool for poverty alleviation, the West accuses it of being “forced labour” because employment outside the hometown “is not voluntary.”²⁸ After more than 15 months of debate in the US Congress, the *Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act* (UFLPA)²⁹ became law in December 2021. Since June 2022, it has restricted imports of goods made with forced labour. It prohibits the importation of products from listed manufacturers that use forced labour in Xinjiang or that use forced labour from the Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz or other persecuted ethnic groups in Xinjiang in cooperation with the XUAR government, as well as for manufacturers that use such products as inputs. The US Customs will not issue an import permit unless the importer can clearly demonstrate that the product is free of forced labour.

“Forced labour in Xinjiang” is a focus of the “Forced Labor Lab” project at the Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice at Sheffield Hallam University in the UK. The investigations, with reports since

²⁸ See Adrian Zenz (2021), “Coercive Labor and Forced Displacement in Xinjiang’s Cross-Regional Labor Transfer Program. A Process-Oriented Evaluation”, *Jamestown Foundation*, <http://jamestown.org/program/coercive-labor-and-forced-displacement-in-xinjiangs-cross-regional-labor-transfer-program/> (access: 04/2024); *BBC*, “‘If the others go, I’ll go’: Inside China’s scheme to transfer Uyghurs into work”, 02/03/2021, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-56250915> (access: 01/2024).

²⁹ “This bill imposes importation limits on goods produced using forced labour in China, especially the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and imposes sanctions related to such forced labor. [...] The *Forced Labor Enforcement Task Force* shall report to Congress a strategy for preventing the importation of goods produced in China using forced labor. The strategy must contain certain information, including a list of entities (1) producing goods in Xinjiang using forced labor; or (2) working with the government in Xinjiang to move forced labor or Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, or members of other persecuted groups out of Xinjiang. [...] The U.S. Customs and Border Protection shall generally presume that goods produced by these entities and certain other entities, including those sourcing material from Xinjiang or involved with Chinese government forced labour programs, are barred from importation into the United States. An importer may rebut this presumption by establishing, with clear and convincing evidence, that the good in question was not produced wholly or in part using forced labour”; <http://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/6256> (access: 01/2024).

2021, initially focussed on the textile industry and have since expanded to include the automotive and solar industries.³⁰ Laura Murphy, Professor of Human Rights and Contemporary Slavery at the centre, was an adviser to the under-secretary for policy in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) during the Biden administration to support its policy on the implementation of the UFLPA.³¹

In Germany, the Volkswagen Group has been at the centre of allegations of forced labour. In line with China's "Go West" policy³², the group started production in the Ürümqi Economic & Technological Development Zone in September 2013, together with its Shanghai joint venture partner SAIC. Since then, the criticism has continued. Even an audit of the plant at the end of 2023, which certified that the factory was free of forced labour, did not appease critics at home and abroad. BASF, also under fire, announced its withdrawal from two joint ventures in the XUAR in February 2024. More and more companies came under pressure. For example, VW, BMW and Jaguar are alleged to have sourced parts of their products exported to the US from the XUAR in violation of the UFLPA (as of May 2024). The March 2024 agreement between the European Council and the European Parliament to ban products made with forced labour also targets China and Xinjiang.

³⁰ See <http://www.shu.ac.uk/helena-kennedy-centre-international-justice/research-and-projects/all-projects/forced-labour-lab> (access: 01/2024).

³¹ Cf. <http://sourcingjournal.com/topics/labor/dhs-laura-murphy-sheffield-hallam-helena-kennedy-xinjiang-forced-labor-uyghur-465553/> (access: 01/2024); <http://www.csis.org/people/laura-t-murphy> (accessed: 04/2025).

³² In 1999, the central government adopted the "Great Development of the West" (西部大开发) package of measures with the aim of reducing the development disparities between the coastal areas and the regions of central and western China, which had steadily increased with the start of the reform and opening-up policy. With centralised investments and increased regional exchange, economic development was to be promoted in 70 per cent of the country's territory; among other things, companies from the coastal areas were to establish branch companies in central and western China; see <http://zh.wikipedia.org/zh-hans/西部大开发> (access: 04/2024).

Xinjiang in the United Nations

In the aftermath of 9/11 (2001), the US formed global alliances against terror and placed the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) on its list of “Persons Who Commit, Threaten To Commit, or Support Terrorism” in September 2002 and on the list of “Foreign Terrorist Organisations” (FTOs) in April 2004.³³ At the request of the USA, China, Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan, the United Nations also included ETIM on the UN Security Council’s “ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions List” in 2002.³⁴ While the group remains on the UN list, it was removed from the US terror list in October 2020 on the orders of then US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo³⁵: According to the State Department, there has been no credible evidence of the movement’s existence for more than ten years.³⁶

Between 2019 and 2023, China’s Xinjiang policy was discussed at the UN eight times. Contrary to the expectations of Western governments that submitted motions condemning China, the counter-motions supporting China’s position received far more support: according to a constantly updated list by the Qiao Collective, a group of Chinese expatriates³⁷, Beijing’s position was supported by a total of 86 states at one point, while the critics were supported by only 56. In terms of population, the pro-China camp represents 49.3 per cent of the world’s population (or 31.4 per cent outside China), while the anti-China camp represents only 15.8 per cent of the world’s population.³⁸

³³ <http://www.qiaocollective.com/education/xinjiang> (access: 01/2024).

³⁴ <http://scsanctions.un.org/815u9en-all.html#alqaeda>; see also <http://www.qiaocollective.com/education/xinjiang#timeline-of-events> (access: 01/2024).

³⁵ http://www.voanews.com/a/extremism-watch_uighur-diaspora-hails-removal-etim-us-terror-list/6200004.html (access: 01/2024).

³⁶ <http://www.dw.com/en/us-removes-separatist-group-condemned-by-china-from-terror-list/a-55527586> (access: 04/2024).

³⁷ <http://www.qiaocollective.com/education/> (access: 01/2024).

³⁸ Cf. <http://www.qiaocollective.com/xinjiang-at-the-un> (access: 01/2024).

The OHCHR Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery issued three press releases on human rights violations in Xinjiang: in March 2021, June 2022 and September 2022. (The 2023 press release on China, however, was on human rights violations in Tibet, with allegations of the forced placement of Tibetan children in boarding schools).³⁹

In May 2022, UN Human Rights Envoy Michelle Bachelet travelled to China and Xinjiang, as mentioned above. The 48-page final report of August 2022 describes the genesis of the visit (invitation from the Chinese government as early as September 2018), separatist and terrorist events in the XUAR from 2009 to 2016 (pp. 5-6), legal and administrative measures taken by the XUAR government against terrorism and extremism (pp. 5-11), deprivation of liberty, VETCs and other human rights issues (pp. 11-40). The report summarises: “Serious human rights violations have been committed in XUAR in the context of the Government’s application of counter-terrorism and counter-‘extremism’ strategies”.⁴⁰ Recommendations included the release of arbitrarily detained persons and further cooperation with OHCHR (pp. 43-45). The Chinese government responded with a detailed 131-page rebuttal, published as an annex to the OHCHR report. It detailed the deradicalisation programmes, including the establishment of the VETCs, as counter-terrorism and anti-poverty measures, as well as the legal and administrative regulations and measures.⁴¹

³⁹ See <http://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/> (access: 01/2024).

⁴⁰ UN OHCHR 2022, 45. <http://www.ohchr.org/documents/country-reports/ohchr-assessment-human-rights-concerns-xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region> (access: 01/2024).

⁴¹ Information Office of the People’s Government of XUAR (2022), *Fight against Terrorism and Extremism in Xinjiang: Truth and Facts*, <http://de.china-embassy.gov.cn/det/zt/7c/202209/P020220903589368181607.pdf> (access: 05/2024).

A trip to Xinjiang and a sober view

Against the backdrop of the overwhelming press and media campaign in Germany and the “Western” world in general, the editors of this volume felt it necessary to take a closer look at the situation in Xinjiang, its historical background and, of course, at the Chinese narrative – as one of several voices. As the example of the Chinese government’s counter-statement attached to the OHCHR report of August 2022 shows, it is important for Beijing to explain the situation in Xinjiang to foreign countries, often in English. In addition, the Chinese government has published a large number of *white papers* on the subject with extensive data sets⁴², explaining individual problems in detail and commenting on allegations. Since 2017, these have included in particular the following white papers:

- *Human Rights in Xinjiang – Development and Progress* (June 2017)⁴³
- *The Fight Against Terrorism and Extremism and Human Rights Protection in Xinjiang* (March 2018)⁴⁴
- *Cultural Protection and Development in Xinjiang* (Nov. 2018)⁴⁵
- *Historical Matters Concerning Xinjiang* (July 2019)⁴⁶
- *Vocational Education and Training in Xinjiang* (Aug. 2019)⁴⁷
- *Employment and Labour Rights in Xinjiang* (Sep. 2020)⁴⁸

⁴² <http://www.qiaocollective.com/education/> (access: 01/2024) and <http://english.scio.gov.cn/> (access: 01/2024).

⁴³ http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2017-06/02/content_40946969.htm (access: 04/2024).

⁴⁴ http://english.scio.gov.cn/node_8010999.html (access: 04/2024).

⁴⁵ http://english.scio.gov.cn/2018-11/15/content_72675096.htm (access: 04/2024).

⁴⁶ http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/21/content_WS5d33fed5c6d00d362f668a0a.html (access: 04/2024).

⁴⁷ http://english.scio.gov.cn/2019-08/16/content_75106484.htm (access: 04/2024).

⁴⁸ http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/202009/17/content_WS5f62cef6c6d0f725793c192.html and http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2020-09/17/content_5544154.html (access: 04/2024).

- *The Communist Party of China and Human Rights Protection – A 100-Year Quest* (June 2021)⁴⁹
- *Respecting and Protecting the Rights of All Ethnic Groups in Xinjiang* (July 2021)⁵⁰
- *Xinjiang Population Dynamics and Data* (Sep. 2021).⁵¹

Reports on Xinjiang’s economy, society, policies, history and culture can be found on the English-language website of the State Council Information Office and in the Chinese daily newspapers *China Daily* and *Global Times*. In addition, the continuing Western accusations have caused some resentment among Chinese citizens, prompting them to post their own reports and videos on social media.⁵² In the Western debate, however, this information is hardly noticed or is generally dismissed as Chinese narratives or Chinese government-controlled propaganda.⁵³

In view of the gradual deterioration in political relations between Germany/EU and China (including the new geopolitical bloc formation alluded to at the beginning) and the contradictory or even conflicting statements from Western and Chinese sources, a small group of China scholars from various disciplines and with decades of experience in China, as well as an expert in international law, were interested in getting their own impression of the situation on the ground. The idea for

⁴⁹ http://english.www.gov.cn/news/topnews/202106/24/content_WS60d41f65c6d0df57f98dbcfe.html (access: 04/2024).

⁵⁰ http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/202107/14/content_WS60ee599bc6d0df57f98dcd8c.html and http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-07/14/content_562480.htm (access: 04/2024).

⁵¹ http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/202109/26/content_WS615016cfc6d0df57f98e0e16.html (access: 04/2024).

⁵² The Qiao Collective has compiled many of these on its website: <http://www.qiao-collective.com/xinjiang-responds> (access: 01/2024). There is also an indication that 900 corresponding videos have been uploaded to *YouTube*; in January 2024, for example, there were app. 650 “Uyghur Stories”; see <http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCK9Ucky97ozdCwGL-bGM43Q/videos> (access: 01/2024).

⁵³ The article by Hauke Neddermann in this volume provides detailed information on this topic.

the trip came from the group, which also suggested places, institutions and interlocutors. As the intention was academic, the partner organisation was an academic institution: the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences (XJASS). The participants were aware that this was a state organisation and that the possibilities for obtaining information were generally limited. With limited time on both sides, the trip focussed on the prefecture of Kashgar in the south, one of the core regions of the Uyghur population, and Xinjiang's capital, Ürümqi, where issues already raised by the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner were discussed, particularly with legal institutions and academics. The group also raised questions about the whereabouts of the two renowned Uyghur academics, Prof. Tashpolat Tiyip (塔西甫拉提·特依拜, geographer, former president of Xinjiang University) and Prof. Rahile Dawut (热依拉·达吾提, the world's leading ethnologist in the field of Uyghur culture). The trip was funded by the participants themselves. It was also agreed that there should be no restrictions on the proposed facilities, the questions raised by the group and the proposed locations and dialogue partners. Due to the academic nature of the trip, press and other media coverage was rejected as a matter of principle. After the trip, two of the participants published a short statement in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (11 September 2023) calling for a re-examination of the obviously changing conditions in Xinjiang.

The academics invited by the XJASS, Georg Gesk, Thomas Heberer, Norman Paech, Monika Schädler and Helwig Schmidt-Glinterz, travelled to the regions of Kashgar and Ürümqi for several days in May 2023. Their main interest was not to investigate the undeniable allegations about the human rights situation. Rather, they wanted to find out whether anything had changed in regional policies since the appointment of a new political leadership in Xinjiang at the end of 2021 and, if so, in what direction. The group focussed on the following topics: [1] local and regional development policies and instruments; [2] employment and social policies (including employment policies, labour remuneration, and gender equality); [3] state institution building/legal system; [4] education, culture, religion and language. In this context, at the

group's suggestion, relevant institutions were visited, and discussions were held there, as well as discussions with representatives of villages, townships and counties in order to deepen and classify what had been seen. Discussions in Kashgar, each lasting several hours and involving around 25 participants – teachers, headmasters, company employees, village, district and county officials, heads of the Xinjiang Bureau of Education and staff from the Xinjiang Revitalisation Bureau – focussed on the education for ethnic minorities (kindergarten, primary, secondary, vocational schools) and rural development in Xinjiang. In Ürümqi, discussions were held with urban planners on urban development.

A panel discussion with members of the Legal Committee of the XUAR People's Congress with around 20 participants focussed on legal developments in the region, with an emphasis on counter-terrorism in the 2010s and today. In another round, around ten academics from the XJASS spoke on the topic of protecting the culture of ethnic minorities. There were many opportunities for dialogue during the numerous fact-finding tours on culture, education and the economy in Kashgar and Ürümqi, as well as with the accompanying XJASS researchers. People from different ethnic groups – Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Han Chinese – were involved in all the discussions. In preparation, discussions were held in Beijing with academics from various disciplines and with Xinjiang researchers on a self-organised and informal basis. These interlocutors were assured of confidentiality.

First results

The travellers have summarised their initial findings from their days in Kashgar and Ürümqi. Firstly, it is important to note that Xinjiang is no longer a closed region and can be visited openly and relatively easily.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ This was also noted by NZZ reporters in autumn 2023: “The NZZ travelled to Xinjiang on its own in November [2023]. Although the government had the reporters shadowed, it did not interfere with the investigation”; see [http://www.nzz.ch/ international/umerziehungslager-in-xinjiang-es-gibt-sie-noch-von-normalitaet-keine-spur-ld.1767739](http://www.nzz.ch/international/umerziehungslager-in-xinjiang-es-gibt-sie-noch-von-normalitaet-keine-spur-ld.1767739) (access: 04/2024), translation by the editors.

The group had expected to find a situation similar to that of 2021: omnipresent controls, army and police posts everywhere, and an oppressive atmosphere. Therefore, they were completely surprised that all this was gone and that “normality” seemed to prevail. The conversations also took place in an open atmosphere.

Change processes and “return to ‘normality’”

The trip illustrated that the 2017-2020 “fight against terrorism and Islamism” in Xinjiang can be seen in retrospect as a transitional phase, which is now to be replaced by a phase of renewed “legalisation”. The new Party secretary, Ma Xingrui, who took office in December 2021, spoke to the research group of a return to “normality” as soon as possible, which is already evident in everyday life, especially in the predominantly Uyghur region of southern Xinjiang, in both urban and rural areas. State arbitrariness in the context of “anti-terror measures”, and in some cases in the period leading up to them, is now acknowledged and explained as a temporary “terror emergency”. There is also an unmistakable acceptance of the new modernisation drive (education, health care, and work) that southern Xinjiang, in particular, has experienced in recent years and which continues, especially among the Uyghur population. The terror and its consequences have affected and traumatised not only the Han but also the Uyghur population. The camps set up during the height of the war on terror are said to have been largely dismantled. (Adrian Zenz, who – as noted above – has produced most of the documentation on developments in Xinjiang in recent years, makes a similar argument in an article published in the July 2023 issue of *The China Journal*). According to Ma Xingrui and other leaders, this phase should now be followed by the institutionalisation of law and the return to or expansion of legal procedures. The people of Xinjiang would need to regain confidence in the legal system.

Of course, the Party Secretary's announcement of a "return to 'normality'" alone is not convincing in light of the previous developments. Further visits to the region are therefore needed, as well as concrete investigations into the extent to which there are further signs of such a return.

Education and social programmes for stabilisation

With the introduction of 15 years of free kindergarten, schooling and vocational training for young Uyghurs, the state has initiated a new development push primarily for the south of Xinjiang and is gradually extending this to the north in order to proactively counter new conflicts. This includes the creation of a largely state-subsidised healthcare system, as well as regionally distributed and adapted development and resource aid from 19 Chinese provinces (incl. investment in industry, agriculture, services and education) to create training and employment opportunities for Uyghurs, paid in accordance with national regulations.

One example of the new policy is the modern vocational training centres that now exist in every county in Xinjiang. A technical vocational college in Kashgar with some 10,000 students, undoubtedly a model institution, was generously endowed by the wealthy province of Guangdong. To encourage rural families to send their children there, students received 200 yuan a month to support their parents, in addition to free education. In particular, young members of local ethnic minorities, including a high proportion of young women, receive free vocational training. A total of 22 subjects were offered, including car mechanics, IT, mechanical engineering, fashion design, tourism, etc.

The many state-subsidised branches of companies in eastern Chinese partner provinces are mostly locally adapted companies in areas such as agricultural machinery or food production. The companies offer training and promotion opportunities and, according to their own statements, adhere to national wage regulations. In rural areas, many women are employed in such companies, and one Uyghur manager explained how difficult it was to persuade village men to allow their wives to work. In

the end, they were persuaded by the additional income, which helped raise living standards. Another example is a village cooperative that specialises in the production of traditional Uyghur musical instruments as a way of generating additional income while preserving Uighur tradition. During the heyday of Islamist rule, music and the making of musical instruments were stigmatised on religious grounds. Now, however, the local authorities are subsidising the project, as many musical instruments are needed in Xinjiang schools – also helping to preserve Uyghur culture.

One measure of the success of this policy was the fact that the relics of extensive police surveillance (dusty, moth-covered checkpoints along the rural arteries) were still there, but had clearly not been used for some time in the regions visited.

No special discrimination against the Uyghur language and culture was found. Although Mandarin is the main language of instruction in schools, Uyghur is always offered as a subject at compulsory school age, as is the case in all areas of China where ethnic minorities have their own language and script. The state is clearly committed to preserving the Uyghur cultural heritage and is investing considerable financial resources to increase the pool of knowledge needed to do so. There is currently an academic debate on the Chinese internet about the need to strengthen the teaching of the Uyghur language in schools while at the same time addressing the shortage of Uyghur teachers.

Why this book?

This publication is the result of a desire to make the findings of the trip and further research on the subject available to a wider audience. The aim is not to provide a general, comprehensive description of Xinjiang and the Uyghurs. Rather, the editors wish to focus on certain areas of conflict that have received too little attention in the current discussion of the XUAR, supported by categorisations by other China, Xinjiang and Central Asia scholars.

An episode in the autumn of 2023 shows how important such information and analysis is for discussions in China studies: On 11 September 2023, as mentioned above, two of the travellers – Thomas Heberer and Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer – published a guest article in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*: “Jenseits von Hass und Zorn – nach der erfolgreichen Kampagne gegen Terrorismus und Islamismus sollen sich nach dem Willen Pekings die Verhältnisse in Xinjiang wieder normalisieren [*Beyond Hatred and Anger – After the Successful Campaign against Terrorism and Islamism, Beijing Wants Conditions in Xinjiang to Return to Normal*]”. The article was originally 18,000 characters long but had to be cut to 9,000 at the request of the newspaper. The newspaper would then only accept 5,000, preferably “provocative theses”, so the authors had to give up most of their arguments. It was only after a lengthy discussion that they agreed to publish the heavily abridged article in order to start a debate. The article then sparked an emotional debate in the German Sinology community, which Mechthild Leutner addresses in her chapter “Scholars and Sinologists as ‘China-Friends’ and ‘China-Understanders’: A traditional means of appreciation and devaluation from the 17th century to the present” in this volume.

The reactions and their vehemence once again underlined the great need for discussion on the subject of Xinjiang. They revealed existential questions within German China studies: How can we do research on China and on Xinjiang in particular? How can we understand what “really” happened and is happening in Xinjiang? The old adage that seeing with your own eyes is a thousand times better than hearing or reading about it still applies. But what if you can only travel accompanied, i.e. “under supervision”? What if the people you’re researching are afraid to say anything or to tell “the truth”? Above all, what if you don’t travel at all for fear of endangering your local research partners or even yourself?

The editors of this volume are aware that the entire Xinjiang discourse in the Western media cannot be seen in isolation from general China policy and the new ‘systemic rivalry’ between ‘the West’ and ‘the autocracies’ alluded to at the beginning. Even if the present volume is

understood in this context, the editors and authors concentrate on the conditions in Xinjiang itself. The complex situation in Central Asia as a whole is highlighted by Udo Barkmann's contribution, "Central Asia as a continental bridge or Thucydides trap?" With the information, scholarly material and reflections offered in this volume, which are currently outside the mainstream of the Xinjiang debate, the editors aim to contribute to a culture of understanding within and beyond academia that leaves room for pluralistic academic positions and contributes to an open exchange of scholarly opinions.

Critical questions about Xinjiang remain unanswered: How justified are some of the convictions under the anti-terror regime? Why are scientists Rahile Dawut and Ilham Tohti still in prison? What is known about Tashpolat Tiyip? What about the many other prisoners? When we talk about legalisation, it remains unclear how this will be implemented and how the promise of legalisation will be fulfilled. Nevertheless, the plea of the editors and other contributors to this anthology regarding Xinjiang and China is clear: they recommend intensifying academic exchanges with scholars on the ground as well as with scholars from other parts of China, some of whom have devoted their academic work to Xinjiang for decades.

As much as the editors are associated with the contributions in this volume, they are the contributions of individual authors who are responsible for their own work. Nevertheless, a brief overview is provided here in the hope that the contributions, both collectively and individually, will be recognised, understood and discussed as voices in the understanding of developments in Xinjiang and the international embedding of the Xinjiang discourse.

The primary intention of the editors of this volume is to place our own experiences and insights within a broader historically informed framework that takes into account the various contemporary public spheres and forums of discourse. As an introduction to longer time horizons, *Hans van Ess's* contribution analyses the eventful history of the Uyghur connection to the Xinjiang region, as well as the role of members of other Turkic-speaking peoples in this transit area and in the various

oasis towns. It becomes clear that “it was only through the resettlement measures of the Qing, who wanted to reclaim the empty or emptied land so that the military expansion would pay off”, that the Uyghur population began to spread across the whole of present-day Xinjiang in the 19th century. At the same time, the high proportion of Uyghurs in the population at the time of the founding of the People’s Republic can only be explained by migration movements since the founding of the Chinese Republic in 1911.

Thomas Heberer then examines the reasons for the Chinese leadership’s harsh behaviour in the Xinjiang region, especially since 2014. Since the 1980s, in the wake of China’s reform and opening-up policy, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Central Asian states, as well as the spread of Islamist movements in the Middle East and in Central, Southeast and South Asia, Xinjiang has witnessed a creeping Islamisation of society, combined with a rise in separatist movements and an increase in terrorist acts, first in Xinjiang and then in other regions of eastern China. The article begins with an overview of the Islamic ethnic groups and the history and characteristics of Islam in the region. It then briefly discusses the recent history of conflict, the experience of which continues to influence the collective consciousness of the region’s ethnic groups, before turning to the growing tendencies of separatist and Islamist movements. The influence of such currents from China’s neighbouring countries is also discussed, as is the renaissance of Islam and growing ethnicity, especially among the Uyghurs and Kazakhs. The growing security dilemma has created a sense of national threat among China’s political leadership and large sections of the population, which the state has attempted to counter with a policy of enforcing security and, in some cases, overriding the rule of law. At the same time, nationality policy became more focused on the process of nation-building. This was accompanied by a change in nationality policies and increased disciplinary procedures.

Norman Paech looks at the allegations of human rights abuses against China, in particular the accusation of genocide and crimes against humanity, and the response of the German Bundestag’s Committee on

Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid. He adds further perspectives as well as the statement of the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet. He also sees the considerable terror problems as a consequence of the economic neglect and lack of prospects of the Uyghurs and the continuing immigration of Han Chinese and the resulting ethnic tensions in Xinjiang in recent decades. Against this background, he examines the Chinese concept of human rights and concludes with an “assessment under international law” of the allegations made against China: he considers it unjustified to conclude from the various measures taken by the Beijing government, which could be described as a “development dictatorship”, that they were carried out with the intention of “destroying the Uyghur group as an ethnic minority”. With regard to other allegations of torture, persecution and “cultural genocide”, the article calls for further investigations and an open “dialogue on a political and scientific basis with Chinese partners”.

In view of the current situation in Xinjiang, Chinese politicians and the editors of this volume speak of a legalisation after a peak phase of the anti-terror struggle. *Georg Gesk* provides a detailed analysis in his article “The goal of realising the rule of law – in Xinjiang”. He reconstructs the Chinese rule of law programme, which has been enshrined in the Chinese constitution (1982) since 1999 and has undergone significant changes since Xi Jinping took office, and situates the efforts and procedures to stabilise the XUAR within this framework. He traces how Xinjiang’s political and state leadership has combined its large-scale project to comprehensively improve the structural foundations of society in the fight against Islamist terrorism and ethnic separatism with the establishment of rule-of-law structures and processes. This article examines in detail the prevention and education goals associated with the much-criticised detention centres and provides a legal analysis of these facilities. Ethnic minorities, who form the local majority in parts of Xinjiang, are to be integrated into society by participating in the division of labour while preserving their traditional cultural achievements. Gesk shows how XUAR legislation has standardised these tasks not only in terms of substantive law, but also in terms of procedural law.

Barry Sautman focusses on the accusation of “genocide”, placing it in the context of historical experiences with genocide. He also examines the concept of “cultural” genocide before looking specifically at legal definitions and discussing right-wing repopulation discourses (“Great Replacement”) and the concept of “bloodless genocide” coined by Franz Fanon. His analysis is complemented by a description of related debates in the United States, France, Italy and other countries. He also explores the Janus-faced nature of ideas of purity and extermination as well as the existential fears of the white population in the US. Taking a broad view of real and fictional plots, accusations and conspiracy theories in recent history, he questions the claim of a bloodless genocide against the Uyghurs in China, especially through birth control – not least in light of freely available population statistics. At the same time, the genocide allegations are placed in the context of fantasies of self-empowerment in the Western world, particularly in the United States.

The article by Israeli Xinjiang researcher *Yitzhak Shichor* in *Sociology of Islam*, 2023, reprinted in our German-language volume with a “Postscript” (April 2024), made clear how much the Xinjiang debate is a package of Western fantasies and must be understood as a propaganda campaign. The debate is counterproductive – not least because it runs counter to the interests of the Uyghurs themselves. Not only is the US hurting itself with its sanctions against China, but the accusation of genocide virtually ignores the question of how to improve the living conditions of the Uyghur population. According to Shichor, the debate is primarily an anti-China campaign – and at the same time, he says, a distraction from the crimes against humanity committed by Western states themselves until the middle of the 20th century. Precisely because the campaign originally initiated by the World Uyghur Congress from Washington is not in the interests of the Uyghurs, but rather harms them, Shichor has written this “Postscript” to defend himself against the accusations made following his article of 2023 and to sharpen his argument. This English-language volume contains only the postscript.

Mechthild Leutner examines the question of why, in times of upheaval, China in particular is declared an enemy and instrumentalised in geopolitical activities and disputes in order to pursue one's own interests – perceived or real. In her contribution, she looks at shifts and changes, particularly in the European image of China, embedded in general trends in the history of ideas and the changing political environment. At the heart of this has always been the question of perspectives on and approaches to China. Ultimately, the article illustrates a centuries-long quest for 'China competence' – the latest political calls for this are therefore just another chapter. In looking at the history of China studies, especially in German-speaking countries, it becomes clear that while there has almost always been a diversity of discourse and different positions, there has also almost always been a tendency to construct China as Europe's antithesis – in a positive or negative sense. In the concluding part of her remarks, the author places her findings in the context of current debates on world order, new animosities within Chinese studies, and the exclusion of divergent views in the Xinjiang discourse.

For *Hauke Neddermann*, too, Xinjiang is currently "In the crosshairs" of opinion makers, as he calls his analysis of German media coverage. According to Neddermann, against the backdrop of the situation in the XUAR, the image of China as the enemy is being portrayed in a particularly harsh light: orientalisating, colonial and racist attributions, as well as political defensive reflexes against a Chinese counter-model described as threatening, are working together. A shrinking corridor of opinion contrasts with a numerical multiplication of published Xinjiang texts, which is analysed quantitatively and qualitatively in the study. The coverage reflects common linguistic patterns of moralising conflict familiar from the wars of recent decades. The topos of genocide plays a central role in the mass media discourse: Xinjiang is placed in the vicinity of the Gulag archipelago and Auschwitz – and the People's Republic of China, in a contemporary reversal of Western self-images, becomes the realm of evil.

The USA's role in the geopolitical competition for power and influence is addressed several times in this volume and described in detail in *Udo Barkmann's* article on the last decade, which includes the debate within China. The focus is on the "New Silk Road" and Central Asia as a diverse region. The article looks at individual Central Asian states and their key players, which are now attracting more attention in Europe. It is now possible to speak of a "New Great Game" being played out in Central Asia – but one in which an association of Central Asian states could also generate new momentum.

In the concluding article, *Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer* summarises the geographical starting point for the Xinjiang debate: he places the Tarim Basin at the centre of his considerations as a multi-ethnic transport and meeting corridor between Europe and Central Asia on the one hand and East Asia on the other. In doing so, he traces the arc back to the longer historical periods and the role of this region in the former "Great Game", when Britain and Russia, as well as other European powers, competed for power and influence there, and the United States was still primarily preoccupied with itself. He also discusses China's gradual reclaiming of Xinjiang from the Soviet Union in the late 1940s.

Finally, the editors would like to reiterate that their intention with this volume is to take a historically informed view, out of a sense of academic responsibility and with the aim of capturing the polyphony of the present. They do so in the conviction that this is the only way to make the interweaving of different interests and their interactions transparent and – hopefully – to promote efforts towards a peaceful and just development of this historically, but also presumably for the future, important region of Inner Asia.

The editors
July 2024

Addendum to the introduction (March 2025)

A book with contemporary relevance is never “up to date”. In addition to numerous “minor events” since the publication of the first German-language edition in 2024 – such as the sale of the VW plant in Ürümqi and its test track in Turpan to a state-owned Shanghai company, or the upholding of a libel suit against Sheffield Hallam University by a London court – world events with consequences that cannot yet be foreseen are relevant: This volume cannot deal with the events and outcomes of the second Trump administration since January 2025. Of particular relevance to the Xinjiang region is the emergence of the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP), which played a significant role in the overthrow of Assad in Syria, with an estimated 4,000-6,000 Uyghur fighters.

In his chapter in this volume, Thomas Heberer has already referred to the activities of these fighters as part of the jihadist-Salafist terrorist organisation al-Nusra Front in Syria and another offshoot in Afghanistan. Al-Nusra Front was designated a terrorist organisation by the UN Security Council in 2013. Initially affiliated with the terrorist organisation al-Qaeda, it broke away from this network in 2016 and in 2017 formed the Islamist organisation Hai’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) with other smaller Islamist groups, centred in the Syrian region of Idlib. During the Syrian civil war, this organisation, which TIP also joined, fought not only against the Assad government, but also against the Free Syrian Army and Kurdish units. As early as 2015, it was reported that TIP units were involved in the murder and displacement of Christians in the Syrian town of Jisr al-Shughur (Zenn 2015).⁵⁵

⁵⁵ See Jacob Zenn (2015), “Al-Qaeda-Aligned Central Asian Militants in Syria Separate from Islamic State-Aligned IMU in Afghanistan”, *Terrorism Monitor* 13:11 (May 2015), <http://jamestown.org/program/al-qaeda-aligned-central-asian-militants-in-syria-separate-from-islamic-state-aligned-imu-in-afghanistan/> (access: 02/2025); see also the corresponding video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_NXxIQnmsR4 (access: 02/2025).

The HTS military offensive led to the fall of the Assad regime in late 2024. After the takeover, TIP leaders are said to have been given high-ranking positions in the Syrian armed forces.⁵⁶ In December 2024, TIP threatened China in a propaganda video: “Now here in Syria [...] we fight for Allah, and we will continue to do this in our Urumchi, Aqsu and Kashgar in the future. We will chase the Chinese infidels away”. The TIP has declared that with the end of the Syrian civil war, its future focus will be on fighting the Chinese government.⁵⁷

Turkey is helping the TIP in northern Syria to fight and oust the Kurdish organisations there.⁵⁸ There are plans to settle the TIP fighters in northern Syria to create a buffer zone between Turkey and the Kurds.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Abdulaziz Dawood Khudaberdi, a commander of the TIP, was appointed general by the Syrian government in Dec. 2024; see <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-military-golani-islamist-fighters-uyghur-b2671918.html>.

⁵⁷ See Sophia Yan (2024), “Uyghur fighters in Syria vow to come for China next”, *Daily Telegraph*, 13 December 2024, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2024/12/13/uyghur-fighters-in-syria-vow-to-come-for-china-next/> (access: 02/2025).

⁵⁸ *On the Turkish influence on the Uyghurs in Syria: İhsan Umun yazdı: Suriye'deki Uyghur savaşçılar Çin için ne ölçüde tehdit?* (İhsan Umun wrote: To what extent do Uyghur fighters in Syria pose a threat to China?), 29 January 2025; <http://medyascope.tv/2025/01/29/ih-san-umun-yaz-di-suriyedeki-uygur-savascilar-cine-ne-kadar-tehdit/> (access: 02/2025).

⁵⁹ On this topic: Michael Clarke (2024), “Is China’s Uyghur Challenge ‘Changing’ Its Calculus on Syria?”, *The Diplomat*, 4 December 2024, <http://thediplomat.com/2017/12/is-chinas-uyghur-challenge-changing-its-calculus-on-syria/> (access: 02/2025); Johann C. Fuhrmann (2025), “China im Visier der Turkestan Islamic Party”, *Länderbericht*, ed. by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 15 January 2025, <http://www.kas.de/de/laenderberichte/detail/-/content/china-im-visier-der-turkestan-islamic-party> (access: 02/2025); Sven Hauberg (2025), “China gerät ins Visier von Verbündeten der neuen syrischen Machthaber”, *Merkur*, 13 January 2025, <http://www.merkur.de/politik/china-geraet-ins-visier-von-verbuedeten-der-neuen-syrischen-machthaber-zr-93509789.html> (access: 02/2025); Wolfgang Hirn (2025), “Was ist die Turkistan Islamic Party und was hat sie vor?”, *ChinaHirn* Newsletter, 05 January 2025, <http://www.chinahirn.de/2025/01/05/politik-xinjiang-i-was-ist-die-turkistan-islamic-party-und-was-hat-sie-vor/> (access: 02/2025); “Militant Uyghurs in Syria threaten the Chinese government” (2025), *Economist*, 09. January 2025, <http://www.economist.com/china/2025/01/09/militant-uyghurs-in-syria-threaten-the-chinese-government> (access: 02/2025); Tom O’Connor (2024), “China Vows to ‘Strike Down’ Syria’s Victorious Uyghur Rebels Threatening Xi”, *Newsweek*, 14 December 2024, <http://www.newsweek.com/china-urges-stability-syria-uyghur-rebels-1999575> (accessed: 02/2025); Harold Thibault

According to numerous press reports, Uyghur fighters were actively involved in the massacres of civilians from the Alawite minority in Syria in March 2025.

(2025), “Uyghur fighters from the Turkistan Islamic Party helped Hayat Tahrir al-Sham overthrow the Bashar al-Assad regime, hindering Beijing’s diplomatic support and economic aid”, *Le Monde*, 18 January 2025, http://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/01/18/chinese-diplomacy-towards-syria-s-new-regime-hampered-by-presence-of-uyghur-fighters_6737165_4.html (access: 02/2025); Yang Xiaotong (2024), “China has cause to be terrified of rebel-run Syria”, *Asia Times*, 13 December 2024, <http://asiatimes.com/2024/12/china-has-cause-to-be-terrified-of-rebel-run-syria> (access: 02/2024).

Hans van Ess

History of Xinjiang and the Uyghurs from the 15th to the 19th century

This chapter provides a historical context for the Uyghur presence in the area known as Xinjiang 新疆 – or “New Borderland” – since the Mongolian Dzungar Khanate was crushed in the 18th century. Xinjiang officially became a province of the Chinese Empire under this name in 1884. In July 2019, the People’s Republic of China published a *white paper* on the history of Xinjiang, pointing out that the region has always been multi-ethnically populated and cannot be assigned to a single nation.¹ The *white paper* contains a whole series of inaccuracies and various scientifically problematic statements. For example, the translation of the term *Xinjiang* as “land newly returned” at the end of Section I is irritating. This is either bad English – or the formulation is intended to suggest that Xinjiang has always belonged to China. Historically, one may argue this point of view. Linguistically, however, it cannot be justified: “xinjiang” does not mean “newly returned”.²

Such nationalistic overzealousness prevents Western readers from receiving the more thought-provoking aspects of the Chinese argument. Xinjiang has in fact had an extremely chequered relationship with China for 2,000 years, with various phases of stronger and weaker Chinese dominance. It is certainly correct to point out that the huge area cannot

¹ See <http://tt.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zggk/201908/P02021072806824071237.pdf> (accessed: 05/2024).

² The word *gui* 歸, commonly translated as “to return”, was often used in imperial China for names given to foreign cities or territories that had been subjugated. In this context, however, *gui* does not mean “to return”, but “to turn towards”. Thus the city of Hohhot, Köke Khota in Mongolian, was initially called *guihua* 歸化 (“to turn to imperial reform”) in Chinese. It is very possible that the idea of the word *gui* is behind the misrepresentation of the *white paper*. The idea of “[borderlands] that have turned back to China” could be expressed in Chinese as *gui xia/hua* 歸夏/華 or *gui guo* 歸國, which could then be retranslated – incorrectly in terms of content – as “return to China”.

simply be declared as “Uyghur”, as seems to be the common understanding in Europe and the USA. While the south-west corner of the territory lay in the shadow of world-historical developments and may therefore ethnically have remained quite homogeneous over a relatively long period of time, the majority of the country was a transit area that was constantly exposed to a variety of changes. In the northern half of Xinjiang, at least in the former Dzungarian areas, a mixture of members of different Turkic-speaking peoples, Mongols, Muslim Hui Chinese and Han Chinese lived from the middle of the 18th to the end of the 19th century, concentrated mainly in the newly founded city, which was probably still called Urumqi³ at the time, as well as in Yining/Gulja in western Xinjiang, both in formerly Mongol-dominated territory.

The Chinese *white paper* authors’ insistence on Xinjiang’s multi-ethnicity is obviously contrary to Western statements that less than 5% of the population in the region were Han Chinese when the People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949. The implication is that their mass settlement afterwards was an injustice. Against this background, it seems necessary to scrutinise the historical circumstances referred to in the *white paper* on the basis of sources of various provenance.

The question of the origin and identity of the Uyghurs must also be scrutinised. Both the Chinese and English-language accounts are obviously incomplete. While for Western authors the word “Uyghur” is an ethnonym that the New Uyghur-speaking Muslim oasis townsmen gave themselves as a unified ethnic group in the 20th century, the *white paper* draws on a meaning that the name “Uyghur” had in the sources of the Tang, Yuan and Ming dynasties and applies it to today’s Uyghurs. In fact, the early Chinese sources speak of Uyghurs as nomads who settled in Mongolia, north-western Xinjiang and Uzbekistan, while later Chinese sources – including the Ming dynastic history – only mention Uyghurs in the Hami region; although they are said to have been related to the Turkicised inhabitants of neighbouring Turfan, they were not considered identical to them. It is also unclear whether and how closely the

³ Apparently not yet at that time: Ürümqi; see below.

inhabitants of Turfan were ethnically related to the Turkicised inhabitants of Kashgaria in southwest Xinjiang, according to Chinese sources. In any case, the authors were not of the opinion that they were a common Uyghur people.

Today, the new Uyghur area in the western sense is located in the two centres of Turfan and Kashgaria, but not in large parts of the rest of Xinjiang or in the present-day capital of Ürümqi. According to Chinese understanding, today's Uyghurs are an amalgam of the originally nomadic, Turkic-speaking peoples of Mongolia and Hami in the Chinese border region on the one hand and the ethnically different inhabitants of Turfan and Kashgar on the other. In the “West”, on the other hand, it is assumed that the Uyghurs have been a unified people for centuries, whose ancestral territory is a large part of Xinjiang.

1. Who and where were the Uyghurs historically?

When Genghis Khan incorporated the territories now known as Xinjiang into his rapidly growing Mongol empire at the beginning of the 13th century, the Uyghurs, who were partly Manichaean or Buddhist and partly Nestorian Christian at the time, proved to be his most loyal allies. Their capital was Beshbalik (i.e. “city of five”), which was located almost 200 kilometres north-east of today's Ürümqi. However, the main area of settlement appears to have been today's Uzbekistan in addition to areas north of Beshbalik as far as Siberia⁴⁵, although Uyghurs and Uzbeks from Khorezmia are not clearly differentiated in the dynastic history.⁶ After this, the region of Xinjiang became a bone of

⁴ *Yuanshi* 元史, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976, 63.1575.

⁵ *Yuanshi* 63.1567-1570 lists the cities that belonged to the Uyghur region. In *Yuanshi* 118.2915, Xunsigan 尋斯干, which is identified as Samarkand, is referred to as a Uyghur city. In *Yuanshi* 63.1568, however, Samarkand is transcribed as Samargan 撒麻耳干.

⁶ The large cities of present-day Uzbekistan actually belonged to the Huihui 回回, which apparently meant the settled townsfolk from Transoxania, while the nomadic Uyghurs were Huihe 回紇. It is possible that the geographical indication in *Yuanshi*

contention for more than a hundred years between the descendants of the youngest Genghis son, Tolui, who ruled China, and those of the third son, Chagatai, who had taken control of Central Asia after the division of the giant empire. Around 1309/10, the southern part of Xinjiang, which extended as far as the Tianshan Mountains, finally fell to the Chagatai heirs, who were mainly anchored in Transoxania and soon converted to Islam; the northern part of the region, populated by nomadic Western Mongols, Kazakhs and Uyghurs, went to the Yuan Empire.⁷

Despite the linguistic relationship between today's Uzbeks and today's Xinjiang Uyghurs, Chagatai rule was not based on a naturally connected area. The Tarim Basin is shielded from the surrounding lands in the west and south by mountains up to 7,000 metres high. Although it is possible to descend from these mountains to the oasis cities from the west, it is easier for larger armies to reach them from the east, although the desert is of course also a considerable obstacle.

In the middle of the 14th century, the Chagatai Empire split into a western and an eastern part. While Timur Lenk founded the Timurid Empire in Transoxania, the actual successors of Chagatai, the Mughals (i.e. Mongols), retreated to what is now Kyrgyzstan, eastern Kazakhstan and the Tarim Basin. In the 15th century, the Eastern Chagatai Empire, which is often referred to as Moghulistan in Western sources, but as Beshbalik in *Mingshi* or Ilibalik from 1418 onwards, fell to a northern, more nomadic, and two southern, more sedentary and Muslim groups.⁸

63 (see note 4) shows that Genghis Khan had assigned the Uyghurs not only their own land but also that of the Transoxanians in return for their loyalty.

⁷ Michal Biran (1997), *Qaidu and the Rise of the Independent Mongol State in Central Asia*, London: Curzon Press, 38; Jürgen Paul (2012), *Zentralasien*, Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 231. This borderline can also be seen on the map "Yuan Period General Map 2" in *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji* 國歷史地圖集, vol. 7, Shanghai: Zhongguo ditu chubanshe, 1982, 5f.

⁸ This is not entirely clear from the description in the *Mingshi* 明史, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974 (in the original version: MS), as it initially refers to Beshbalik as the northern Xinjiang bordered by Khotan, the Oirats, Samarkand and Huozhou and does not mention Turfan at all; cf. Later Turfan is mentioned several times as a

The latter had their base in Yarkant, from which a khanate emerged for several centuries. Within this khanate, six cities emerged in the extreme south-west of present-day Xinjiang, which joined together to form the “Altishahr” – i.e. “six cities”. It is unclear exactly which six cities were meant. In any case, they included Kashgar, Yarkant and Khotan in the south and Aksu and Kucha in the north; the allocation of the sixth city varied. Yarkant was nominally the khanate. However, the individual cities appear to have remained quite independent and prospered economically, presumably due to their sheltered location in the shadow of conflicts to the north. The oasis of Turfan formed a separate unit. To the north lay Ilibalik, to which the presumably Uyghur nomads from Beshbalik had retreated, with a centre in the eastern part of present-day Kazakhstan and in the north-western part of Xinjiang. From this time onwards, the Mongolian Jungars spread further and further south from the north-east. The former Uyghur centre of Beshbalik was now also part of their territory.⁹

In the north of the Chagatai heartland, the border between the Ming Empire and the Chagatai rulers initially ran between Hami on the Chinese side and Turfan on the Chagatai side through what were actually Uyghur ancestral lands. 130 Chinese li – about 70 kilometres – east of Hami ran the Uyghur River¹⁰, which is probably named after the Uyghurs who settled or nomadised there. The first two chapters on the “Western Areas” of the standard history of the Ming dynasty report on the considerable military pressure to which the Uyghurs of these areas east of Turfan in particular were subjected by Turfan and also by the Timurids to the west of present-day Xinjiang. In the *Mingshi*, the Uyghurs only refer to the Turkic-speaking population of the areas west and

state independent of Beshbalik or, from 1418, Ilibalik, after the ruler had been killed by his cousin Vais and the tribe had moved westwards; see MS 8608.

⁹ A good overview is provided by the map “Ming II” in *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji* 7, 42f. The tripartite division of the Eastern Chagatai is also mentioned in MS 329.8529.

¹⁰ See Emil Bretschneider (1887), *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources*, vol. ii, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Part IV: “China’s Intercourse with the Countries of Central and Western Asia during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, West”, 178.

south of Hami, but not those of Turfan. At the beginning of the *Mingshi* treatise on Hami, it is said that Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (r. 1368-1398) established the military prefecture of Anding 安定, which was about 100 kilometres southwest of present-day Dunhuang 敦煌, after he had pacified the Uyghur territory.¹¹ A little later, there is talk of three peoples living in Hami 哈密 itself: Huihui 回回, which probably refers to Muslims from the Turkic peoples who are now part of Uzbekistan, Uyghurs and Kara-Hui, a group whose origins cannot be clearly determined.¹² It is said that the people of Liucheng 柳城, located east of Turfan, spoke a language similar to that of the Uyghurs.¹³ They were therefore not considered “Uyghur”, even though they may have been culturally related. Northeast of Liucheng was Huozhou 火州, the old Gaochang 高昌, which was apparently also still considered Uyghur territory.

The rulers of Turfan had Mongol names until the first half of the 15th century and maintained good relations with the Ming. From the middle of the 15th century, they annexed the two cities of Huozhou and Liucheng, and their rulers, who now bore Muslim names and referred to themselves as sultans, became more assertive towards the Ming. In 1473, Turfan troops invaded Hami for the first time. Their superiority led to the Uyghurs retreating to the Gansu Corridor, so that the Uyghur presence in the ancestral Uyghur territory west and south of Hami was apparently ended in the second half of the 15th century,¹⁴ even if it can be assumed that the exodus caused by Turfan was probably not complete. Turfan was able to take Hami at the end of the 15th century. The Ming also subsequently withdrew from Hami.

¹¹ *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji* 7.84 3/6.

¹² MS 329.8511 and 8513. Bretschneider (1887), *Mediaeval Researches*, 178, says: “unknown to me”. The suffix “hui” written here 灰 could, like the homophone 回, go back to the Mongolian term “ghul” for ethnic groups. Kara means “black”, so the people would simply be called the “blacks”.

¹³ MS 329.8527 and 8528.

¹⁴ MS 329.8516 and 8525.

All of this raises doubts as to whether the townspeople of the much more distant Altishahr, which is simply referred to as “Khotan” (Yutian 于阗) in *Mingshi*¹⁵, saw themselves as Uyghurs. It doesn’t look like that. The Ming history obviously sees them as something completely different from the Uyghurs, who they saw as subjects of the Chinese empire and who obviously preferred the rule of the Ming to that of Turfan. However, the frequently expressed view that the name “Uyghur” for the Turkic Muslims of Xinjiang only emerged in the 20th century is also a simplification: Mongolians, Chinese and also authors writing in Chagatai have continued to use this term afterwards. At least the mention in Mongolian sources suggests that Uyghurs must have been very present in the late 16th and early 17th centuries¹⁶, although it is not clear whether this actually meant Turkic-speaking peoples of *Xinjiang* or whether it was not the Uyghurs who had retreated eastwards into the *Hexi/Gansu corridor* before Turfan.

Recently, English-language secondary literature has often referred to the fact that Mirza Muhammed Haidar Dughlat (d. 1551), who wrote in Chagatai and lived first in the Yarkant Khanate and then in Kashmir, did not know what was meant by the Uyghurs in the mid-16th century.¹⁷ This is seen as evidence that the folk name “Uyghur” was no longer in use at that time and that the Uyghurs had effectively disappeared from the map. However, the basic assumption of Gladney and others that Yarkant must have been populated by Uyghurs or their descendants

¹⁵ MS 329.8529; i.e. not as Yarkant and not as Kashgar either. Which of the three cities was the most important obviously varied.

¹⁶ See Hans van Ess (2017), “Der Name der Uiguren”, in: Shing Müller and Armin Selbitschka (eds.), *Über den Alltag hinaus. Festschrift for Thomas O. Höllmann on his 65th birthday*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 253-266; cf. also the Mongol chronicle of Saghan Secen from 1662, which distinguishes between the four ethnic groups of Chinese, Mongols, Tibetans and Uyghurs; Isaac Jacob Schmidt (1829), *Geschichte der Ost-Mongolen und Ihres Fürstenhaus*, St. Petersburg: N. Gretsche, 235; Johan Elverskog (2023), *The Precious Summary. A History of the Mongols from Chinggis Khan to the Qing Dynasty*, New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 150.

¹⁷ See Dru Gladney (2007), “The Ethnogenesis of the Uyghur”, *Central Asian Survey* 9:1, 9, based on the translation of the *Tarikh-i Rashidi* by N. Elias.

is wrong. The fact that people in Yarkant did not know who the Uyghurs were was probably due to the fact that there was little connection to these people living around 2,000 kilometres away. Another author writing in Chagatai, Abul Ghazi Bahadur (1603-1664), repeatedly mentions the Uyghurs a century after Mirza Haidar Dughlat. Like the Chinese sources, he places them in Mongolia and Beshbalik at the time of Genghis Khan, as well as on the Irtysh River in Siberia. He clearly distinguishes them from the Kashgarians in southern Xinjiang.¹⁸ Abul Ghazi also frequently refers to Uyghurs in his own time, although he almost always locates them in the region around Urgenc in present-day Uzbekistan. At the end of his story, he speaks of a massacre of them in the city of Khiva, also in Uzbekistan, which took place in the middle of the 17th century.¹⁹ It can therefore be assumed that the Uyghurs mentioned in the *Mingshi*, who lived in Hami and the surrounding area, only represented the eastern wing of the Uyghurs who originally lived in Mongolia and Beshbalik, while Abul Ghazi's Uyghurs can be traced back to the more western parts of the people, presumably nomads with a centre in the Ilibalik region, parts of whom had come to Uzbekistan. In the 15th and 16th centuries, there was apparently hardly any contact between these people and the population of Kashgar because the states were too far apart and there were no family or ethnic ties. An important difference between Uyghurs and Kashgarians may have been that the former were nomads, while the latter were sedentary farmers and above all merchants, who in this respect were more related to the Uzbek townsfolk in their way of life, while the Uyghurs lived like Mongols. Only the language united the two groups, although it is not clear how well the two Turkic languages were understood by each other.

In summary, it can be said that the oasis city of Turfan, whose inhabitants were Islamised in the 14th and 15th centuries, achieved a considerable position of power, which it was probably able to maintain for a

¹⁸ See the translation of Le Baron Desmaisons (1874), *Histoire des Mogols et des Tatares*, par Aboul-Ghazi Bèhadour Khan, St. Pétersbourg: Academy of Sciences, 41 and 157.

¹⁹ Op. cit. 320f.

large part of the 16th century. During this time, there was hardly any Chinese presence in Xinjiang. Different ethnic groups apparently settled in the three centres there, although most of them were probably Turkic peoples. Only in Gansu and north-west Xinjiang, however, were there Uyghurs.

2. Xinjiang under the supremacy of the Dzungars

However, the heyday of the oasis seems to have come to an end soon afterwards. The western Mongolian Oirats, or Dzungars, now became the dominant power, without whom no local ruler could get by. In the 17th century, following internal disputes, a Sufi of the Naqshbandi order, Afaq Hodja (1626-1694), originally born in Hami (or “Khumul” in Turkish), was able to take power in Altishahr with the help of the Mongolian Jungars from the north of Xinjiang. He had made contact with the 5th Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso (1617-1682), in Tibet, who owed his status and influence to the real great power in the region, namely the Mongols of the western Khoshot tribe.²⁰ The Khoshot were relatives of the western Mongol Oirats, who undertook a campaign to the south under Galdan (1644-1697), drove out the previous Yarkant and Khotan rulers and installed the Afaq Hodja in their place. However, the latter paid dearly for the help of the Mongols. Although the descendants of the Afaq Hodja were able to rule the cities in the south of present-day Xinjiang, they had to pay high taxes to the Mongolian Dzungars. At its peak, the Dzungar Khanate encompassed the entire territory of present-day Xinjiang, parts of eastern Kazakhstan, Mongolia and the whole of Tibet.

The fact that Galdan ultimately attempted to gain suzerainty over the whole of Mongolia and thus induced the Eastern Mongol Khalkha to ally themselves with the Manchu (or to submit to them) is well de-

²⁰ See James Millward (2021), *Eurasian Crossroads. A History of Xinjiang*, New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 86ff.

scribed in research.²¹ The Eastern Mongol Khalkha preferred the rule of the Qing to that of their Western Mongol cousins. In 1691 they submitted to the Qing empire. A large tribe of Western Mongols, the Torgut, had already migrated through the Kazakh steppe to the Tsarist Empire in the 1630s out of fear of the Dzungars. The Volga Kalmyks emerged from them. The Khoshut, in turn, migrated from their grazing areas near present-day Ürümqi to Qinghai and Tibet.²² Meanwhile, the Russians attempted to persuade the Dzungars on their south-eastern border to submit voluntarily – partly on the grounds of protecting them from the Chinese. Although Galdan was supplied with modern weapons by the Tsarist Empire, he considered formal submission to be superfluous. His ambitions brought him into conflict with the Qing Empire: on the one hand, this was fuelled by the fact that the Dzungars and the Qing were fighting for supremacy in Tibet – both sides were also courting the actual rulers there, the Western Mongolian Khoshut. On the other hand, the Dzungars began to harass the Turkish-populated oasis of Hami (Khumul). After the first Dzungar attacks at the beginning of the 18th century, the Qing expanded their borders and began to build a fortress in Barköl, north of Hami. A short time later, they conquered Turfan, which willingly submitted because the Dzungars apparently deported parts of the population at will when they needed farmers to secure their grain supply.²³ This was probably also the beginning of the colonisation of the Gulja/Yining region by Turkic-speaking farmers. The Qing later continued the same practice, which must have massively increased the number of people from the south, although Han Chinese also found a place here.²⁴

At Galdan's back, his nephew Tsewang Rabtan (1643-1727) rose up against him. When the Manchurian Kangxi Emperor died in 1722, his successor Yongzheng (r. 1723-1735) began to concentrate on Tibet and

²¹ See in summary Peter Perdue (2010), *China Marches West*, Cambridge: Belknap, 138-152.

²² Millward (2021), *Eurasian Crossroads*, 89.

²³ Perdue (2010), *China Marches West*, 229-231 and 306.

²⁴ Op. cit. 345f. and 351f.

Qinghai, which was colonised by Mongol tribes. However, his successor Qianlong (r. 1735-1796) seized his opportunity when succession disputes broke out among the Dzungars. The border region between Dzungaria and the Qing empire had previously been the scene of lively trade, although this was evidently less profitable for the Qing than for the Dzungars, who acted as middlemen for goods from south-western Turkestan and elsewhere. The Manchurian border officials were forced to buy Dzungarian goods and give Chinese goods in return. This was all the more unpleasant as there had previously been a direct exchange with Turkestan. The Qianlong Emperor put an end to this unfavourable trade when more and more Western Mongols fled to the Qing Empire during the Dzungarian succession disputes. When one of the Dzungarian pretenders to the throne asked him to intervene, he sent two armies to Yili in 1755. Within four years, he succeeded in crushing the Dzungar Empire. The Manchurian ruler does not appear to have shied away from massacring prisoners. While normally interested in gaining tax-paying subjects, the Qianlong Emperor had male Dzungars executed indiscriminately. The Qishiye report, which will be discussed in more detail below, states that in an area of one million Chinese miles, not one out of a million people was left alive. Such figures are probably not to be taken at face value, as elsewhere Qishiye often miscalculated by a factor of ten. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that significant parts of the original Dzungarian population of northern Xinjiang were wiped out. A few decades later, Qing official Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794-1857) assumed that there had originally been around 600,000 Dzungars, some of whom were killed, some of whom fled and some of whom died of chickenpox, an epidemic that raged not only in the Dzungarian region at the time.²⁵

When the Qing advanced into the centre of the Dzungars in Yili in 1755, they freed the brothers Burhan ud-Din and Hodja Jahan (or Jihan), the sons of the overlord of Altishahr, whom the Dzungars had held captive until his death. They sent Burhan ud-Din to Yarkand to

²⁵ Perdue (2010), *China Marches West*, 283-287, based on reports by Wei Yuan and Russian reports; cf. also op. cit. 484ff.

take control there for the Qing. His brother remained with the Qing, but then fled to Yarkand and persuaded Burhan ud-Din to rebel against Qing rule. However, the two Hodja brothers are said to have found no support among the local population, so they fled to neighbouring Badakhshan, the extreme north-east of Afghanistan bordering today's Xinjiang. However, the rulers there had them executed – and handed their heads over to the Qing. Altishahr had thus fallen to the Qing Empire and was no longer subject to tribute to the Dzungars, but to the Manchurians. The Manchurian Qing dynasty thus replaced the Dzungars as overlords of the former Mughal territories. They now referred to them as Xinjiang. Towards the end of the 1750s, the rule of the descendants of Genghis Khan in these areas finally came to an end.

3. Demography after the annexation to the Qing Empire

The above historical description was necessary because it contains surprising elements in light of the descriptions of the military power of states such as Turfan in the 15th or 16th century. Conflicts that led to Xinjiang becoming part of the Qing Empire took place in the northern half of the region, where mainly Mongols lived, not settlers of Turkic origin or even Uyghurs. Their once flourishing empires no longer seem to have played a role in the 17th century. This is also shown by the fact that the Qing were barely able to determine the number of inhabitants in many parts of Xinjiang. Apparently, a decline had occurred, the reasons for which have been practically ignored in research to date. Of course, it can be partly explained by the southern migration of the Dzungars, which Peter Perdue attributes to the pressure of Russian expansion in Siberia.²⁶ It remains questionable whether this explanation is sufficient. Let us begin with a brief overview of how the demography of Xinjiang presented itself to the Qing after they had conquered the region.

²⁶ Perdue (2010), *China Marches West*, esp. 94-101.

The Manchurians began to secure the conquered territories militarily by stationing garrison soldiers. The great geographical description of the Qing Empire, the *Da Qing yitongzhi* 大清一統志, gives precise details for many places about how many people lived in each place at the end of the 18th century and how many soldiers were stationed there. In fact, there were surprisingly few towns and people in this vast area. Most of Xinjiang was uninhabited. The *Da Qing yitongzhi*, which is included in the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 collection with a preface from the year Qianlong 29/30 (ca. 1765), provides extensive figures on the demography of Xinjiang at this time.

Population of Xinjiang, 1765²⁷

	<i>Households</i> (without mention = Hui, today's Uyghurs)	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Other Population</i>	<i>Soldiers</i>	<i>Convicts</i>
Yili	6.406	20.356	3,150 Oirats, 25,595 Torguts, 1,000 Koreans, 1,800 Chahar Mongols 3,000 Green banner “minhu” 民戶 71 (209 resi- dents)	6,384 Man- churian and Mongolian troops	244
Tarbaghatai	3,516 Oirats 914 Torgut	11.737 4.022		850	
Hami	1.950	12.163		270	180

²⁷ Source: *Da Qing yitongzhi*; see *Siku quanshu*, *Da Qing yitongzhi*, chapters 415 (Yili), 417 (Hami, Pizhan), 418 (Tarbaghatai), 418 (Karashahr, Kucha, Sayram, Aksu), and 419 (Ush, Kashgar, Yarkant, Khotan). Cf. also the slightly different figures in James Millward (2000), “Historical Perspectives on Contemporary Xinjiang”, *Inner Asia* 2:2, 121-135; the author relies primarily on a Qing census from 1818, when massive Chinese immigration had already begun. However, this hardly affected the south of the region.

	<i>Households</i> (without mention = Hui, today's Uyghurs)	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Other Population</i>	<i>Soldiers</i>	<i>Convicts</i>
Pizhan/Turfan	2.937	10.373			
Karashahr (today Korla)	1.330	5.390		362	
Kucha	1.112	4.660	Shayaer 沙雅爾: 673 households, 1,898 people		
Sayram	500	1.627	Bai: 563 households, 1,735 people		
Aksu	7560	24.607		15	
Ush/Uqturfan	822	3.158		400	
Kashgar	14.056	66.443			
Yarkand	15.574	65.495			
Khotan	13.642	44.603			

The figures were updated up until the final version of the *Siku quanshu*, i.e. around 1777-78. Twelve cities are listed for the whole of Xinjiang, which, together with their catchment areas, had population figures according to which 257,248 Muslim inhabitants lived in an area of 1,665,000 square kilometres – 4.5 times the size of Germany. Of these, 176,541 inhabitants, almost three quarters, lived in the three cities of Kashgar, Yarkant and Khotan in the far south; if you add the city of Aksu, which is a little further north, the figure rises to 201,148, which is well over three quarters of the total population. This means that in the rest of Xinjiang, beyond these four cities, there were probably only around 50,000 inhabitants recorded in the tax registers in an area of well over one million square kilometres. It should be noted that a large part of the region consists of deserts and that not all inhabitants were actually included in the Qing's figures – tax evasion has always led to incomplete registers in China. Furthermore, the above figures do not include 30,000 to 40,000 Mongols, mainly Oirats and Torguts, who

lived scattered in the north of the province after the Qing troops had mercilessly persecuted the Mongols on the orders of the Qianlong Emperor. Nevertheless, every single average-sized prefecture in eastern China was home to at least as many people as the whole of Xinjiang. If 600,000 Dzungars had fallen victim to the genocide in the 18th century, then the Mongols living in the north would have outnumbered the Turkic-speaking towns in the south almost three to one before the conquest.

It is easy to see from the figures that Xinjiang was not a homogeneous area in the 18th century. There were very few inhabitants of Turkic origin in the north, who were referred to by the Mongolian name “taranchi” (= farmers). Many of them had only recently been resettled there, among others by the Dzungars in Yili. Otherwise, however, they did not yet play a role there. Interestingly, there is also no mention of Kazakhs, who are dealt with in another chapter and who probably settled or nomadised west of Yili.²⁸ While a small number of around 10,000 farmers lived in Turfan, the Turkish settlement centre was at the foot of the Himalayas, in the three towns of Khotan, Yarkant and Kashgar, as well as in Aksu. Interestingly, the figures given by the British army commander Francis Younghusband after a visit to Turfan in 1887 are quite similar: he found around 12,000 to 15,000 Turks and 5,000 Han Chinese settlers there.²⁹ Apparently little had changed in the Turkish population figures in over 100 years. However, the presence of the Chinese is particularly significant, as it shows that northern Xinjiang had become even more multi-ethnic in the 19th century than before. The same can also be seen from Younghusband's information on Hami, Karashahr and Korla. In Karashahr, Younghusband found “Turki” and “Tungans”, but also Mongols, whom he refers to as Kalmak³⁰, and Chinese. Elsewhere, Younghusband mentions that there were always two

²⁸ *Siku quanshu, Da Qing yitongzhi*, Ch. 420.

²⁹ Younghusband, Francis E. (1896), *The Heart of a Continent*, London: John Murray, 119f. According to Younghusband, there was also a Chinese city in Hami alongside the Turkish one; see op. cit. 111.

³⁰ So Kalmyks is actually the name for the Oirats who had emigrated to the Russian Tsarist Empire.

cities everywhere in Turkestan: the “native” and the “Chinese”.³¹ – Younghusband’s remark by and large confirms the correctness of the Manchurian data, not only as far as Turfan is concerned.³² This raises the question of whether the figures were also so low in the Ming period, when Turfan was still a powerful state. It is hard to imagine. Apparently, there was a sharp decline in the population. In any case, northern Xinjiang seems to have represented a similar potential for the Qing’s expansionist ambitions as Siberia did for the Russian tsar – except that the climatic conditions in Xinjiang were more favourable.

Had the Dzungar invasions decimated the population? Or was climate change perhaps to blame? We know that one of the two low points of the so-called modern Little Ice Age occurred in the 17th century.³³ In any case, these figures make it clear why Wei Yuan and others came up with the idea at the beginning of the 19th century that Xinjiang was a suitable solution to the problems caused by the 200-year population explosion in China. Xinjiang was not simply the exclusive homeland of the Uyghurs, where one would have had to compete with the former inhabitants for land or even take it from them by force. Rather, the Qing could use every inhabitant of the land to cultivate it – and they had to channel a stream of immigrants to Xinjiang for this purpose, just as the People’s Republic of China did from 1949.

For the Qing dynasty, Xinjiang was one of the many practically uninhabited territories on the fringes of its own empire that had to be considered in terms of what to do with them: leave them to their own devices because it was too costly to get involved? Or integrate them into the Chinese empire and move population there? Unlike in the case of Manchuria, the decision was made to colonise this area by settling people there. Some of the population was recruited from poorer Chinese areas, while others were brought to the region as convicts. These measures were very similar to the colonisation of Australia by Great

³¹ Younghusband (1896), *The Heart of a Continent*, 149.

³² He estimated the number of inhabitants of Aksu at 20,000; see op. cit. 129.

³³ The second was to follow towards the end of the 19th century, at the time when most of today’s climate models begin.

Britain, which took place at almost the same time. Soldiers were an important pillar, who, following the traditional model of garrison settlements (*tuntian* 屯田), were to cultivate land as farmers and defend it at the same time.³⁴ Less than 50 years after the conquest of Xinjiang, around 155,000 Chinese apparently lived there at the beginning of the 19th century, compared to around 320,000 Uyghurs, with the Uyghurs mainly residing in the south-west of the region and the Chinese in the north-east.³⁵

In retrospect, it is interesting to see that this immigration policy was extremely successful despite the demographic shift in favour of the Uyghurs after 1911. Where the Qing government did not apply it, as in Mongolia or Manchuria, where immigration from other areas of China was prohibited, China lost these areas in whole or in large parts after 1911. Manchuria could only become an object of desire for Russia and Japan because relatively few people lived there – and because it was not at all clear why this area should belong to China in terms of population. (The massive Chinese influx into north-east China only took place later.³⁶) Xinjiang, on the other hand, remained a largely uncontested part of China even after the collapse of the empire – despite two short-lived Turkestan republics that were limited to small corners of the territory. Moreover, the Turkic-speaking peoples, who now referred to themselves as Uyghurs, lacked opportunities to exercise military power beyond the relatively small geographical territories in which they were indigenous – there were simply too many other ethnic groups there to resist. Even if many Chinese settlers left again, the areas did not automatically become Uyghur. Instead, there was a vacuum that could easily be filled again after 1949.

³⁴ The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps was also organised according to this 2,000-year-old model from 1954; see Hauke Neddermann (2010): *Socialism in Xinjiang. Das Produktions- und Aufbaukorps in den 1950er Jahren*, Münster: Lit, esp. 70-74.

³⁵ Millward (2000), “Historical Perspectives”, 123.

³⁶ Thomas Gottschang and Diana Lary (2000), *Swallows and Settlers: The Great Migration from North China to Manchuria*, Ann Arbor: Centre for Chinese Studies.

4. The “Records of what I heard and saw in the Western Regions”³⁷

One of the first contemporary witnesses of the Chinese land seizure in Xinjiang in the 18th century was Qishiyi 七十一, or “Number 71”, who wrote down his impressions of the new border territories in a report entitled “Records of what I heard and saw in the Western Territories” (*Xiyu wenjian lu* 西域聞見錄). We know nothing about this Qishiyi except that he completed his preface in the 12th month of Qianlong 42, more precisely on 17 January 1778, the year from which the population data of *Da Qing yitongzhi* originate. He wrote it in the “mountain hermitage for the Fourth Rehearsal” (or: “for the Fourth Return”, *fusi shanfang* 復四山房), and he mentions that he was nicknamed Chunyuan. We do not know what the “Fourth Rehearsal” is all about, but one plausible possibility is that Qishiyi alluded to the hexagram “Rehearsal” or “Return” (*fu* 復) of the *Book of Changes* by naming his mountain hermitage, in the fourth position of which there is a weak line. This is a yin position (陰), which is traditionally assigned to a higher official in this fourth position. The text reads: “Walk in the centre, but practice the [right] alone” (中行, 獨復). This is supposed to be an image of one man going ahead in a group but following the right alone. Qishiyi – meaning 71 – could be a number given to a convict, exile or soldier. Whatever he had done, on his return he vowed to do better and named his hermitage after this promise. – In his foreword, Qishiyi explains that he lived in Xinjiang for a very long time and knows his way around there very well. He therefore wrote a report on what he had seen, and where he had only learnt something from hearsay, he ignored the relevant reports at the slightest doubt. However, Qishiyi may have witnessed only some of the things described in this text.

The name “Western regions” (*xiyu* 西域) in the title is old. It has been used since the 2nd century BC to refer to the Central Asian regions where there was sometimes a Chinese presence, sometimes not. Inter-

³⁷ Cf. the historical print from 1778, in the Historical Prints of the Sinica of the Berlin State Library, libri sin. 624, with the title *Xiyu wenjian lu*.

estingly, the “Western regions” were distinguished early on from “foreign states” (*waiguo* 外國), which referred to areas with which China did not interact directly or with which it did not maintain tribute relations.³⁸

In its first two chapters, the *Xiyu wenjian lu* talks about the recent history of the individual places in Xinjiang, their inhabitants and some local specialities. In two chapters, it then goes on to report on the neighbouring states of the Qing empire, firstly on the Kazakhs and the Kyrgyz, then on areas such as Andijan in present-day Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. It is interesting that the Kazakhs appear in this chapter on foreign countries, because when the Qing armies conquered Xinjiang, they are also said to have submitted, which is why on almost all maps the Qing empire extended as far as Lake Balkhash around 1800. However, this submission was probably only pro forma in order to prevent the Qing army from marching through. Qishiyi sees the subjugation of the Kazakhs as a great event and explains at one point that the Kazakh territory was within the borders of “Zhongguo”. Nevertheless, it becomes clear that the reality was different and that the real outer border of the empire was where it still is today. There was no real Qing presence in the Kazakh territory, it was only nominally subjugated. The Manchurian-Russian treaties (Nerchinsk, Kiachta) left the course of this border open, perhaps because neither power had any serious interests there.³⁹

The fourth chapter contains descriptions of the Russians and the Ottomans, followed by a number of Central Asian countries such as Kokand and Bukhara. Chapters five and six are devoted to the Qing’s military endeavours in Xinjiang, and finally to the adventurous return migration of a large part of the Torguts from Russia to the Qing Empire. Finally,

³⁸ Incidentally, in the standard history of the Ming, the area of the “Western lands” or “Western regions” extends as far as Istanbul. It is noteworthy that the term “Western regions” is no longer used in China today, but instead the originally German term “Seidenstraße” (*silk road*) is used, which is the modern equivalent of the same concept.

³⁹ Michael Weiers (1979), *Die Verträge zwischen Russland und China 1689-1881*, Bonn: Wehlung (= facsimile of the collection published in St Petersburg in 1889).

the seventh and last chapter deals with the customs and traditions that prevailed in “Hui-jiang”, the Hui borderland. This is particularly important for the image that the Qing formed of Xinjiang.

4.1 *The geographical description*

In the first chapter of his description, Qishiyi begins with geographical information that there was a northern route of cities running from east to west in Xinjiang. The starting point is the oasis of Hami (Khumul), which belonged to the Qing Empire. At the time of the Kangxi Emperor, the Dzungars disputed this city with China and advanced further eastwards. The Muslim inhabitants (*hui zhong* 回眾) fled, whereupon Kangxi began his campaign of liberation. The city of Hami under its Muslim ruler Ishaq (Isaac, 1767-1780) played a central role in supplying the armed forces.⁴⁰ The language spoken in this area was so different from that used in the outer areas – meaning the cities of southern Xinjiang that were not yet part of the Qing Empire – that they did not understand each other.⁴¹

Qishiyi comments that “Uyghur tribes” (回紇部落) settled widely from Hami to the west over tens of thousands of Chinese miles. What exactly is meant by this remains unclear. It could be that Qishiyi is using historicising language. However, it is also possible that in his perception, the northern route of Xinjiang was actually populated by the Uyghurs in earlier times. As has been noted, their capital was once located in Beshbalik, which was not too far from Hami, north of Turfan. The capital was moved to Ilibalik, i.e. Gulja/Yining, with which Qishiyi ends his description of the northern route, in 1418. Qishiyi also calls Hami an ancient Hui land (古之回國) – the reader wonders whether this term means “Uyghur land” or just “Muslim land”. In fact, Qishiyi refers to the Muslim inhabitants of the area as “Hui ren” or “Hui zi”. It seems that he does not simply mean “Muslims”, but rather Turkic-speaking seden-

⁴⁰ XYWJL 1.3b-4a.

⁴¹ XYWJL 1.4b.

tary people, not Iranians, for example. Kazakhs or Afghans were not “Hui” for him, even if they were Muslims. In this respect, it is obvious that for Qishiyi, “Hui-guo” were “Muslim countries”, but the term “Huiren” or “Huizi” only refers to Turkic-speaking Muslims.

Qishiyi is enthusiastic about Urumqi, which was located “in former Dzungarian territory” – in other words, it was not Uyghur land. After the Manchurian campaigns, the Oirats had been completely destroyed, so that an area of a thousand Chinese miles (around 500 kilometres) was “completely empty, so that not even the smoke of a human [dwelling] could be seen in the distance” (千里空虛，渺無人煙).⁴² As the land was fertile, Qianlong built a new, more favourably located city eight miles away from the former Dzungar city in his 30th year (= 1765). There was water and fertile pastures; people flocked there, tea and wine houses opened, and singing boys and various craftsmen settled there. It’s like reading a description of Shenzhen in the 1980s: A gold-rush atmosphere for anyone who wanted to try something new in a new place. The reader involuntarily gains the impression that Qishiyi may have lived in Urumqi, even though the *Da Qing yitongzhi* does not yet contain any population figures for this city. The place was probably still too insignificant at the end of the 18th century, and yet the text mentions 3,000 elite soldiers, then numerous ordinary households and 3,000 Manchurian and 2,000 Han Chinese soldiers, as well as 78 officials and finally 5,300 soldiers. It is unclear exactly what these numbers mean, but it is clear that Urumqi became the central location for the establishment of a military presence. There is no mention of Uyghurs, and it seems that there were hardly any Uyghurs there either.⁴³

It is said that Urumqi was the richest place on the other side of the border. On the red mountain above, there was a temple with red walls (probably a temple for the god of war, Guandi), which is why the area was popularly called “Wulumuqi”, meaning “red temple”.⁴⁴

⁴² XYWJL 1.5b.

⁴³ XYWJL 1.5b-6a.

⁴⁴ XYWJL 1.6a-b.

The etymology is not entirely clear. However, it is likely that Qishiyi believes that the name of the city of Urumqi derives from the Mongolian “ulaghan” for “red” and “muji” for “region, province”. It is also possible that “muqi” derives from the Manchurian “miyooze” (or “miyoosi”) for “temple”, although this form derived from Chinese has no lexical evidence.

But one thing is clear: in the Qing sources, the name is derived from words with a “u” and is read accordingly as Urumqi, not the Turkicised Ürümqi.⁴⁵ Today’s city is a Manchurian-Chinese foundation. Uyghurs only moved to this area, where almost half of the Han Chinese living in Xinjiang live today, at a late stage. It was originally called Urumqi, not Ürümqi.

From Urumqi, Qishiyi jumps 700 kilometres through largely uninhabited land to the western border at Yili. After a massacre of “a million Dzungars”, officials were appointed there to oversee the Oirat, Torgut and Uyghur towns as well as the khans of the border peoples on the outside – probably Kazakhs.⁴⁶ A motley crew of Manchurians, Chinese, Koreans, Turks and Mongols were settled to populate the newly founded city on the Yili River; it was called the “City of Favour for the Faraway” (*huiyuan cheng* 惠遠城). About 30-40 kilometres east of Yili was a Muslim town called Gulja (固爾扎), which today has become the Turkish name for Yili, but apparently originally meant a different place.⁴⁷ Yili was declared the headquarters from which both the Mongolian northern route and the Turkish southern route could be controlled. Qishiyi praises the Qianlong Emperor for the fact that all the lands of

⁴⁵ There is no reasonable etymology for the Turkic-sounding “Ürümqi”. In *Xiyu tongwen zhi* 西域同文志 (ed. *Siku quanshu*) 1/6b-7b, Urumqi is derived from “to strike each other” = battlefield. This must have been “urush-“ in Old Turkic. Other considerations are that “Urumqi” derives from the Turkic word “urum” for milk and that “-ci” is the suffix of the nomen *actoris*: “milk maker”, which would have referred to the Mongolian nomads. There are also attempts to link the name with the Sogdian “irümcina” and the Sogdian word “irü” for forest. However, this would then be Iranian, not Turkish.

⁴⁶ XYWJL 7b.

⁴⁷ XYWJL 8a-b.

the Uyghurs (*huihe zhi bang* 回紇之邦) had been included in the state's registers – more had thus been achieved than in a hundred generations before.⁴⁸ It is interesting that Qishiye uses the term “Uyghurs” here again for the historical ancestral lands of this people, but not later for Altishahr. Whatever he meant by the term, he seems to have had a clear historical awareness of where Uyghurs were to be found.

In his second chapter, Qishiye turns to the southern route, which he begins with the two towns of Pizhan 關展 and Turfan, which are quite close to each other. He talks about how the Oirats had plagued the Turkish rural population and reports that the approximately 3,000 households were economically unable to provide for themselves. Watermelons, which were the most important crop, obviously did not yield enough food and money to make a living in the region. – Halfway between Turfan and Kucha was Karashahr, the old Uyghur Yanqi 焉耆, with its ruined city dating back to the Tang period. A small Muslim population group initially lived there together with Torgut Mongolian nomads. However, they fled due to the Mongol threat, whereupon the Mongols turned the area into pastureland. This is an interesting reference that suggests what might have happened to other towns in the area in the 17th century, long before the Chinese-Manchurian conquests. After the pacification by the Qing, they attempted to settle the Torguts. Qishiye said nothing about the numerical strength of this Torgut group, but their presence gives him the opportunity to speak at length about the Torguts: He said that attempts to encourage them to farm had been difficult because the people were lazy and preferred to rob and steal, causing merchants and Hui households to suffer. Their women were completely shameless, which is why it was possible to fornicate with them everywhere. However, they were much better manual labourers than the Hui women. Poverty often led them to sell their children as servants to the sedentary Muslim townspeople.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ XYWJL 10a.

⁴⁹ XYWJL 2.3b-4b.

130 kilometres further southwest, Korla, with 700 households of “Hui ren”, follows in the description, then – after another 300 kilometres – the town of Bugur, where 2,000 Muslim households originally lived. After the Qing had put down a revolt there, however, only 100 households remained, which is why 500 other Muslim households were settled. 150 kilometres further on, they reached Kucha, where the rebellion had had even more devastating effects. This town was an important Turkish town with 30,000 to 50,000 Muslim households. However, when the Chinese troops arrived, there were only seven goats and two cattle left. According to Qishiyi, 1,000 households lived in Kucha when he was there.⁵⁰

This is where the description of the actually significant territory of southwestern Xinjiang begins. The population of the city of Ush was wiped out after a rebellion, and 500 new households from the four cities of Aksu, Yarkant, Hotan and Kashgar were brought there to cultivate the land.⁵¹ Qishiyi’s report does not tell us much about Aksu, but he attributes a population of 70,000 to 80,000 households to Yarkant, which is certainly an exaggeration. He emphasises that it was a trading town where merchants from all parts of China, as well as from Andijan, Kokand and Kashmir, had gathered. In contrast, there was now great poverty, the people were dissolute – presumably an allusion to prostitution – and there was a preference for homosexuality (喜男色), much like in Fujian and Guangdong.⁵² Above all, however, Qishiyi emphasises the quality of the jade. He has little to say about Hotan, where he has not noticed any bad customs.⁵³

Finally, many pages are again devoted to Kashgar, the westernmost and last city described by Qishiyi. He says that when a foreigner talked about the “Hui ren” from the individual cities of Xinjiang, he usually

⁵⁰ XYWJL 2.7b.

⁵¹ XYWJL 2.11b.

⁵² XYWJL 2.15a.

⁵³ XYWJL 16a-b.

referred to the Muslims from Kashgar (喀什噶爾回子).⁵⁴ Qishiyi is probably using the same Kashgarian term that Abul-Ghazi Bahadur used – as mentioned above – to distinguish the Kashgarians from the Uyghurs. 250 Han troops were stationed in Kashgar; the Muslim city was located next to the garrison town. Arts and crafts were valued in the city, and rich families kept singing girl troops, just like in eastern China. Qishiyi also recognises a high level of prostitution in Kashgar. Before the pacification by China, the city had repeatedly suffered under the Kyrgyz, but now it was flourishing.⁵⁵

Incidentally, it is quite clear that Qishiyi knew the Mongolian-Manchurian north of Xinjiang much better than the Muslim south. His figures in the north correspond to the official data, while in the south he was obviously more re-liant on estimates. One thing is clear, however: there were very few people living on the northern route, including in Hami and Turfan, and even fewer Turkic speakers.

So much for the description of Xinjiang's geography and the historical events that led to its subjugation by Qianlong. Leaving aside the relatively sparsely populated oases of Hami and Turfan, the Turkic-speaking population was concentrated in the six cities – “Altishahr” – Kucha, Ush, Aksu, Yarkand, Hotan and Kashgar, although Kucha and Ush were apparently largely deserted following suppressed uprisings. Whether massacres were actually the reason for the exodus of a large part of the population in these two cities, or whether their numbers were in any case significantly smaller than Qishiyi assumed, can no longer be determined today. Although mass executions can be assumed, the majority of the population probably sought refuge in one of the other four southern cities as the Qing armies approached.

⁵⁴ XYWJL 17a.

⁵⁵ XYWJL 19a.

4.2 Some anthropological observations

An entire chapter that Qishiye dedicates to the natural and social conditions in Xinjiang is entitled “Notes on the customs in the Muslim [Uyghur?] lands” (*Huijiang fengtu ji* 回疆風土記). At the end, he emphasises the fear that the inhabitants of southern Xinjiang had of the Mongols – “like a dog before a tiger or a mouse before a cat”. The latter repeatedly invaded to steal the cattle and rape the women.⁵⁶ Otherwise, however, he uses this chapter primarily for informing his reader about local customs. He begins by making fun of how little the Muslims understand about agriculture. They don't weed the fields, he says, but claim that it promotes plant growth. They grew wheat as their main crop, as well as rice and cotton. Rye was cultivated for alcohol production and as fodder for animals. According to him, there was still a lot of untapped potential for promoting agriculture here.⁵⁷

In addition to the description of fasting, Qishiye is particularly fond of the different types of alcohol that the Turkish population of Xinjiang had invented, produced and apparently consumed with enthusiasm. He describes the breaking of the fast at the end of Ramadan, at which the local ruler gave the population beef and mutton and served a good grape wine. At Newroz (努魯斯), the New Year's festival, people drank in the same way as at the beginning of summer, when so much mulberry wine was fermented from the ripe mulberry fruits that each household received several barrels. Women and men could be seen everywhere indulging in alcohol in the shade of the trees, and drunken Muslims were constantly encountered (從此所遇，皆醉回子矣). Grape wine seems to have been widely consumed in autumn, after the grapes had ripened; in the other seasons, people apparently drank less strong alcohol made from rye or millet, from which arak, i.e. schnaps, was also distilled.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ XYWJL 7a.

⁵⁷ XYWJL 7.1a-2a.

⁵⁸ XYWJL 7.3a-4a.

All this is interesting because Qishiye reports on the strict ban on pork and also on the circumcision ceremony. He therefore knew the Muslim commandments and customs well. However, he had obviously not heard of a ban on alcohol in Xinjiang, nor of the idea that women could wear veils. On the other hand, he reports that men and women were equal, that one can simply get divorced and that a man had to accept it if his wife threw him out of their common house – just like the other way round. Islam in Xinjiang in the 18th century was obviously very different from today.⁵⁹

5. The development of Xinjiang in a world-historical comparison

Xinjiang came to the Manchurian Empire at almost the same time as Poland was partitioned by Prussia, Russia and Austria. As is well known, this partition triggered considerable migration flows. German-speaking settlers increasingly came to Poland. At the same time, Russia expelled the Ottoman rulers from the northern side of the Black Sea and settled Russians in the westernmost part of this area, and then also in its eastern part in the course of the industrialisation of the 19th century. In North America, the period of the Manchurian conquest of Xinjiang coincides with the period in which English colonialists drove their numerically inferior French rivals out of a vast, sparsely populated area.

Whether there were overriding reasons, for example, of a climatic nature, for the reorganisation of the world of states in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe, Central and East Asia, but also in North America, cannot be determined at the present state of our knowledge. Technological innovations, which, among other things, favoured the Russian advance in Central Asia, are likely to have been of greater significance.

Just as political changes in Europe brought about massive demographic shifts, the takeover of the Manchurian Qing in Xinjiang led to the spread of Turkic-speaking Muslims to northern Xinjiang, where they

⁵⁹ XYWJL 7.5a-b, 7.8b.

were needed as labour. At the same time, the Qing government encouraged an influx from the Chinese inland provinces. Some Muslim Hui also fled to Xinjiang to escape unrest in China. Although the Turfan oasis in eastern Xinjiang was populated by Turkic speakers, the northern part of the region was otherwise inhabited by nomads, probably Mongols, Kazakhs and perhaps also some Uyghurs. If the population of Xinjiang was 95% Uyghur in 1949, this does not reflect the conditions of the 19th century, but the development since the Chinese Revolution of 1911. Although warlords succeeded in maintaining Chinese overlordship in Xinjiang, the insecure conditions led to a massive migration of Han Chinese back to China. This was certainly not as violent as the expulsion of the Germans from the former eastern territories of the German Reich, but it was structurally a similar process – today we would probably call it “remigration”. Nationalism, which aimed to create ethnically pure areas in many parts of the world in order to establish nation states there, did not stop at Xinjiang. The resettlement of Han Chinese and Hui after 1949 was a movement in the opposite direction, which restored a previous state rather than being something new.

6. Concluding remarks

In addition to the two oasis towns of Hami and Turfan in the north of Xinjiang, only a small part of today’s area of the same name was populated by settled Turkic-speaking townfolk from the south in the 18th century, who were given the name “Uyghurs” in the 20th century. Originally, the name only applied to the Turkic-speaking nomads in the north. This fact explains the Chinese lack of understanding of the prevailing idea in Europe and the USA that cities such as Urumqi could originally have been Uyghur and not Chinese and that industrial settlement there should therefore be judged according to ethnic rather than labour market criteria. From a historical perspective, the apologists from the People’s Republic of China are therefore right.

It was only through the resettlement measures of the Qing, who wanted to reclaim the empty or emptied land so that the military expansion would pay off, that the Uyghur population also began to spread across the entire area of present-day Xinjiang in the 19th century. The Turkic-Muslim homeland that the Qing subjugated and which is now associated with the Uyghurs was the ancient land of the six cities of Altishahr in the south-western corner of Xinjiang, which used to be called Kashgaria – in clear distinction to the land of the nomadic Uyghurs, which was located in the north-west of the province, in cities such as Beshbalik or Ilibalik.

Thomas Heberer

Security dilemma and nation-building

Political and social background to the development in Xinjiang

When I first travelled to Xinjiang in 1980, nationality issues seemed to be less conflict-laden, at least in the northern part of the region. That year, I travelled with a group of workers from a hotel in Ürümqi, the capital of Xinjiang, to *Tianchi* (Heavenly Lake), a mountain lake about 50 kilometres from Ürümqi. The hotel ran log cabins there, which were rented out to Chinese tourists. Although the season had not yet opened, the workers – Han and Uyghur – were supposed to be preparing everything. I was the only guest and developed a close relationship with the workers, supplemented by contacts with Kazakh cattle breeders who lived nearby. Almost all evenings were spent together with the workers and Kazakhs, and there was no sign of resentment between the ethnic groups.

The second trip to southern Xinjiang in 1990 showed a different picture. Strong resentment towards Han Chinese was palpable. I heard many reports of injustice and perceived discrimination against Uyghurs. In a teahouse on the edge of the famous Sunday Bazaar in Kashgar, I struck up a conversation with a Uyghur. He told me:

*This is our soil; it does not belong to China and the Chinese who exploit us. Visitors come to this market from all over Central Asia. Their languages are very similar to ours. We have much more in common with them than with the Han Chinese. You could even say that the Central Asian peoples and we Uyghurs form a common people.*¹

¹ Interview, 22 April 1990. This article is supplemented by some personal experiences during longer stays in the north and south of Xinjiang in 1980, 1990, 2007 and 2023, as well as informal conversations with people from Xinjiang's ethnic minorities and Chinese Xinjiang experts in China between 1990 and 2023. The interviewees were assured anonymity, so that no names are mentioned, only the place and time of the respective conversation.

How did this change from apparent ethnic integration and harmony to thoughts of otherness and independence come about? What were the consequences that the state drew from the developments in Xinjiang? This article focuses on analysing the motives and background for the draconian state actions in the region between 1990 and 2017, as these have so far only been marginally analysed in the academic literature.²

Parallel to the reform and opening-up policy in China and the associated liberalisation, Islamist and separatist tendencies grew stronger in Xinjiang. They ultimately culminated in terrorist activities in some cases and spread from Xinjiang to other parts of China. The government justified the harsh measures associated with this with a “security emergency”. In Western literature, this aspect is often downplayed or completely neglected. In some cases, it is even denied that Islamism, separatism and terrorism were the cause of the Chinese government's actions. Corresponding Chinese reports are described as a mere “narrative” of the Chinese leadership, which was not the cause of this action, but merely attempts to conceal the assimilation policy of the Chinese authorities.³

Jeffrey D. Sachs, one of the world's most renowned economists, and William Schabas, an internationally recognised expert in international law, write on the subject:

There are credible charges of human rights abuses against Uighurs, but those do not per se constitute genocide. And we must understand the context of the Chinese crackdown in Xinjiang, which had essentially the same motivation as America's foray into the Middle East and Central Asia after the September 2001 attacks: to stop the terrorism of militant Islamic groups.

And further:

² The sections, *Religious characteristics of the Turkic peoples in Xinjiang, Beijing and Islam and Xinjiang – a historically conflict-ridden region*, make partial reference to earlier publications; see Heberer 2010.

³ See e.g. Alpermann 2021, 144ff.; Rodriguez-Merino 2023, 4ff. and 79ff.; Roberts 2018 and 2020, 142ff.; cf. also Alpermann 2024, 159-164.

*As the Hong Kong-based businessman and writer Weijian Shan has recounted, China experienced repeated terrorist attacks in Xinjiang during the same years that America's flawed response to 9/11 led to repeated US violations of international law and massive bloodshed. Indeed, until late 2020, the US classified the Uighur East Turkestan Islamic Movement as a terrorist group, battled Uighur fighters in Afghanistan, and held many as prisoners. In July 2020, the United Nations noted the presence of thousands of Uighur fighters in Afghanistan and Syria.*⁴

References to the fight against terrorism and separatism are often met with the accusation that the Chinese government is justifying human rights violations. However, such arguments run the risk of completely ignoring the background.⁵ It therefore makes sense to include the state's behavioural logic and motives in the overall context in order to gain a clearer picture of the development process in Xinjiang between 1990 and 2017.

The first question that arises here is to what extent we can speak of a "terrorist threat" at all, and – if this is the case – secondly, what the causes of this are, and thirdly, why the Chinese state has reacted in such a harsh manner. Limiting the context to Xinjiang alone is not sufficient to categorise the state's actions. This raises the fundamental question of what role the *party state* plays in China's development process as a whole, including Xinjiang and other peripheral areas/border provinces, what overarching goals it is pursuing and what this means for Xinjiang's development. National security policy ideas and the nation-building process are two essential factors without which the background of the state's actions cannot be understood. It is important to analyse these self-concepts in order to understand the state's conclusions with regard to further development (domestic security dilemma and nation-building). It also makes sense to refer to the function of the state as a "developmental state".⁶

⁴ Sachs/Schabas 2021 (translation from German); on the issue of "genocide", see the contributions by Norman Paech and Barry Sautman in this volume and Slawotsky 2021.

⁵ Similar to Greitens et al. 2019/20, 11; Shichor 2023.

⁶ Heberer 2017 and 2023.

The concept of the developmental state, developed by US political scientist Chalmers Johnson in the 1980s,⁷ was originally applied to the role of the state in Japan's development process, and later to developments in South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia.⁸ In all cases, these were state entities in which the political elite pursued strictly planned and effective development on the basis of top-down, authoritarian rule by a unified organisation, whether on the basis of a single party (Taiwan, Singapore) or with the help of a military dictatorship (South Korea). Despite all the differences and peculiarities of the individual states in East Asia, this concept provides a suitable framework for analysing the behaviour and actions of the Chinese state as well.

Developmental states are purpose-orientated and strong states with a firm will and consensus among the political elite to develop the nation economically, socially and politically. These tasks also include the state-building and nation-building process. At the same time, they are in a position to enforce all-round development from the top down, overcoming particular social interests and resistance. This requires effective intervention in the economy as well as control of enterprises and their goals, whereby intervention and control are also able to compensate for market deficits. Such states should also be in a position to implement their policies nationwide. They have a relatively high degree of independence from the influence of social interest groups. Without such autonomy, the state cannot exercise effective control over society, it cannot regulate social relations and, if necessary, it cannot discipline social forces in the interests of national development. Another part of this concept is strict and repressive action against individuals or organisations that potentially oppose the development goals of the main actor – in this case the CCP. Such states have an effective bureaucracy, which must be constantly professionalised and should guarantee political stability. In China, the functions of the developmental state are performed by the CCP as the leading force.

⁷ Johnson 1982.

⁸ See also Kohli 2004; Woo-Cumings 1999.

Following this approach, the sociologist James Scott saw a tendency in states that pursue planned development and modernisation to order nature and society administratively, to shape and control all aspects of social life through rational-technical design according to a plan in order to realise an overriding national goal or vision. In China, this goal currently consists of endeavouring to create a “comprehensive modern polity” by 2049/50, including a stable and consolidated nation. This objective corresponds to the concept of the “developmental state”, which sees its function not only in planning modern society and its structure, but also in subjecting it to its functional ideas.⁹ Development in Xinjiang has been and continues to be subordinated to this mission by the Chinese party-state.

In order to better assess the role of Islam in China and in the Xinjiang region, the following section will first provide an overview of Muslim ethnic groups in China as well as the history and characteristics of Islam among the Turkic-speaking ethnic groups in Xinjiang in particular. This is followed by a brief discussion of the region’s recent history, which has been characterised by various forms of conflict. The historical experiences and expectations of these ethnic groups continue to have an impact on their collective consciousness (Durkheim) right up to the present day. This article then looks at the rise of separatist and Islamist movements since the 1990s and the terrorist activities that have taken place in this context.¹⁰ It also looks at the influence of such movements from China’s neighbouring countries as well as the renaissance of Islam and the growing ethnicity, particularly among Uyghurs and Kazakhs. The core thesis of this article is that the increasing acts of terrorism and the associated internal security dilemma after 1990 created a sense of national and individual threat among China’s political leadership and large sections of the Chinese population, which the

⁹ See Scott 1998.

¹⁰ As Fuller/Lipman (2004, 347) have shown, it is difficult for outsiders to distinguish between pan-Turkish, general separatist, Islamist and secular movements, as the respective ideologies sometimes overlap within the organisations concerned, which makes it difficult to draw a clear distinction.

party-state attempted to counteract with a determined policy. Legal rules were largely overridden in the process. The political consequences of the perceived security dilemma were also reflected in a prioritisation of the nation-building process and a stronger focus of nationality policy on this process, combined with a programme of social disciplining.¹¹

I. Xinjiang – Ethnic and religious features

Muslim ethnic groups in China

According to China's latest population census from 2020, the number of people belonging to one of the Muslim ethnicities is around 26 million. They are spread across ten ethnic groups. (However, this does not mean that these 26 million are also devout Muslims. Specific figures on the number of devout Muslims in China are not available).

The corresponding ethnic groups, which make up a fifth of the ethnic minority population, are made up of six Turkic-speaking groups (Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Salars, and Tatars), two Mongolian-speaking groups (Bonan and Dongxiang¹²), one Iranian-speaking group (Tajiks) and the Hui, the second largest Muslim ethnicity. Externally and in terms of language, the Hui hardly differ from the Han Chinese majority.¹³

¹¹ Cf. Heberer 2022 and 2023, 148-160.

¹² Ma 1987.

¹³ The “Han”, the largest nationality (commonly referred to as “Chinese” in the West), do not actually form a homogeneous group. On the one hand, they are the result of the mixing of different peoples over the course of history. On the other hand, they also include groups that differ significantly from one another in terms of language, clothing, customs and traditions or lifestyle, such as the Hakka, the Cantonese, the inhabitants of Fujian and others.

Population figures of Muslim ethnic groups in China according to the 2020 census

<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Share of</i>	
		<i>all minorities (%)</i>	<i>Total population (%)</i>
Uyghurs	11.774.538	9,36	0,91
Hui	11.377.914	9,05	0,89
Kazakhs	1.562.518	1,24	0,12
Dongxiang	774.947	0,62	0,06
Kyrgyz	204.402	0,16	0,02
Salars	165.159	0,13	0,01
Tajiks	50.896	0,04	0,00
Bonan	24.434	0,02	0,00
Uzbeks	12.742	0,01	0,00
Tatars	3.544	0,00	0,00
Total	25.951.094	20,65	2,02

Source: <https://www.bilibili.com/read/cv14109722>; access: 04/2025.

While the other people form ethnically cohesive communities with a largely uniform settlement area and their own language, the Hui ethnic group emerged from very different immigrations. They form a religious rather than an ethnic community, with the spectrum ranging from assimilated urban Hui to strictly orthodox Muslims who avoid contact with non-Muslims. Hui can be found in all provinces¹⁴, and the other Muslim ethnic groups are concentrated in north-west China.¹⁵ Over one million Hui live in Xinjiang alone. The largest Turkic-speaking group are the Uyghurs, who are linguistically and culturally closest to the Uzbeks. The second largest ethnic group are the Kazakhs, a Turkic people with a Mongolian flavour, whose Muslim faith has retained

¹⁴ On the Hui see, among others, Gladney 1996.

¹⁵ See Gladney 1996; a detailed overview of Xinjiang's ethnic groups can be found in Hoppe 1995.

traits of shamanism. Some of them fled to China after a rebellion in 1916, after the October Revolution in 1917 and in the course of the collectivisation of agriculture in the Soviet Union at the end of the 1920s.¹⁶

In addition to Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, there are a number of smaller nationalities that are little known to us, such as the Salars, who mainly live in the Xunhua Autonomous County of the Salars (north-west Chinese province of Qinghai), and to a lesser extent in the Ili district in Xinjiang. They supposedly immigrated from Samarkand during the Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) and mixed with Tibetans, Hui and Han. They speak a Turkic language that is related to Uyghur and Uzbek.¹⁷ The Iranian Tajiks, on the other hand, are the so-called Mountain or Pamir Tajiks, who are also called Wakhi in the literature.¹⁸ With the exception of the Shiite Tajiks¹⁹, most Muslims in China are Sunnis and follow the Hanafi school of law.²⁰ The small community of Tatars living in the north of the “Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang” fled to China mainly as a result of Russian expansionist policies in the 19th and early 20th centuries.²¹ The small Yugur nationality (2020: 14,706 people), which mainly lives in the Yugur Sunan Autonomous County (Gansu Province), speaks three languages (Mongolian, Chinese, and Turkic). Around half of them speak a Turkic language. There are also several thousand Tuvans living in the Altai Mountains in Xinjiang, who have not yet been recognised as a separate ethnic group.

¹⁶ Mierzhahan 1989; on the Kazakhs in China, see Benson/Svanberg 1988.

¹⁷ Ma/Ma 2004.

¹⁸ See *Tajikezu jianshi* 2008; Xiao 1989.

¹⁹ On the religion of the Tajiks, see Wang Shouli 1982.

²⁰ Pillsbury 1981, 46. The Hanafi school of law is one of the four schools of law in Sunni Islam. In addition to the authentic traditions of the Prophet and the faith, it also makes the individual situation and personal judgement the basis of jurisprudence. This school is therefore considered a rather liberal form. It represents the majority among all those Sunnis who belong to the Turkic peoples (including the Turks themselves), as well as among the Sunnis of the Asian mainland east of Iran, i.e. in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, India, Bangladesh, China, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

²¹ *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu* 1984, 251ff.

Religious characteristics of the Turkic peoples in Xinjiang

The beginning of the Islamic conversion of the Turkic peoples in Central Asia is dated to the 8th century, after the troops of the Arab Abbasid Caliphate had militarily defeated the Chinese army at Talas and advanced into Central Asia. The ruler of Kashgar and Hotan (Khotan), Satok Bughra Khan, is said to have embraced the Islamic faith in the 10th century in what is now Chinese territory. In the centuries that followed, Islam reached the Tatars (10th century), Uzbeks (13th/14th century), the inhabitants of the areas that have been referred to as Uyghurs since the 1930s²² (15th century) and Kazakhs (16th/17th century).²³ Ethnic differences between the Turkic peoples in Xinjiang, primarily Uyghurs and Kazakhs on the one hand and Hui on the other, prevented co-operation in the following centuries, which could have led to the emergence of a common Islamic state in the 19th century. Nevertheless, numerous Hui fled to present-day Xinjiang following uprisings or due to famine or natural disasters in the Chinese heartland. Due to the ethnic antagonisms there, this posed no threat to the Chinese central government. Instead, Hui proved to be mediators/transporters of Confucian cultural elements as well as mediators between Turkic peoples and Han. During the Qing period (1644-1912), Hui were appointed as local officials in Xinjiang, some of whom acted even more rigidly towards the Turkic peoples than Han officials.²⁴ In contrast to the Hui, the Turkic peoples only adapted to Han Chinese influence to a limited extent until the 20th century.²⁵

Among the Turkic peoples, the role of Sufism has also increased again since the 1990s. On the Silk Road, Muslims once again danced the *zikr*, a meditative exercise to visualise God, which plays a prominent role in Sufism.²⁶ Sufism has helped to keep Islam alive in China. Since it does

²² See section "Differentiation of the Uyghur population".

²³ Newby 1988, 927.

²⁴ Cf. op. cit. 934, and Forbes 1991.

²⁵ On Islam in Xinjiang, see also Fuller/Lipman 2004.

²⁶ Dance of the dervishes, in which the upper body is moved forwards and backwards until a state of trance is reached and short Koranic verses are recited.

not necessarily require an imam as a mediator between man and God, nor does it require formal prayers, but rather believers can enter into personal contact with God through meditation, yoga and inner contemplation, the practice of faith was able to survive in secret even in times of fierce opposition to religiosity as a “superstition” (Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution). However, as in other Islamic countries, Sufism faces opposition from many orthodox Muslim institutions. As *Sufi sects* largely evade state control and appear unorthodox in their behaviour, most representatives of official Islam and representatives of the party and state were unanimous in their rejection.²⁷ In a study of Sufi brotherhoods in the successor states of the Soviet Union, for example, it became clear that these could develop into the seeds of Islamic fundamentalism and ethnonationalism.²⁸

There are therefore two major strands of Chinese Islam: the Islam of the Hui, which came to China peacefully, mostly through traders and merchants, and partially adapted to Confucian customs, and the Islam of the Turkic peoples, which was partly spread by the sword in Central Asia. While the Hui are not seen by the Han Chinese as an ethnic but primarily as a religious community, the Turkic peoples are defined less religiously than ethnically. But despite all the differences, for example, with regard to separatism or Sufism, there are similarities between the Hui and Turkic peoples: both see themselves as part of the *umma*, the overarching community of Muslim believers, especially under conditions in which the faith appears to be threatened by modernisation and migration processes. Not only are the religious foundations and religious beliefs of all Muslims in China identical. In the cities, members of different ethnic groups can often be seen praying together in a mosque, and in some Sufi orders there is cross-ethnic membership. Localised discrimination against local Muslim communities quickly leads to nationwide solidarity among Muslim groups. The return to the market and entrepreneurship has also given rise to economic networks of Muslims. Such networks not only pursue economic goals, but also

²⁷ Interview with Xinjiang researcher, Beijing, 29 September 2009.

²⁸ Lehmann 1996, 9f.

social and charitable ones: they support mosques and Muslim schools and promote charitable organisations. Private Muslim educational and publishing organisations have also emerged in the course of the policy of opening up and reform.²⁹

The identity of the ethnic groups in Xinjiang also goes back to Islam. At the same time, religion was an important factor in their survival. However, a distinction must be made here between Kazakhs and Kyrgyz on the one hand and Uyghurs on the other. The former have combined animistic and shamanistic traits with Islam, making them less radical in their beliefs, while Uyghurs – historically speaking – have tended towards more pan-Islamic influences.³⁰

Differentiation of the Uyghur population

The ethnic group referred to as Uyghurs is not originally a homogeneous group. The term “Uyghur” has existed for centuries. However, in the 8th century it referred to a coalition of nine nomadic *Tiele tribes*³¹ in northern China, Mongolia and the Altai Mountains. Classification and identity as “Uyghur” have changed over the course of history.³²

The “Uyghurs” consist of many sub-ethnic segments and exhibit a considerable degree of regional differentiation. The Uyghur politician Burhan Shahidi (Baoerhan, 1894-1989), governor of Xinjiang for many years after the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 and holder of various leadership positions at both central and regional levels, was of the opinion that the term was only officially introduced by the provincial government of Xinjiang under Soviet influence in the 1930s at his suggestion.³³ Since the Qing period, the oasis inhabitants of the Tarim Basin had only been referred to by place names (Kashgar-

²⁹ Cf. e.g. J. Wang 2003, 230.

³⁰ Hoppe 1992, 362, also points this out.

³¹ The *Tiele* (铁勒), an ancient Turkic people, are considered to be descendants of the “Xiongnu” (“Huns”).

³² Cf. Gladney 1990.

³³ Rudelson 1997, 6f., takes a similar view.

is, Taranchis, Turkis, etc.) or generally as *chanhui* (纏回, “wrapped Hui”) or *chantou* (缠头, “head-wrapped”), probably in the sense of “turban wearer”.³⁴ Rudelson/Gladney also point out that Soviet influence played a role in the naming at the time.³⁵ According to them, “Uyghur” stood for Turkic-speaking Muslims in the Xinjiang region, who had previously established themselves as local communities under different names.³⁶ However, the grouping under a standardised name led to an increasing awareness of a common ethnicity among the Uyghurs. A common language and Islam promoted intra-ethnic integration and identity.

However, Rudelson speaks of fragmented identities with regard to Xinjiang and the Uyghurs. Occupational groups traditionally formed strong communities, while family relationships (clans), ancestry or oasis affiliation played a secondary role. Using the example of the Turpan oasis in eastern Xinjiang, he illustrates that the three social groups of intellectuals, merchants and farmers have different forms of identity. Intellectuals would differentiate themselves more strongly from Han and identify more with the Turkish world of Central Asia and Turkey. They are more secularly orientated and anti-Islamic, but more pan-Turkish. Those parts of the peasant population who have hardly any contact with the outside world see themselves as devout Muslims and have a primarily localised (oasis-oriented) identity. Uyghur merchants with contacts in China’s heartland, who would benefit from the reform and opening-up policy, see themselves first and foremost as Chinese citizens. According to Rudelson, these differences made it difficult to develop a

³⁴ Personal conversation with Burhan Shahidi on 12 August 1986 in his flat in Beijing. See also his book *Baoerhan*, 1984, 244. In the conversation, Burhan also discussed the intensive pan-Turkish and Soviet attempts to exert influence in Xinjiang, which had diminished but continued to exist, as well as the growing external influence of radical Islamic currents in the course of the opening-up policy.

³⁵ Rudelson 1997, 5ff.; Gladney 2004, 217.

³⁶ Hoppe 1995, 56ff. See also: Friederich 1995, 6/7. Van Ess (2017) comes to a different conclusion, according to which the term has survived over time, but may have referred more strongly to the inhabitants of western Xinjiang. Overall, however, the genesis of the ethnonym has not yet been sufficiently clarified.

common Uyghur identity. The liberalisation of state policy in the 1980s also led to a positive attitude towards the Chinese government among farmers and merchants in the Turpan oasis. At the same time, Rudelson recognises a certain dilemma facing the government: if it restricts the practice of Islam, Uyghurs feel oppressed and see the government in a rather negative light. A clear liberalisation, on the other hand, could lead to Uyghurs differentiating themselves more strongly from Han Chinese society.³⁷

There is no doubt that the development of infrastructure (road construction, rail network, airports, telecommunications, media in the Uyghur language, etc.) has favoured communication within Xinjiang and among the Uyghurs and contributed to the strengthening of Uyghur identity. China's education policy and the favourable access to educational institutions for ethnic minorities have encouraged the emergence of a Uyghur educated class. At the same time, the opportunities to become economically independent favoured the development of an entrepreneurial class. All of this has helped to strengthen the Uyghur sense of identity and ethnic self-confidence.³⁸

There are also interethnic tensions between the Turkic peoples, some of which are due to different lifestyles, such as those of nomads (Kazakhs) and farmers (Uyghurs). Some Uyghurs are said to treat the other ethnic minorities in a patronising manner, for example, using the word "Kazakh" as an insult.³⁹ Some Uyghurs also labelled Kazakhs as dirty, lazy and backward. There are also similar contradictions between Uyghurs, Kyrgyz and Tajiks.⁴⁰ It is therefore understandable that proposals such as the establishment of an independent "Uyghuristan" are not very attractive to other ethnic minorities. Separatist Uyghur movements abroad are aware of this and are therefore more likely to try to appear in the name of pan-Turkism or pan-Islamism.

³⁷ Rudelson 1997, 167-171.

³⁸ Cf. also Starr 2004b; Benson 2004; Rudelson/Jakowiak 2004.

³⁹ Hoppe 1995, 145.

⁴⁰ Cf. Friederich 1995, 23ff.

Xinjiang: Migration and migration policy

Xinjiang, half the size of India and five times the size of Germany, accounts for one-sixth of China's territory and is home to large reserves of raw materials (including oil). It is the only province in China with a large population of Turkic-speaking and Muslim ethnic minorities.

Population of ethnic minorities and Han in Xinjiang according to population censuses (1953-2020)⁴¹

	1953	1964	1982	2020
Total population	4,7836	7,2701	13,0815	25,8523
of which:				
Han (%)	6,94	31,93	40,40	42,24
Ethnic minorities (%)	93,06	68,07	59,60	57,76
of which: Uyghurs (% of total population)	75,42	54,90	45,53	44,96

According to the 2020 census, Xinjiang has a population of 25.85 million, with ethnic minorities accounting for 14.94 million (57.8% of the population), including 11.77 million Uyghurs (45%). Han Chinese have a share of 10.92 million people (42.2%).

There is no doubt that the percentage of ethnic minorities in the total population of Xinjiang has decreased significantly since the 1950s. Politically, this percentage shift in favour of the Han can only be interpreted as the central government's desire to promote the need for national security in order to minimise the risk of ethnic secession.⁴² The historian James Millward has shown that there were already strong endeavours to settle more Han immigrants in Xinjiang in the 19th and first half of the 20th century for security policy reasons. Security migration therefore has a history and is not a phenomenon of the People's Republic alone. However, due to the insecure situation in Xinjiang in the 1930s and 1940s, there were also renewed emigration movements.

⁴¹ *Xinjiang renkou fazhan* (Development of the population of Xinjiang; 2021), <http://ca.china-embassy.gov.cn/zt/baipishu2019/202203/t2022030510648275.htm> (access: 04/2025); see also Toops 2004.

⁴² Warikoo 1992.

This policy was also linked to the debate on nation-building that emerged in China at the end of the 19th century.⁴³ As will be shown in Section IV, both factors, security policy considerations and nation-building, have remained relevant to this day.

Beijing and Islam

At the beginning of the 1950s, all Muslim organisations were brought together in the state-controlled *Islamic Association*, which was to act as a link between the worshippers and the state and exercise control over the respective religious communities. At the end of that decade, traditional organisations such as Sufi brotherhoods or the so-called *menhuan*⁴⁴ were banned. Finally, during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), mosques were closed or destroyed, and the study of the Koran and circumcision were banned. Some believers were forced to breed pigs. However, a significant proportion of the Red Guards in Xinjiang, who fought Islam as a “superstition”, are said to have come from Muslim Uyghur families.⁴⁵

With the beginning of the reform and opening-up policy at the end of the 1970s, Beijing initially pursued a more moderate policy towards Chinese Islam. This was also linked to its efforts to attract investment and development aid from Islamic states and its endeavours to gain their support in foreign policy. However, the liberalisation policy also led to new conflict constellations: While parts of the Muslim nationalities returned to the basic values of Islam and the Koran, the central state endeavoured to place Islam at the service of an ethically connoted religious policy:

⁴³ See Millward 2023.

⁴⁴ *Menhuan* are Šūfī sects that are descended from the respective founders and are intended to fulfil the function of a leader. *Menhuan leaders* have authority and control over property and the occupation of positions within the respective sect. Specific rules and rituals, as well as loyalty to the leader, play a central role in the *Menhuan*.

⁴⁵ MacInnis 1989, 234.

*Islam which urges people to give up bad habits and practice good behavior is, objectively speaking, helpful, regardless of the motive of the speaker, in bringing bad social norms under control. Good social norms teach people to be good citizens and abide by the law.*⁴⁶

In turn, there was a growing tendency among Muslim ethnic groups to see themselves as true believers in this ethical understanding of religion and to regard Han Chinese as “idolaters” or “impure”.⁴⁷ This was not only common among some Uyghurs, but also among orthodox Hui. Because, as one Hui once put it, the Han were “people without Arab and Muslim blood”.⁴⁸ Many Han Chinese, on the other hand, looked down on the cultures of the Muslim minorities because, in their eyes, they rejected Chinese-Confucian values such as ancestor worship as well as two pillars of Chinese food culture (pork and alcohol). They also seemed to use a “secret language”, Arabic, in their religious practices.⁴⁹ The Islamisation of parts of society in Xinjiang in turn made it difficult to live together with Han Chinese in everyday life. This Islamisation was accompanied by taboos such as visiting Han restaurants, accepting invitations to eat with Han (“pork eaters”) or drinking alcohol. In some cases, this created separate, parallel spheres of life.⁵⁰ The slogan of the Islamic separatist forces from the 1930s, “Kill the Han, wipe out the Hui” (*sha Han mie Hui*), was also said to have been “heard again” [from the 1990s, T.H.’s note].⁵¹

The literary scholar Yao Xinyong (*Jinan Univ.*, Guangdong), who lived and worked in Xinjiang for many years, reports that there was a kind of informal “religious police” that tried to control and sanction behaviour according to radical Islamic ideas, e.g. with regard to the behaviour of “un-Islamic” clothing worn by women. The distinction between “halal” (actions and things that are commanded by Islamic law) and “haram”

⁴⁶ Op. cit. 256.

⁴⁷ Cf. Witte 1922, 96/97.

⁴⁸ Cited in Pillsbury 1981, 51.

⁴⁹ Op. cit. 50.

⁵⁰ Interview with Xinjiang researcher, Beijing, 29 September 2009.

⁵¹ Ji 1992, 32.

(those that are forbidden by Islamic law) has become increasingly widespread in Uyghur society. Everything that had to do with the government, the Han or modernisation was considered “haram”. All of this increased the segregation of Han and Uyghurs.⁵² As Zhou (2019, 1190) reports, Islamists are said to have banned listening to the radio, watching television, reading newspapers, singing and dancing. Laughing at weddings and crying at funerals were ostracised, and women were forced to wear burqas. It was propagated that “jihadist martyrs would go to heaven” and that the “killing of an infidel” was valued more highly “than ten years of piety”.

A new development occurred when, in May 1989, members of all Muslim nationalities represented in China demonstrated together for the first time across the country against the book *Xing fengsu* (Sexual Customs), written by Han Chinese authors and published by a Shanghai publisher. The book described Muslim sexual customs and was seen by believers as a denigration of Islam. Minarets were compared to phalli, Muslim tombs and domes to the “mouth of Venus”, pilgrimages to Mecca to “orgies” and the taboo on eating pork interpreted in sexual terms. In Beijing alone, 3,000 Muslims took to the streets; in the Hui-strong, north-west Chinese cities of Lanzhou, Yinchuan, Xining and others, hundreds of thousands took to the streets. The protests began in Ürümqi and grew into riots, particularly in the north-west, which the authorities responded to rather moderately on Beijing’s instructions for fear of escalation. The book was banned and destroyed, and the editors responsible were punished.⁵³ An exhibition in Wuzhong (Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, north-west China), which I discovered by chance in a mosque in 1993, documented the protests. An *Ahong* (阿訇, *akhond*, imam) proudly reported on the protests and the “victory” over the “Chinese Salman Rushdie”. As can be seen in the photos, the demonstrators carried banners reading “Death to Chinese Salman Rushdie” and “Destruction of Chinese Satanic Verses”.⁵⁴

⁵² Yao 2014.

⁵³ Gladney 1994.

⁵⁴ The events are confirmed by Gladney 1996, 2ff. and 1994, 255-259.

Muslims in Qinghai are also said to have offered a bounty of 600,000 yuan for the liquidation of the editor responsible, so that he had to be taken into protective custody.⁵⁵

Religious protests by Muslims in the People's Republic were not new. But they took on a new quality in 1989 because [a] all Muslim nationalities were involved, including those in Xinjiang; [b] radical fundamentalist actions abroad (death threats against Salman Rushdie) found their counterpart in China, so that Chinese Islam took on a transnational dimension; [c] the form and content of the protests indicated a radicalisation of the Islamic movement in China; [d] the state exercised the utmost restraint, not only for national but also for international reasons, as it did not take action against the protests anywhere; [e] through their success, Chinese Muslims have realised that together they could form a strong force.

Overall, a historically grown state attitude towards religions in general probably contributed to the strengthening of resentment towards the central state. The state expected religions to be loyal to it and its principles. Since – from a historical perspective – religious movements had repeatedly given rise to insurrectionary movements, they were at the very least regarded as suspect phenomena. On the one hand, Han Chinese did not produce their own religion of salvation, and on the other, philosophical Confucianism often equated religion and superstition. Since religious activities gave rise to parallel power structures that could become a threat to the state, religious activity was historically always subject to strict controls. If it proved to be loyal to the state, it was tolerated, and if not, it was persecuted. This attitude of seeing religion as something foreign, coming from outside, sometimes threatening to the state, which gained influence especially in times of internal weakness, also continued in the People's Republic. A wall newspaper from the time of the Cultural Revolution, for example, stated with regard to Muslims:

⁵⁵ Gladney 1996, 4.

*From now on, you will no longer be allowed to hide behind your religious mask – we will destroy you. You will no longer be allowed to waste your time with prayers; everything you mumble in Arabic is anti-Chinese.*⁵⁶

Even if the policy was initially more moderate from the 1980s onwards, the basic tendency still remains. The policy of “Sinicisation” of religions, which by no means refers only to Islam or Xinjiang, but to all religions within China, is an expression of the efforts to shield religions from external influences and to integrate them into the nation-building process under the motto “Sinicisation of religions”.

Xinjiang and the role of pan-Turkism

In addition, the idea of pan-Turkism, i.e. the unification of all Turkic-speaking peoples in a political and cultural entity, also gained importance in Xinjiang in the 19th and first half of the 20th century.⁵⁷ The idea of a national unity of all Turkic peoples is still very strong in Turkey as well as in Central Asia and always prevailed when the central governments in countries with Turkic minorities were weakened. The Chinese authorities see pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism as the “ideological foundations” of separatism:

*‘Pan-Turkism’ and ‘pan-Islamism’ are opposing twins. They originate from Central Asia and pose a huge and real threat to the security and social stability of China’s north-western border areas [...]. The collapse of the Soviet Union provided a unique opportunity for the independence of the five Central Asian states. At the same time, the ‘Turkic culture’, the ‘Turkic world’, the ‘Turkic green’, the ‘Turkic homeland’ and other cultural, racial, political and territorial ‘pan-nationalist’ ideas were warmed up and spread on Central Asian soil.*⁵⁸

Pan-Turkism has been the most influential ideology among Uyghurs in Xinjiang since the 19th century.⁵⁹ It emerged in the Ottoman Empire as a reaction to the expansion of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus and

⁵⁶ Quoted in Bush 1970, 294.

⁵⁷ See e.g. Landau 1995; Wang, Ke 2018, 27-32.

⁵⁸ Ding 2004, 10.

⁵⁹ Tian 2018; Chen/Pan 2000; Yang 2020; Yu 2021.

Central Asia. It assumes that Uyghurs and Turks are descended from the “Ancient Turks” and therefore form a single unit.⁶⁰ The term “Turkestan” means “land of the Turks”, whereby a distinction was made between “West Turkestan” (comprising the former Central Asian Soviet republics) and “East Turkestan” (Xinjiang).

From the 19th century until the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, there were repeated uprisings to create a pan-Turkish state. Yakub Bek (1820-1877), a khan from what is now Uzbekistan, attempted to establish a Turkish-Islamic state from Kashgar in the mid-19th century with the help of Turkey, Great Britain and Russia. For almost twelve years (1865-1877), this region with its capital Kashgar was largely independent before it was reconquered by Chinese troops in 1876-78.⁶¹ Yakub Beg received weapons and military advisors from Turkey and renamed his state the “Turkish Protectorate of Yettishar” in 1874.⁶² The Ottoman Sultan was regarded as the supreme ruler of “Kashgaria”. This corresponded to Yakub Beg’s pan-Turkish ideas. The Ottoman Sultan granted him the title of “Emir” (governor or prince) and regarded the entity as a vassal state. Yakub Beg also had coins issued with the image of Sultan Abdülaziz (1830-1876). And the flag of this “republic” corresponded to the Turkish national flag, albeit in blue instead of red, a clear indication of its ties to Turkey.⁶³

The German explorer Wilhelm Filchner (1928) traced the development of Yakub Beg and its state in detail. Throughout history, but especially in the 19th century, Xinjiang was a fiercely disputed region between England, Russia and the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁴ In 1863, the Kyrgyz occupied Kashgar, plundered the city and established a regime of terror. The consequences were famine and the spread of epidemics and disease.

⁶⁰ Yang 2020.

⁶¹ Warikoo 1992; Wang Ke 2018, 27-31.

⁶² Yettishar, or Kashgaria, comprised the seven cities of Kashgar, Hotan, Yarkand, Yengisar, Aksu, Kucha and Korla.

⁶³ Karpat 1991; Shichor 2009, 5ff.; Babayan 2011, 14.

⁶⁴ See the detailed description in Skrine/Nightingale 1987.

The various ethnic groups of Xinjiang (Sarten⁶⁵, Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Hui, Dungan, etc.) fought constantly for power and influence and courted support from the Chinese emperor's court or from the British and Russians. The capture of Kashgar by Jakub Beg was welcomed by the local population, as he liberated Kashgar from the Kyrgyz and initially endeavoured to create orderly conditions. Jakub Beg did not see his main opponent in the Chinese imperial court, but in Russia, which tried to extend its influence in Central Asia to what is now Xinjiang and endeavoured to play the various ethnic groups off against each other. Jakub Beg therefore sought the support of England and the Ottoman Empire against Russia. He eventually established a reign of terror with draconian punishments so that he visibly lost the support of the local population. Russia eventually supported the Qing dynasty with weapons and ammunition against Jakub Beg. With his death and the conquest of Kashgar by Chinese troops, his territory fell apart.⁶⁶

At the request of a delegation from Kashgar during a visit to Istanbul in 1913, the Ottoman Empire sent hundreds of volunteer teachers to Xinjiang, nominally to establish modern schools. Among them were many Uyghurs who had studied in Turkey. Pan-Turkic ideas were taught in these schools. The textbooks in Turkish originated from the Ottoman Empire and propagated that the Sultan of that empire was the "supreme ruler" of all Turkic peoples. The Chinese government conceived of this as a threat to the internal stability and sovereignty of the country. The Turkish teachers were expelled, and the use of such textbooks was banned. Representatives of pan-Turkic ideas were persecuted.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Hans van Ess (2017) points out that the term referred to the Turkic-speaking peoples in Central Asia in the 19th century. "Sart" is a Sanskrit term that was used in the Secret History of the Mongols for the community known as Huihui in Chinese. However, the Huihui were not identical to the Uyghurs, but referred to the inhabitants of Bukhara or rather the whole of Khorezmia. "Sart" apparently meant something like 'merchants'; see also Haw 2014, 19.

⁶⁶ Cf. Filchner 1928, 184-282.

⁶⁷ Shichor 2009, 7, and 2018; also Wang Ke 2018, 31/32.

In the 1920s, it was Japan that sought to spread pan-Turkish ideas in Xinjiang with the aim of establishing a “Turanian Empire” that would encompass Xinjiang, Mongolia and Central Asia and function as a Japanese vassal state. A descendant of the last Ottoman dynasty was intended to become the “ruler” of this empire.⁶⁸ With the accession to power of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey, in 1923, and the incorporation of the Central Asian states into the Soviet Union, the idea of pan-Turkism in Central Asia receded into the background.⁶⁹

In the 1930s, there were renewed uprisings in East and South Xinjiang aimed at creating an Islamic community. The repressive policies of the administration at the time contributed to this. At the end of 1933, a *Turkish Islamic Republic of East Turkestan* was proclaimed in Kashgar. Pan-Turkish ideas also played a role here.⁷⁰ The above-mentioned flag of this republic corresponded to the flag that is still used today by separatist Uyghur organisations abroad and is regarded as a symbol of the connection with Turkey. Russia and Great Britain tried to exert influence in Xinjiang and put pan-Turkish ideas at the service of their interests.⁷¹ Turkey, in turn, provided weapons, military advisers and economic aid. The Chinese government only managed to put down the uprising with Soviet support. Moscow was paid for this help by granting it privileges and special rights in Xinjiang. In 1944, the Kazakhs rose up with Soviet support.

⁶⁸ Babayan 2011, 15. On Japan's role in Xinjiang in the 1920s and 1930s and its cooperation with the British to contain Soviet influence, see Wang Ke 2018, 50-59. During the First and especially during the Second World War, the idea of establishing a Greater Turkish vassal state in Central Asia also emerged in Germany. This was to act as a German outpost in relation to England's Indian colonies and also encompass Xinjiang. The first steps towards this were the establishment of a “Reichskommissariat Turkestan” and the formation of a “Turkestan Legion”, which is said to have included Uyghurs. Nazi Germany attempted to utilise the ideology of pan-Turkism; cf. Romanko 2004; de Cordier 2010; Johnson 2010, 46f.; Krause 2011; and Kokebayeva 2016.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Zhao 2016, 175; Wang Ke 2018, XVIff.

⁷¹ Wang 1998, 107-234.

The suppression of this uprising by *Guomindang* Chinese troops was followed by another uprising in the same year. The latter led to the founding of a socialist *republic of East Turkestan* that was directed against *Guomindang* rule. The Soviet Union helped to establish it.⁷² After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Xinjiang was successfully reintegrated into China, once again with the support of the Soviet Union.⁷³ By the end of 1951, the new central government had broken all resistance in the region.

As early as the 1930s, the Chinese ethnologist Ling Shusheng pointed out that the *Guomindang* government in Xinjiang began to promote a policy of spreading the standard Chinese language (*Putonghua*) and the immigration of Han Chinese. Even then, national security interests and the promotion of nation-building were at the forefront of political programmes. Ling criticised the fact that the government of the Republic of China was not concerned with the internal problems of Xinjiang, but only with the issue of external threats. It was also pursuing a policy of cultural oppression in the region. For him, pan-Turkish ideas were the result of internal dissatisfaction among the ethnic groups in the region.⁷⁴

The influence of pan-Turkism not only played a significant role in the first half of the 20th century, but also repeatedly made itself felt after the founding of the People's Republic of China.⁷⁵ In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, there was continued unrest in Xinjiang in which pan-Turkist ideas played a role.⁷⁶ Between 1950 and 1981, there are said to have been 19 “armed counter-revolutionary rebellions” in Xinjiang and 194 “separatist incidents”. To give a few examples: Osman (Batyr) Batur

⁷² On the more recent history of Xinjiang in the 19th and first half of the 20th century, see Forbes 1986. As Benson (1990, 32 and 182) makes clear, pan-Turkic ideas also played a role here, primarily in urban areas. See also Wang Ke 2018, 107-234.

⁷³ Cf. Ziemann 1984; Benson 1990.

⁷⁴ See von Mende 1988, 152/153.

⁷⁵ Yang 2020.

⁷⁶ Dou 2000; see also *Xinjiang de fankong* 2019.

organised a Uyghur uprising in April 1950. In early 1951, he and 25 other rebels were captured and executed. In 1955, a Uyghur uprising led by Abdul Imit in the Hotan district was crushed, killing dozens of Uyghurs and numerous government soldiers. In 1962, Uyghurs and Kazakhs rebelled against the local government in Yining (Ghulja). In this context, around 60,000 Uyghurs and Kazakhs fled to the Soviet Union. The leadership in Moscow was accused by the Chinese of having triggered this incident. In 1969, a “Revolutionary People’s Party of East Turkestan” (ETPRP), founded two years earlier, was accused of having organised an uprising in Suhkaz (Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture of Kizilsu), which should have been put down by the People’s Liberation Army (VBA). In May 1981, a state arms depot of the VBA was raided in the Kashgar area, which is said to have been used in a rebellion that took place in the same year, which in turn was put down.⁷⁷

In the 1980s, after the introduction of the reform and opening-up policy, pan-Turkish ideas shall have spread rapidly among the Uyghur youth and Uyghur intellectuals. According to Duan, a large number of organisations were formed among pupils and students in the Kashgar area with names such as the “East Turkestan Liberation Party”, “Atatürk Liberation Organisation”, “Matrilineal Turkish Liberation Organisation”, “Green Wolf Youth League”, “Blue Wolf Liberation”, “East Turkestan Islamic Party”, “Tianshan Eagle Alliance”, etc. The lawyer Jia Yu also cites the example of a “secret society ‘5-23’ for the study of the Holy Quran”, which is said to have been uncovered in 2010 in the community of Pisina, Guma County (Hotan District).⁷⁹ Koran students, it was argued, had been involved. The secret society was concerned on the one hand with the study of the Koran, and on the other with training for “jihad” and planned jihadist martyrdom missions.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ *China/Uyghurs (1949-present)*, ed. by Univ. of Central Arkansas, <http://uca.edu/politicalscience/home/research-projects/dadm-project/asiapacific-region/chinauighurs-1949-present/> (access: 04/2025); Wang 1998; Millward 2004, 5ff.; Trailović 2023, 93.

⁷⁸ Jia 2015.

Written material from Turkey is believed to have played a particular role in the spread of pan-Turkish ideas, such as the volume *History of East Turkestan*, published in Ankara in 1987, in which the history of the region was described from a pan-Turkish perspective.⁷⁹ This book and other “separatist publications” had obviously been widely distributed in Xinjiang.⁸⁰ As early as 1992, the then CCP chairman Jiang Zemin had warned against the ideology of pan-Turkism or pan-Islamism and associated separatist ideas.⁸¹ In April 1996, the Chinese authorities banned the import and distribution of unauthorised Islamist publications and recordings.⁸² Between 1990 and 2014, the number of published articles (excluding book publications and public documents) on the subject of “pan-Turkism” has increased successively from a single article in 1990 to 74 (2002) and 109 (2012). Between 1990 and 2014, 1,332 academic publications on the subject of pan-Turkism have appeared in China.⁸³

The social scientist Yuyan Zhang (2022) distinguishes between the “Turkic factor” and pan-Turkism. The former, as an identity feature of “Turkishness”, forms the cultural basis of Uyghur identity, while pan-Turkism forms the basis for separatism, while at the same time appealing to the solidarity and support of other Turkic peoples.

The idea that pan-Turkism poses an external national threat in Xinjiang has obviously been reflected in the Chinese people’s security perceptions and collective memory. After all, it has played a central role in the

⁷⁹ The book was originally written in 1940 by Muhammad Amin Bughra. Bughra was the leader of the “Turkish Islamic Republic of East Turkestan”. After the failure of an attempt to break away from China, he wrote the book in exile in Kashmir. In 1935, he agreed with Japan to establish such a republic, with Tokyo agreeing to supply weapons and funding. However, the rapid failure of this republic meant that there was no co-operation. The corresponding book was then republished in Turkey in 1987 and was also widely distributed in Xinjiang. Bughra made the statement: “Our fatherland is Turkestan, our nationality is Turkish, our religion is Islam”, quoted in Babayan 2011, 29.

⁸⁰ Ji 1992, 32.

⁸¹ Jiang 1992.

⁸² *South China Morning Post*, 16 April and 23 April 1996.

⁸³ Shichor 2018.

political and religious movements there since the 19th century and has inspired separatist movements. It therefore represents a persistent, latent danger. This perception is stored in the collective memory and influences state policy accordingly.⁸⁴

II The erosion of the security situation

Growing security problems: separatism and the radicalisation of Islamic faiths

China's reform and opening-up policy, which began after 1979, also led to greater freedoms in Xinjiang. The borders to the then still Soviet Central Asian republics were opened, transnational contacts developed and information from abroad reached the region. This ended three decades of isolation of Xinjiang from the neighbouring states. The opening up of the region to the outside world intensified after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Central Asian states in 1991.⁸⁵ This development and the expansion of Islamist movements, not only in the Near and Middle East, but also in Central and South Asia in particular, favoured a creeping Islamisation of society. China's economic liberalisation was accompanied by a growing sense of nationality among Xinjiang's ethnic minorities and, in this context, an increase in conflicts.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990/91 and the rise of ethno-nationalist and Islamist movements among the peoples of Central Asia as well as in Afghanistan and Pakistan caused the Chinese leadership to worry that similar developments could occur in China, especially as Islamisation and ethno-nationalism were also spreading to neighbouring Xinjiang. As outlined above, separatist, pan-Turkish and Islamist movements and organisations emerged there. Some of these were accompanied by terrorist activities, including suicide bombings, attacks on Han

⁸⁴ See Schluessel 2020, 149ff.; Yao 2014; Zhou 2019.

⁸⁵ See Friedrich 1992.

Chinese and the assassination of Uyghurs who co-operated with the government. The Chinese leadership did not see the problems in Xinjiang as a purely ethnic issue, but placed them in the context of internal sovereignty as well as national and geostrategic security.⁸⁶ Poverty, particularly in the southern part of Xinjiang,⁸⁷ a widespread feeling of discrimination against Han Chinese and the growing influence of Islamic beliefs from neighbouring Islamic countries favoured the spread of Islamist and separatist tendencies. The latter was exacerbated by government attempts to restrict and control religious activities.

At the end of 1985, students in Ürümqi, the capital of Xinjiang, protested against nuclear weapons tests in their region and the deportation of a large number of criminals from eastern and central China; they demanded greater political autonomy, the replacement of Han officials with democratically elected members of the ethnic minorities, the abolition of rigid family planning regulations, an increase in funding for the education and training of members of ethnic minorities and more scholarships for studying abroad.⁸⁸ In May 1989, students again organised demonstrations in Ürümqi, which were accompanied by protests by fundamentalist Muslims and led to violent clashes with local authorities. The protest was directed against the above-mentioned book, which described Muslim customs in connection with sexual interpretations.

At the same time, we can speak of a creeping renaissance of Islam in Xinjiang during this period. To illustrate this, here are a few examples from studies by Chinese social scientists: A study in villages in the Kashgar Prefecture (southern Xinjiang) in the 1990s found that more than 90 per cent of the local population regularly took part in religious activities, with this proportion being higher in rural regions than in urban areas.⁸⁹ A study of Kazakh villages in the Yili Prefecture (northern Xinjiang) in the early 1990s showed that even CCP “activists”,

⁸⁶ See Seo/Cho 2013.

⁸⁷ According to Zhao/Feng (2005), around 34 per cent of the population in Kashgar Prefecture lived in absolute poverty in 2003, cited in Kerr/Swinton 2008, 122.

⁸⁸ Dreyer 1994, 49.

⁸⁹ Luo 1991, 248.

“model workers” and officials took part in religious activities. A considerable number of party members are also supposed to have engaged in religious activities, even though they are prohibited to do so.⁹⁰ The increasingly Islamic-orthodox atmosphere was reinforced by pressure from strict believers on non-believers. In some cases, the former are said to have refused to shake hands with non-believers (including those of their own nationality), to visit them on festivals and holidays or to attend their funerals. According to studies from the early 1990s, religious activities in southern Xinjiang were already almost impossible to control at that time. In Kashgar Prefecture alone, there were 5,000 mosques in 1978, and by the 1990s there were already twice as many, with each mosque also serving as a school, i.e. a religious school. In contrast, the number of state schools had fallen drastically.⁹¹ Islamic jurisprudence (by imams), Muslim marriages (sometimes involving several wives), sermons against the birth planning policy and attacks against birth control centres had assumed alarming proportions, according to Chinese sources.⁹² The importance and prestige of imams had also increased significantly⁹³: A survey of primary school pupils in a county in Xinjiang, for example, revealed that more than 60 per cent of respondents stated “*akhond*”, i.e. imam, as their career aspiration.⁹⁴

The Chinese authorities blamed an “overly liberal attitude” towards Islam for the growth of separatist and Islamist movements: it was argued that a growing number of Koran schools were openly propagating “separatist ideas”, namely the independence of Xinjiang and the re-establishment of a republic of East Turkestan. Tens of thousands of members of Muslim peoples had attended these schools. The majority of party members, cadres and teachers have turned to Islam, although the number of believers in this group is believed to have fluctuated

⁹⁰ Luo 1991, 251.

⁹¹ Dongsheng 1992, 94.

⁹² A corresponding development obviously also took place in the Hui areas; cf. Gladney 1996, 160ff.

⁹³ Xu 1992, 13ff.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15ff. – *Akhond* (a Persian term) stands for Muslim scholars; cf. Li Xing 1991.

between 50 and 100 per cent. In Kashgar, four-fifths of all retired party officials are said to have pursued religious activities, with a larger number having worked as imams. The situation, it was argued, had been similar for teachers at schools and universities. In some cases, young people in schools were only awarded the title “Three Good Students” (originally for students who not only studied hard but also served socialism and the people) if they had taken part in the prescribed five daily prayers. In some educational establishments, prayers and the Koran had been read aloud.⁹⁵ An investigation in the township of Baren, Akto County (the place where an uprising broke out in spring 1990⁹⁶), revealed that all pupils carried the Koran in their school bags and went to the mosque after school to pray. In Payzawat County (Kashgar Prefecture), 61 per cent of pupils in a primary school had been pupils in private Koran schools at the same time, despite the existing ban. In the Shule County, local imams were found to be giving religious instruction in the schools.⁹⁷

As a result, measures to separate religion from the public sphere were enacted in the early 1990s. The then *Provisional Regulations on the Control of Religious Activities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region* stated that no one was allowed to “use religion to oppose the ‘Four Basic Principles’” [i.e. the principles enshrined in the constitution, according to which no action should be directed against the leadership role of the Communist Party, the socialist system, the dictatorship of the proletariat, Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong’s ideas] or be “against the unity of the motherland” [Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong’s ideas] “and against the unity of the motherland and the nationalities”. It was forbidden to use places designated for religious activities to “organise secret societies and incite unrest and counter-revolutionary activities”. “Feudalistic religious practices”, such as Islamic taxes, the demand for unpaid work, forced donations and the administration of justice by clergymen, missionary activities, private

⁹⁵ Further examples can be found in Allès 2003.

⁹⁶ See section “Phase 1: 1990-2001”.

⁹⁷ Dongsheng 1992, 94.

religious instruction, the reception of foreign religious broadcasts and contacts with religious organisations from abroad, were expressly prohibited.⁹⁸ The *Provisional Regulations on the Control of Religious Personnel in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region* in turn assigned religious officials and clergy the tasks of “adhering to patriotism”, educating believers “in the spirit of the Party” and regularly reporting to the relevant organisations on the “activities of temples and churches”. Once a year, the activities and behaviour of this group of people were to be monitored, and appropriate punitive, laudatory or educational measures taken. The operation of Koran schools and the religious instruction of persons under the age of 18 were prohibited.⁹⁹

From the beginning of the 1990s, mosques were partially contracted out to village administrations or neighbourhood committees, with the contracts stipulating that these institutions had to adhere to the aforementioned “Four Basic Principles” in the interests of the country’s unity and the fight against separatist forces. From then on, foreigners were forbidden to preach in mosques. The operation of unauthorised Koran schools, marriages according to Muslim tradition instead of the official marriage law, jurisdiction according to Muslim law and propaganda against the birth planning policy were “contractually” prohibited.¹⁰⁰ In 1996, the construction of unauthorised new mosques was banned, and publications about Islam were strictly controlled and their distribution restricted.¹⁰¹

Increasing destabilisation: Attacks and insurgencies, 1990-2009

The aforementioned lawyer Jia Yu categorises the development in Xinjiang since the 1990s into three phases: re-emergence – relative calm – new period of high incidences. The first phase began with the unrest in Baren township, Akto County, in April 1990 and lasted until the terror-

⁹⁸ Cf. the translation by B. Staiger 1991, 12/13.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13/14.

¹⁰⁰ Xu 1992, 15.

¹⁰¹ *Xinjiang Ribao*, 17 April 1996.

ist attacks of 11 September 2001 in the USA. During this time, terrorist acts in Xinjiang increased enormously. Between 1990 and 2001, there are said to have been at least 200 major terrorist attacks in Xinjiang, in which 162 people were killed and more than 440 injured. During this period, a total of 503 separatist organisations or cells were smashed by the police.

In the second phase between 2001 and 2009, the separatist Islamist organisations suffered setbacks. The intensification of international anti-terror efforts after 11 September 2001 and the anti-terror cooperation with Russia and the Central Asian states within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation also played a part in this. The relevant organisations regrouped during this period and attempted to combine military operations (*jihad*) with influencing public opinion and creating an atmosphere of fear.

The third phase until 2017 began with the 5 July riots in Ürümqi in 2009, followed by a large number of attacks and suicide bombings. There were 122 cases of terrorist assaults in 2009, 134 in 2010 and more than 100 each in 2011 and 2012. The number of victims and material damage increased, and the attacks spread to other parts of the country.¹⁰² In the following, we take up Jia Yu's periodisation in three phases.

Phase 1: 1990-2001

In spring 1990, an attempted uprising in the township of Baren (Akto County of the Kyrgyz autonomous prefecture of Kizilsu) on the border with Kyrgyzstan made headlines around the world, triggering province-wide unrest.¹⁰³ The cause was a ban issued in March of that year on the construction of new mosques and Koran schools. According to an official statement, a pan-Turkish Muslim underground organisation was

¹⁰² Jia 2015.

¹⁰³ An overview of unrest and attacks prior to 2002 can be found in Hierman 2007: he makes it clear that there has been repeated unrest in Xinjiang since the 1950s. On developments in Xinjiang 1949-77, see also: McMillen 1979.

said to have taken advantage of the resulting outrage and prepared a major uprising. The “Muslim Party of East Turkestan” had called for a “holy war against the pagans” and was fighting for a unified Turkic state and the creation of a “Republic of East Turkestan”. Weapons for the uprising, it was argued, had been provided from Afghanistan. 3,000 armed Uyghurs had occupied the township of Baren and declared war on the Han Chinese. The uprising was put down by police and military units, and numerous communities were bombed and destroyed. The Lanzhou military region had deployed 200,000 soldiers to Xinjiang. The unrest had claimed hundreds of victims on both sides and had taken on a supra-regional character.¹⁰⁴ Baren, the area where the uprising began, is not unknown. In the same district there had already been an uprising by the Kyrgyz against the local *Guomindang* government in 1944.¹⁰⁵

There were also riots in several other cities and regions, such as the Kazakh autonomous prefecture of Ili in northern Xinjiang. As part of the “fight against separatist organisations”, Chinese security authorities broke up around 500 “bandit gangs” – a traditional Chinese term for rebels – and arrested several thousand people in the second half of 1990 alone.¹⁰⁶ – I was in the city of Artux, the capital of the Kizilsu Autonomous Prefecture, in the second half of April 1990, shortly after the unrest in Baren further north. I had no knowledge of the unrest; I only learnt about it after my return to Beijing. But tensions were also palpable in Artux. The mere act of photographing the city’s government building, which was notable for its Kyrgyz architectural features, brought plainclothes security officers to the scene, who took me for a chat in their vehicle, asked if I was a Soviet citizen, why I had taken a picture of the building, and what the reason for my visit was. During the conversation, the police officers referred to the tense situation in the region, the danger of unrest and the spread of separatist ideas. The ten-

¹⁰⁴ Liu 2008; Hastings 2011; from a different perspective: Alptekin 1990.

¹⁰⁵ Liu 2008.

¹⁰⁶ Peters 1991, 152.

sions were also palpable during conversations with Uyghurs in Kashgar, with separatist and pan-Turkish ideas being openly expressed, especially by younger Uyghurs.

And indeed, throughout the 1990s, there were repeated rallies and demonstrations against “Chinese dominance” in the region and in favour of the creation of an independent Muslim or pan-Turkic state. In conversations with local Uyghurs, the two seemed to intermingle.

During unrest in parts of Xinjiang in 1991, people demonstrated not only for independence, but also against the exploitation of raw materials – especially oil. There were also protests against the suppression of religious practice, with the demand being made that Ürümqi, the capital of the autonomous region, should once again become a purely Muslim city.¹⁰⁷ Due to the unstable situation and increased activities of underground organisations, the Chinese leadership moved larger troop units from the Mongolian border to Xinjiang at the end of 1991.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, Ürümqi was rocked by several bomb attacks in the spring of 1992, resulting in numerous deaths and injuries. The Chinese authorities blamed this attack on a separatist movement, which, however, denied this.¹⁰⁹ In 1992, Xinjiang was declared an “unstable region” in an internal document. The governor of the autonomous region, Tömür Dawamat, stated after the attacks that the central political task was to combat separatism.¹¹⁰

In 1993, unrest was reported simultaneously from twelve counties and cities, including an attack on the Lop Nor nuclear test site by more than a thousand Uyghurs in March 1993 and reports of armed clashes with the Chinese military.¹¹¹ In 1994 and 1995, violent demonstrations in favour of Xinjiang’s independence took place again in many cities. In April 1995, 50,000 Kazakhs and Uyghurs demonstrated against communist rule and in favour of an independent state. Hundreds are sup-

¹⁰⁷ *South China Morning Post*, 11 December 1991.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Hoppe 1992, 363.

¹¹⁰ Wei/Li 1992, 8.

¹¹¹ *East Turkestan News Bulletin*, 03/1993, 1ff.

posed to have died in serious clashes.¹¹² Just how precarious the situation must have seemed to the Chinese leadership is illustrated by a decision by the Central Military Commission that in emergency situations, troops from the military district of southern Xinjiang could be deployed to other regions of Xinjiang without the prior consent of the central government.¹¹³

An article in the CCP's theoretical journal *Qiushi* on the 40th anniversary of the founding of the autonomous region in 1995 stated that separatism and the fight against it had existed throughout Xinjiang and would continue to exist. This struggle would be "extremely fierce" (*shifen jianrui*) and "bitter" (*jilie*), a sign that the party leadership already assessed the situation there as very serious.¹¹⁴ And indeed, the region was constantly shaken by bomb and guerrilla attacks, protest demonstrations and subsequent repressive measures by the authorities during these years.¹¹⁵ In the same year, the party leadership of Xinjiang also described the situation as extremely serious and critical.¹¹⁶

In May 1996, separatists killed a Muslim religious leader, the imam of Kashgar, who was also deputy chairman of the Xinjiang Political Consultative Conference, for co-operating with the Chinese authorities.¹¹⁷ In the same year, nine "separatists" were killed in a bloody gun battle with Chinese security forces.¹¹⁸ A study investigating the rise in "terrorist activities" concluded that all cases were linked to "illegal religious activities".¹¹⁹

¹¹² *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 01 July 1995.

¹¹³ See Smith 2000, 198.

¹¹⁴ Wang 1995; Mackerras 2001 analyses the causes of separatist movements in Xinjiang.

¹¹⁵ Cf. e.g. Winchester 1997; Razak (2002, 51-59) mentions over 200 "acts of terrorist violence by East Turkestan terrorists" with 162 dead and 440 injured in the period 1990-2001.

¹¹⁶ *Xinjiang Ribao*, 16 January 1998 and 22 January 1999.

¹¹⁷ *Gongren Ribao*, 03 June 1996; Martina 2014.

¹¹⁸ *Xinjiang Ribao*, 16 May 1996.

¹¹⁹ Forney 1996, 46/47.

In 1997, unrest broke out once again in Yining on the border with Kazakhstan, among other places, with demonstrators demanding the establishment of an independent Islamic state.¹²⁰ As trouble continued to brew in the city, around 9,000 additional armed security forces were deployed to the city of 300,000 inhabitants in spring 1999. The government blamed an “Islamic Hezbollah of East Turkestan” for the unrest – Han Chinese had been murdered and their bodies publicly burned.¹²¹ The provincial governor at the time, Abdulahat Abdurixit, admitted in 1999 that there had been “several thousand” terrorist activities in the 1990s.¹²² According to the Ministry of Public Security, twelve separatist movements had existed in Xinjiang. These movements did not describe themselves as Uyghur or Kazakh, but as Turkic or pan-Turkic. A number of organisations and eleven individuals were declared terrorist organisations or individuals.¹²³ The publication was accompanied by an appeal to the international community to support China in combating its terrorism problem.

In this context, a study by Joanna Smith (2000), who spent a longer period in Xinjiang in the mid-1990s and conducted intensive field studies there, is interesting. She described her findings at the time in detail in an essay. Especially among urban youths and younger people who had grown up during the period of reform and opening-up policies, there was a high degree of support for separatist ideas and an independent state for the Uyghurs.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ “Xinjiang wuzhuang baodong jishi” (Report on armed uprisings in Xinjiang) (1997). *Zhengming*, 03/1997, 26/27; “Zai Yili ganbu dahuishangde jianghua” (Speech at a meeting of party cadres in Yili; 1997), *Xinjiang Ribao*, 23 August 1997.

¹²¹ “1997 Yining 2.5 saoluan shijian” (The riots in Yining on 5 February 1997). *Baidu*, <http://baike.baidu.com/item/1997%E5%B9%B4%E4%BC%8A%E5%AE%812%C2%B7%E9%A%9A%E4%B9%B1%E4%BA8B%E4B6/12702426> (access: 04/2025); *Ming Pao*, 10, 11 and 12 February 1997, cited in Smith 2000, 198.

¹²² Cited in Becquelin 2000, 87.

¹²³ For more details see: *China aktuell* 12 (2003), 1442ff.

¹²⁴ This view corresponds with the observations of lawyer Jia Yu, who reports that the members of these organisations were primarily people born in the 1980s and 1990s. He backed up this argument with examples (Jia 2015).

Among young urbanites, she identified three groups that were particularly susceptible to separatist tendencies: “intellectual dissidents”, small tradespeople and the unemployed.¹²⁵ In rural areas, on the other hand, she found a lower level of dissatisfaction with government policies. She explained this with a lower presence of Han Chinese in the countryside and correspondingly fewer points of friction and conflicts with them. In addition, there have been some noticeable improvements in the living conditions of the rural population as a result of the reform policies. Separatist tendencies were also much stronger in southern Xinjiang than in the northern and eastern parts of the province. Among Kazakhs, on the other hand, there had been considerable rejection of a “Uyghuristan”, with fears that the Uyghurs could dominate it ethnically. According to Smith, Kazakhs were more interested in emigrating to Kazakhstan or incorporating the Kazakh autonomous Prefecture of Ili into the neighbouring country.¹²⁶ She concluded that the “independence movement” was primarily an “urban” movement.¹²⁷ Middle-aged people who had experienced the “Great Leap Forward” (1958-60) and the “Cultural Revolution” (1966-76) were more likely to be satisfied with the liberal minority policy of the 1980s. Elderly people, who had experienced the unstable times of the 1930s and 1940s and the massive ethnic discrimination of that period, primarily appreciated the new stability. In their opinion, the significant increase in the immigration of Han Chinese, competition for resources (natural resources), land, education and jobs, a feeling of disadvantage, discrimination and Han superiority in everyday life were the causes of the dissatisfaction of Uyghurs. Increasing segregation between Uyghurs and Han has been observed, and with it the existence of separate spheres of life. Turning to Islam or to religious beliefs that are understood as Muslim would have strengthened their own identity and set them apart from the “faithless” Han. Externally, she saw the emergence of Muslim states in Central Asia and the influence of Islamist organisations from Central, South and West Asia (Paki-

¹²⁵ Smith 2000, 209.

¹²⁶ See op. cit.

¹²⁷ Smith 2000, 216.

stan, Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia)¹²⁸ as a further factor in the growth of Islamist beliefs. The construction of mosques with funds from foreign Islamic states, pilgrimages to Mecca, radical preachers returning from abroad¹²⁹, as well as foreign Islamist preachers and exiled Uyghur foreign broadcasters also appear to have played a role.¹³⁰ In the mid-1990s, the religious researcher Liu Zhongkang spoke of the fact that even Muslim dignitaries in Xinjiang sometimes preached inflammatory words and deeds and that this could hardly be controlled.¹³¹

Phase 2: 2001-2009

The situation in Xinjiang seemed to have calmed down in the early 2000s thanks to drastic measures.¹³² Jia Yu explains this with the intensification of the international fight against terrorism, the counter-terrorism measures in Central Asia within the framework of the “Shanghai Co-operation Organisation” founded in 2001 and the success of the fight against terrorism in Xinjiang. In my opinion, there are also other factors: during this period, the party leadership decreed that the local authorities would be held responsible for further incidents because they had not sufficiently fulfilled their social management mandate. Doubts therefore remain as to whether there was actually a calmer phase or whether incidents were no longer reported to higher levels by the local governments for the aforementioned reason.¹³³ A Chinese social anthropologist who has been conducting research in Xinjiang for years and regularly carried out fieldwork there has also pointed out that the number of victims was significantly higher, as there were instruc-

¹²⁸ The spread of Wahhabism, an Islamist ideology based on ideas from the early days of Islam and promoted internationally by Saudi Arabia, also gained influence in Xinjiang; see Zhang 2013; Yin 2014; Gonul/Rogenhofer 2017.

¹²⁹ Ibid.; cf. also Waite 2007, 169ff.; Alpermann 2021, 115.

¹³⁰ Smith 2000.

¹³¹ Liu 1996, 66.

¹³² Björn Alpermann (2021, 148) argues that since Chinese media rarely reported on terrorist incidents between 2001 and 2008, the situation calmed down.

¹³³ Cf. Smith 2000, 199.

tions to impose disciplinary measures on local administrations in the case that further attacks occurred there. As a result, local authorities had not reported any more cases, so that the officially reported incidents and numbers of victims were presumably significantly lower than the actual figures.¹³⁴ A report by the Chinese State Council from the beginning of 2002, which explicitly warned of the dangers of “East Turkestan terrorism”, also contradicts the argument of a calming phase.¹³⁵

In 2003, the Ministry of Public Security spoke of only four separatist organisations that were active in various ways in Xinjiang: “Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement” (ETIM), “Eastern Turkestan Liberation Organisation” (ETLO), “World Uyghur Youth Congress” (WUYC) and “Eastern Turkestan Information Center” (ETIC).¹³⁶ It is unclear whether this reduction is due to the successful dismantling of some of the aforementioned organisations or whether there has been a process of unification among them. The state countermeasures of the 1990s obviously only had a limited effect, so that a new anti-terror campaign (keyword: *yanda*, “strike hard”) was launched in 2003. However, as Chinese Xinjiang researchers pointed out in interviews, these government measures apparently have had only a limited effect.¹³⁷

In 2008, numerous attacks with fatalities were again reported from Kashgar and Kuqa, for example, in August¹³⁸, which apparently oc-

¹³⁴ Interview with Prof. Ma Rong, Peking University, 18 May 2023. Under the heading of “*Yipiao foujue*”, “hard evaluation criteria” have indeed been introduced throughout the country since the 2000s. Among other things, these stipulated that in the event of social unrest breaking out, local leaders were to be punished for their inability to recognise and solve the “problems of the masses” at an early stage. Such a punishment entailed considerable disadvantages for the career prospects of the cadres concerned. This sanction did not only apply to Xinjiang, but to any form of unrest in the country; see Heberer/Trappel 2013, 1053ff.

¹³⁵ “‘Dong tu’ kongbu shili nan tuo zuize” (The “East Turkestan” terrorist forces cannot clear themselves of their guilt), *Renmin Ribao*, 22 January 2002.

¹³⁶ “Gongbu shoupi rending ‘Dong tu’ kongbu zuzhi he kongbu fenzi mingdan” (Publication of a first list of “East Turkestan” terrorist organisations and individuals), statement by the Ministry of Public Security, *Renmin Ribao*, 16 December 2003.

¹³⁷ Interview with Xinjiang researcher, Beijing, 29 September 2009.

¹³⁸ “Xinjiang Kashi 8.4 xijing an” (Attack on police officers in Kashgar on 4 August 2008). *Baidu*, <http://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%96%B0%E7%96%86%E5%96%>

curred in the context of the opening of the Olympic Games in Beijing (8 August). For example, there was an attack on a police station in the city of Kashgar in which 16 police officers were killed, and a series of twelve attacks in Kuqa at various locations in the city, including supermarkets, hotels and government buildings, resulting in numerous fatalities.¹³⁹ There were also indications of further planned attacks during the 2008 Olympics in China, with the “Turkestan Islamic Party”, for example, announcing attacks on aeroplanes and means of transport during the Olympic Games in China by video.¹⁴⁰

Phase 3: 2009-2017

The situation escalated again in 2009. The immediate cause was the so-called “Shaoguan Incident” in the city of Shaoguan, Guangdong Province. Violent clashes broke out between Uyghur migrant workers and Han Chinese in a factory thereafter Uyghur workers were falsely accused of sexually assaulting a Han Chinese female worker. Han labourers attacked fellow Uyghur workers, resulting in at least two Uyghurs being killed by angry Han and around 118 people being injured, most of them Uyghurs. This event led to protests in Xinjiang’s capital, Ürümqi, in July 2009, which, initially peaceful, took action over the Uyghurs killed in Shaoguan. Eventually, the protests erupted into violent clashes in Ürümqi and other places in Xinjiang, in which 197 people were killed and more than 1,700 injured.¹⁴¹

In the years that followed, the number of terrorist attacks increased, not only in Xinjiang, but also in eastern Chinese cities. In 2012, a Tianjin Airlines plane was hijacked by Uyghurs; in 2013, there was an attack at

80%E4%BB%80%E5%85%AB%C2%B7%E5%9B%9B%E8%A2%AD%E8%AD%A6%E6%A1%88/14447801; 2008 nian Kuche baozha an (Explosive attacks in Kuqa 2008). *Baidu*, <http://baike.baidu.com/item/2008%E5%B9%B4%E5%BA%93%E8%BD%A6%E7%88%86%E7%82%B8%E6%A115740839> (access: 04/2025).

¹³⁹ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 August 2008; Kolonko 2008.

¹⁴⁰ “Chinese Islamists threaten Olympics”. *France 24*, <http://www.france24.com/en/20080808-chinese-islamists-threaten-olympics-terrorism-olympics-2008> (access: 04/2025).

¹⁴¹ Cliff 2012; Hastings 2011; Tobin 2020b; O’Brien/Brown 2022, 157-182.

the entrance to the Imperial Palace in the heart of Beijing; and in 2014, another at the railway station in Kunming (Yunnan province), resulting in numerous deaths and injuries. ETIM was responsible for most of the terrorist attacks. According to official figures, terrorist attacks in Xinjiang claimed hundreds of lives and injured people between 2011 and 2015 alone.¹⁴² A suicide attack at Ürümqi South Railway Station in 2014 was considered particularly serious because it took place on the last day of President Xi Jinping's Xinjiang inspection tour.¹⁴³ ETIM had already been declared a terrorist organisation by both the USA and the UN Security Council in 2002.¹⁴⁴ After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in the USA, there was even a rapprochement between the United States and China with regard to the joint fight against terrorism. Yuni Park, an expert in international relations, wrote in a corresponding study:

*The U.S.-China relations, too, have felt the transformative winds after 9/11. Early U.S. State Department reports on international counter-terrorism co-operation spoke highly of China's efforts. For example, in one of the State Department's first post-9/11 reports on global terrorism, U.S.-China terrorism co-operation was summed up as follows: 'China, which also has been a victim of terrorism, provided valuable diplomatic support to our efforts against terrorism, both at the United Nations and in the South and Central Asian regions, including financial and material support for the Afghan Interim Authority. Beijing has agreed to all of our requests for assistance, and we have established a counter-terrorism dialogue at both senior and operational levels.'*¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² “Xinjiang baoli kongbu shijian” (Acts of violence and terrorism in Xinjiang), *Baidu*, baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%96%B0%E7%96%86%E6%9A%B4%E5%8A%9B%E6%81%90%80%96%E4%BA%8B%E4%BB%B6/7302300 (access: 04/2025).

¹⁴³ http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-05/01/c_11104167.htm (access: 04/2025).

¹⁴⁴ United Nations Security Council (ed.), *Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM)*, http://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/faq_sanctions_listsummaries/entity/eastern-turkistan-islamic-movement (access: 04/2025).

¹⁴⁵ Park 2017, 8; details of the cooperation can be found in: U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2001*, vi, 15ff., <http://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organisation/10319.pdf> (access: 04/2025).

In 2020, however, the USA removed ETIM from its “terror list”, which is undoubtedly also due to the intensifying hegemonic conflict between the two countries.¹⁴⁶

III Root cause analysis

Internal causes

Since the 1980s, the strands of conflict in Xinjiang have intensified. Not only international constellations, but above all social, political and economic factors such as increasing development disparities between eastern and western China, insufficient self-government rights, uncontrolled immigration of Han Chinese and ecological destruction played a role. Cultural-religious upheavals (dissatisfaction with the attempt to separate religious and secular matters, interference in local customs, contrasts between Confucian-socialist and Muslim ideas) were also reflected here. In addition, there was long-standing dissatisfaction with unemployment, poverty, perceived discrimination against Uyghurs working in the eastern part of China and a fundamental feeling of economic and cultural disadvantage, which exacerbated this dissatisfaction. In (informal) conversations with Uyghurs, situations were often described that had fuelled the feeling of unequal treatment. – This problem has also been discussed in China itself. In the following, selected examples from the large number of corresponding Chinese academic publications will be provided to illustrate that research into the causes was also conducted in the Chinese domestic discourse. However, this took a back seat due to the perceived security dilemma.

¹⁴⁶ *U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Counterterrorism*, Exec. Order 13224, <http://www.state.gov/executive-order-13224/> (access: 04/2025); cf. “US removes shadowy group from terror list blamed by China for attacks”, *The Guardian*, 06 November 2020, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/06/us-removes-shadowy-group-from-terror-list-blamed-by-china-for-attacks> (access: 04/2025).

One of the most nuanced analyses came from the above-mentioned literary scholar Yao Xinyong. In his opinion, understanding the problems in Xinjiang requires a multi-faceted approach that includes the history of the region and the current situation, religion and secularism, geographical, economic and political problems, as well as global and geopolitical factors. The outbreaks of violence there are a symptom of the failure of ethnic politics. Yao argues that the development in Xinjiang had to do with modernisation processes that have led to the dissolution of traditional communities and institutions, primarily in rural areas, and – associated with this – the turn to religion and the re-emergence of sects, coupled with poverty and a low level of education. In addition, the fusion of pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism in the 19th century and the East Turkestan independence movement of the 1940s and related ideas are still influential in Xinjiang today. The Cultural Revolution did enormous damage to the integration process of the ethnic groups in the province, and even afterwards there was no real concept for integration. The state behaved passively, and the issue of nation-building was not conceptualised. The uncontrolled immigration of Han Chinese and the lack of arable land in rural areas, which had been exacerbated by immigration from other provinces and the expansion of urban areas, had been linked among Uyghurs with the idea that Han Chinese were to blame for all ills – especially as they had proved to be more successful than the local Uyghur population. This was compounded by feelings of marginalisation and discrimination due to differences in language, appearance, lifestyle or religious beliefs. In the minds of many Han, “Uyghur” was associated with criminal behaviour – theft, fraud, drug dealing, prostitution, and later religious extremism or terrorism. In everyday life, Uyghurs had complained that they were subjected to more intensive checks at security checkpoints (airports, railway stations, etc.), treated in a patronising manner and turned away from hotels. According to Yao, these factors have led to a crisis in Uyghur society, which has turned more intensively to Islam and its various forms. Without an understanding of this complex situation, no rational

handling of the Xinjiang problem is possible.¹⁴⁷ In this context, a leading official from Kashgar Prefecture complained in a dialogue with Wang Hui (*Tsinghua Univ.*) that “some leading cadres” had little ability to analytically classify and deal with local problems. Political guidelines were misinterpreted and incorrectly implemented. There was also a lack of understanding of questions of religious faith. There were too many bans and an excess of unnecessary censorship.¹⁴⁸

Numerous Chinese academics recognised a connection between political deficits (lack of real, enforceable autonomy rights), economic (exploitation of raw materials without benefits for the region), cultural (revitalisation of Islam with simultaneous growing state restrictions on religion) and social factors (immigration of Han Chinese, perception of modernisation as a threat to their own culture) and the growing radicalism of the Turkic peoples in Xinjiang. A Chinese sociologist, himself a Uyghur, emphasised, for example, that politicians lacked trust in the Uyghurs, including in Uyghur experts and cadres. In the social sphere, a legal framework for the “managing of society” was lacking. Economically, Uyghurs felt disadvantaged in the market; in addition, the unemployment rate among them was relatively high; they earned less than Han in the same jobs. There were few opportunities to complete vocational training, and they were under-represented in more qualified professions. Companies were also less willing to employ Uyghurs. In addition, the culture of the Uyghurs was not sufficiently respected and cultivated.¹⁴⁹

Lawyer Jia Yu argued that despite reform policies, Xinjiang has remained backward. As far as the per capita disposable income of city dwellers was concerned, Xinjiang had slipped from 17th place (1999) to 30th place (2009), putting it in second last place in the country. In rural areas, the per capita net income of farmers had hardly changed and the gap to the national average had grown continuously. Due to the

¹⁴⁷ Yao 2014.

¹⁴⁸ Wang/Wang 2016.

¹⁴⁹ Tursun 2018.

geographical isolation as well as economic poverty and backwardness, so Jia, one could speak of medieval conditions in some rural areas. The unemployment rate was also high. Many Uyghurs had therefore gone to the east of China as migrant workers. Between 2000 and 2010, a third of the counties in Xinjiang were dependent on transfer payments from those workers. This was the only way to improve the income situation of these counties. The employment rate in southern Xinjiang was one of the lowest in the country.¹⁵⁰

Tang Lijiu, a former official and later entrepreneur who spent a large part of his professional life in Xinjiang, blamed not only the Cultural Revolution for these problems, but also the cadre policy: cadres from ethnic minorities were not sufficiently promoted and appropriately deployed. Among the Han in Xinjiang, especially among Han officials, “Han chauvinism” was widespread, which was expressed in the generalised view of Uyghurs as extremists, terrorists and Islamists. According to Tang, this is the cause of conflicts between Han and members of ethnic minorities. There was little appreciation of Uyghur culture among Han officials. In addition, there existed discrimination against Uyghur migrant workers in the cities of eastern China.¹⁵¹ I have heard such complaints not only in Xinjiang, but also from Xinjiang researchers and Uyghurs who have worked outside the region. During a visit to the southern part of Xinjiang in 1990, I heard several times how dissatisfied people were with the administration of the region.

Another Chinese source makes it clear that the intolerance of local authorities and businesses towards Muslim customs and habits was a constant source of conflict. For example, while Sunday was a legal day of rest in China, Friday was a working day – and Muslims were not allowed to attend funeral and wedding ceremonies during working hours, even if they were obliged to do so according to local customs and reli-

¹⁵⁰ Jia 2015, although there appear to have been clear differences between urban and rural populations, Han and members of ethnic minorities, and northern and southern Xinjiang; see Cappelletti 2020, 98ff. and Wiemer 2004.

¹⁵¹ Tang 2014.

gion. In most cases, violations of such orders (by the management or the leadership) were punished drastically. This had increased the feeling of discrimination among many Muslims¹⁵²

In the 1990s, the authorities attempted to find out the mood of the population by means of surveys in the hope of finding examples of a positive assessment of state policies and historiography by the local population. According to a survey from the early 1990s, in which pupils and students from Xinjiang's ethnic minorities were asked whether Xinjiang had been part of China since the Han period (206 BCE to 220 CE), 41 per cent are said to have considered this statement "false", whereas 26.5 per cent answered "don't know".¹⁵³ Another survey was conducted at the end of the 1990s by the Nationality Research Institute of the Academy of Social Sciences in Xinjiang among residents of Kuqa and Xayar counties in the Tarim Basin, i.e. in an area where considerable natural gas and oil resources had been discovered. When asked who they thought owned these local resources, as many as 28.5 per cent of respondents answered that they belonged to Xinjiang's nationalities. In addition, 15.2 per cent stated that the exploration of local raw materials primarily entailed disadvantages for the local population.¹⁵⁴ Another Chinese study from 1996 from the Turpan region illustrated that many Uyghurs were of the opinion that predominantly Han Chinese would gain access to the scarce resources and that this fact was the cause of conflicts between Han and Uyghurs.¹⁵⁵

It is also important to note that both Uyghurs and Han in Xinjiang did not form a homogeneous opinion group, but rather held very different opinions.¹⁵⁶ Various Chinese Xinjiang researchers are of the opinion

¹⁵² *Xinjiang qiye gaige* 1995, 13/14.

¹⁵³ Dongsheng 1992, 93. Bovingdon 2004c speaks of "contested histories" in this context.

¹⁵⁴ Xu 1992, 15. The problem with such surveys is that many of the respondents do not dare to speak out openly because they fear possible repression, which could be categorised as support for "separatist ideas". The high percentage of critical responses therefore speaks in favour of a critical opinion.

¹⁵⁵ Li 1996.

¹⁵⁶ O'Brien/Brown 2022, 4ff.

that radical separatists or Islamists formed a rather small minority among the Uyghurs. The majority were primarily interested in preserving their culture in the context of greater autonomy and within the framework of the Chinese state.¹⁵⁷ Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism were rejected by the majority of the population.¹⁵⁸

External causes: Influences from neighbouring Islamic countries

Under Stalin, the Soviet Union attempted to gain control and influence in Xinjiang in continuation of the policies of the Russian Empire.¹⁵⁹ During the years of the “Cold War” between the Soviet Union and China, Moscow repeatedly endeavoured to stir up the ethnic minorities in Xinjiang against the Chinese central government. However, any form of independence for Xinjiang also seemed to be taboo for the Soviet Union.

It was the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of independent states in Central Asia that favoured separatist aspirations in Xinjiang, especially as contacts between the nationalities on both sides of the border increased significantly due to the opening of borders and the expansion of trade. The existence of several hundred thousand Uyghur emigrants living in neighbouring countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan also played a role in this process. In the 1990s, some religious leaders in Central Asia sought a united, Muslim Turkistan. One of these leaders in Uzbekistan declared in 1992: “First Fergana, then Uzbekistan and then all of Central Asia will become a Muslim state”. The intention was to lead an Islamic revolution throughout Central Asia, including “East Turkestan”.¹⁶⁰ In the same year, a “Party for an Independent Uyghuristan” was founded in the Kyrgyz capital of

¹⁵⁷ Chinese social anthropologist Ma Rong in an interview at Peking University on 18 May 2023; also: Interview with another Xinjiang researcher, Beijing, 19 May 2023. The Uyghur sociologist Tursun 2013 makes a similar statement; see also Vagneur-Jones 2017 and Davis 2008.

¹⁵⁸ Interview, Beijing, 19 May 2023.

¹⁵⁹ See also Silde-Karklins 1975.

¹⁶⁰ Rashid 1992, 23.

Bishkek with the aim of establishing an independent Uyghur state. 270 delegates from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkey took part.¹⁶¹

In the 1990s, the Chinese leadership recognised the international dimension of the problem. The Chinese authorities blamed the growing separatist and Islamist movements in Xinjiang not least on “foreign influences”, such as an organisation founded by the late Isa Yusuf Alptekin¹⁶²; various “separatist” organisations operating from Central Asia; the “Islamic League”, which fights for the “liberation of East Turkestan”, and an “American Society for East Turkestan”, which was founded in New York in 1983.¹⁶³ In September 1994, the five most important secessionist organisations decided to strengthen their cooperation: The ‘Turkestan Islamic Party’, founded in Pakistan by Hasan Mahsum (an Islamist group based in Afghanistan¹⁶⁴; it has been designated as terrorist by numerous countries and the UN), the ‘East Turkestan People’s Revolutionary Army’ (a Marxist-Leninist separatist group originally formed in Xinjiang), the ‘East Turkestan Liberation Organi-

¹⁶¹ Filonyk 1994, 162; Bruce Pannier, “Why Are Central Asian Countries Silent About China’s Uyghurs?”, *Radio Free Europe*, 22 December 2020, <http://www.rferl.org/a/why-are-central-asian-countries-silent-about-china-s-uyghurs-/3085252.html> (access: 04/2025).

¹⁶² Alptekin was a Uyghur politician (born 1901 in Yengisar, Kashgar, died 1995 in Istanbul) who worked in the diplomatic service of the Republic of China in Uzbekistan in the 1920s and for the Chinese Ministry of Defence in the 1930s. He was a staunch opponent of the short-lived Islamic “First East Turkestan Republic” based in Kashgar (Nov. 1933–April 1934) and the Soviet-backed “Second Turkestan Republic” in northern Xinjiang. He left China in 1949. In 1954, he tried to persuade the government of the “Republic of China” in Taiwan to give up its claim to Xinjiang, which it refused to do because Xinjiang was an “integral part of China”. His organisation received support above all from pan-Turkish circles in the Turkish government. He lived in Turkey until his death and became a Turkish citizen. Isa Alptekin is the father of Erkin Alptekin, who lives in Germany and from 2004 until 2006 was the first president of the World Uyghur Congress, founded in Munich.

¹⁶³ An overview of the various organisations can be found in Hoppe 1995, 149ff.

¹⁶⁴ Hasan Mahsum was the leader of the Islamist extremist group “Turkistan Islamic Party”. He was rumoured to have links to Al-Qaeda. In 2003, he was shot dead by the Pakistani army during an anti-terrorist operation.

zation', which was classified as a 'terrorist organisation' by China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (it was responsible for poison attacks in Xinjiang and attacks on Chinese in Turkey), the "Eastern Turkestan Grey Wolf Party" (a pan-Turkish group) and the "East Turkestan Independence Organisation".¹⁶⁵

As early as 1985, Tibetan, Mongolian and "East Turkestan" organisations active abroad founded an alliance in Switzerland, with the Dalai Lama as its chairman.¹⁶⁶

Turkey played a special role after the founding of the People's Republic of China, as numerous Uyghur leaders from the republican era had settled there, continued to demand the independence of "East Turkestan" and also found a political hearing there for a long time, especially among representatives of pan-Turkish ideas.¹⁶⁷ With the independence of the Central Asian states and the policy of opening up in Xinjiang too, such activities increased. In December 1992, "East Turkestan" organisations with the support of Saudi Arabia and Turkey founded the "World National East Turkestan Konsultay (Congress)" in Istanbul, which was attended by representatives from Central Asia, the United States, Australia, Pakistan, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Switzerland. An "East Turkestan National United Committee" was founded, and the name of the country (East Turkestan), the national flag (crescent flag), the national anthem (Shadiya) and the national emblem were determined.¹⁶⁸

The "Congress" was to coordinate independence activities and organise the armed struggle.¹⁶⁹ There is no doubt that these organisations posed an external threat to China's security, even if their direct action inside Xinjiang may have been limited.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ *East Turkestan News Bulletin*, 4/1993, 2f.

¹⁶⁶ It is unclear whether this organisation is still active. Internationally, however, there is cooperation between organisations of these three exile groups abroad.

¹⁶⁷ Shichor 2009, 12-36.

¹⁶⁸ *Op. cit.* 19-20.

¹⁶⁹ Babayan 2011, 16.

¹⁷⁰ An overview of this can be found in *Dong 'Tu' kongbu zuzhi da jiemi* 2004.

However, the National Congress then split over the question of whether independence or autonomy should be sought. At the beginning of 2004, a “World Uyghur Congress” was founded, which rejected independence and spoke out in favour of autonomy.¹⁷¹ On 14 September of the same year, however, an “East Turkestan Government in Exile” under the leadership of Anwar Yusuf Turani was constituted in Room HC-6 of the US Capitol in Washington.¹⁷² This government rejected autonomy and set itself the goal of independence for the region.¹⁷³ Its headquarters are in Washington.¹⁷⁴ These organisations had good relations with Turkey and with organisations in the Central Asian republics. Former Turkish President Özal (1927-1993) is said to have told Isa Yusuf Alptekin that all areas inhabited by Turkic peoples had been liberated, with the exception of East Turkestan – now its liberation was on the agenda. Alptekin shall have replied that “East Turkestan” was “the mother of the entire Turkish world”.¹⁷⁵

Even when Recep Tayyip Erdoğan became Turkish Prime Minister in 2003, his Foreign Minister and later Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu advocated pan-Turkish ideas.¹⁷⁶ Under President Erdoğan, however, Turkish-Chinese relations improved significantly. While Erdoğan had still labelled the state’s actions in Xinjiang as “genocide” in 2009, relations with China were subsequently upgraded to a “strategic partnership”, particularly with regard to Ankara’s economic expectations.¹⁷⁷ However, he still argues today that the concerns of the Uyghurs are also

¹⁷¹ Shichor 2006.

¹⁷² Ibid. Its current “president” is Mamtimin Ala; see <http://east-turkistan.net/leadership/> (access: 04/2025).

¹⁷³ “Voice of America Report on Chinese Opposition of ETGIE”, *Voice of America News*, 14 September 2004, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Voice_of_America_Report_on_Chinese_Opposition_of_ETGIE.ogg (access: 04/2025).

¹⁷⁴ Cf. homepage of the “Government in Exile”, <http://east-turkistan.net/> (access: 04/2025).

¹⁷⁵ Shichor 2009, 25; Kuşçu 2014; *Dong ‘Tu’ kongbu zuzhi da jiemi* 2004.

¹⁷⁶ Shichor 2018. Davutoğlu is considered a representative of neo-Ottomanism, which has strong pan-Turkish echoes.

¹⁷⁷ See Mackerras 2015, 37ff.

the concerns of Turkey. In a statement following a cabinet meeting on 20 November 2013, he noted, “Just as the pain of the oppressed in Palestine is our pain, the pain of our Uyghur brothers [...] is also our pain”.¹⁷⁸ During an official visit by Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan to China in June 2024, during which he also visited the cities of Ürümqi and Kashgar in Xinjiang, he appealed for China to protect the cultural rights of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang and allow them to “live their values”.¹⁷⁹ For this reason, the Chinese government still has doubts today about Turkey’s behaviour towards the Uyghurs, around 50,000 of whom live in Turkey.

Neighbouring Pakistan and Afghanistan also played a central role in supporting Islamist forces for many years. This mainly concerned the export of fundamentalist ideas, which promoted radicalisation among Uyghurs, but also the supply of weapons, funds and drugs from both countries. In addition, Muslim states invested in the construction of mosques and madrasas (Islamic teaching facilities) in Xinjiang and other Muslim regions of China, as well as the significant increase in pilgrimages to Mecca since the opening-up policy.¹⁸⁰ Some of the radical and militant Uyghur leaders were also trained for years by the Taliban in Afghanistan and, in some cases, by radical Muslim movements in Pakistan.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Erdoğan: *Uyğur Türkü, Ahıska Türkü, Kırım Tatarı, Kerkük Türkmeni kardeşlerimizin sıkıntısı da bizim sıkıntımızdır* (Erdoğan: The problems of our brothers Uyğur Turks, Meskhetian Turks, Crimean Tatars and Kirkuk Turkmens are also our problem), <http://tr.uyghurcongress.org/erdogan-uygur-turku-ahıska-turku-kirim-tatarı-kerkuk-turkmeni-kardelerimizin-sikintısı-da-bizim-sikintimizdir/> (access: 04/2025).

¹⁷⁹ “Bakan Fidan Uyğur Özerk Bölgesi’ni ziyaret etti” (Minister Fidan visited the Uyğur Autonomous Region), *TNT Haber*, 05/06/2024, <http://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/bakan-fidan-uygur-ozerk-bolgesini-ziyaret-etti-862096.html> (access: 04/2025); Frazer, Suzan (2024), “Turkey urges Chinese authorities to protect the cultural rights of minority Muslim Uyghurs”, *AP*, 05/06/2024. <http://apnews.com/article/turkey-china-uyghurs-cultural-rights-11834ba94024ea82af1f45c5df1fbd82> (access: 04/2025).

¹⁸⁰ Gladney 1999, 37ff.

¹⁸¹ Haider 2005; Mehsut/Golovkina 2014; Rehman 2014; Roberts 2004.

Even Beijing's old friend Pakistan was long suspected of at least tolerating the influence of Pakistani Islamists in Xinjiang. Islamabad was repeatedly urged to take action against groups such as Jamaat-e-Islami, which financed, trained and armed secessionist movements in Xinjiang. More than a hundred Uyghurs from Xinjiang were studying at Islamic institutes of the Jamaat movement in Pakistan at the time. One of these students openly told the *Far Eastern Economic Review*:

*My city is not Muslim. It is full of communists who do not allow Muslims to study or pray [...]. We want to establish a new Muslim state for the Uyghurs and leave China.*¹⁸²

Afghanistan, as a state neighbouring China, plays a key role with regard to the security situation in Xinjiang. The Chinese Central Asia researcher Zhao Huasheng wrote in 2021 that the starting point of China's Afghanistan policy was security and stability in Xinjiang, with Afghanistan having long posed the greatest external threat. Until 1996, Afghanistan was a permanent base for separatist Uyghur organisations. Al Qaeda and the Taliban had supported these organisations spiritually and materially, trained fighters and supplied weapons, and they had given shelter in Afghanistan to East Turkestan separatists who had fled from China.¹⁸³ The most important separatist organisation, ETIM¹⁸⁴, has had its base in this country since 1998. However, despite intensive efforts in the 1990s, Beijing did not succeed in dissuading the Taliban from supporting the independence movement in Xinjiang with weapons and drugs (to finance arms purchases).¹⁸⁵ Visits to Afghanistan by Taliban representatives in Beijing and employees of the China Institute for Contemporary International Relations, a think tank of the Ministry of State Security, did nothing to change this.

¹⁸² Rashid 1995.

¹⁸³ Zhao 2021.

¹⁸⁴ On ETIM, see Reed/Raschke 2010.

¹⁸⁵ Ahrari 2000; Small 2015.

Western intelligence services had already ascertained links between Uyghur groups and Osama bin Laden in 1999. Uyghurs are even said to have fought in Chechnya.¹⁸⁶ In the same year, China offered the Taliban trade relations through Pakistan's mediation if they stopped supporting Uyghur independence movements. A meeting between China's then ambassador to Pakistan, Lu Shulin, and Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar in Dec. 2000 also failed to produce any results because Lu demanded that Taliban support for Uighur fighters be stopped, while Omar demanded that China support the lifting of UN sanctions against Afghanistan, which had been imposed after the attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998.¹⁸⁷ In September 2000, *Far Eastern Economic Review* also reported that Uyghurs were fighting in a brigade set up by Osama bin Laden.¹⁸⁸ In Nov. 2001, the then Chinese Vice Premier Qian Qichen told Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, that around 1,000 Uyghurs were being trained by Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and that around one hundred were fighting with the Taliban.¹⁸⁹

Following the withdrawal of the US and its allies from Afghanistan in 2021, Beijing intensified its relations with the new Taliban government. In July 2021, Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with a Taliban delegation, China began to provide humanitarian aid and economic assistance, imported goods from the country duty-free and advocated internationally for the lifting of imposed sanctions and aid for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Taliban leader Mullah Omar declared that attacks on Xinjiang would be stopped. According to official information, the Taliban have now stopped supporting Uyghur organisations in Afghanistan and are hoping for further economic aid from China.¹⁹⁰ Only the "Islamic

¹⁸⁶ Soloshcheva 2017, 419.

¹⁸⁷ Felbab-Brown 2020.

¹⁸⁸ Lawrence 2020.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. "Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network Daily Report", 13 November 2001, NAPSNET@nautilus.org; *Uyghur Information Agency*, 20 December 2001, <http://www.uyghurinfo.com> (access: 08/2012).

¹⁹⁰ See e.g. Felbab-Brown 2020; Kashgarian 2021; Feng 2021; Standish 2021.

State Khorasan Province”, an Afghan offshoot of the “Islamic State” in Syria and Iraq, still has Uyghurs among its fighters and supports Uyghur independence.¹⁹¹ However, the Taliban have now driven this organisation, which was active in the Afghan-Chinese border region, into other Afghan provinces.¹⁹²

Nevertheless, the “Islamic State Khorasan Province” has repeatedly carried out attacks against Chinese citizens and Chinese facilities in Afghanistan and, at the end of 2023, once again declared its intention to “liberate” East Turkestan.¹⁹³

Beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan, China is concerned about influences from the new Central Asian states. The “Shanghai Cooperation Organisation” was founded back in 1996 on China's initiative and initially comprised Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan with the aim of combating “separatism, terrorism and religious extremism”, among other things. Uzbekistan (2001), India and Pakistan (2017) and Iran (2023) later joined. In 2001, the six members signed the “Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism”. In 2000, for example, China granted Uzbekistan military aid to combat the

¹⁹¹ These are largely members of the “Turkestan Islamic Party” (formerly “East Turkestan Islamic Movement”); see Pantucci 2023.

¹⁹² Kelemen 2022 and Standish 2021; on Sino-Afghan relations, see e.g. Zhou/Su/Yuan 2022.

¹⁹³ Webber 2023. In the meantime, the Taliban government has completed a road to the Chinese border, which had been started by the previous regime, in the hope of facilitating and expanding the trade of goods with China. For security reasons, Beijing has not yet agreed to set up a border and customs station there; see Zhao 2024. The dangerous nature of the “Islamic State Province of Khorasan” was demonstrated not only by the example of planned attacks in Germany and Austria and the arrest of members of this organisation, most of whom came from Tajikistan and Afghanistan, but above all by the attack in Moscow in March 2024, which left more than 140 dead. Khorasan stands for a historical region that refers to Afghanistan, the Central Asian republics and “East Turkestan” or Xinjiang; see Osman 2016. The aim of the IS province of Khorasan is to create a transnational caliphate. Following the attack in Moscow, Federal Minister of the Interior Nancy Faeser declared that this group currently poses the greatest Islamist threat in Germany (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 24 March 2024). This organisation also continues to pose a potential threat to China; see Kelemen 2022 and Giustozzi 2024.

“Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan”, which came from Afghanistan and sought to overthrow the Uzbek government and whose ranks included a large number of Uyghurs.¹⁹⁴ In 2003, joint military manoeuvres by several members of this organisation took place for the first time, including in Xinjiang. These were primarily aimed at “combating terrorism”.¹⁹⁵ At the “First China-Central Asia Summit” in Xi’an in 2023, President Xi promised the Central Asian states that he would support them in their fight against terrorism.¹⁹⁶

Another player in the region in the 1990s was Iran. In 1991, the Chinese government complained in internal reports that “in recent years, a certain country in the Middle East and its embassy in China have been trying to increase the influence of the Shiite sect of Islam in China” and to instigate “an Islamic revolution”.¹⁹⁷ Based on economic relations, relations between the two countries have meanwhile improved significantly. China is Iran’s largest trading partner and the main buyer of its oil. China is also helping to expand Iran’s infrastructure. As mentioned, Iran joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in 2023.¹⁹⁸ Saudi Arabia, where thousands of Uyghurs have settled as traders since the 1920s, has also played a role. According to one report, most of them

¹⁹⁴ For example, the “Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan”, founded in 1991, which was primarily active between 1999 and 2018 and was allied with Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan; https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/islamic-movement-uzbekistan#text_block_19654 (access: 04/2025).

¹⁹⁵ For more on this organisation, see Song 2016 and Zhao 2012 on its role in the fight against terrorism.

¹⁹⁶ The importance China attaches to security cooperation with the Central Asian states can be seen in the joint Chinese-Uzbek communiqué of 25 Jan. 2024 on the occasion of a visit by the Uzbek President to China: “Both sides will continue to work together to combat terrorism, [...] separatism and extremism, as well as the illegal trafficking of drugs, weapons, ammunition and explosives and transnational organised crime”. “To counter these threats, both sides will deepen co-operation in the areas of law enforcement and security and enhance the exchange and sharing of information between relevant agencies”. Full text of the communiqué: https://www.gov.cn/yaowen/liebiao/202401/content_6928099.htm (access: 04/2025).

¹⁹⁷ *China Today*, 06/1991, 154.

¹⁹⁸ Habibi 2023.

favour an independent “East Turkestan state” and identify with the ultra-conservative ideas of Saudi Wahhabism. Ideas that they are also said to have spread among Uyghur Mecca pilgrims.¹⁹⁹

Uyghur fighters abroad

In an interview with *Radio Free Asia* in 2003, Mehmet Emin Hazret, leader of the “East Turkestan Liberation Organisation” (ETLO), stated:

*Our principle goal is to achieve independence for East Turkestan by peaceful means. But to show our enemies and friends our determination on the East Turkestan issue, we view a military wing as inevitable.*²⁰⁰

From 2015, the presence of Islamist Uyghur fighters abroad became more visible on the internet. The Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) began posting videos of Uyghurs fighting in Syria online. It was publicised that thousands of Uyghur fighters were active in the al-Nusra movement – an al-Qaeda offshoot – in northern Syria.²⁰¹ In early 2017, Uyghurs declared in an IS video that they wanted to “drown Han Chinese in a sea of blood”.²⁰²

Uyghur fighters also became increasingly active in China's neighbouring countries and began to infiltrate southern Xinjiang from Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Pakistan, recruiting young Uyghurs as fighters and carrying out terrorist attacks. Weapons were also supplied, mainly from Afghanistan²⁰³, Pakistan and Tajikistan. More serious, however, was the

¹⁹⁹ See Dorsey 2018.

²⁰⁰ “Separatist Leader Vows to Target Chinese Government”, *Radio Free Asia*, 29 January 2003. <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/97878-20030129.html> (access: 04/2025).

²⁰¹ Greitens et al. 2019/20, 32/33. According to Soloshcheva 2017, 421, Uyghurs would fight in the so-called “Katibah Turkistan” (Turkistan Battalion).

²⁰² Soloshcheva 2017, 417; Martina/Blanchard 2017. Greitens et al. 2019/20, 32ff., contain a number of statements by Uyghur fighters from IS and the al-Nusra Front to return to Xinjiang and fight for an independent state there. The number of Uyghur fighters in Syria alone has been estimated by foreign intelligence services at several thousand.

²⁰³ Becquelin 1998, 16/17, shows that arms and drug smuggling between China and Afghanistan – in both directions – was by no means something new.

fact that Islamist and separatist forces were networked via the internet and thus transferred expertise in the manufacture and use of weapons and guerrilla techniques. Propaganda material and Muslim literature also found their way into China after the opening to the outside world and contributed to the spread of Islamist and separatist ideas. There also existed individual training camps in the Afghan-Chinese border region. External influence probably had a primarily ideological and mobilising effect; arms supplies and the infiltration of Uyghur fighters from abroad appear to have played a secondary role in acts of terrorism.²⁰⁴ At the end of 2023, the director of the Tajik “Center for Strategic Research” under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Usmonzoda Kh, pointed out that terrorist organisations such as the aforementioned “IS Khorasan” and “Al Qaeda” repeatedly tried to smuggle drugs into Tajikistan from Afghanistan in order to acquire funding. It can be assumed that these organisations are also trying to smuggle drugs into Xinjiang, especially as illegal border crossings are quite possible along the 414 km-long border in the high mountains.²⁰⁵

Domestic security dilemma

Harvard economist William H. Overholt argues that successful developing countries place greater emphasis on domestic security for reasons of legitimacy at home and in the interests of future growth, but also in the interests of their geopolitics.²⁰⁶ Cheng Li, who worked at Brookings for many years, is also of the opinion that all countries prioritise the security of their country, because without security all other factors are irrele-

²⁰⁴ Fuller/Lipman 2004, 347, point out that it is difficult for outsiders to trace contacts between organised groups in Xinjiang and abroad.

²⁰⁵ According to scientific studies, drug smuggling and abuse are among the most significant social problems in Xinjiang; see Tanner 2011 and Zhao Jie et al. 2023 as well as “Afuhan, Bajisitán, Zhongya diqu dupin wenti” (The drug problem in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia), *Jingcha peixun wang*, 30 June 2017, <http://lnjcx1.com/NewsInfo.aspx?n=927> (access: 04/2025). As the Chinese-Afghan border is heavily guarded on both sides, it can be assumed that attempts are made to smuggle drugs into Xinjiang via the less guarded Chinese-Tajik border.

²⁰⁶ Overholt 2023, 61ff.

vant.²⁰⁷ If a country is confronted with internal and/or external security problems, then security is the top priority, also with regard to economic and cultural considerations and interests. Under Xi Jinping, the security factor replaced the development factor as the top priority. Security, it was now argued, was the prerequisite for all development.²⁰⁸ Internal and external security also form the basis for entire internal stability.

In terms of China's nationality policies, the unconditional preservation of internal stability and the acculturation of other ethnic groups have been part of the Chinese state's self-image and core tasks for centuries.²⁰⁹ The state has derived and continues to derive a high degree of legitimacy from guaranteeing stability and ethnic integration. The history of China exemplifies that the erosion of stability due to internal unrest, for example, was interpreted as a consequence of state failure, so that the ruler forfeited the "mandate" conferred to him by "heaven", i.e. lost his legitimacy. Socio-political movements such as the *Taiping* or *Yihetuan movements* [the latter the so-called "Boxer Rebellion"] in the 19th century were seen as indicators of state weakness and a decline in power. In addition, the Chinese population has had the historical/colonial experience that internal weakness leads to oppression and humiliation by external forces (in the collective consciousness primarily by imperialist European powers or Japan in the 19th and 20th centuries). National strength and the safeguarding of territorial integrity and national sovereignty have been regarded as absolute reasons of state at least since the experience of colonial oppression. And the legitimacy of the state ultimately depends on whether it is able to guarantee security in the country.

The precarious security situation in Xinjiang since the 1990s and especially after the unrest of 2009 and the associated destabilisation of the region also spawned the emigration of many Han Chinese from Xinjiang. This concurrently led to a loss of Han skilled workers who were urgently needed for the development of the region. There also appeared

²⁰⁷ Li 2023.

²⁰⁸ See Howard Wang 2023.

²⁰⁹ Cf. Heberer 2023, 52-58.

widespread resentment among the Han Chinese population in China with regard to the security situation in Xinjiang and other parts of the country. Wang Hui spoke of “a major shock for Chinese society”.²¹⁰ As attacks have been reported repeatedly over the years, increasingly also outside the Xinjiang region, state authorities have been accused of “weakness”. Nobody dared to travel to Xinjiang anymore.²¹¹ After attacks in other parts of China too, criticism of the political leadership increased. The question was raised as to why the state was unable to get violence and terror in Xinjiang under control. Solving the problem therefore became a core task for the political leadership; otherwise, there was a risk of a significant loss of legitimacy.

The new leadership under Xi Jinping was forced to take action from 2012. In a speech in 2014, Xi declared that “counter-terrorism” would be at the centre of activities in Xinjiang in the coming years, with the aim of restoring order and stability. At the same time, the national consciousness of all ethnic groups should be fostered. The focus should be on raising the standard of living for all residents. Employment and education programmes were declared essential in order to increase the level of training and education as well as school attendance. Furthermore, more effective poverty reduction programmes were needed.²¹² Xi thus basically outlined some of the core social problems in the region.²¹³

In order to show strength, from 2017 onwards, all those who were somehow suspected of being close to terrorism, separatism and Islamism were subjected to a re-education or disciplinary process on a large scale. In May 2023, Chinese academics and representatives of the authorities claimed that this process had also led to cases of state arbitrariness, especially as the legal system had been virtually suspended.²¹⁴

²¹⁰ Wang 2009.

²¹¹ Informal discussion, Beijing, 19 May 2023.

²¹² Xi 2014a.

²¹³ Similarly, Bovingdon 2004b, 37: “In Xinjiang Uyghurs are poorer, less urban, less likely to go to high school and college, and have fewer job prospects than Han”. Cf. also: Bovingdon 2004a.

²¹⁴ Interview with Xinjiang researcher, Beijing University, 18 May 2023.

The party leadership had already called in the 1990s for the “three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism” to be combated with the utmost vigour. However, the success seems to have been rather moderate at first, even though the party secretaries of Xinjiang, Song Hanliang (1985-1994) and Wang Lequan (1995-2010), had already launched campaigns against separatism and Islamism in these years, combined with an increasing degree of repression. However, the unrest in 2009 made it clear to the central leadership that this had not solved the security problems.

In May 2023, a long-standing Chinese Xinjiang researcher described with tears in his eyes how terror and intimidation from separatist and Islamist organisations had dominated everyday life in southern Xinjiang since the 1990s and especially after 2009, creating a traumatic situation for the Uyghur majority of the population. The state had largely lost control of security, which could also have led to a loss of legitimacy with regard to the security policy competence of the political leadership. The political leadership therefore had to declare a “state of emergency”, deploy military units to Xinjiang and establish a harsh disciplinary regime as the only way to regain control of the situation and stabilise conditions.²¹⁵

Chinese sources clarify that in an anti-terror campaign planned after 2009, short-term “educational measures” were initially to be carried out for Uyghurs who had shown sympathy for separatists and Islamists.²¹⁶ As the unrest and attacks could not be contained quickly, a new party secretary (Chen Quanguo, 2016-2021) was tasked with restoring stability within five years. The accusations levelled against him in the West are that he tackled this with all severity and serious human rights violations. At the end of 2021, a new party secretary, Ma Xingrui, was then appointed: an aerospace scientist who had previously been governor of Guangdong province and now announced Xinjiang’s return to economic development and “normalization”.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Meeting on 19 May 2024 in Beijing; see also Greitens et al. 2019/20.

²¹⁶ Greitens et al. 2019/20, 15.

²¹⁷ Interview with Ma Xingrui, Party Secretary of Xinjiang, Ürümqi, 26 May 2023.

The restoration of security and stability had already been declared a central task in Xinjiang in 2014. In fact, nationality policies in China were and are primarily understood as part of national security policy, not as a question of greater ethnic autonomy.²¹⁸ Political scientist Zhou Ping (*Yunnan University*), Vice President of the Chinese Political Science Association, emphasised this view once again in a book published in 2021: As most ethnic minorities settled in border areas, special attention should be paid to problems of disintegration of peripheral areas and to “border governance”. Nationality policy should be viewed primarily from the perspective of the state and state security policy.²¹⁹ As a result of the developments in Xinjiang, the security policy aspect and the question of “border area governance” moved to the centre of the Xinjiang debate. At the same time, the security issue gained greater influence on the redefinition of nationality policy and the nation-building process.

In the meantime, China has stepped up security cooperation with neighbouring countries – including Tajikistan, Afghanistan and, more recently, Kazakhstan – in order to help improve internal security in these countries and minimise the potential spread of unstable factors to Xinjiang. At the same time, Beijing is significantly expanding the military infrastructure in the region.²²⁰

IV. Far-reaching consequences: the primacy of nation-building and changes in nationalities policies

Nation-building is a process in the course of which standardised state institutions and structures are to be created across the entire territory of a country, and a collective national identity is to emerge. This includes

²¹⁸ See Weiner 2022, with contributions by Thomas Heberer (“Ethnicity in China”), Jonathan Lipman (“Being Muslim and Chinese”), Ben Hillman (“Tibet: From Conflict to Protest”) and Y.-W. Chen (“Ethnic Conflict in Xinjiang and Its International Connections”).

²¹⁹ Zhou 2021.

²²⁰ China Power Team 2024.

the development of a national language or at least a *lingua franca* as a general means of communication, the integration of linguistically and ethnically diverse sections of the population and the creation of national symbols and national myths. It is a protracted process that – historically speaking – was usually associated with violent conflicts and the displacement or even expulsion and annihilation of ethnic minorities (cf. nation-building in countries such as the USA, Australia, New Zealand, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Myanmar and Turkey). Nation-building also means that the respective state should be in a position to effectively control the entire territory. If the corresponding (state) capacity is lacking, a nation-building process can fail.

For a long time, social scientists were convinced that ethnic and cultural differences within nation states would be levelled out over the course of modernisation processes and economic development. This belief also prevailed in Chinese politics. Recently, however, it has become clear that an “ethnic revival” on a global scale has emerged, resulting in the formation of new states (e.g. on the territory of the former Soviet Union or former Yugoslavia). In many countries around the world, ethnic conflicts intensified and led to clashes between the ethnic majority and ethnic minorities.²²¹ This problem was also reflected in China and led to a new emphasis on security policy and the nation-building process.

Political scientist Yan Xuetong (*Tsinghua Univ.*) has noted that research into the causes of political decision-making is rarely carried out. He has also noted a contradiction between the Chinese nation-building process and the protection of ethnic minority cultures, a contradiction that is also reflected in the Xinjiang policy. He wrote:

*China's process of building a modern nation-state is not yet complete, and China's peaceful rise is initially based on nation-state building. For decades, China has faced great difficulties in building a nation-state: On the one hand, it needs to promote the national identity of the Chinese people, but on the other hand, it needs to protect the cultures of ethnic minorities. This is a contradiction.*²²²

²²¹ Cf. Hippler 2004.

²²² Yan 2009.

The unrest in the Tibetan settlement areas (2008), in Xinjiang (2009) and in Inner Mongolia (2011), but above all the perceived threats from separatist and Islamist forces in Xinjiang, intensified the feeling among the party leadership of increasing disintegration of the peripheral areas. This triggered a debate within the political leadership and among Chinese intellectuals about necessary modifications in nationality policies. Proposals to extend self-government rights and for a more sensitive policy towards ethnic minorities went largely unheard. From the academic world, it was primarily sociology professor Ma Rong (*Peking University*) and Tsinghua professors Hu Angang and Hu Lianhe who, from 2009 onwards, argued that special rights for ethnic minorities and the emphasis on ethnicity had not led to more integration, but to greater segregation and an overemphasis on ethnic specificities. Instead of national coherence, the question of self-administration was placed at the centre. However, assimilation and “Han-ification” (*hanhua*) were declared to be necessary side effects of nation-building and modernisation processes.²²³ Ma was of the opinion that, as in the USA, minority issues should be conceived of as individual, not political, issues.²²⁴ Both Hu Angang and Hu Lianhe spoke in favour of a “second generation of ethnic politics”, linked to the abolition of the recognition of ethnicity, the elimination of the system of self-government, the promotion of regions instead of ethnic groups and the strengthening of education in the standard Han Chinese language (*Putonghua*).²²⁵ In doing so, they took up ideas that had already been proposed by Liang Qichao (1873-1929), an influential intellectual and political pioneer, in the 1920s (see below).²²⁶

In 2014, Ma relativised his position. He now took the view that the idea that economic development would solve ethnic problems was wrong. According to Ma, ethnic and religious problems could not be solved with money or the barrel of a gun. Using the example of Xinjiang, he

²²³ Ma Rong 2009.

²²⁴ Ma Rong 2009.

²²⁵ Hu/Hu 2012.

²²⁶ Cf. Liang 1902-1906; 1912 and 1960.

argued that providing jobs for members of ethnic minorities, increasing incomes, improving the environment and preserving ecosystems, promoting bilingual education in schools and universities, as well as protecting minority customs, controlling immigration, protecting natural resources and combating “Great Han chauvinism” (*da hanzuzhuyi*) were also essential to defuse ethnic conflicts.²²⁷ In 2019, Ma Rong clarified his position again and argued that the task of future nationality policies in China was to strengthen the identification of all members of ethnic groups with the Chinese nation. Instead of talking about members of ethnic groups, the term “individual citizens” should be used from now on. Standardisation would take priority over diversity and autonomy.²²⁸

In this context, Bulag pointed out that a significant change in the concept of the state had commenced in China after 2010: from a “multi-ethnic state” to a “unitary community of the Chinese nation”. A stronger integration of ethnic minorities, for example, in the course of the implementation of *Putonghua* as the national standard language, the downgrading of both regional autonomy and the use of minority languages and a stronger convergence of customs, habits and development programmes were part and parcel of the new concept to accelerate state and nation building.²²⁹

The current Chinese leadership has indeed declared the nation-building process, i.e. the “creation of a unified Chinese nation”, to which all of China’s ethnic groups should feel an equal sense of belonging, to be a central task. Uyghurs, Tibetans, Mongols and others should define themselves primarily as “Chinese” in the sense of citizenship and not primarily as Uyghurs, Tibetans or Mongols. The aim would be to enforce *Putonghua* as the *lingua franca* and to create a “common identity for all ethnic groups” on Chinese territory.²³⁰ The state is seen as the

²²⁷ *Beida jiaoshou Ma Rong de jianghua 2014*. more detailed: Ma 2016.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Bulag 2021.

²³⁰ In China, the term “Chinese” (*Zhonguoren*) does not only refer to the ethnic majority, who are called “Han”, but to all inhabitants of China.

representative of interests and the embodiment of the nation, and identification with it is demanded. This “state nationalism” already dominated ethnic politics in the “Republic of China” before 1949.²³¹ It was Sun Yat-sen, the first president of the Republic of China, who made corresponding considerations. He compared the Chinese people to a “pile of loose sand” and advocated strengthening the nation’s consciousness and the identification of China’s people with the state and nation as well as the formation of a common identity based on cultural tradition. As long as national consciousness was low and only supported by intellectual elites, the state, as the bearer of the interests of the people, had to mould them into a nation through an ‘educational dictatorship’.²³²

For a long time, the party leadership believed that the economic and technical modernisation of the minority regions would solve the problem of integration and the creation of a *Zhonghua minzu*, a Chinese nation to which all ethnic groups feel an equal sense of belonging. However, in a speech on nationality issues in 2014, Xi Jinping stated that the previous nationality policy and the policy of regional autonomy had proved successful and should be continued. At the same time, ethnic interaction, the prioritisation of standard Chinese over the teaching of minority languages and the development of inter-ethnic communities should be further promoted: an indication of a stronger focus on inclusive policies and acculturation.²³³ The nation-building aspect was also emphasised by Wang Yang, then chairman of the Political Consultative Conference and member of the Politburo Standing Committee, during a visit to Inner Mongolia in early 2021. He emphasised that nation-building was a central theme in China’s new nationalities policy. Without a shared sense of identity with regard to the Chinese nation, the nation-building process could not be successfully managed. All auton-

²³¹ Cf. Zhao 2004, 21ff.

²³² Cf. Sun 1963 and Heberer/Senz 2006. Wang Hui (2014) has pointed out that “nation-building” is a phenomenon of modernity, but that it takes place differently in China than in Western societies. For reasons of space, we cannot delve into this question here; cf. Wang 2014.

²³³ Xi 2014b; see also Bulag 2021.

omous areas of ethnic minorities should strengthen their awareness of the Chinese nation and culture, intensify education in the standard language, *Putonghua*, and promote ethnic unity and social stability.²³⁴

When Xi Jinping visited Xinjiang in July 2022, he also emphasised the importance of the Chinese nation-building process as a “core task”:

*It is necessary to forge a sense of community among the Chinese nation and promote the exchange and integration of different ethnic groups. Chinese civilisation is the root of the cultures of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang. It is necessary to educate and guide the cadres and the masses to correctly understand the history of Xinjiang, especially the history of national development, to develop a firm conception of the history of the Chinese nation, and to mould the Chinese heart and soul.*²³⁵

He repeated this in a similar form in a speech during another visit in August 2023, saying that building a strong sense of community in the context of the Chinese nation was “the main line” of “any work on nationality policy”. In this context, education in the spoken and written common national language should also be promoted and people's awareness, and ability to use the spoken and written common national language should be improved.²³⁶

²³⁴ “Wang Yang zai Nei Menggu diaoyan shi qiangdiao jiandingbuyi zhulao Zhonghua minzu gongtongti yishi, laogu jianshe zuguo beijiāng anquan wending pingzhang” (During his inspection tour to Inner Mongolia, Wang Yang emphasised raising awareness of the community of the Chinese nation and establishing a security and stability boundary on the northern borders of the motherland). 14 April 2021, <http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2021-04/14/11230659.htm> (access: 04/ 2025).

²³⁵ “Xi Jinping zai Xinjiang kaocha shi qiangdiao wanzheng zhunque guanche xin shidai dangde zhijiang fanglie, jianshe tuanjie hexie fanrong fuyu wenming jinbu anju yele shengtai lianghaode meihao Xinjiang” (During his inspection in Xinjiang, Xi Jinping emphasised the Party's strategy for governing Xinjiang in the new period must be fully and accurately implemented, and a beautiful Xinjiang with a harmonious, prosperous, prosperous, civilised and advanced life and an excellent ecology must be built), 22 July 2022, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2022/0715/c1024-32476930.html> (access: 04/ 2025).

²³⁶ “Xi Jinping zai tingqu Xinjiang weiwuer zizhiqū dangwei he zhengfu Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan gongzuo huibao shi qiangdiao” (Xi Jinping's remarks on the occasion of the work reports of the Party Committee and Government of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps). *Dangjian wang*, 06 September 2023, <http://www.dangjian.com/shouye/>

The modification of religious policy, i.e. the “Sinicisation of religions” (*zongjiao Zhongguohua*), can also be placed in the context of this nation-building process. In a speech at the 3rd plenary session of the 1st session of the 13th National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference in 2018, the Chairman of the Chinese Islamic Association, Yuan Faming, a member of the Hui nationality, explained that mosques also have the task of preaching adherence to socialist core values, promoting the blending of Islam and traditional Chinese culture (Confucianism) towards the creation of “Muslim patriotism” and not “blindly copying foreign models” in terms of religious architecture: Buildings for religious use should rather reflect Chinese characteristics and style. The interpretation of the Koran should also prioritise the rejection of religious extremism.²³⁷ Although the culture of Chinese Islam should not be eliminated, it should be subordinated and adapted to the goal of creating a unified nation with a common cultural foundation.

As far as regional economic policy is concerned, MERICS expert Alexander Davey argues that there are no signs

that minorities in Xinjiang are treated better. It is about the economic development of the region under the supervision of Han Chinese and for the

zhuanti/zhuantiku/xuexihuoyewenxuan/202309/t20230906_6663652.html (access: 04/2025). See also Xi 2024a, where he identified the importance of the national sense of community and the sinicisation of religions in China as priorities of ethnic and religious policy, as well as his fundamental article in the journal *Qiushi*, which states that “since the 20th National Congress of the CCP, the Chinese people of all ethnic groups have embarked on a new path to build a strong China and realise national rejuvenation on all fronts through a Chinese path of modernisation”. The article calls for developing a modern civilisation for the Chinese nation and promoting a sense of belonging to the Chinese nation. It is crucial to promote comprehensive communication and interaction between the various ethnic groups and consolidate the great unity of the Chinese nation in order to advance Chinese modernisation (Xi 2024b). Prof. Meng Fanli, Vice Party Secretary of Xinjiang University, also explained in this sense that the “main goal of ethnic work” was to “create a strong sense of community” among all ethnic groups as the “foundation of national unity” (Meng 2023).

²³⁷ See Yang 2018, etc. In some Muslim areas, Arabic architectural elements or lettering on mosques or halal restaurants have been removed; see e.g. Leibold 2019.

*benefit of the entire country. Socio-economic development in Xinjiang is of central importance for Beijing in order to improve its global image and present itself to the population as a stabilising force.*²³⁸

The development of Xinjiang, like that of all regions in China, including the settlement areas of ethnic minorities, is undoubtedly taking place in the context of the interests of the state as a whole. The political leadership is not only interested in legitimising its regional policy by improving the living conditions of the various ethnic groups in Xinjiang, but also in doing so. But here too, economic development is prioritised over minority rights, which could also be interpreted as part of the current nation-building process.

Disciplinary processes and civilizing of ethnic minorities

Efforts to integrate non-Han peoples into Han culture existed throughout Chinese history.²³⁹ As Schneider points out, during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties, officials were convinced that non-Han peoples were uncivilised and in need of “leadership” by the Han, who possessed a superior culture:

*It was therefore the duty of the respective central state to support the civilisation of these 'barbarians' in order to pacify their settlement areas.*²⁴⁰

Similarly, Liang Qichao (1873-1929) regarded this type of nationality policy as an indispensable part of the Chinese nation-building process, in which the Han had to prove their “assimilative power”. Liang referred to the Han’s “civilizing mission” towards other ethnic groups across all dynasties.²⁴¹ He wrote: “If one is able to transform people so

²³⁸ Alexander Davey, “Beijing seeks to stabilise – its interests – in Xinjiang”, *MERICs China Essentials*, 30 May 2024, <http://merics.org/en/merics-briefs/scientific-espionage-property-market-taiwan?msdyntrid=b70MKyKPaQ9UJUAdatR-F9vTXN7EOXP1SV1QFWtLIL0#beijing-bemht-sich-um-stabilisierung-seiner-interessen-in-xinjiang-15887> (access: 04/2025).

²³⁹ See e.g. Hierman 2007.

²⁴⁰ Schneider 2017b, 103. On the civilisation process in the Qing period, see Schluessel 2020.

²⁴¹ Wiens 1954; Schmidt-Glitzner 1997; Schneider 2017b.

that they become the same as oneself, it is called ‘assimilative power’”.²⁴² This view has characterised the discourse on the national question to this day. Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975) held similar views. Mao distanced himself from this idea and repeatedly warned against “Great Han chauvinism”. However, in the various political campaigns of the Mao era (such as against “local nationalism” in the second half of the 1950s or during the “Cultural Revolution”), very similar goals were pursued. Even today, the concept of “assimilative power” is still reflected in the basic ideas of the “second generation of nationality politics” outlined above.²⁴³

Modernising states try to adapt the population to their concept of state and nation-building and their concepts of modernisation and discipline.²⁴⁴ With regard to the civilizing of ethnic minorities in China, some western academics speak of “civilizing projects”, which the social anthropologist Stevan Harrell describes as follows: a group that conceives of itself as the civilizing centre seeing in other ethnicities less civilised groups that need to be elevated to a higher level of civilisation in order to catch up with the ethnic group of the civilizing centre.²⁴⁵ Similarly, Gladney (2004), in agreement with Scott²⁴⁶ and Heberer (2001 and 2014), also examined the civilizing mission of the “centre” towards ethnic minorities.²⁴⁷

²⁴² Cited in Schneider 2017a, 67. In his dissertation, the Chinese Islamic researcher Li Gang (2021) showed that there have been two approaches in Chinese history with regard to the treatment of “barbarians”: a *separative* approach, which focussed on exclusion or isolation, and an *assimilative approach*, with the aim of assimilating them into Chinese culture. Li argues that this dualism has a “tradition” in Chinese history, which continues to have an impact on minority policy today.

²⁴³ See Heberer 2022.

²⁴⁴ This has already been shown by the sociologist James Scott; see Scott 1976, 1990, 1998 and 2009.

²⁴⁵ Harrell 1995, 4.

²⁴⁶ Scott 2009, 116-126.

²⁴⁷ On the concept of “civilizing missions” in China, see Hirono 2008, 1. Hirono defined it as an “asymmetrical image of the relationship between so-called ‘civilised’ and ‘uncivilised’ to help the ‘uncivilised’”.

The distinction between “civilized” and non-civilised or “barbarian” peoples was by no means unique to China. Rather, this distinction existed in all cultures as an asymmetrical relationship and a differentiation between “us” and “the others”.²⁴⁸ Or, as the philosopher Charles Taylor put it, between culture and nature, “We are trained, disciplined, formed, and they are not. The raw meet the cooked”, wrote Taylor.²⁴⁹ In China, *wen*, in the sense of educated and learned people, was another criterion for distinguishing between the “civilized” and the “uncivilized”. Civilization in this sense meant changing the social rules of morality, the way of life, the customs, habits, rites and moral concepts of ethnic minorities and adapting them to the “civilized” customs of the ethnic majority.

In China, the idea of civilizing other ethnic groups has strong roots in the country’s history. Hirono explains, for example, that the basic idea of policy towards other ethnicities since the Han period (206 BCE-220 CE) has been the state’s conviction that these ethnic groups “can change their status from uncivilised to civilised by achieving greater proximity to the centre of civilisation and thus to the prevailing civilizing ideology”, and that this principle has not changed significantly throughout Chinese history.²⁵⁰

According to the Chinese government, the massive subsidies for infrastructure and poverty alleviation programmes, as well as the development programme for China’s Western region (*Xibu da kaifa*), did not bring the hoped-for results. Instead, as described above, unrest and attacks in Xinjiang led to significant loss of life and property damage, as well as a decline in mutual trust between Han and other ethnic groups in the region. Terrorist attacks in various parts of China strengthened the Chinese government’s conviction that the established nationality policy had not led to more ethnic integration and modernity, but had instead promoted separatism, religiosity and ethnic segregation.

²⁴⁸ See e.g. Chen 2017, 2-9.

²⁴⁹ Taylor 2004, 38.

²⁵⁰ Hirono 2008, 72.

In addition, the southern region of Xinjiang, which is mainly inhabited by Uyghurs, remained relatively poor and underdeveloped despite all “civilizing” and development efforts. As described above, a “new generation” of nationalities policies was deemed necessary.²⁵¹ In the view of the Chinese government, the integration of the Uyghurs into the nation-building process also requires a planned process of discipline and civilizing.

A government document from 2017 suggests that the “vocational training and education programme”, i.e. the “re-education” of Uyghurs²⁵² and other members of Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, are closely linked to the disciplining, civilizing and resettlement in urban areas as part of an education and training programme for labour and employment. In a document comprising more than 25 points on vocational training in the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture in Xinjiang, key points also relate to issues of discipline (“industrial discipline”), self-discipline and civilised behaviour in everyday life, i.e. changing the manners, habits and hygiene of the ethnic population.²⁵³

This is an expression of a phenomenon that the economic historian and social scientist Karl Polanyi called *The Great Transformation*²⁵⁴, which is characterised by the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society and from self-sufficiency to market relations. At the same time, this process leads to a change in values, whereby ideas of a peasant-nomadic culture come into conflict with those of an industrialising or industrialised and urban society. Distrust in interpersonal relationships outside the immediate reference group such as village or clan, as well as familism with a focus on social protection, social security, order and

²⁵¹ Sines 2002; Greitens et al. 2019/20; Yan 2020.

²⁵² See Jacobs 2018.

²⁵³ *Zizhiqiu jiguan fadian* (Notice of the Autonomous Region for Authorities), “Guanyu jin yibu jiaqiang he guifan zhiye jineng jiaoyu peixun zhongxin gongzuode yijian” (Opinion on further strengthening and standardising the operation of vocational education and training centres), <http://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6558509-China-Cables-Telegram-Chinese.html> (access: 04/2025).

²⁵⁴ Polanyi 1977.

ritual functions, innovative thinking, fatalism, limited ambitions, etc. are among these traditional ideas.²⁵⁵ States resort to the means of “social disciplining” in order to accelerate such transitions.²⁵⁶ This process is illustrated below using a series of examples.

Social disciplining of this kind begins at school. Yi Lin’s research in primary schools in Ürümqi, which are primarily attended by Han Chinese children, found that language disciplining is widespread. According to Yi, Uyghur students were not allowed to speak Uyghur at school, and parents of Uyghur students were advised to limit their children’s use of Uyghur, if at all, to the family space and not allow them to do so in public. In addition, female pupils were forbidden to wear a headscarf at school, a traditional “must” for Uyghur females. Han teachers also complained about the “undisciplined”, “barbaric” (*yeman*), “irrational” and “unhygienic” behaviour of Uyghur pupils. One of the main goals of Han teachers seemed to be to discipline Uyghur students to behave like Han.²⁵⁷ The teachers interviewed by Yi stated that it was essential to discipline Uyghur students through “verbal or physical violence”. They considered violence to be the “most effective method of disciplining” Uyghur students and a suitable means of “civilizing” them.²⁵⁸

Regarding the recruitment of Uyghur labour, Sun²⁵⁹ and Li²⁶⁰ show that despite the tax benefits for companies hiring ethnic minority employees in Xinjiang, Han entrepreneurs often perceive Uyghurs as people with “low skills”, which leads to “high training costs”. They complained of a lack of discipline, punctuality, adherence to contracts, a sense of efficiency, an aversion to being effective and a preference for “spiritual over material life”. For these reasons, Han entrepreneurs did not want to hire Uyghurs. On the other hand, according to Li, low wages, poor working conditions, high pressure, etc. lead to conflicts between work-

²⁵⁵ We have specified this question in Fan, Heberer and Taubmann 2006, 239-277.

²⁵⁶ I have explained this process using China as an example in Heberer 2023.

²⁵⁷ Yi 2016, 33ff.

²⁵⁸ Op. cit. 36.

²⁵⁹ Sun 2020, 243/244.

²⁶⁰ Li 2015, 36.

ers of ethnic minority origin and company management.²⁶¹ – A 2018 document from the government of Kashgar Prefecture on the education of ethnic minorities from poor areas states:

*Strengthen the awareness of organisational discipline of urban and rural workers through military training and improve the development of behavioural norms (...). The organisational discipline, ideological awareness, language communication and professional skills of urban and rural workers should be improved to solve the problem of lack of organisational discipline, language communication difficulties, lack of awareness of discipline, law and professional skills of urban and rural workers.*²⁶²

With regard to rural areas, another research report in 2019 stated that, as a result of labour education in a village under the jurisdiction of Hotan city, there are “fewer loafers basking in the sun, drunks and gambling addicts have disappeared, wallets are full to bursting and there is hope for life”.²⁶³

Similarly, a Uyghur village leader told the author in an interview in 2023 that it had sometimes taken a great deal of persuasion to motivate the men to work and to get women to take up jobs.²⁶⁴ In addition, the daily newspaper *Xinjiang Ribao* 2018 spoke of “instilling a modern, civilised lifestyle in the souls of the peasants”; the cadres should “guide peasants to discard outdated customs and lead a modern and civilised life”.²⁶⁵ A document issued by the government of the Quapqal district (Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture) in the same year set out the basic idea of this programme: to educate and train “surplus labour” in special training centres in order to increase the local employment rate. District

²⁶¹ Li 2015, 36.

²⁶² *Kashi diqu xingzheng gongshu* 2018.

²⁶³ Xinjiang Weiwuer 2019.

²⁶⁴ Conversation in Kashgar, 23 May 2023.

²⁶⁵ “Shenru cujin gezu ganbu qunzhong jiaowang jiaoliu jiarong da lao Xinjiang shehui wending he changzhi jian de jianshi jichu” (Deeply promote the exchange and integration of cadres and masses of all ethnic groups to lay a foundation for social stability and long-term stability in Xinjiang), *Xinjiang Xinwen zai Xianwang*, 14 February 2018, <http://www.xjbs.com.cn/news/2018-02/14/cms2047926article.html> (access: 04/ 2025).

officials were urged not to overlook “a single household and a single person” to be trained and employed. The aim was to “turn farmers and herdsmen into industrial workers, improve labour efficiency, discipline the workforce and abandon selfish thoughts and idleness”. “Iron discipline” was to be enforced through “militarised management”.²⁶⁶ A report on *employment and poverty alleviation training* in four districts in southern Xinjiang outlined the programme for the years 2018-20 and stipulated that more than 100,000 people from poor families should receive vocational or entrepreneurial training during this period and that more than 90 per cent of all participants should be employed afterwards.²⁶⁷ Buckley/Ramzy²⁶⁸ quote an official from the Junfujie garment company in Kashgar, which had trained and employed several thousand workers: “By starting with military drills before they start work, we encourage a sense of discipline”. The chairman of the company, Sun Yijie, reported that discipline is cultivated through military training and that he had already trained more than 6,000 people. In addition to this training, the participants were also taught *Putonghua*.²⁶⁹

Military forms of education already played a role in China during the Republican period (1912-49) and were continued during the People’s Republic. There, they are by no means equated with “coercive measures”. Military education also exists in schools and universities throughout the country and was and is considered as a part of national education.

²⁶⁶ *Guanyu zuohao fuwu Chabchar xian chengxiang fuyu laodongli zhuan yi jiuye gongzuo shishi fang’an* (Implementation of the Plan for the Transfer and Employment of Urban and Rural Surplus Labour in Qapqal County), County Government Decree, 22 March 2018, <http://www.xjcbcr.gov.cn/info/1200/57613.htm> (access: 04/2025).

²⁶⁷ *Wo qu chutai Nanjiang si dizhou shendu pinkun diqu jiuzhe fupin peixun cujin jihua pinkun jiating zhiye jineng peixun quan fugai* (Our region adopts a plan for employment, professional training, poverty alleviation and poverty reduction in the four districts of southern Xinjiang), 09 June 2018, http://www.sohu.com/a/23478357_118570 (access: 04/2025).

²⁶⁸ Buckley/Ramzy 2020.

²⁶⁹ See e.g. Lehr/Bechrakis 2019; Sun Yijie 2018.

The civilizing programmes in Xinjiang focused on villages in the southern part. The following example illustrates the way in which a Han Chinese work team from the Development and Reform Commission of a military unit was stationed for some time in a village in Maralbexi (Bachu) County in Xinjiang to carry out a “civilizing mission”. As part of a poverty reduction programme, the soldiers not only helped the local Uyghurs to diversify and develop agricultural production in order to increase their income, but they also propagated “modern” hygiene standards. According to the article in question, “poverty reduction” begins with diligence, but must also improve hygiene standards. With regard to the civilizing “mission”, the article from December 2018 states:

*At the beginning of his stay in the village, Wu Fuwen [the deputy team leader] found that the household hygiene conditions of most villagers were poor and the villagers had not developed good hygiene habits such as drinking boiled water, washing their feet and brushing their teeth, with massive consequences for their health. To change this, Wu Fuwen bought daily necessities such as toothbrushes, toothpaste and soap at his own expense and distributed them free of charge to the villagers [...]. [He managed] to organise the villagers to carry out health care, rewarded those who were outstanding, personally guided those who lagged behind, and changed the villagers’ living habits over time.*²⁷⁰

According to the report, the villagers were very grateful for the efforts of the working group.²⁷¹

The civilizing initiatives were not limited to issues of rural and industrial work, but also dealt with local customs. Grose illustrates this with the example of new, government-built homes and their interior and the removal of traditional and religious symbols, i.e. the remodelling of Uyghur living spaces. With the help of a campaign to “beautify living spaces”, the behaviour and lifestyle of Uyghurs were to be changed in

²⁷⁰ “Zhagen jiceng zuo fuwu jianxing shiming ju minxin” (Take root at the grassroots level, provide services, fulfil the mission, and win people’s hearts). *Kunlun Wang. Xinjiang Dangjian Wang*, 06 Dec. 2018, <http://220.171.42.248/P/C/3324.htm> (access: 04/ 2025).

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

line with the government's ideas of a "civilised life". The campaign began in 2019 in the poverty-stricken Uyghur heartlands in southern Xinjiang. The official main objective was to lead the local population into the "modern age".²⁷²

With regard to Xinjiang, the Chinese authorities came to the partial conclusion that the Uyghurs were not sufficiently civilised, as Islamism, support for Islamist sects and terrorist activities had increased²⁷³, and that this behaviour not only destroyed the social and political order, but also deviated from "Chinese civilization". The people concerned must therefore be re-educated in order to become civilised.

According to a "white paper" published by the Chinese State Council in August 2019, the government of Xinjiang had set up so-called "vocational education and training centres" at the time, in which members of the Uyghur and other ethnic groups were to be taught the standard Chinese language, should acquire legal knowledge and professional skills and undergo a "de-radicalisation programme". This measure, which was seen as a violation of human rights in Western countries because, according to those affected, admission to such centres was not voluntary, was intended to re-educate members of ethnic minorities who were seen as infected by "extremism, Islamism and separatism" in order to adapt and integrate them into the nation-building process. In addition – according to the official Chinese argument – training in vocational skills and *Putonghua* should make it easier for them to find a job or become self-employed.²⁷⁴

²⁷² See Grose 2020.

²⁷³ See Greitens et al. 2019/20.

²⁷⁴ White Paper of the State Council of the People's Republic of China (2019 ed.), *Xinjiang de zhiye jineng jiaoyu peixun gongzuo* (Vocational education and training in Xinjiang), http://www.gov.cn/zheng ce/201908/16/content_5421633.htm (access: 04/ 2025).

In reality, however, this situation is far more complex.²⁷⁵ Zhou Zunyou, a lawyer working at the Max Planck Institute for Foreign and International Criminal Law in Freiburg, has presented an interesting academic interpretation in the context of the “de-radicalisation programme”, which has not yet been taken note of by academics, but whose arguments form an interesting basis for discussion.²⁷⁶

Conclusion

Three points are central to this chapter:

[1] Separatist, pan-Turkish and Islamist ideas existed in Xinjiang long before the founding of the People’s Republic of China and continued to emerge after 1949. Since the 1990s, there has been a gradual loss of state control as a result of pan-Turkish separatist and Islamist movements and, as a result, a precarious security situation.

[2] The failure to address the social tensions and backgrounds in which this precarious situation unfolded prevented early, effective prevention measures.

[3] The idea/perception of a state of national emergency by politicians and the Han population, which the government tried to counteract by

²⁷⁵ According to Zenz 2021, 11, rural people who are in a “labour transfer” institution differed from those in so-called “re-education institutions”. The former were trained in state vocational training centres, which were not re-education institutions. These are regular vocational schools. Training programmes of this kind, even if they involve quasi-military education, are sometimes carried out by private companies. According to the *Xinjiang Labour and Employment Security White Paper* published by the Information Office of the Chinese State Council in September 2020, there is an annual average transfer of “surplus labour” of 2.763 million people, including 1.678 million from the poorer southern part of the Auton. Region. According to the report, most of them are employed in three industrial sectors: in agricultural processing, in the textile and clothing industry and in the assembly of electronic products; see http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2020-09/17/content_5544154.htm (access: 04/2025). However, no information is provided on the specific conditions of this type of employment.

²⁷⁶ Zhou 2019.

“tough” measures, whereby the measures taken were intended to have an “educational” and awareness-raising character according to the Chinese understanding of the state, had – according to the accusation of the UN Commission on Human Rights – led to the violation of fundamental human rights.

It is not surprising that a state fights separatism and Islamism, especially if the goals are to be realised using terrorist methods. In view of hundreds of acts of terror and attacks with thousands of dead and injured, it is incomprehensible to classify terror merely as a “narrative” of the government. Ultimately, this is based on the view that only “democratic states” have a right to fight terror, but not “authoritarian states”.²⁷⁷

In order to gain a picture of the real development in Xinjiang, especially after 2017, it would be necessary to answer various questions, such as [a] how Uyghurs and members of other ethnic minorities in the region assess the development from the 1990s onwards; [b] to what extent the majority of the minority population there felt threatened by separatism or Islamism; [c] what the actual conditions in the “centres” were like and where and why the reported aberrations occurred; [d] to what extent the government or the party succeeded in co-opting at least parts of the intellectual and political elite of the ethnic minorities and thus contributing to the isolation of “extremism” in its various forms.²⁷⁸ However, it is probably difficult to provide objective answers to these questions at the present time. For this reason, neither data or statements by the Chinese government nor by human rights organisations are able to reflect the actual situation.

There is no doubt that China’s government took an overly harsh approach to the problems in Xinjiang, which posed a challenge to the security and stability of the entire country and in which – if public order

²⁷⁷ For example, sinologist Mareike Ohlberg (2024) from the German Marshall Fund speaks cynically of “isolated terrorist attacks” in an article in the *Berliner Zeitung* and argues that these were basically just a “completely normal expression of religious, ethnic and linguistic identity”.

²⁷⁸ As Wilson/Piazza (2013) have shown, counter-terrorism in authoritarian states works most effectively in a combination of co-optation and repression.

could not be restored – public opinion could have seen a weakness in the leadership of the CCP. This could also reflect the “legalistic side” of nationalities policy, which has helped to shape China’s dynastic history. As early as 1980, a Chinese conference on nationality theory stated that the overriding principle in the treatment of nationalities in imperial times was:

Whether a nationality is legitimised [by the imperial court, T.H.’s note] or not is determined by whether it is high or low; whether a nationality is obedient or not is determined by whether it is classified as good or evil; whether a nationality submits or resists is determined by whether it is valued or punished.

According to the report, this principle has had a great influence on Chinese politics to this day.²⁷⁹ Sinologist Otto Franke also recognised a “fundamental idea of Chinese statecraft” in this policy of the Chinese emperors.²⁸⁰

One of the state’s consequences of the complicated situation of unrest and conflict in Xinjiang was a stronger emphasis on nation-building and the orientation of ethnic minorities towards “strengthening the common identity of the Chinese people” – a term that encompasses and should encompass all inhabitants on the territory of China.

For political scientist David Tobin (2020a), the Uyghur identity is jeopardised by the nation-building process of the Chinese central state. In the case of Xinjiang, however, it is not a question of an “either/or” of one or the other identity. As a rule, nation-building processes aim to ensure that the members of all ethnic groups in a state conceive of themselves first and foremost as citizens of the nation in which they live and that they identify with this nation. In the case of the ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, this does not exclude the parallel existence of different identities (Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, etc.). However, if the identity only applies to one’s own ethnic group and not to the Chinese nation at the same time, then this necessarily favours efforts to form a separate state (“separatism”) or to unite with peoples in neighbouring

²⁷⁹ See *Minzu Yanjiu*, 1/1981, 79.

²⁸⁰ Franke 1967, 307ff. See also Zeng 1936 and Lattimore 1962, 307ff.

countries (“pan-Turkism”). The problem between national patriotism and ethnonationalism is a problem in almost all countries with significant ethnic minorities, not only in Africa and Asia, but also in Europe. Just think of the Catalans in Spain, the Scots in Great Britain, the New Caledonians in the Pacific who belong to France, the South Tyroleans in Italy, the Hungarians in Romania, and the Serbs in Kosovo or in Bosnia-Herzegovina, to name just a few examples. On the other hand, Tobin rightly points out that the authorities and Han Chinese have developed the cliché that Uyghurs are generally to be distrusted as well as the stereotype Han = safe, Uyghurs = security risk.²⁸¹ This kind of blanket discrimination would basically require specific state counter-measures, above all through corresponding policy regulations from the central government, combined with programmes of state education, educational work and even the promotion of personal encounters between Han and people from ethnic minorities. In this respect, however, there appears to be a significant deficit in China to date.

Since 2009, security in the western region had obviously taken centre stage, especially as the state realised that the social problems and resentment could not be solved quickly and easily and that stability and security should therefore be restored first. The “hitting hard” movement then no longer took any account of legal procedural rules – the security aspect took top priority. This is precisely what former UN Human Rights Commissioner Michelle Bachelet criticized in a statement in China in May 2022, when she argued that human rights violations could not be justified by the fight against terrorism and Islamism.²⁸² However, according to the Chinese government, the temporary suspension of legal regulations and procedures was necessary in the emergen-

²⁸¹ Cf. Tobin 2020, 222ff.

²⁸² United Nations 2022a. However, China's government seems to have learnt lessons from the criticism of the human rights commissioner. The *white paper* on counter-terrorism and the legal system reads in part like a response to the criticism: not only are terminological clarifications made, but more precise legal and procedural standards and modalities are also defined, Guowuyuan 2024.

cy situation.²⁸³ Bachelet's agreement with the Chinese government to discuss such issues in dialogue with each other with the aim of working through and – as far as possible – correcting undesirable developments was not pursued further by the UN Human Rights Commission after the end of her term of office. This was a missed opportunity to enter into a dialogue with the Chinese government about China's Xinjiang policy. Ultimately, the question is what the current alternative is. Independence for Xinjiang is neither conceivable nor realisable in terms of the Chinese understanding of the nation. Moreover, the Uyghur population is only concentrated in a few districts, primarily in the south of Xinjiang.

Therefore, the idea of the UN human rights commissioner to enter into a dialogue with the Chinese government about Xinjiang was certainly constructive. This could also have been recommended to the EU, which had imposed sanctions against China because of the situation in Xinjiang, lifted in 2025 only. Sanctions alone, without having an idea of how to proceed, are basically not effective, but rather a symbolic expression of political helplessness. The historian Nicholas Mulder explained on the issue of sanctions that the credibility of sanctions depends not only on their imposition, “but also on the clear conditions of their lifting”: the world is in “an ideological-geopolitical situation in which it is easier to impose sanctions than to lift them”.²⁸⁴ In this sense, the *Economist* magazine already argued in 2021 that dealing with China with sanctions seems “completely out of touch with the global political context”.²⁸⁵ A dialogue would have been helpful for both sides, provided that both sides were willing to engage in it.

²⁸³ The sociologist Sun Liping (Tsinghua Univ.) has criticised this: If laws are applied arbitrarily, interpreted arbitrarily and enforced arbitrarily, then there can be no question of *fazhi* (法治) – “governing with the help of law”; see Sun 2024.

²⁸⁴ “Große Länder kann man nicht aushungern”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2 January 2024.

²⁸⁵ “‘Genocide’ is the wrong word for the horrors of Xinjiang. To confront evil, the first step is to describe it accurately”, *The Economist*, 11 February 2021, <http://www.economist.com/leaders/2021/02/13/genocide-is-the-wrong-word-for-the-horrors-of-xinjiang> (access: 04/2025).

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Norman Paech

The human rights of the Uyghurs¹

With the economic rise and growing political importance of the People's Republic of China, the tone of reporting and discussion about the People's Republic has become extraordinarily harsh, both in politics and in the media, especially in NATO countries. Not only has the relationship with the People's Republic been downgraded from one of cooperation to rivalry. In 2023, former British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak described China as the “greatest threat to internal and international security”. He accused China of “stealing technology” and “infiltrating universities”. The government in Beijing has been blamed for supporting Russian President Vladimir Putin in his war against Ukraine, as well as for threatening neighbouring countries. “They torture, imprison and indoctrinate their own people in Xinjiang and Hong Kong”.² Sanctions are imposed on the People's Republic, and warnings are issued against too close cooperation in both business and science. Whatever the reasons for this confrontation, there is already open talk of a military conflict between the USA in particular – and with it NATO – and the People's Republic of China.

The accusations

Accusations of serious human rights violations, particularly against minorities in Tibet and, more recently, especially against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, are a key element, indeed an instrument, of this dispute. The parliaments of France, Canada and the Netherlands have accused the Chinese government of genocide. Immediately after taking office, US

¹ This text is based on literature and internet research as well as a fact-finding trip in May/June 2023; see the introduction to this volume for information on the trip. Direct quotations from German-language sources were translated into English by the author.

² Sunak 2023.

President Joseph Biden accused China of committing genocide in Xinjiang, for which it would “bear the costs”.³ In March 2021, the Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy in Washington D.C. presented a comprehensive study on the allegations entitled *The Uyghur Genocide: An Examination of China’s Breaches of the 1948 Genocide Convention*.⁴ Wenzel Michalski, the director of Human Rights Watch, gave a brief summary of the allegations to the Human Rights Committee of the German Bundestag. According to Michalski, the Chinese government is guilty of almost all the crimes against humanity listed in Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, including murder, torture, surveillance, cultural and religious extinction, sexual violence and forced labour. He described these crimes as part of a ‘widespread, systematic attack’ on Muslims of Turkic origin, which has reached an unprecedented scale.⁵ The World Uyghur Congress in Munich continues to speak of the ‘ongoing genocide of our people’ and the ‘active eradication of the cultural and religious identity of the Uyghurs’, which, they claim, President Xi Jinping admitted during his visit to Xinjiang.⁶ A 2023 publication by journalist Mathias Bölinger is presented in the blurb as an explanation of the ‘long history of the campaign of extermination against the Uyghurs’, ‘which shows that the persecution continues to this day, albeit more invisibly and all the more perfidiously’.⁷ He also speaks of the ‘destruction of ethnic identity’⁸, an offence under international law. On German television, Uyghurs abroad have made accusations such as: ‘Those in power in China have decided to eradicate the Uyghur identity, culture and religion’.⁹ The German anthropologist Adrian Zenz, Senior Fellow for China Studies at the Victims of

³ See Aljazeera 2021.

⁴ <http://newlinesinstitute.org/rules-based-international-order/genocide/the-uyghur-genocide-an-examination-of-chinas-breaches-of-the-1948-genocide-convention/> (accessed: 04/2024); Bücklers 2021.

⁵ Michalski 2021.

⁶ World Uyghur Congress 2023.

⁷ Bölinger 2022.

⁸ For example, op. cit., p. 152

⁹ Mamuti 2022.

Communism Memorial Foundation in the USA, according to Wikipedia, is often cited as a source for the serious human rights allegations. He compiled the *Xinjiang Police Files* primarily from leaked and hacked documents of unknown origin, which became known as the *China Cables*. They serve as the basis for the allegations about the so-called re-education camps in Xinjiang. Alexander Görlach also refers to these files in *Deutsche Welle* when he speaks of “concentration camps” “in which people are imprisoned and tortured” and describes China as a “terror regime” that “has cultural assets destroyed, as in Tibet, in order to eradicate the heritage of the people to be subjugated”.¹⁰ *Der Spiegel*’s accounts of the journey of its author Georg Fahrian add nothing new to this.¹¹ He could have copied everything from the relevant sources while staying in Hamburg. The outrage is always expressed in terms that can be escalated when it is written about “totalitarian obsession with control” that is “reminiscent of medieval witch-hunts”, “the largest internment of an ethnic-religious minority in modern times”.¹² Xinjiang is usually referred to as an “open-air prison”. The US has banned the import of products from Xinjiang and sanctioned some high-ranking officials. The European Union has also banned various officials from travelling to the EU and frozen their assets.

The Human Rights Committee of the German Bundestag

Against this media backdrop, the German Bundestag’s “Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid” held two hearings on 19 November 2020 and 17 May 2021 on the “International legal assessment of human rights violations against the Uyghurs” with a total of 14 experts. Without going into detail, only Prof. Eva Pils (School of Law at King’s College, London) spoke of an “initial suspicion” of genocide,

¹⁰ Görlach 2022.

¹¹ Fahrian 2023; for criticism, see Spennrath 2023.

¹² Cf. Obermeyer/Strittmatter 2020. On Xinjiang reporting in the media, see also the article by Hauke Neddermann in this volume.

and Adrian Zenz, this time as a professor at the European School of Culture and Theology, of the risk of “creeping genocide”. However, the accusation of serious crimes against humanity was raised by all experts except Prof. Mechthild Leutner and myself. At the end of the hearings, the committee adopted a declaration with the votes of all parliamentary groups against the vote of the parliamentary group Die Linke – the AfD was not present. It states, among other things:

Numerous witness reports and research by journalists and human rights experts have since revealed that the inmates in these camps are regularly subjected to torture, sexual violence and psychological terror. Through daily indoctrination to internalise the communist state ideology, the Uyghurs are systematically deprived of their cultural identity both in freedom and even more so in captivity. In addition, members of the ethnic minorities in Xinjiang are forced to perform masses of forced labour, women are sterilised against their will and forced to have abortions under threat of imprisonment. In the meantime, even official Chinese government statistics document the consequences of this brutal strategy, with which China disregards numerous human rights agreements it has signed. The birth rate of minorities in Xinjiang has plummeted since this systematic campaign by the state and the party began a few years ago. In the long term, the existence of the Uyghur people is jeopardised by this brutal and systematic strategy [...]. Also on the basis of these expert opinions, the Committee comes to the conclusion that the serious human rights violations against the ethnic and religious minorities in Xinjiang should be characterised as crimes against humanity.¹³

As the legislative period ended shortly after the declaration, there was no further debate or resolution in the plenary session of the Bundestag. Although the committee had dropped the accusation of genocide, it had declared serious crimes against humanity to have been proven. Given this clarity, it could only be a matter of time before a new initiative to condemn China was taken by the Bundestag in the new legislative period. Contrary to the intentions and expectations at the time, the allegations made in the Human Rights Committee's statement have not yet

¹³ http://www.bundestag.de/webarchiv/Ausschuesse/ausschuesse19/a17menschen_rechte/declarations/xinjiang-849224 (access: 04/2024).

(November 2025) been the subject of a debate in the Bundestag. However, both in 2023 during the Scholz government and in 2025 during the government of Chancellor März, a “Parliamentary Group on Uyghurs” consisting of members of the FDP, Greens, SPD, and CDU was formed. The initiator of the 2025 group, SPD member of parliament Derya Türk-Nachbaur, stated that the goal was “to keep the necessary attention for possible human rights violations alive in the German public. This should also be reflected in parliamentary initiatives, briefings, and press releases.”¹⁴ We can therefore assume that the current committee will soon take up this initiative again and call on the Bundestag to reach a decision on genocide and crimes against humanity committed by the People’s Republic of China.

Other voices

Although criticism of the human rights situation in Xinjiang is absolutely dominant in the media and politics, it should not be overlooked that a number of other authors and long-standing experts on China have spoken out in recent years, presenting divergent positions and differentiated assessments. Above all, they take into account that the Chinese government has had to contend with jihadist and separatist terror since the late 1980s.¹⁵ It is estimated that there are up to 20,000 Uyghur jihadists who not only wanted to turn Xinjiang into an emirate, but also to secede from China and establish an Islamic East Turkestan. But even the toughest fight against terrorism has to respect human rights. In individual cases, the authors acknowledge gross misconduct and possible human rights violations in Chinese policy towards the Uyghurs. (This is not an accusation that applies exclusively to the Chinese – the US prisons in Iraq, Abu Ghraib, Afghanistan, Bagram and Guantanamo bear witness to how little the USA, for example, has managed to fulfil this

¹⁴ Heidt 2023; Türk-Nachbaur 2025.

¹⁵ Cf. Behrens 2021a, 183ff.; Schneider 2023, 271; Elsner 2020, 249f.; Bücklers 2021; Kronauer 2019a.

commandment in its fight against terrorism). However, the authors see no convincing evidence or even proof of systematic rape, sterilisation or torture in Xinjiang. For example, Wolfram Elsner, former professor of economics at the University of Bremen, points to the terrorism of Uyghur extremists, who not only challenged Chinese policy in Xinjiang, but also fought alongside the Taliban, IS and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and later in Syria. As early as 2011, former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger “spoke of the potential impact of Islamist terrorism on Xinjiang province” in his book on China.¹⁶ The US government under President Trump only removed the “East Turkistan Islamic Movement” (ETIM) from the terror list in November 2020, which President Bush’s administration had listed in 2002. Elsner comes to the opposite conclusion to the prevailing opinion when he writes, alluding to the USA:

*China’s method, however, is not secret prisons and torture centres all over the world, but development and prosperity, the method of bourgeois society [...], a method of social integration and national development, which capitalism can no longer realise today.*¹⁷

Uwe Behrens, who has been working as an entrepreneur in China since 1990, also doubts the generally reported figures of around one million Uyghurs interned in re-education camps and questions the sources, which do not come from the UN but from the USA. The “World Uyghur Congress”, based in Munich, is also largely financed by the “National Endowment for Democracy” (NED) from the USA. Behrens also refers to the repeated attacks and threat of terrorism by Uyghur Islamists and explains the domestic political situation with the words:

The Chinese government has therefore been faced with a dangerous situation for several years, particularly in Xinjiang: internal social conflicts that have still not been adequately resolved and an external terrorist threat. It is seeking to counter this with a dual strategy. On the one hand, the standard of living of the Uyghur population is to be raised through a com-

¹⁶ Cf. Kissinger 2012, 252.

¹⁷ Elsner 2020, 256.

*prehensive investment programme, including an intensification of education by raising the level of education, and the influx of Han Chinese is no longer being encouraged. On the other hand, active anti-terrorism measures are being intensified.*¹⁸

In this fight against terrorism, Behrens says, China is

*relying on reason and education: The authorities are trying to educate those who are potentially susceptible and conspicuous, they are seeking knowledge against religious radicalisation and political extremism. The leadership has the devastating consequences of the ‘holy war’ in other regions in mind.*¹⁹

In his wide-ranging studies on Chinese society and politics, the ethnologist and political scientist Thomas Heberer from the University of Duisburg-Essen also focusses on ethnic minorities and the methods and content of their integration into the People’s Republic. He sees this above all as a project of “disciplining and civilising”, which aims, among other things, to transition from an agrarian to an industrial society and to adapt people to “modernity”, not only in Xinjiang but throughout the country.²⁰ Heberer discussed the apparently lively exchange between Chinese academics and politicians on the objectives of nationality policy in light of the unrest in Tibet (2008), Xinjiang (2009) and Inner Mongolia (2011), which has led to terrorist attacks, particularly by Uyghur Islamists in Xinjiang. He pointed out that despite the government’s reform policy, ethnic conflicts have grown. And he doubted whether the type of “affirmative action” with which the government gives ethnic minorities advantages in terms of access to universities, birth control, and use of their own language and script, as well as cultural offerings, is enough to make religious, ethnic and cultural differences disappear. The policy is too focused on economic development and modernisation, he says.²¹ In contrast to critics who see the events in Xinjiang as a pure programme of repression and assimilation,

¹⁸ Behrens 2021a, 188.

¹⁹ Op. cit. 192.

²⁰ See Heberer 2023, 148-160.

²¹ Cf. ibid. 2022.

Heberer points to the background: the security dilemma, which was characterised by a high level of terrorist activity in Xinjiang and other regions and an associated intensified programme of nation-building.²²

In her statement for the Human Rights Committee on 18 November 2020, sinologist Mechthild Leutner (Freie Universität Berlin) goes into detail about the allegations surrounding the re-education and internment camps that are at the centre of the criticism. She points out that these camps are obviously what the Chinese call education and training centres, which exist throughout China – including in Xinjiang. They are set up by local authorities and factories and have been supported and evaluated by the World Bank until recently. The centres set up as part of the fight against terrorism and extremism are to be distinguished from these centres. They are primarily used for deradicalisation with a strictly regulated daily routine and also carry out vocational training measures. They were dissolved in December 2019. These, in turn, are to be distinguished from the prisons and labour camps in which convicts serve their sentences, and in which forced labour must also be performed. There were also re-education camps in China, but these were abolished in 2013. The government is also continuing to push ahead with its poverty reduction and job creation measures in Xinjiang, which, with their regulations on birth and marriage controls as well as restrictions on religious activities in the private sphere, interfere heavily with the traditional patriarchal way of life.²³ Mechthild Leutner also confirms a major terror and security problem for Xinjiang, which has arisen from the radicalisation of fundamentalist currents in Sunni Islam in conjunction with the separatist struggles for an independent republic of East Turkestan. The author has not been able to identify any indications or even evidence of serious systematic human rights violations by the Chinese government in the defence against terrorist attacks and the resocialisation of captured terrorists in the “deradicalisation centres” until 2019.

²² See the article by Thomas Heberer in this volume.

²³ Leutner 2020, 2ff.; 11.

Jörg Kronauer, author of numerous publications on China, even writes that China has chosen the softer version of the anti-terrorist struggle and is attempting integration through vocational training, language training and ideological persuasion.²⁴

The position in the UN

At the end of October 2021, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights published the report written by High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet entitled *OHCHR Assessment of the Human Rights Situation in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China*. The report is dated 31 August 2021, but was only published on the last day of her term of office at the end of October 2021, which suggests that there may have been disagreements about its content. It concludes that there were serious human rights violations, particularly in the period from 2017 to 2019, during the Chinese government's anti-terrorism measures:

*The information currently available to OHCHR on the implementation of the government's declared fight against terrorism and 'extremism' in the XUAR (Xinjiang Autonomous Region) in the period 2017-2019, and possibly beyond, also raises concerns from the perspective of international criminal law. The extent of arbitrary and discriminatory detention of members of the Uyghur and other predominantly Muslim groups under the laws and policies related to the restrictions and general deprivation of fundamental rights enjoyed individually and collectively may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity.*²⁵

The report is expressly limited to the period from 2017 to 2019, as the Commission apparently had no comparable findings for the period after that. On 10 August 2018, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) presented a report that was announced

²⁴ Kronauer 2019a, 79.

²⁵ OHCHR Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China, 31 August 2022, No. 148.

by Reuters with the headline: “UN says it has credible reports that China is holding one million Uyghurs in secret camps”. Since then, this figure has been circulating in the media. Apart from the fact that the committee is not the UN but an independent expert panel, it transpired that the report’s reference to ‘re-education camps’ was made solely by the American member of the committee, Gay McDougall, without citing any sources, and endorsed solely by a representative of Mauritania.

The Chinese government’s reaction to Michelle Bachelet’s report was clear and negative. In a note verbale,²⁶ she rejected the accusations in the OCHCR report, accusing the Commission of violating its mandate and failing to recognise the progress that ethnic minorities in Xinjiang have made in collaboration with the government of the People’s Republic in terms of human rights, as well as their long-standing fight against terrorism. The note also provided extensive documentation on the extent of terrorism in the region and the fight against it.

The fight against terrorism

Despite all the accusations of crimes against humanity and genocide, the problem of terrorism in the region is played down in the Western media and only mentioned in passing at best. However, it is necessary to take a look at the particular security problems in Xinjiang in order to assess the extent and quality of detentions and restrictions on freedom.²⁷ Uprisings to create an independent state date back to the 19th century. In the years since 1930, they aimed to establish an Islamic theocracy, and in 1933 the Republic of East Turkestan was proclaimed in Kashgar in South Xinjiang. At that time, it was only possible to put down the uprising with Soviet help. Since the 1990s, numerous attacks and violent unrest have highlighted two problems in the region: on the one hand, the radicalisation of fundamentalist Muslims and, on the

²⁶ <http://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ohchr-assessment-human-rights-concerns-xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region> (access: 04/2024).

²⁷ In detail: Thomas Heberer’s contribution in this volume.

other, the separation plans of Uyghur nationalists. Under the influence of the Islamic neighbouring states of Afghanistan and Pakistan in particular, a potential for violence has developed, some of which was trained by the Taliban and, in conjunction with Al-Qaeda, is responsible for terrorist attacks resulting in hundreds of deaths – not only in Xinjiang, but as far away as Beijing. It is worth remembering that US troops picked up Uyghurs from the Taliban in Afghanistan at the time and brought them to Guantanamo as terrorists. They were only released there a few years ago without a trial.

The bomb attacks in Ürümqi in 1992, 1993, 1997 and 1998 with numerous fatalities have become well known.²⁸ The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported more than 200 terrorist attacks with 162 fatalities between 1990 and 2001 (25 Nov. 2019). The Chinese countermeasures were only able to contain the terror temporarily. On 9 July 2009, a bloody massacre in Ürümqi, the capital of Xinjiang, made it clear that the separatist forces obviously could not be pacified by conventional police and military means. Over 1,000 Uyghurs attacked police and Han Chinese with knives and sticks, looting and setting fire to vehicles, shops and residential buildings. 197 people were killed, 134 of them Han Chinese. It is suspected that the diaspora of exiled Uyghurs also played a role in this pogrom.²⁹ The *Global Terrorism Database* maintained by the University of Maryland near Washington records increased assassinations and terrorist attacks in the period that followed, which reached as far as Tiananmen Square in Beijing, where three Uyghurs drove an SUV into a crowd of people on 28 October 2013, killing two passers-by and injuring 38. Han Chinese in particular had previously been attacked and killed or injured in Kashgar in 2011 and 2012. This series reached a bloody climax on 1 March 2014, when Uyghur jihadists outside Xinjiang slaughtered 31 people and injured 141 in Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan – an event that has gone down in terror history as “China's 9/11”. A terror expert from Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, Rohan Gunaratna, said after the massacre in Kunming:

²⁸ Cf. Leutner 2020, 1f.; Kronauer 2019b; Behrens 2021a, 184; Elsner 2020, 250ff.

²⁹ Kronauer 2019a, 3.

“I would estimate that there have been more than 200 attacks in the past twelve months, maybe even more”.³⁰ Michael Clarke from the Australia National University in Canberra assumes that there are at least ten armed radical Islamic Uyghur groups who want to liberate Xinjiang from Chinese rule.³¹ The Chinese Minister for Security even speaks of twelve separatist movements in the 1990s.³² Their connections went to Turkey and to relevant organisations in the neighbouring states of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan, where they later joined Islamist groups such as IS, Al-Qaeda, the NUSRA Front and the Taliban. From there, they carried out attacks in Xinjiang and recruited fighters.

In response to this series, the anti-terrorism campaign “Strike Hard” was launched in 2003, and, following further unrest in 2009, the central government in Beijing passed an anti-terrorism law for Xinjiang in 2015, which the autonomous region supplemented with its own anti-terrorism regulations in 2016. As a result, the criticised re-education camps, or “deradicalisation centres”, were set up, although they were closed again in 2020. This is also acknowledged by the harshest critic, Adrian Zenz. However, the connection between Uyghur jihadists and foreign countries should not be ignored. This is not limited to training by the Taliban, but also includes joint combat missions in northern Afghanistan and alongside IS and Al-Qaeda fighters in Syria, South East Asia and Libya. By late 2024, several thousand Uyghurs were fighting alongside the Nusra Front against the Assad government in Syria.³³ It was only in 2014 that the last three of a total of 17 Uyghurs captured by the US Army in Afghanistan from the Taliban as terrorists were released from Guantanamo. If all these scattered mercenaries were to return to Xinjiang one day, this would undoubtedly increase the security problems.

³⁰ Cited in Kronauer 2019a, 4.

³¹ See Scheben 2021.

³² See Heberer/Schmidt-Glitzner 2023.

³³ See Sydow 2019. See also the Addendum to the introduction to this edited volume, pp. 33-35.

Overall, even this incomplete data shows that the Chinese authorities have had to deal with a considerable terror problem over the years, particularly in Xinjiang, and have also had to use police and military force in the process. However, the talk of the “systematic internment of an entire ethno-religious minority”, which in terms of scale is “probably the largest since the Holocaust”, as Adrian Zenz is quoted as saying, is in my opinion without any real basis and completely out of place in comparison. We know from the US counter-terrorism campaign in Afghanistan and Iraq about the massive human rights violations that have resulted from the mistreatment of prisoners in camps such as Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib and Bagram. It cannot be ruled out that such problems have also occurred in the “deradicalisation centres” in Xinjiang. However, based on our discussions at the Academy of Social Sciences in Ürümqi and with the party leadership of Xinjiang, I consider the continued existence of such centres and camps to be very unlikely in the present (2024). Ma Xingrui, the new party secretary in office since December 2021, admitted to arbitrary measures during the anti-terrorism campaign. At the same time, he emphasised that a rapid return to normality is now needed. Legal awareness and the security of legal procedures must be strengthened in order to regain the general public's trust in the legality of government action.

The minority policy

Another aspect that is essential for the assessment of the allegations is China's policy towards ethnic minorities. The People's Republic of China comprises 56 nationalities. In addition to the ethnic majority of Han Chinese, there are 55 ethnic minorities with a population share of 8.5 per cent and eleven written languages. The “autonomous areas” of the ethnic minorities, which include Xinjiang, make up almost two-thirds of China's total territory. They are predominantly border areas with rich resources but are lagging considerably behind the eastern, coastal core area in terms of development. However, it is not only this backwardness that needs to be overcome through extensive economic

and social programmes, but also the vertical divide between the Han and the tributary “uncivilised barbarians”, which dates back to the imperial era.³⁴ The *China Cables* mentioned above revealed that the vocational education and training programme, i.e. the re-education of the Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, was closely linked to the task of disciplining, civilising and resettling them in urban areas. This involves industrial discipline, self-discipline and a civilised approach to daily life, which is intended to change the behaviour, habits and hygiene of the ethnic population, including the learning of the standard Chinese language – Mandarin. This can be described as a rigorous assimilation policy, but its main aim is to combat poverty and improve the standard of living of the predominantly rural population.

Economic neglect, unemployment among the Uyghurs and ongoing Han immigration have undoubtedly been major factors in ethnic tensions in Xinjiang since the late 1990s. The subsequent period of unrest only exacerbated the tensions. The party had to get a grip on this in order to create an environment for the local population in which the individual and society could develop. The means to this end was to transform the large mass of rural unemployed into a productive labour force in industry. As a result, 1.4 million new jobs have been created in Xinjiang since 2016. From 2014 to 2019, the number of employees rose by 2 million. Healthcare is subsidised by the state. The fight against illiteracy has become another focus of development efforts through education policy measures such as the introduction of 15 years of free kindergarten, school and vocational education in southern Xinjiang, which is also to be extended to the north, and the establishment of boarding schools.³⁵ Teaching in the compulsory school years is organised on two tracks. In primary school, some subjects are taught in Uyghur. Mandarin is the main language in lower secondary school and only optional in upper secondary school. According to the Ministry of Education, the proportion of pupils attending secondary school in the Uyghur-dominated parts of Xinjiang grew from 38 per cent to 84 per

³⁴ Cf. in detail the writings of Thomas Heberer.

³⁵ See Heberer/Schmidt-Glitzner 2023.

cent in five years. In 2019, it was already 98.82 per cent for the province as a whole. More than 46 per cent of 18- to 22-year-olds pursued higher education, a figure that has doubled since 2010.³⁶

The development aid provided by other, more prosperous Chinese provinces, which invest in industry, agriculture, services and education and thus create training and employment opportunities for Uyghurs, is remarkable. This includes, for example, the new vocational training centres in every county in Xinjiang. We visited the centre in Kashgar with around 10,000 trainees, which was generously supported by Guangdong Province. A total of 22 subjects are offered here, ranging from IT technology, mechanical engineering and food production to fashion and tourism. The training is free of charge, and the young people also receive 200 yuan (approx. €26.30) a month to support their parents. This is undoubtedly an incentive to send their children to school. It also gives members of other ethnic minorities, especially young women, the opportunity to receive free vocational training. A Uyghur manager who runs a private fashion company in which women from the immediate neighbourhood make clothes explained that the rent for the state-owned property is adjusted as a percentage of her company's profits, so she could never be driven into deficit by the rental costs.

Support for development also includes a central government programme that has regularly sent experts from around 120 central departments and organisations to the region since 1997. They specialise in the fields of education, medical care, science, law and technology, as well as culture and tourism. Over 60 per cent specialise in technical disciplines and business management. To date, over 20,000 of these specialists are said to have been deployed throughout Xinjiang. Shortly after our trip, in June 2023, another 600 specialists arrived in Xinjiang for a three-year assignment. There is no doubt that this programme also aims to integrate the troubled province into the Chinese national entity, but the value of the support for the development of this region should not be underestimated.

³⁶ See Bücklers 2021.

The Chinese concept of human rights

Before assessing the accusations made under international law, a few remarks on the Chinese socialist concept of human rights should draw attention to the different approach compared to the capitalist West. The differences already emerged in the deliberations of the victorious powers in 1945 on the *UN Charter*.³⁷ While Churchill did not want to see human rights anchored in the Charter with a view to the Commonwealth, Stalin considered them irrelevant for international peace. However, he insisted on the inclusion of social and economic rights, which Churchill in turn rejected as incompatible with the Western capitalist economic order. It was therefore agreed not to burden the Charter with this contentious issue and to dispense with human rights. In 1948, a different compromise was found in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Political and civil rights were included in the declaration together with social, economic and cultural rights and were not made binding. At the same time, the UN General Assembly instructed the Human Rights Committee to draft a legally binding text. The deliberations were not without controversy between the West and the East with their different ideologies, so that in 1961 two separate covenants³⁸ were agreed upon, which were adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966 with legally binding force. Since then, it has been up to each state to decide how to deal with the binding nature of the respective rights in the respective covenants.

While this separation is no longer an issue in Western capitalist states, it continues to play a role in the Chinese debate, emphasising the distinction from the Western bourgeois understanding of human rights.³⁹ In his article *Central Elements of the Chinese Way of Human Rights*, He Zhipeng begins by contrasting the two concepts:

³⁷ Cf. Paech/Stuby 2013, 654; para. 34ff.

³⁸ *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, 19 Dec. 1966; *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, 19 Dec. 1966.

³⁹ On the historical and philosophical roots of the Chinese human rights dialogue, see Xian 2012.

The human rights of the Uyghurs

The human rights work led by the Communist Party of China (CPC) is quite different from traditional Western human rights work in terms of operation, structure and mechanism, as the CPC leads the people and upholds the people-centred approach. Therefore, in safeguarding and realizing human rights, the Party primarily serves as a guiding force. When planning initiatives, it first considers the needs of the people and serves their needs for a better and happier life. Moreover, in promoting and implementing these initiatives, the CPC constantly examines how to ensure the people's voices are heard and their sense of fulfilment enhanced; it strives to make the people feel cared for and supported in their daily lives, and to experience fairness and justice within the legal system. In contrast, the traditional human rights mechanism in the West puts the people and the government in an opposite position, in which the citizens challenge the government and demand the government to restrain its own actions so that the people can freely enjoy their corresponding rights.⁴⁰

Two fundamental prerequisites of the Chinese concept of human rights are named here: the leading role of the Party in the centralised system of the People's Republic and the importance of the people as the primary subject of human rights. As a result, the Party and the state have the task of first creating the prerequisites and conditions for the enjoyment of human rights by the people. This “people-centred” approach is widely discussed in literature, especially following the 20th National Congress of the CCP.⁴¹

Whereas the Western concept is primarily concerned with the freedom of citizens from state interference, the “people-centred” approach requires the state to create and guarantee the foundations for a “modestly prosperous society in every respect”. Terms such as “right to contentment and a happy life”, “right to livelihood and development”, “overcoming poverty” and “fulfilment of the people's livelihood” characterise the human rights debate, which sees the party and the government primarily as service providers. It is a discussion typical of a developing

⁴⁰ He 2023 (translation reviewed by the editors).

⁴¹ Cf. Li 2023.

society⁴², in which the government participates with numerous “white papers”.⁴³

In recent years, the discussion about political and democratic rights – “rule of law” and “law-based governance” – has played a greater role.⁴⁴ Although human rights and the rule of law are recognised as different concepts, they are interwoven in such a way that one cannot be realised without the other.⁴⁵ The classic rights to freedom, such as freedom of opinion and speech, the right to vote and the prohibition of torture, are, like social rights, not understood as rights of defence but as rights of performance. For example, the state should enable a “relatively relaxed social mindset”⁴⁶ for freedom of opinion and speech, while the ban on torture requires its own means of securing evidence, opportunities for legal proceedings and judicial processes. These rights are therefore heavily dependent on the conditions that the state must create for them to be effective. The fact that state action is also bound by this “rule of law” and may only act within a legally clearly defined and limited framework is – apart from the current reality – a self-evident part of the discourse. As China has no constitutional jurisdiction, and no such jurisdiction is being discussed or planned, control falls to the people, which results from the “people-centred” approach. The leading role of the party remains untouched, which is why there is no room for trade unions with the right to strike. Recently, however, efforts have reportedly been made to legalise the party’s internal structures to a greater extent⁴⁷: Citizens are referred to their electoral and influence possibilities in the legislative, judicial and administrative institutions instead of protest marches and demonstrations.

⁴² Cf. e.g. Jiang Jianguo 2023.

⁴³ Cf. e.g. State Council Information Office 2009 and 2021.

⁴⁴ Cf. e.g. State Council Information Office 2008.

⁴⁵ Cf. Gu 2015.

⁴⁶ “社会心态相对宽松” (He 2023).

⁴⁷ Cf. He 2023.

China has so far submitted two comprehensive and very detailed National Human Rights Action Plans for the years 2010 to 2015, 2016 to 2020 and 2021 to 2025.⁴⁸ They also report on the international activities of the People's Republic in the UN's extensive human rights network. China has signed and ratified numerous UN conventions and actively participates in the reporting system, in particular, the Human Rights Committee. Despite having been signed in 1998, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights remains the one significant treaty yet to be ratified by the Chinese government as of November 2025.

The assessment under international law

The allegations made focus on the criminal offences of Articles 6 and 7 of the Rome Statute (RSt) of 17 July 1998, genocide and crimes against humanity, which have been incorporated into German criminal law with largely identical content in Articles 6 and 7 of the Code of Crimes against International Law (VStGB) of 26 June 2002. This concerns measures that may well be directed against individual persons, but are collectively aimed at a group or the civilian population in general.

a) Art. 6 RSt lists the following offences that could be present here:

For the purposes of this Statute, “genocide” means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such [...]; b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

aa) The Uyghurs are undoubtedly a group of people protected by Art. 6 RSt (approx. 12.7 million Uyghurs out of a total of approx. 21 million inhabitants of Xinjiang). In case law, “serious physical or mental harm” is defined as “torture, inhuman or degrading treatment and persecution

⁴⁸ See State Council Information Office 2021.

as well as acts of sexual violence, rape, mutilation and interrogation accompanied by beatings and/or death threats”.⁴⁹ The harm must therefore be so severe that it results in the risk of partial or total destruction of the group. However, the destruction does not have to have occurred. The wording of the article only refers to the “causing” of harm and the “intention” of destruction, which do not have to have occurred.

If we assume that there are verifiable reports on individual human rights violations in Xinjiang, all reports on the so-called re-education and internment camps lack serious data and evidence. Photos and satellite images of building complexes behind high walls have repeatedly had to be withdrawn as false or unsuitable evidence. Amnesty International published a report with the headline *In the land of invisible camps*, in which the correspondent of the Berlin *taz*, Felix Lee, wrote that he could not find anything about re-education camps, but that he knew of “witness statements” that “brainwashing and torture” had taken place.⁵⁰ All the figures of up to one million internees in the camps are based on extrapolated estimates, which are reported everywhere in the media but have no proof of their reliability for legal use. They come from the “Chinese Human Rights Defenders” network. Their surveys in individual villages can hardly be regarded as serious investigations.⁵¹ Insofar as they are based on the statements of Uyghurs living abroad, they are unverified secondary information that also lacks legal value. The same applies to the study published in 2021 by the “Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy”⁵², which estimates the number of Uyghurs allegedly interned in 1,400 units at up to two million. As long as these maximum figures, which also come from secondary information and internet research, are not reliably verified and confirmed, they can hardly be legally utilised. There is no doubt that there will still be prisoners arrested in the government’s fight against terrorism who are now serv-

⁴⁹ Cf. Ambos 2008, II, 137.

⁵⁰ See Scheben 2021.

⁵¹ Cf. Behrens 2021b, 7.

⁵² <https://newlinesinstitute.org/uyghurs/the-uyghur-genocide-an-examination-of-chinas-breaches-of-the-1948-genocide-convention/> (access: 04/2024).

ing their sentences behind bars or awaiting trial. Nothing is currently known about their numbers or conditions of detention. If the genocide allegations relate to these prisoners, who are politically among the most dangerous activists of the separatist movement for the government, these prisons and the conditions of detention would first have to be investigated by independent institutions before legal conclusions and consequences can be drawn from the allegations.

Genocide is an intentional offence, i.e. it is not sufficient to simply intend to cause serious harm to members of the group; rather, the intention to destroy the group in whole or in part must be proven. This excessive internal tendency of the offence can be openly declared and therefore easily proven, but it can also only emerge from an analysis of the context and circumstances of the offence. Even if it could be assumed that the numbers mentioned in the allegations and the treatment contrary to human rights are correct, an intention to destroy the group/Uyghurs in whole or in part cannot be recognised. There is no need to rely on the Chinese government's official statements about its efforts in Xinjiang to overcome poverty and the development gap, which it regularly publishes in its white papers.⁵³ Reports from observers who have frequently visited the region over the years⁵⁴ also show that there has been massive economic investment in Xinjiang in recent years and that the material quality of life of the population has improved considerably.

As a result, many Han Chinese moved to the underpopulated region as labourers. This was due to the abundance of raw materials, but also, for example, to the New Silk Road project, which runs through Xinjiang, improving the infrastructure and opening up excellent job opportunities for the manufacturing industry.⁵⁵ In addition to the development of modern production sites for the textile, automotive and electronics industries, a lot of money has been invested in modernising agriculture.

⁵³ Cf. e.g. *White Paper: Employment and Labour Rights in Xinjiang* (09/2020) and *White Paper: Vocational Education and Training in Xinjiang* (08/2019).

⁵⁴ See Behrens 2021a; Bücklers 2021.

⁵⁵ Cf. Yang/Mao 2023.

This has created considerable export opportunities for American exporters of agricultural machinery, for example. Today, 70 to 80 per cent of the cotton harvest is said to be mechanised, which in turn has freed up hundreds of thousands of harvest workers who no longer come to Xinjiang. As a result, not only was absolute poverty⁵⁶ overcome in 2020, but the average income is now said to be even higher than the average for the whole of China.⁵⁷ There is no reason not to trust the data published by *China Daily* on 14 November 2020, which reported an increase in employment in Xinjiang between 2014 and 2019 from 11.35 million to 13.5 million and job creation for a total of 8.3 million rural unemployed.⁵⁸ This would undoubtedly not have been possible without the drastic educational measures mentioned above.

The fight against the recurring acts of terrorism has resulted in a control apparatus that is obviously terrifying for Western observers. Armed checkpoints were set up at the entrances and exits of every town, and in the cities, there was a police station every 500 metres, but these have obviously been largely dismantled today. All traffic is monitored by cameras with facial recognition, which is not a speciality in Xinjiang but is known throughout China. In 2019, a total of 200 million cameras are said to have been installed throughout China.

Despite the numerous interventions in the everyday lives of the Uyghurs, which have torn them away from their traditional way of life and generated considerable resistance, the economic and social development measures implemented do not suggest that they were carried out with the intention of destroying the Uyghur ethnic group. At best, one could speak of a "development dictatorship", a term commonly used in development literature to describe centrally controlled development activities that cannot be accused of intending to destroy their beneficiaries.

⁵⁶ Cf. Leutner 2020, 4.

⁵⁷ See Scheben 2021.

⁵⁸ Cf. Leutner 2020, 4.

bb) The intention to destroy the group in whole or in part is also required for Art. 6 RSt “c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part”. This means that the “group as such” is to be destroyed not only physically, but also socially and politically. Even if one considers that the “civilisation project” aims to transform the agrarian way of life and habits into a modern, urban, industrial and service-oriented society, the “destruction” of the old, outdated agrarian society does not mean destruction in the sense of genocide. If, for example, industrialisation in Xinjiang has resulted in the resettlement of around 170,000 people to the new industrial centres⁵⁹, this measure is not intended to destroy the people, but to serve the economic and social development of the region.

cc) Finally, “d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group” cannot justify the criminalisation of China’s birth control measures. Birth control is one of the measures that covered the entire People’s Republic and even favoured minorities with two births in urban areas and three births in rural areas. Even exceptions were possible in rural areas. Birth control would generally have to be assessed as a punishable offence according to criminal and human rights criteria in order to stigmatise it as genocide in Xinjiang as well – an obviously an obviously futile endeavour. However, if forced sterilisations and abortions have taken place, these are undoubtedly criminal acts that must be prosecuted, but do not justify the accusation of genocide.

The accusation of “ethnic cleansing” is also sometimes levelled as a further act of genocide. According to general legal opinion⁶⁰, this offence pursues a different goal than genocide. It involves the expulsion of people, but not the extermination of the group. Expulsion may well be punishable as a crime against humanity (Art. 7 para. 1d) or a war crime (Art. 8 para. 2b). However, the resettlement of people from extensive agricultural areas to industrial centres in order to find work and suitable living conditions there does not constitute expulsion.

⁵⁹ Cf. Behrens 2021a, 3.

⁶⁰ Cf. Ambos 2008, II para. 144.

Overall, a genocide against the Uyghurs cannot be substantiated due to a lack of reliable and reliable evidence. Based on the available reports and accusations, the objective offence alone is not fulfilled. In any case, the intention of destruction, for which there is no solid evidence, is missing. We did not have the opportunity, nor was it our intention, to verify the facts of the alleged accusations relating to the period before 2020. However, the experiences we were able to gather on our trip only reinforced my doubts about the allegations. For the period after that, the economic, social and cultural development of society that presented itself to us in Kashgar and Ürümqi left no doubt that there is no basis for the still widespread accusation of genocide.⁶¹

b) The accusation of a crime against humanity includes, according to Art. 7 RST:

any of the following acts when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack: ... (e) Imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law; (f) Torture; ... (h) Persecution against any identifiable group or collectivity on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender as defined in paragraph 3, or other grounds that are universally recognized as impermissible under international law, in connection with any act referred to in this paragraph or any crime within the jurisdiction of the Court; ... (k) Other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health.

aa) All offences, including the deprivation of liberty etc. under Art. 7 para. 1 e), must have been committed “in the course of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population”. The Rome Statute defines an “attack directed against a civilian population” in Art. 7 para. 2 a) as “a course of conduct involving the multiple commission of acts referred to in paragraph 1 against any civilian population, pursuant to or in furtherance of a State or organizational policy to commit such attack”. This makes it clear that it does not have to be an attack in

⁶¹ Cf. Jeßberger 2021, 5ff.; Bücklers 2021.

an armed conflict. However, it must be carried out more frequently, be “widespread”, i.e. require a large number of victims, or be carried out “systematically”, i.e. on the basis of prior planning and policy.

Leaving aside the numerous questions of interpretation and disputes surrounding this definition, “deprivation of liberty” means imprisonment, but “other deprivation of liberty” means any other deprivation of liberty if it is serious or violates the basic rules of international law. The latter is the case if the deprivation of liberty occurs without a legal basis or in a procedure contrary to the rule of law. The “re-education camps” that could constitute a deprivation of liberty are the camps that were closed in 2013 and the “deradicalisation centres” that were closed in 2020. What remains are the penal camps where offenders serve their sentences and the facilities where education, training and vocational training are organised for the population. Just like prisons, marriage regulation and family planning, there is a legal basis for these educational institutions, apparently referred to as detention camps⁶², which have not yet been accused of violating international law.

bb) Torture pursuant to Art. 7, para. 1 f has repeatedly played a role in the allegations. International law is founded on the absolute prohibition of torture. Where individual victims of torture present their testimonies, the perpetrators must be held criminally responsible. However, the further conditions required for a crime against humanity, namely the use of torture “as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population,” are extremely doubtful. Here, too, further concrete investigations are required in order to provide reliable evidence of such a major crime. Until this evidence is available, a crime against humanity through torture cannot be assumed.

cc) The offence of persecution under Art. 7 para. 1 h means, according to Art. 7 para. 2 g, “the intentional and severe deprivation of fundamental rights contrary to international law by reason of the identity of the group or collectivity”. The allegations have not yet been made in this specific form. There are also no indications that groups other than pris-

⁶² See Wikipedia: Xinjiang internment camps.

oners have been deliberately denied fundamental rights. In particular, the exercise of religion is guaranteed by the constitution, albeit limited to the private sphere. Since this exercise is guaranteed by a purely individual right and there is no institutional guarantee of religion as in the Christian countries of Europe, the so-called freedom of religion has a clearly different meaning and scope in the Eastern and Western countries, which cannot be compared with each other. However, there are no consequences under criminal law. Foreign observers report regular visits by believers to mosques, which leads them to assume that the disputes are not primarily about religion, but primarily about the separation of Xinjiang from China and the establishment of a caliphate. The large Koran school built with state funds in Ürümqi, with a mosque and residential building for the Koran students, speaks more in favour of state acceptance of the religion than oppression. There are said to have been 5,000 mosques in the Kashgar district in 1978 and 10,000 in the 1990s; now there are said to be a total of 28,000 mosques in Xinjiang with a Koran school in every district.

The use of one's own language is also guaranteed under constitutional law, including in public spaces. As mentioned, teaching in the compulsory school years is bilingual. It should also be noted that, in contrast to Europe, social and economic human rights are much more important in China than political and cultural human rights. To paraphrase Bertolt Brecht: first comes the food, then the morals.

dd) Finally, "other inhumane acts of a similar character" are only subsidiary to other crimes against humanity in accordance with Article 7(1k). Examples cited in case law and literature include forced transfers, unlawful experiments on human beings, the closure of a medical facility, the refusal to treat patients, and exclusion from care facilities.⁶³ Internment in camps could certainly be included under this offence if it is "intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health". This is claimed time and again. However, the existence of these camps is still extremely controversial. The evi-

⁶³ Ambos 2008, II, margin no. 219.

dence presented is unconvincing, and they have been disbanded since 2020. The same applies to inhumane treatment and serious harm to physical integrity, which are necessary to fulfil the criminal offence. Chinese sources themselves speak of a “military management” of their training concept, which suggests an authoritarian and probably also repressive education. However, this obviously applies to the whole of China and not just to Xinjiang and the provinces. So far, there have been no calls for prosecution.

A brief summary

Although there are currently no signs in Xinjiang of the extermination campaign that the media claim is being waged against the Uyghurs, this accusation continues to haunt the influential press. The source is still the “World Congress of Uyghurs” in Munich with its regular press releases, in which Xinjiang exists only as “East Turkestan”. For example, in 2023, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* published a guest commentary by Dolkun Isa, the then President of the World Uyghur Congress, and Riszwana Ilham, the President of the Swiss Uyghur Association, under the headline “*The Chinese government is committing genocide against the Uyghurs*”:

*China’s iron-fisted policy [...] is about the extermination of the Uyghur people [...]. The Chinese government’s genocide policy against Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples has been going on for seven years now [...]. If Xi Jinping has his way, the Uyghurs will disappear without a sound, without economic or political consequences.*⁶⁴

Apart from the obvious nonsense of these claims, which any traveller to the province will immediately recognise⁶⁵, the question arises as to what is driving politicians and the media in the West to launch this campaign. It can be explained neither by ignorance of this distant coun-

⁶⁴ Dolkun 2023.

⁶⁵ See Flounders 2023; Behrens 2024.

try and its foreign culture, nor by concern for the well-being of the Uyghur people. It is obviously a well-calculated element in the increasingly sharp geopolitical dispute between the USA and the People's Republic. This is because the campaign originates in the USA and is constantly fuelled from there, even if the "World Congress of Uyghurs" is based in Munich. In essence, it is neither about the Uyghurs nor about human rights, but about discrimination and the weakening of China's position in the world. "Genocide" is an ugly word and one of the most serious accusations. It is often applied to the crimes of other opposing states, but avoided as a label for one's own comparable or worse acts of violence.⁶⁶ For example, the German Bundestag was prepared to recognise the killing of hundreds of thousands of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as genocide without much hesitation (2 June 2016). However, it has still not been able to decide to recognise the German genocide of the Herero and Nama in German South West Africa in 1904 as such. The term 'genocide' was also used to justify NATO's war against Yugoslavia in 1999, following the 1995 massacre of 8,000 Bosnians in Srebrenica. This was done to justify the subsequent bombing of Yugoslavia. However, the problematic double standard that is so obvious in this word does not outweigh its propagandistic added value in discrediting the opponent and asserting one's own superiority.

It is hardly surprising that some Western countries are following the US down this path. The fact that the rest of the world is not doing the same, and that the "Organisation of Islamic Cooperation" welcomes the conditions under which Muslims live in China,⁶⁷ as well as the fact that 50 states support Chinese policy in a joint resolution against condemnation by 22 states,⁶⁸ has not made anyone here think twice yet.

Under these conditions, there is little prospect of this confrontation changing, even if the focus of the anti-Chinese campaign shifts to Taiwan's political status. Currently, attempting to destabilise an increasingly important international political and economic power seems to be the

⁶⁶ Herman/Chomsky 2023, 72f.

⁶⁷ Chan 2019.

⁶⁸ See Jamestown Foundation 2019.

only way for the US and its allies to maintain their dominance. In my opinion, this is a futile attempt, but there is a risk that the conflict could escalate into a military confrontation.

To prevent this from happening, an open dialogue on a political and scientific basis with Chinese partners is all the more urgent. However, it should not be burdened with accusations, threats, insinuations or even sanctions. Neither side wants to talk to the other side under such conditions. The Chinese leadership has offered representatives of the UN and its member states talks and a visit to Xinjiang under these conditions. The offer should be accepted. We were able to move around freely on our trip. Xinjiang is open, a favourite destination for tourism. You can visit the region without any problems. It is probably currently the only way to gain clarity about the reality in Xinjiang and to exchange views on the existing differences.

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The goal of realising the rule of law – in Xinjiang

China is a country whose size makes it possible for apparent contradictions to coexist so that they only lead to conflict to a limited extent. Since China has simultaneously experienced several decades of very rapid and multidimensional development, we find ourselves in a situation in which such apparent or actual contradictions are very often obvious. The outer ring motorway of Beijing is about 940 km long. There is no European city large enough to require such transport measures – the M25 ring road around London is just 188 km long. At the same time, there are abandoned villages in the mountains to the west of Beijing that have died out in the last ten years, leaving them to slowly decay. The dimensions of these contrasts are difficult to imagine on an abstract level, which is why it is essential to expose oneself to the local experience in order to “grasp” them in the literal sense. Of course, in France too, you can see how the level of development of Paris has long surpassed that of the rest of France, while there too, in the provinces, abandoned villages are hidden in the scrubland or in sprawling forests. The difference is that the growth of Paris exceeds the direct social memory – three generations – while the growth of Beijing has essentially only taken place since the 1990s and thus within a single generation. While the conflicts that industrialisation created for European societies were mainly an issue of the 19th century and have therefore disappeared from the collective memory in their entirety¹, in China they have a very real and current impact on the present.

¹ On the impoverishment of workers in the course of industrialisation and the connection to the crime rate, see Robert von Mohl (1835), “Ueber die Nachtheile, welche sowohl den Arbeitern selbst, als dem Wohlstande und der Sicherheit der gesamten bürgerlichen Gesellschaft von dem fabrikmäßigen Betrieb der Industrie zugehen, und über die Nothwendigkeit gründlicher Vorbeugungsmittel”, *Archiv der politischen Oekonomie und Polizeiwissenschaft*, vol. 2. 141-203, esp. 155f.

We live in a world in which some people believe that they can transcend the boundaries of space and time at will via the internet. It often goes unnoticed that by adopting such an attitude, we end up depriving ourselves of the opportunity to question our own preconceptions by comparing them with physical and cultural reality. The nervousness or relaxation of an entrance control at the underground in Shanghai or at the entrance to the bazaar in Ürümqi cannot be experienced virtually. However, it says a lot about the “real world” of those affected by these things. These are experiences that can hardly be gained in a virtual world, but which enable those who experience them to at least partially deconstruct their own preconceptions: What does ‘striving’ for security mean? Where do you feel burdened by security measures? Where less so? If at least parts of Xinjiang appear more relaxed in some ways than Beijing, for example, this is an experience that differs greatly from the reality conveyed by the media. It is therefore important to move beyond borders and take a closer look at things, recognise other realities and try to understand them.

Based on this, this article explores impressions from a trip to Kashgar and Ürümqi, attempts to categorise them from the perspective of law and, as far as the author is able to do so with his limited knowledge, tries to explain them at least in part. For the sake of this attempt at an explanation, this article first reconstructs the rule of law programme, which has been enshrined in the Chinese constitution (1982) since 1999, and which has changed significantly since Xi Jinping took office. It becomes clear that this is less a structural constant than an evolving programme that understands the changes in state institutions and its normative foundations as the realisation of objectives on the one hand, but which also attempts to solve the hitherto legally unresolved problem of the relationship between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese state in a kind of “normative realism” on the other.

In the province of Xinjiang, which is characterised by 13 ethnic groups, this already conflict-ridden Chinese legal framework collides with an area that’s got additional problems and distinctly differs from other regions in China in many respects. Since the beginning of this century,

the terror index in China, and in Xinjiang in particular, has risen sharply. On the surface, the source of the problem was an ever more radical Muslim fundamentalism, which in some cases was combined with ethnically motivated aspirations for independence. The CCP, as well as Chinese state and society, found themselves in a situation in which normative grey areas made politics vulnerable, because political solutions that were not normatively secured and individual ad hoc decisions were very easily confronted with accusations of arbitrariness and capriciousness. – The political and state leadership of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) had launched a large-scale project in its fight against terrorism. In the wake of this project, it became apparent that much more effort should have been made to comprehensively improve the structural foundations of society. Interestingly, it combined this with the establishment of rule-of-law structures. This applies not only to securing important living conditions (water, education, work), but also to the consideration of how to persuade society not to turn away from modernity in a martial manner, but to participate in production based on the division of labour – while at the same time preserving traditional cultural achievements (language, music, dance, clothing, architecture, etc.), including those of ethnic minorities (which are local majorities in parts of Xinjiang).

The aim of the article is therefore to show how the legislation of the XUAR has not only standardised these tasks in terms of substantive law, but also how it has structured them in terms of procedural law. In addition to questions of the rule of law and the fight against terrorism, it also deals with questions of radicalisation prevention and the policy of integration instead of assimilation.

1. The Chinese rule of law as a programme

The idea of what law is, what it is used for and to what extent a state is not just a state of law, but a constitutional state has changed several times over the decades. First of all, the 3rd Plenum of the 11th Party

Congress on 18 December 1978 must be cited as the starting point for the goal of setting normative limits to the arbitrariness of the state and the masses. The experience of absolute lawlessness (“无法可依”, meaning: there is no law to abide by) during the Cultural Revolution had traumatised large sections of the political and intellectual elite – insofar as these elites had survived these “black ten years”, as they are often called in China today. It is therefore not surprising that the CCP officially called for laws to be enacted and then actually applied strictly so that violations of the law would be sanctioned: “有法可依, 有法必依, 执法必严, 违法必究”, in other words: there is law that can be obeyed; if there is law, then it must be obeyed; the application of the law must be strict, and violations of the law must be prosecuted. This was easier said than done at the time, as many state institutions had been abolished during the Cultural Revolution in order to concentrate power in the hands of revolutionary committees 革命委员会. Article 22 of the 1975 Constitution states that the Revolutionary Committees act simultaneously as a permanent organ of the people’s congresses and as the people’s government of the respective level. Article 23 also stipulates that the Revolutionary Committees are also responsible for the application and enforcement of laws and regulations. Article 25 II stipulated that the tasks of the People’s Procuratorate should be carried out by the public security organs, i.e. the police, also a department of the Revolutionary Committees. This meant that the People’s Procuratorate had been normatively and de facto dissolved in its function as a prosecuting authority and as an institution that ensures compliance with the law on the part of the state. Even if the courts still nominally existed, Article 25 III stipulated that courts should follow the mass line and that serious anti-revolutionary criminal cases in particular should be tried “by the masses” and revolutionary criminal cases “be discussed and criticised by the masses” (群众讨论和批判). As there was neither a codified criminal law nor a codified criminal procedure law at the time, the floodgates were open to the excesses of these mass events. The people’s court as an institution had thus effectively ceased to exist in many cases.

So when the CCP developed the goal at its party congress at the end of 1978 of building a society in which there are laws that people abide by and where – in the event of violations – sanctions are imposed, the reality was twofold: firstly, the Marriage Act of 1950 was almost the only officially valid law; secondly, although the old judicial buildings still existed, there was a lack of personnel in many cases. The People's Procuratorates had been completely dissolved, and many judges had become victims of campaigns.

The problem of having to rebuild the judiciary from very scanty fragments was solved in such a way that, on 1 July 1979, laws were enacted for the reorganisation of state institutions – including the reestablishment of people's courts and people's procuratorates, so that the reorganisation of the judicial authorities was carried out on the basis of laws. On the other hand, a *Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China* 中华人民共和国刑法 (= cCL old) and a *Criminal Procedure Law of the People's Republic of China* 中华人民共和国刑事诉讼法 (= cCPL old) were passed on the same date so that the normative conditions for punishing offences against the law were created. An attempt was made to solve the personnel problem by assigning members of the People's Liberation Army to learn the new laws on criminal law and criminal procedure and to get them to the point where they could begin their service at the People's Courts or the People's Procuratorates on 1 January 1980 within six months. For these soldiers, the fight against the external enemy had thus become a fight against the internal enemy. If, as a result, the sometimes martial-sounding language² is still used today, especially in the course of campaigns to curb certain criminal offences, this cannot be

² For example, Yang Cheng 杨诚, President of the Intermediate People's Court of Chengdu City, is quoted in his annual report to the Municipal People's Congress as saying that the courts of Chengdu City took strict punitive (严惩) action against serious crimes in 2023; cf. 成都: 依法严惩各类严重刑事犯罪, 02.02.2024, http://author.baidu.com/home?from=bjh_article&app_id=160069503212903 (access: 06/2024). See also the report of the SPC on the "profound advancement of the targeted struggle to sweep out the black and remove the evil" (深入推动扫黑除恶专项斗争), 21 August 2020, http://www.spp.gov.cn/spp/xwfbh/wsfbt/202008/t0200821_477416.shtm (access: 06/2024).

explained solely by the glorification of the revolutionary struggle, but presumably also by the personal background of many members of the Chinese judiciary in the 1980s. – Moreover, the difference in language should not obscure the fact that these cases are predominantly quite succinct attempts to consistently solve and sanction crimes, whereby phrases like “fighting crime” or “war on drugs” are often used in English as well.

These measures were the first step on the road to a law-based state. During the 1980s, an attempt was made to provide a normative basis for all actions of the state. However, both the National People's Congress (NPC) and its Standing Committee (SC NPC) were structurally overwhelmed. It was impossible to pass laws on a wide range of social and administrative issues during the NPC's yearly two-week session. The SC NPC, with its more than 50 meeting days per year, was also often overburdened due to the fact that there were only very few legal standards in certain areas. It was therefore common for authorities to standardise matters within their area of competence themselves, so that they first issued ordinances which they then applied themselves.

However, this allowed for arbitrariness. This was not particularly noticeable in a more traditional context, as the political leadership was legitimised by virtue of its office to make decisions to solve problems. Responsibility was conceived politically and not legally. This idea changed at the latest with the adoption of the *General Rules of Private Law* 民法通则, which no longer regulated the legal relationship of property through the inclusion and exclusion of subject categories or the inclusion and exclusion of object categories, but instead provided a functional definition of property rights.³ This triggered a general functionalisation of the law, in which the subject is interchangeable, so that a general justification qua office was no longer possible. In the 1990s, the awareness of the conflict arising from this paradigm shift led to the discourse on the dichotomy of “rule by person” (人制) vs. “rule by law” (法制).

³ See Gesk 2000 for details.

Suddenly it became clear that there was a contrast between normative and personal rule, i.e. that no civil servant was authorised to go against the functionality of the law simply because of their status or position. In practice, this led to adjustments to the legal system, such as the adoption of the *Administrative Procedure Act* 中华人民共和国行政诉讼法 on 4 April 1989, which in the early days was even referred to in publications as the “Act on the Suing of Civil Servants by Citizens” (民告官法).⁴ Also, in an effort to limit arbitrariness by the administration, but without this being immediately confronted in court, the *Administrative Complaints Act* 中华人民共和国行政复议法 of 29 April 1999 was passed around ten years later. Again, a few years later, authorities were prohibited from including fines imposed by the respective authority in their own budget, which stopped the explosive increase in levies and fines, i.e. the harassment of citizens through an inflationary increase in law enforcement authorities (执法扰民), as it was called in official documents at the time.⁵

This development shows how the state realised that it not only had to restrict individuals (cadres, officials) through the law, but also how it had to restrict itself through laws in order to prevent arbitrariness and abuse of power. It is only logical that the passing of the *Legislation Act* 中华人民共和国立法法 of 15 March 2000 significantly restricted the executive’s authority to create norms. In the discourse on the rule of law, the resulting insights are reflected in the concepts of law as a tool of state authority, which is used top-down (法制), and law as a general norm that restricts state authority and citizens alike (法治). While law as a tool of state authority, with the sharpness of a sword, enforces the law almost solely from the top down, a more modern and comprehensive understanding of law sees law as a system that – like water – penetrates everywhere. Both aspects were symbolised in the radicals of the homo-

⁴ For example, in the title of Tang 1992, the designation of the law as “Lawsuits by citizens against civil servants’ law” can be found there in the preface; cf. loc. cit., 3.

⁵ Cf. the *Resolution of the Council of State on the further relative centralisation of the right to impose administrative fines* 国务院关于进一步推进相对集中行政处罚权工作的决定, 22.08.2022.

phonic characters of *zhì* 制 with the radical 刂 for knife and *zhì* 治 with the radical 氵 for water. It was hoped that this would lead to a juridification of the state, i.e. more legal guarantees for citizens. As a culmination of this development, in 2004 the state's respect for and guarantees of human rights (国家尊重和保障人权) were added as paragraph 3 to Article 33 of the Constitution (1982).

However, the fact that the CCP often regarded itself as having a special legal status posed a problem. For example, in corruption cases it was customary to first initiate party disciplinary proceedings in order to rule out the possibility that the behaviour in question was covered by party statutes; only then, after the party disciplinary proceedings had been concluded, could the People's Procuratorate officially initiate criminal investigations. This led inevitably to the problem of arbitrary decisions and a serious threat to state authority (including a threat to the authority of the CCP). In order to solve this cluster, Xi Jinping demanded that the provisions already included in the Constitution 中华人民共和国宪法 (4 Dec. 1982, in the version of 15 March 1999) for the "construction of the socialist constitutional state" (建设社会主义法治国家) should encompass an expansion of the doctrine to govern the state through laws to be complemented with a provision concerning the ruling of the CCP itself: "govern the state through laws and the party through statutes" (依法治国, 依规治党).⁶ By harmonising laws and statutes, the responsibility of the party and its members can be redefined and enforced in a previously unknown way. Simply being politically legitimised to a leadership position is no longer enough if laws and statutes impose functional restrictions. It now seems possible to overcome rule by persons and the reflexive application of norms to those who enact them. The already existing constitutionally anchored leadership role of the party has been standardised by law. However, the CCP was obliged to adhere to its own statutes, whereby these were adapted to legal provisions. These two reforms under Xi are therefore important steps towards improved enforcement of the rule of law.

⁶ For the practical realisation of this claim, see the explanations on the development of the Control Commission below.

This brief description of the conceptual development of the idea of what a constitutional state could be should not obscure the fact that there are a number of other phenomena that can easily be categorised as part of the trend towards a constitutional state described above. One important aspect is to be mentioned here, as it is important for further understanding: in the absence of an efficient procedure for constitutional review, and in view of the fact that laws are often only amended after many years, many legal provisions are not adapted to China's level of development. If one also considers that the Supreme People's Court 最高人民法院 (SPC) only issues final judgements in a very few cases, then the enforcement of the rule of law by means of the judiciary seems questionable. With more than two dozen High People's Courts as courts of last instance, a unity of the legal system seems hardly achievable at first. However, without being able to enforce laws judicially and uniformly, hardly anyone would call a state a constitutional state. In order to solve the problems arising from this, the SPC, sometimes together with the Supreme People's Procuratorate 最高人民检察院 (SPP) or with relevant ministries, has issued interpretations (解释) for many laws, which in an abstract normative manner further elaborate and specify legal norms that are underdetermined or difficult to reconcile with social reality and thus greatly simplify everyday judicial life, in particular the uniform application of laws. Thus, we basically face a multi-stage legislative process in which the suggestion for many laws comes from party committees, parliamentary committees or the Political Consultative Conference. These legislative initiatives have to be passed by the National People's Congress 全国人民代表大会 (NPC) or its Standing Committee 常务委员会 (SC NPC). In a third stage, various concretisations and systematisations of the laws are subsequently carried out by a further, subordinate level of legislation, e.g. by the SPC or SPP, the Ministry of Public Security 公安部 (MfPS) and other ministries.

The reason for this legislative cascade becomes clear when we look at the conditions for the separation of powers in the Chinese state. It is true that all state powers have developed their own functionality. Nevertheless, the state has rejected the political-normative paradigm of the

separation of powers due to negative historical experiences from the 1920s. Over the years and decades, this has led to a specific situation in which, on the one hand, state powers are called upon to cooperate, but on the other hand, this creates the danger that conflicts of interest can no longer be resolved, or at least are no longer recognisable to an outside person (because they cannot be articulated) – and therefore cannot be resolved. At best, this can lead to a dangerous stalemate, and at worst, to a dangerous build-up of conflict. The party was therefore essential in a kind of referee function in order to be able to resolve such specific blockades by means of overarching authority. For a long time, the party exercised this quasi-arbitrator function rather indirectly, for example, by signing off on regulations together with certain institutions and thus signalling that other institutions involved would take a back seat. Since the primacy of the party, i.e. the CCP's claim to leadership, was enshrined as a principle in Art. 1 III of the Constitution (1982) as part of the constitutional reform of 2018, this claim to overall leadership by the CCP has become direct.

In addition, the majority of constitutional lawyers assume that the primacy of parliament, which in the Chinese context was originally adopted from the Swiss constitution of 1874⁷, cannot be subject to constitutional review by the SPC, which originates from parliament and is therefore not a direct representative of the sovereign.⁸ Therefore, the courts should only judge according to the law and are not authorised to interpret the constitution.⁹ This goes so far that the SPC, or the general people's courts, only apply the constitutionally guaranteed rights to individual proceedings pending judgement to a limited extent, even when applying the constitution.¹⁰ Disputes between organs are also not normally decided by the SPC, but by the responsible party organs.

⁷ See Gesk 2016, 448f.

⁸ To date, Switzerland therefore does not have a constitutional court; in addition, the Swiss Federal Supreme Court is only authorised to decide on actions against organs with restrictions; see Haller 2020, 681 et seq. for more details.

⁹ Cf. n.a., in: Li/Mo 2012, 416ff.

¹⁰ From this point of view, the Qi Yuling case, which initially attracted a lot of attention and was later removed from the SPC's case collection, is also just a case of the

Therefore, if we consider how the rule of law can help to concretise normatively and practically ambiguous terms in the context of the application of the law, then the legal reality of the PRC is neither able to achieve this through a procedure of constitutional review, nor can it usually guarantee the unity of the legal system through a uniform supreme authority by way of individual case decisions. Ambivalent concepts can therefore be clarified neither by a constitutional nor by an individual legal interpretation in general legal proceedings. Thus, the question of the interpretation of laws in China is different from that in Germany or other Western democracies. In contrast to individual decisions in Western democracies, the interpretation of laws is part of legislation. While the NPC or the SC NPC often only enacts an underdetermined version of the laws, these underdetermined norms are subsequently concretised and filled out by the responsible institutions in a normative-abstract manner. For example, the cCPL (status: 2018) itself has 308 paragraphs, while the interpretation of the SPC on questions of application of the cCPL (status: 2012) has 548 paragraphs, all of which explain and specify the actual law. This facilitates the uniform application of the law. In addition, interpretations can be adapted more easily on the basis of real experience, so that this also leads to a reduction in the workload of the legislative bodies in the narrower sense.

The legislative cascade that we can observe in this context does not stop at the interpretation of the laws by the SPC, but extends to the provincial level, where, for example, the (provincial) High People's Court can in turn contribute to an abstract normative solution adapted to the locality through interpretations.¹¹ This process of graduated legisla-

assertion of constitutionally guaranteed rights, which, however, does not touch on questions of the review of standards; a brief description of the related controversy can be found, for example, at <http://baike.baidu.com/item/%E9%BD%90%E7%8E%89%E8%8B%93%E6%A1%88/5110523> (access: 07/2024).

¹¹ See e.g. *Answers of the Beijing High People's Court and the Beijing Labour Arbitration Commission concerning the Litigation of Labour Disputes (I)* 北京市高级人民法院、北京市劳动人事争议仲裁委员会关于审理劳动争议案件 解答（一），30.04.2024, http://rsj.beijing.gov.cn/xxgk/tzgg/202404/t20240430_3648905.html (access: 07/2024).

tion, in which the Supreme People's Court is essentially integrated, is based at the highest level on constitutionally established institutional competences, as the NPC has the competence to interpret the constitution and laws in accordance with Art. 67 (1), (4) of the Constitution (1982).¹²

When looking for a justification for the SPC's power of interpretation, Art. 131 of the Constitution (1982) initially merely states that the courts exercise a power of judgement on the basis of laws.¹³ Therefore, there is no explicit competence of interpretation; only the competence to apply laws (适用法律) is mentioned. If one assumes that no application of norms is possible without interpretation, then one can see a good reason to expand the circle of legislative institutions in a system in which each deputy of the NPC is theoretically entitled to two minutes of speaking time during legislative deliberations on laws per year during the session. Since the SC NPC, which exercises most of its powers outside the NPC's sessions, would also be overburdened with sole legislative powers, it is understandable that other institutions, which are familiar with the shortcomings of existing normative solutions from the application of the law, attempt to fill this gap. – Even before the 1982 Constitution was drawn up, there was a *resolution by the SC NPC on strengthening the work of law interpretation* 全国人民代表大会常务委员会关于加强法律解释工作的决议 dated 10 June 1981. This resolution predates the current constitution, but it was never revoked and thus still serves as a main basis for the powers of interpretation of the SPC and SPP. As this resolution already existed before the current Constitution came into force, some constitutional law experts concluded that the provisions set out here were not part of the 1982 Constitution and were therefore invalid. Others assumed that these provisions had never been repealed and were therefore still valid. That is why the Supreme People's Court itself took the initiative and referred to the NPC's 1981 decision, which was

¹² Chinese: 全国人民代表大会常务委员会行使下列职权: (一)解释宪法, 监督宪法的实施; (四)解释法律.

¹³ Chinese: 人民法院依照法律规定独立行使审判权.

still in force, in the *provisions on the interpretation work of the judiciary* 最高人民法院关于司法解释工作的若干规定, 法发 (1997) 15号. The NPC obviously respected this position, as it did not change the situation when it passed the *Legislation Act* 立法法 (LL, originally: 15 March 2000). Section 13 LL therefore explicitly states only for the executive that it is authorised to legislate further, concretising the laws, but is silent on the practice of interpretation by judicial authorities. This means that their power of interpretation is still not restricted.

This, together with guiding cases, which the SPC (or the SPP, whose competences often correspond to those of the SPC) regularly selects from judgements of lower instances on certain topics, can then ensure the unity of the legal system to a large extent – despite the aforementioned fact that most cases only go as far as the responsible High People's Court, i.e. do not leave the provincial borders.

We can thus see how the Chinese judiciary, on the basis of the constitution and in recognition of the existing lines of development, is clearly developing in the direction of rule-of-law structures, and how it – together with other institutions, above all within the boundaries of the criminal justice system – is compensating for the deficits of legislation. It still doesn't exceed legal-normative limits. Thus, it becomes clear how, by selecting guiding cases, it also provides the lower courts with a means of deciding typical or difficult cases in an adequate manner and applying the laws in a uniform way.

2. The realisation of the concept of the rule of law in Chinese criminal law

As already mentioned, criminal law was the first and most important legal and normative regulatory structure with which the Chinese state attempted to reorganise society after the Cultural Revolution and achieve stability both in everyday life and in the political context. To this end, a criminal law and a criminal procedure law were enacted on 1 July 1979, which made it possible to prosecute violations of the law.

This political reflex, which ties state authority to the existence and enforcement of criminal law, reflects on the one hand the historical idea that “harsh punishments are necessary in times of disorder” (乱世处重典), but on the other hand shows how the enforcement of criminal law is still regarded today as a fundamental experience of the enforcement of state authority. Criminal law is therefore more than just the individual enforcement of the state’s claim to punishment in each individual case. It is also a symbolic act with which the state manifests its authority. This means that when the state sees itself or society under pressure, it first tries to respond with criminal law. Nevertheless, the response of criminal law today is very different from the one it had shortly after its introduction in 1980. It is worthwhile analysing what has changed in concrete terms and to what extent these changes are (also) due to the idea of the rule of law.

What initially changed significantly between the introduction of the cCL (old) in 1979 and the current version of the cCL from 1997 is the group of people who are subject to criminal sanctions. The circle of addressees quickly changed: originally, it was only the criminal act of (human) offenders that was sanctioned, whereby an extension beyond the actual circle of direct offenders only took place in the case of incitement (Section 26 cCL old). This narrow understanding of the circle of perpetrators and the persons responsible for compliance with criminal law was already established with the decision issued by the SC NPC on 8 March 1982. This narrow understanding of the group of offenders or persons responsible for compliance with criminal law was already extended with the *Decision of the SC NPC regarding the strict sanctioning of serious damage to the economy* 全国人民代表大会常务委员会关于严惩严重破坏经济的罪犯的决定, issued on 8 March 1982. According to No. 3 of this decision, all state authorities, the army, companies and non-profit organisations etc. had a duty to actively inform their employees and the public about relevant problem areas and obligations to act. This initially created an indirect criminal responsibility for companies (and authorities), which manifested itself in the fact that companies (and authorities) were obliged to clarify criminal offences that had al-

ready occurred and to prevent criminal offences against their employees. However, failure to do so did not result in any specific sanctions. In order to emphasise this obligation, the 1997 revision of the cStG resulted in the direct criminal liability of “units” (单位)¹⁴ and their managers. The obligation to prevent and repress offences under criminal law was thus extended to companies etc. and their management personnel. In the latter case, a distinction is often made between “persons responsible for the company” (企业的负责人) and “other persons responsible” (其他责任人员)¹⁵, i.e. CEOs as well as responsible department heads. Criminal law is therefore not only a fundamental organisational structure of society in a very traditional sense – the codes that have applied in imperial China since the Sui and Tang dynasties were almost exclusively focused on criminal law and tried to protect imperial hierarchy as well as moral foundations of Confucianism. Since 1979, criminal law in the PRC has developed into a fundamental regulatory structure, trying to protect both state authority and social order (and thus proving to be a modernised and yet very traditional concept of criminal law).

The importance attached to criminal law and its possible consequences can be seen, for example, in the fact that the SC NPC may only make amendments to the law, but that the enactment of a new penal code is the sole responsibility of the NPC (Art. 62 No. 3 Constitution of 1982) – although it was evident from the cCL (old) how state authorities in 1979 had only limited confidence in criminal law structures. Relevant concerns only dissipated over the years as criminal law competence was built up in the organs of the (criminal) justice system.

¹⁴ This is expressly not purely corporate criminal law, because in 1997 there were still many companies that were not recognised as legal entities. These include functional units (事业单位), such as public hospitals or authorities, which do not have corporate status but have their own budget, so that they are classified as a sanctionable subject. For the definition of the criminal law entity, see e.g. Qu 2016, 336ff.

¹⁵ Cf. e.g. Section 153 II cStG, which, in addition to persons who directly fulfil the offence of smuggling under Section 153 I cStG, also punishes their unit as well as directly responsible managers and other responsible persons.

When the state attempted to take action against arbitrary decisions by state actors at the end of the 1990s, it was not only in the area of administrative law that legislation attempted to make arbitrariness and possible abuse of power by state authorities considerably more difficult by clarifying standards and structures; the same also applied to criminal justice authorities. Looking at the cCL (old), in 1979 there was obviously still concern that the requirement of certainty in criminal law could lead to a dilemma for the state in cases that are clearly perceived negatively by the public and therefore lead to criticism of certain behaviour, but leaving the courts with no criminal law provision applicable. Therefore, legislation was afraid criminal justice authorities could find themselves forced to act while lacking any normative means of action. To allow a discontinuation of proceedings due to lack of an applicable norm was perceived as an intolerable triumph for a person intuitively perceived as a criminal and thus as a loss of authority by the state. For this reason, Section 79 cCL (old) still stipulated that for crimes for which there is no clearly applicable offence in the special section of the cStG (old) under which this crime can be directly subsumed, the most similar offence can be applied, but only under the restriction that the SPC agrees to such an application of the law. This provision on the possibility of analogy in criminal law was deleted without replacement in 1997. That same year, all special or secondary criminal law was integrated into the main criminal law code – there was no longer any desire for parallel regulations or a fragmentation of criminal law provisions. The legislature had clearly developed a new awareness in which it recognised the requirement of certainty and the prohibition of analogy as opportunities to increase the acceptance of state power punishing and sanctioning criminal offences; at the same time, legislation recognised that an increase in efficiency in the prosecution of criminal offences will be achieved once the criminal justice system adheres to normative clarity.

The paradigmatic function of criminal law is also demonstrated by the fact that it is the only law that is continuously reformed and amended by the SC NPC. Since the new version of the cCL in 1997, there have

already been twelve amendment acts. On the one hand, reforms have reshaped the substantive criminal law in such a way that the death penalty has been abolished in around a third of all relevant offences (8th and 9th Amendment Acts, 2009 and 2012). On the other hand, new crimes were introduced into the criminal law; this is especially obvious in the case of terrorism. There is a clear shift in criminal liability, expanding suppression of terrorist behaviour from a traditional terrorist attack to forms of planning, preparing, and supporting terrorist acts. This means prosecution at a time where the terrorist act in a narrow sense did not yet materialise is no longer a case of arbitrary prosecution. This constitutes an obvious decision in favour of clearly defined offences under the rule of law. This was no necessary development. Theoretically, any institution in the field of criminal justice might have invoked section 22 cCL. According to this section, any preparation of a crime is punishable by the law. Therefore, the PSO when investigating crime, the People's Procuratorate when examining evidence and deciding upon indictment, and the People's Court when judging upon an alleged crime, they all could have invoked this section. For lesser cases, it would also have been possible to fall back on section 37 cCL: This makes it possible to generally impose administrative sanctions on acts whose consequences do not reach the level of social harm required for a criminal offence. However, this approach was deliberately avoided. Instead, as part of the 9th Criminal Law Amendment Act on 29 May 2015 – following Section 120 cCL, which defines the main offence of forming, leading and participating in terrorist organisations 组织、领导、参加恐怖组织罪 – a total of six further paragraphs on terrorism-related offences were added to the cCL.¹⁶ These are:

- Section 120-1 cCL, support for terrorist organisations 帮助恐怖活动罪;
- Section 120-2 cCL, preparation of terrorist acts of violence 准备实施恐怖活动罪;

¹⁶ On the question of how these provisions were applied in Xinjiang and how they contributed to an easing of the situation, see section 3 of this article below.

- Section 120-3 cCL, glorification of terrorist acts of violence 宣扬恐怖主义、极端主义、煽动实施恐怖活动罪；
- Section 120-4 cCL, use of extremism to call for and disrupt legally designated institutions (such as marriage, justice, education or social administration) 利用极端主义破坏法律实施罪；
- Section 120-5 cStG, coercion of third parties to wear clothing, insignia etc. of terrorist or extremist organisations 强制穿戴宣扬恐怖主义、极端主义服饰、标志罪；
- Section 120-6 cStG, unlawful possession of symbols of terrorist organisations 非法持有宣扬恐怖主义、极端主义物品罪。

Not only has the substantive criminal law been adapted to conform to the idea of the rule of law, but the *Chinese Criminal Procedure Law* 中华人民共和国刑事诉讼法, the 1979 version of which is cited as cCPL (old), has undergone several waves of reform, all aimed at eliminating abuses and realising the guarantees of the rule of law.

Before we go into the procedural reforms, however, we should take a brief look at some constitutional foundations. The cCPL (old) was originally passed at the same time as the cCL on 1 July 1979. The inexperience with the newly established or functionally re-established institutions of the People's Procuratorate and the People's Court initially led to adjustments in criminal procedure law that took this inexperience into account. Initially, there was concern that individual judges would have to reckon with political pressure from outside the court, depending on the case. This led to Article 131 of the Constitution (1982) guaranteeing not the independence of the judge, but the independence of the court – which should not be subject to pressure from the executive, social organisations or individuals. Section 5 cCPL reiterates this requirement to this day: “The People's Court shall exercise its power of judgement independently and in accordance with the law” (人民法院依照法律规定独立行使审判权). Of course, this has far-reaching consequences for the Chinese concept of the rule of law, which on this basis has an essentially collective foundation, not an individual one. However, to draw the conclusion that no rule of law is possible under these conditions would be tantamount to the demand that the Western model of

society is absolute, without even considering the possibility that rule of law and restriction of state arbitrariness can be achieved with different institutional arrangements.

Furthermore, the constitutional doctrine in China assumes that although the state powers are organised separately, they should not hinder each other through the separation of powers or even render each other obsolete through dysfunctionality, but that they should work together (分权合作). Similarly, the cCPL (old) also initially assumed that the criminal justice institutions should not behave in a mutually confrontational manner, but instead explicitly demanded in Section 5 cCPL (old) that they should “work together, cooperate and restrict each other” (应当分工合作, 互相配合, 互相制约). The order is not random – cooperation and collaboration come first, followed by (possible) restriction. Ensuring that this principle is observed in reality became the task of the Commissioners for Political and Legal Affairs 政法委. This was and is to this very day a party office that is supposed to coordinate cooperation between the police, the People’s Procuratorate and the People’s Court in the background. Nevertheless, an awareness developed that the existing system was inadequate. In many cases, truth was sacrificed at the expense of efficiency, which then led to an erosion of state authority. For this reason, the cCPL was revised in 1996, one year before the new version of the cCL. The focus of the reform centred on the principle of the presumption of innocence (无罪推定). The principle itself in Section 12 cCPL leads to the recognition that without conviction, no one ought to be called a criminal. This leads to a differentiation in language, since persons previously referred to in a very generalised way as “criminals” (犯人) or “criminal element” (犯罪分子) were now called “suspects” (犯罪嫌疑人) or “defendants” (被告人). Procedural rights were therefore reallocated depending upon the stage of the proceeding. Consequently, Section 162 III cCPL now stipulated that the court should recognise an acquittal in the event of lack of evidence.¹⁷ Although Section 7 of the cCPL repeated the requirement for cooperation and mutual limitation between the People’s Court and the People’s Procuratorate, the aim of

¹⁷ For the main points of the new version or reform of the cStPG, see e.g. Fan 2020.

cooperation and limitation was also repeated: the “guarantee of accurate and effective application of the law” (保证准确有效地执行法律). Thus, by enshrining the presumption of innocence in the 1996 version of the cCPL, the Chinese legislator created a completely new dimension of compliance with the law.

Without this reorientation of criminal procedure law in 1996, the subsequent reform in 2012 would hardly have been possible. Due to sensational wrongful convictions, which led to a clearly audible public outcry¹⁸, attempts were made to realise new constitutional requirements due to 2004 amendments. The new version of Art. 33 III of the Constitution (1982) demands that the state respect and guarantee human rights. In light of a string of serious wrongful convictions, the legislator wanted to implement this demand into criminal proceedings. This led above all to a reorganisation of coercive measures during investigations and the redistribution of responsibilities. While investigations are generally the responsibility of the public security organs 公安 (= PSO), which in Germany are known as the police, the People’s Procuratorate 检察院¹⁹ is mainly responsible for examining the charges in criminal proceedings and deciding upon any possible indictment. However, as the People’s Procuratorate also exercises a general supervisory function in criminal proceedings, it was given responsibility for supervising detention cells and remand centres. Since then, this institutional separation has de facto almost completely prevented torture as an investiga-

¹⁸ See, for example, the judgement against She Xianglin, who was initially sentenced to the death penalty for the alleged murder of his wife with a confession and then sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment in the second instance, until the alleged murder victim reappeared eleven years later, so that the wrongful conviction was revised, and the court, on 02.09.2005, recognised a prison sentence of 700,000 RMB; see <http://baike.baidu.com/item/%E4%BD%98%E7%A5%A5%E6%9E%97/23785> (access: 07/2024).

¹⁹ The People’s Procuratorate is occasionally translated as a public prosecutor’s office; its tasks extend into the areas of civil and administrative proceedings. However, its investigative powers have been even more limited since 2018 than was previously the case. As the competence portfolio of the People’s Procuratorate is therefore significantly different from that of the German public prosecutor’s office, the translation used in China is retained here.

tive measure. Since the People's Procuratorate is responsible for the health and physical integrity of detainees, it actively counteracts any potential for torture by the police. In addition, the reflection of the miscarriages of justice led to a redefinition of the tasks of the Commissioners for Political and Legal Affairs 政法委, most of whom were recruited from the PSO. In many cases, they had previously provided the other criminal justice institutions with content-related guidelines so that the outcome of the proceedings was predetermined by the PSO, and errors by the investigating authorities remained unrecognised. Since then, there are no longer any substantive guidelines concerning an intended conviction; instead, if at all, better networking is only sought in procedural terms.

However, here too, the reform of the legal basis was only a step that contributed to the identification of further deficits in the system and was ultimately the reason for further reforms. In 2018, the authority to investigate public officials (i.e. in particular, investigations into corruption cases) was transferred from the People's Procuratorate to the newly created State Control Commission 监察委员会. Since then, this can be carried out in conjunction with the Party Disciplinary Commission 党纪律委员会 and parts of the Court of Auditors 审计部. All three institutions conduct parallel proceedings at the state and party levels. Although it may seem strange from a Western perspective that state and party are investigated separately – just as it is surprising when state and party institutions are united under one roof to investigate suspected cases together – still, this has reduced deficits that previously hindered many corruption investigations. Prior to the reform, when suspects were members of the CCP, they were only handed over to state investigating authorities once the party disciplinary proceedings had been concluded. This created a couple of questions: first, there was a question concerning the authority of the party disciplinary commission, since there was no law that allowed this party institution to detain any suspect. Second, there was no legal way to obtain evidence from non-party members. Third, separate investigations by party and state created a time gap in the investigation. So, in many cases, non-party members had been able

to destroy evidence or move abroad. These problems had been solved by the hybrid investigative institutions created by the 2018 reform. Since then, the party and state did engage in parallel investigations, thus accumulating their respective authorities. Due to that, no time gaps, no legal voids concerning normative authorisation of investigative measures, and no additional delays exist any longer. If party statutes and laws are harmonised in their provisions, then the convergence of party and state investigations will not lead to the party dominating state investigations, but will mean that party members can be held much more accountable under (criminal) law than was previously the case.

The fact that this has not yet led to a total dominance of the party over existing state institutions is shown, for example, by the figures in the SPP's activity report to the NPC from 2019.²⁰ Of all cases referred to the Supreme People's Procuratorate by the National Control Commission in 2018 with a request to bring charges, more than 3% were directly rejected with a decision not to bring charges; more than 20% of all cases were referred back to the National Control Commission with a request to investigate further. If one compares this with the number of innocence verdicts before the People's Courts, which, according to the Supreme Administrative Court, was around 0.068% of all criminal verdicts in 2019²¹, it becomes clear how seriously the People's Procuratorate takes its task of examining charges and is not intimidated by the fact that the request to bring charges is usually made with the consent of the Control Commission and the Party Disciplinary Commission.²²

²⁰ Cf. *Summary of the 2019 report of the Supreme People's Procuratorate to the National People's Congress in figures* 数读2019最高检工作报告, 12 March 2019, http://www.spp.gov.cn/spp/zdgz/tj/201903/t20190312_411545.shtml (access: 03/2019).

²¹ See *Report of the Supreme People's Court* 最高人民法院工作报告 to the 13th National People's Congress, 25 May 2020, <http://gongbao.court.gov.cn/Details/e83007142dac8251d1e1416> (access: 06/2024).

²² In this respect, the author does not see Eva Pils' assessment as being in line with actual developments, at least in important respects. Even in a China under Xi Jinping, the dominance of politics over the law, particularly in criminal law, is on the retreat. A resurgence of the "dual state" is not taking place in criminal law, which should be predestined for such a development; see Pils 2023, 339-375.

This demonstrates the emergence of constitutional structures that take a different approach to Western criminal law, but nevertheless do not make a blanket assumption that the accused is guilty, but instead seriously examine this on a case-by-case basis.

Another area in which the understanding of the rule of law is changing and where this change has led to a completely new situation in the area of criminal justice is in the interaction between criminal and administrative law. For a long time, the relative harshness of criminal law was also due to the fact that a defendant sentenced to less than three years' imprisonment could be sentenced by the Commission for the Administration of Education through Labour 劳动教养管理委员会 under Section 13 *Experimental Provisions for Education through Labour* 劳动教养试行办法 (ExPEtL, 21 Jan. 1982)²³ and possibly sanctioned to one to three years in an (administrative) “educational camp” (劳动教养场所). The commission that had to decide on the placement in these education camps was located at the level of the provinces or large and medium-sized cities (Section 4 ExPEtL), whereby a corresponding department, the Authority for the Administration of Education through Labour 劳动教养工作管理机构 (Section 4 ExPEtL), was formed directly at the PSO for the actual implementation. As the 1982 provision is merely a concretisation of, inter alia, the *Resolution of the State Council on Questions of Education through Labour* 国务院关于劳动教养问题的决定 (RQEtL) of 3 Aug. 1957 and the *Supplementary Provisions of the State Council on Education through Work* 国务院关于劳动教养的补充规定 (SPEtL) of 29 Nov. 1979 (Section 1 ExPEtL), and therefore was not repealed, the provisions of Section 5 of the RQEtL and Section 1 SPEtL continued to apply. According to these

²³ In order to clarify the linguistic difference to prison labour, this article uses the term ‘penal labour camp’ for the system of re-education through labour (劳动改造), which is based on Section 46, 2nd half-sentence, cStG. This criminal law provision establishes a general obligation to work for offenders serving a prison sentence, provided this is physically reasonable. The inmates are therefore persons sentenced by a criminal court. If, on the other hand, we are talking about an (administrative) education camp, then the admission to this education camp is the result of a joint decision by several administrative authorities.

provisions, the management of the (administrative) education camps was jointly the responsibility of the authorities for internal affairs □ □ , the PSO and the authorities for labour 劳动. This meant that although the PSO did not have sole decision-making authority, they dominated the entire procedure – despite the overall supervision by the People's Procuratorate (Section 6 ExPEtL).

Therefore, if the PSO were directly involved in the committal to and management of the administrative detention camps without being subject to judicial control, then any court that found a sentence of less than three years' imprisonment had to fear that the PSO would transfer the accused to a detention camp despite the lenient sentence (or even acquittal). According to lawyers, there were indeed such cases. So, if the People's Court had to fear that its judgement would become a farce if the PSO were to impose a heavier sentence than the one stipulated in the court judgement, then it would tend to only impose sentences above the three-year limit out of concern for its own authority. At the end of the 2000s, when efforts to apply criminal law in a differentiated manner and when courts were asked to apply both "leniency" and "severity" (宽严相济)²⁴, any inconsistencies between sanctions handed out by the PSO and by the People's Courts harboured the risk of a serious loss of authority for both sides. This was one of the main reasons for the unbundling of competences, as part of which the long-standing demand for the abolition of the (administrative) education camp was initially approved in principle by the *Resolution of the CCP Central Committee on the Continuous Deepening of Reforms concerning Important Questions* 中共中央关于全面深化改革若干重大问题的决定 on 12 Nov. 2013 (No. Nov. 2013; No. 34 in Section 9 of the resolution) and finally implemented by a *Resolution of the SC NPC on the Abolition of the Legal*

²⁴ In 2008, the SPC publicly called for "leniency and severity" to be treated simultaneously as a guiding principle for criminal justice and also underpinned this demand normatively on 22 February 2010 with its *Interpretation of the Criminal Justice Policy of Simultaneous Leniency and Severity* (关于贯彻宽严相济刑事政策的若干意见). In 2018, this principle was also introduced into the *Control Law* 中华人民共和国监察法, and in 2019, it was additionally included in relevant party statutes; see Liu/Ling 2019, 17.

Provisions on Education through Labour 全国人民代表大会常务委员会关于废止有关劳动教养法律规定的决定 (28 Dec. 2013; Dec. 2013). – As a result, Section 37 cStG still allows for criminal and administrative sanctions to be seamlessly linked. However, this happens no longer as an act of mutual competition, but along a traversal in which the administrative sanction must clearly be more lenient than the criminal sanction.

The abolition of the (administrative) education camp is not synonymous with a general abolition of all forms of institutions that are often indiscriminately referred to as labour camps. Even if Western articles on labour camps in China (including and especially in Xinjiang) usually only refer to camps, labour camps or even concentration camps in a very undifferentiated way, this lack of differentiation – and the emotional content associated with the term “concentration camp” – makes it difficult to understand the Chinese situation.

In Chinese criminal law, the labour of prisoners is initially based on Section 46, 2nd half-sentence cCL, which requires that convicts serving timely or unlimited prison sentences are obliged to work if they are physically able to do so. Since the Chinese criminal justice system perceives of a person convicted of a criminal offence as being socially harmful – after all, social harmfulness is a necessary prerequisite for criminal liability in China – the function of labour in criminal law is perceived as being different to the function of labour in administrative law. While a person that underwent administrative “education through labour” (劳动教养) was not being perceived as outright bad, a criminal that had been convicted to a prison sentence was perceived as someone who had severely failed society, and therefore he had to undergo “re-education through labour” (劳动改造). Therefore, some labour camps were always run by the Ministry of Justice (司法部), and not by the PSO, for the purpose of re-educating criminal convicts.

Interestingly, the obligation to work for prisoners in Germany is almost identical in wording in Section 41 I sentence 1 of the *Prison Act (Strafvollzugsgesetz* as amended on 5 October 2021), which, in the case of

the German penal system, also mentions occupational therapy and other employment in addition to the obligation to perform appropriate work. The idea that work can fulfil a therapeutic purpose and that prisoners should therefore work is therefore not an invention of Chinese criminal law. Instead, it is common to many penal cultures. At the same time, it is clear that the mere parallelism that a society has compulsory prison labour does not mean that they are the same phenomena. Neither China nor Germany uses prison labour as a substitute institution for (officially abolished) slavery; this cannot be said of the USA in particular.²⁵ If prison labour is therefore assessed differently internationally, there are certainly reasons for this; however, it should not be based on unreflect-ed stereotypes. On the contrary, it seems extremely questionable when the USA, of all countries, takes legal action against forced labour in China (or Xinjiang) in the context of its economic and political dispute with China.²⁶

When differentiating between the various forms of detention centres, there is another form of restriction of liberty, particularly in connection with Chinese anti-terrorism measures, which has structural parallels to German preventive detention: According to Section 30 of the *Anti-Terrorism Act* 中华人民共和国反恐怖主义法 (ATA; originally from 2015, amended in 2018), people who have been sentenced to more than one year in prison for terrorism and who continue to pose a high social risk of reoffending can be sent to a deradicalisation camp. Each year, an assessment must be made as to whether the risk situation has changed. If the risk of a repeat offence has significantly decreased, the individuals must be released immediately. Even if there are no specific provisions in the ATA regarding the content of the educational courses, the basic structure of placement on revocation is comparable to other forms of placement – there is a balancing of the social security interest and the personal interest of freedom of movement.

²⁵ Cf. e.g. Browne 2007, 42ff.

²⁶ Cf. *Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act* (UFLPA), passed on 23 December 2021, entered into force on 21 June 2022; see <http://www.cbp.gov/trade/forced-labor/UFLPA> (access: 06/2024).

3. The challenge of terrorism based upon religious-ethnic reasons in Xinjiang

As explained above, the Chinese state attempted to respond to an increasing terrorism problem not purely situationally, but rather aimed at establishing and expanding rule-of-law structures in the course of the conflict. This includes, not least, the admission – and this was confirmed by representatives of the authorities in Xinjiang in several interviews with our research group in May 2023 – that problems sometimes arose in the early phase of the fight against terrorism, when the state first established necessary structures, and only in a second phase started to improve them. It was recognised that there were not enough experienced police personnel available in the first phase. Auxiliary personnel were hired. These lacked adequate training. As a consequence of this blatant lack of professionalism, there were attacks against inmates in the newly created administrative deradicalisation camps, training centres, etc. At the same time, it was emphasised that the Chinese authorities had noticed and remedied these shortcomings.²⁷ The solution to the problem is likely to be due to increasing professionalisation on the one hand and the establishment and further development of rule of law structures on the other – developments that are taking place both at the level of the nation state and at the level of the XUAR.

The introduction of new offences (Sections 120-1 to 120-6 cCL) in the area of the terrorist environment or preparatory acts and low-threshold terrorist acts has already been mentioned. However, the new provisions were also fraught with problems; supplementary legislation was introduced. For example, Section 120-4 cCL allowed a distinction to be made between activists and other persons. Nevertheless, it was too undifferentiated as a normative provision: How should the dividing line be drawn between those who force others to wear religious fundamentalist symbols or clothing and those who do so out of their own convic-

²⁷ When the actions of the official criminal justice authorities in the UK, for example, are considered in the light of past Northern Ireland terrorism, the abuses of poorly trained Chinese police personnel, while not justified, must at least be seen in context; see (1975).

tion? How should the state react to the signs of religious fundamentalism, which harbours the potential for terrorist activities, but which has not yet manifested itself in a terrorist manner? – In the face of such uncomfortable questions, Germany has in various cases refrained from returning former supporters of the ‘Islamic State’ from camps in Kurdish Syria to Germany. Also, since the arrival of the so-called Syrian returnees, the concept of the ‘Gefährder’ (a person that potentially poses a significant public security risk) and police response towards this kind of risk has been reconsidered – with all the constitutional problems that this entails.

In the Chinese situation, the SC NPC had initially attempted to introduce administrative fines through newly created *provisions in the Chinese Anti-Terrorism Law* 中华人民共和国反恐怖主义法 (= ATL; originally 27 Dec. 2015, amended on 27 April 2018) to introduce administrative fines and impose them in practice by the PSO in cases in which an offence related to terrorism has been fulfilled without reaching the threshold of social harm relevant under criminal law. Section 80 (3) ATL, for example, stipulates that

*[a]nyone who participates in any of the following acts without this constituting a crime may be detained for 10 to 15 days and fined up to RMB 10,000: [...] (3) forcing others to wear clothes or symbols glorifying terrorism or extremism in public.*²⁸

This provision is an important addition to Section 120-4 cCL, as it allows the actual, concrete implementation of Section 37 cCL, according to which low-threshold offences whose minor social harm does not justify criminal prosecution can be punished by administrative fines. Precisely because Section 80 (3) ATL determines the extent to which an administrative fine can sanction an otherwise criminal offence in the absence of criminal relevance, there is a legal basis – and therefore arbitrary sanctioning appears to be practically impossible.

²⁸ Chinese: 参与下列活动之一, 情节轻微, 尚不构成犯罪的, 由公安机关处十日以上十五日以下拘留, 可以并处一万元以下罚款: (三) 强制他人在公共场所穿戴宣扬恐怖主义、极端主义的服饰、标志的。

Nevertheless, this provision is problematic for the situation in Xinjiang: If the wearing of a burqa or similar full-body veil is considered a sign of inequality between men and women and thus a contradiction to the constitutional principle of equality in Art. 48 of the Constitution (1982) or a sign of religious intolerance, and if it is impossible to prove who made the wearer put aside the traditional clothes (which did not include a veil and certainly not a full veil) – how should one react? For this reason, Section 50 (5) of the *Implementing Regulation of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region on the Anti-Terrorism Law* 新疆维吾尔自治区实施《中华人民共和国反恐怖主义法》办法 (XUAR IRATL), further specifies the offence and seeks to concretise the definition and make it applicable to the situation in Xinjiang. Section 50 (5) XUAR IRATL thus formulates the offence in more detail:

*Anyone who carries out one of the following acts, where the circumstances are minor so that they do not constitute a crime, shall be sanctioned in accordance with Section 80 ATL: [...] (5) Using clothes and symbols in public to propagate terrorism and extremism, or forcing others to wear such clothes or symbols.*²⁹

Under Section 80 ATL, the offence is originally defined more narrowly than in XUAR IRATL. Instead, it contains specific provisions on the severity of sanctions and procedures:

Anyone who commits one of the acts listed below, where the circumstances are such that they do not constitute a crime, will be detained by the PSO for 10 to 15 days and may also be fined less than RMB 10,000:

- (1) propagating terrorism or extremism or calls to carry out terrorist acts;*
- (2) production, distribution and unlawful possession of objects that propagate terrorism or extremism;*
- (3) forcing others to wear clothes or symbols in public that propagate terrorism or extremism;*

²⁹ Chinese: 实施下列行为之一, 情节轻微, 尚不构成犯罪的, 依照《中华人民共和国反恐怖主义法》第八十条的规定处罚: (在公共场所利用服饰、标志等宣扬恐怖主义、极端主义或者强制他人穿着、佩戴恐怖主义、极端主义服饰, 标志的。

*(4) intellectual or material support or the provision of opportunities for the provision of information, financing, material, labour, technology or places for the propagation of terrorism or extremism.*³⁰

The comparison shows how the provision in Section 80 (3) ATL only provides for a sanction if others are compelled to wear clothing and symbols, while Section 50 (5) XUAR ATL can also apply a sanction in the event of just wearing such clothes without identifiable compulsion. Furthermore, it is clear that the sole authority to impose sanctions in the cases of the ATL and the XUAR IRATL lies with the PSO. As these are not criminal proceedings, there is no provision for supervision by the People's Procuratorate. The duration of sanctions to the freedom of movement is comparatively short at 10 to max. 15 days. Looking at the sanctionable offences, it is noticeable that these occur or have occurred on a significant scale in everyday life. If, therefore, facilities had to be set up to carry out the detention because the existing remand prisons at the People's Procuratorate or the detention cells at the PSO etc. were overloaded, then this lies in the logic of the normative formulations. If Islamist fundamentalism has made the wearing of the burqa the social norm within a few years, then the full-body veil was – conservatively estimated – worn by at least a quarter of Uyghur women at least sometimes. This in turn shows that in many cases no proceedings were initiated. Instead, the warning or the perception that wearing this garment now has unpleasant consequences was apparently enough to bring about a change in behaviour. At least in May 2023, the author did not notice a single woman wearing a burqa during his visit to Kashgar. The same applies to outward appearances such as long beards, which can also be seen as symbolic. In the case of the latter, the boundaries were obviously less strict.

³⁰ Chinese: 参与下列活动之一，情节轻微，尚不构成犯罪的，由公安机关处十日以上十五日以下拘留，可以并处一万元以下罚款：（一）宣扬恐怖主义、极端主义或者煽动实施恐怖活动、极端主义活动的；（二）制作、传播、非法持有宣扬恐怖主义、极端主义的物品的；（三）强制他人在公共场所穿戴宣扬恐怖主义、极端主义的服饰、标志的；（四）为宣扬恐怖主义、极端主义或者实施恐怖主义、极端主义活动提供信息、资金、物资、劳务技术、场所等支持、协助、便利的。

This reveals another characteristic of the legislation: the norm text only refers to clothing and symbols, while the actual meaning of those clothes and symbols is when they are put into a specific cultural context. So – when does a long beard become religious symbol, and when does it become an extremist religious symbol? Without actual cultural context, this question can't be answered. And it receives different answers in different parts of China, since China is a culturally and religiously diverse country. If this were not the case, there would be an immediate evasive movement, similar to what is happening in criminal drug law with designer drugs, for example. It is clear that, despite all efforts to concretise the criminal offences by setting supplementary standards, there is always a need for interpretation and thus further instructions before such a programme can be implemented comprehensively and stringently. – In its response to terrorism and religious extremism, which has proved to be a breeding ground for terrorist endeavours, the Chinese state is endeavouring to take account of the requirement for normative certainty without completely ruling out the possibility of interpreting actual types of action.

Back to the figures: If you compare photos from Xinjiang at the turn of the millennium and in the early 2010s, it becomes clear how the street scene had changed dramatically, even in large cities such as Kashgar. For example, unveiled women, who used to be clearly in the majority, were now rarely seen, even if most women did not wear a burqa or similar in public – an image that reflects socio-religious processes of change. Religiously influenced ideas of what a woman should and should not do changed in a short space of time and characterised everyday life. As this also affected the Uyghur city of Kashgar, it is clear that this change did not only affect people in less educated rural areas. The conviction that men and women were necessarily unequal and therefore had unequal rights and duties, that a Muslim should shy away from contact with anything impure and withdraw into ethnic segregation, that state institutions such as official marriage, public schools or the use of Mandarin should be rejected – and that all of this could be justified on

religious grounds – took root everywhere. This development is reflected in the sanction norms. As a result, there was widespread enforcement of the law with the obvious aim of changing everyday life.

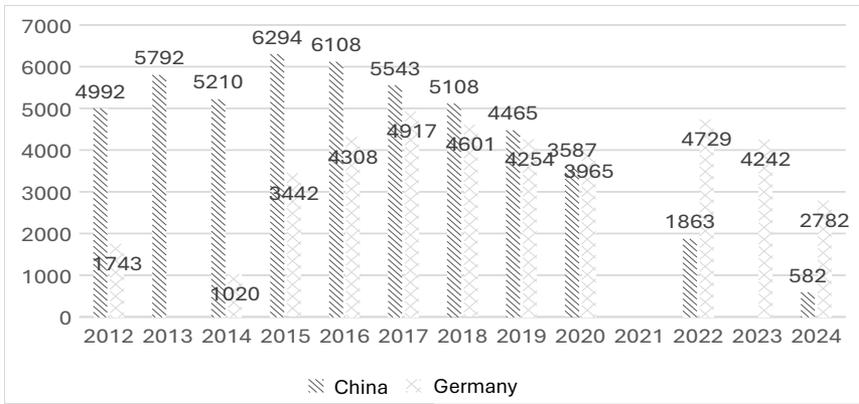
Nevertheless, the Chinese reaction to the increasing terror was not directed against Islam as such or against Uyghur culture as such. Mosques still characterise the cityscape of Kashgar; Uyghur music and other minority cultures, which had been suppressed in the meantime by fundamentalist Islamist circles (similar to the Taliban in Afghanistan), have once again become the norm in public. Anyone who goes out in the evening in Kashgar can easily recognise this.

The fact that Chinese policy in southern Xinjiang was successful is at least in part attributable to the fact that many of the victims of the terror were Uyghurs themselves. The confrontation over different religious beliefs was essentially also an intra-Uyghur one, not just one between the Uyghur and Han Chinese ethnic groups. One of the most striking (and saddest) examples is the murder of imams who opposed jihadist ideas. The most famous case is probably that of Juma Tayir, who, in his function as imam of the Id Kah Mosque, the largest mosque in Xinjiang, proclaimed *ex cathedra* that no one would enter the kingdom of heaven for being a murderer. Just one day later, on 30 July 2014, Juma Tayir was bloodily murdered on his way home from the mosque. It becomes clear how attempts were made to enforce the doctrine of jihad and other fundamentalist ideas, initially directed by Uyghurs against their own Uyghur compatriots and traditional Uyghur culture. The fact that terrorist means were also used was one reason why it was possible to generate considerable religious-fundamentalist pressure to conform in an astonishingly short space of time. As already mentioned, the wearing of the burqa is a striking example of this. In this specific context, the Chinese state reacted by labelling it a fundamentalist statement. Any woman who wears a burqa in public in Xinjiang can therefore be sentenced to administrative sanctions – without it having to be clear whether she is forced to do so by others (her husband? her neighbours? the imam? others?) or whether the choice of clothing was made of her own free will.

The goal of realising the rule of law – in Xinjiang

If we look at the GTI figures³¹ collected by the Australian Institute for Economics and Peace (Figure 1) against this backdrop, it becomes clear that anti-terrorism legislation was introduced at precisely the time when terrorist activities in China were at their peak. Of course, it must be assumed that many terrorist crimes were not reported to the media, so the actual figures are likely to be significantly higher than those statistically recorded in Australia. However, even according to these (incomplete) Australian figures, China was ranked 23rd in the GTI, placing it in the second-highest category of terrorist threat. From these figures – and the crimes behind them – it is clear that national and regional legislation against terrorism has arisen from specific causes and that the NPC, its Standing Committee and other legislative institutions, in particular the legislation of the People's Congress of the XUAR 新疆维吾尔自治区人民代表大会 (PC XUAR), have linked specific objectives with their legislation. (The decline in numbers since 2017 shows that the terrorism problem in China is now smaller than in Germany).

Figure 1: Global Terrorism Index comparing Germany and China³²



³¹ The GTI results from four indicators weighted 0-3 (number of terrorist incidents, number of deaths, number of injuries, and number of hostage-takings, each with a terrorist background) and a weighted five-year average. In 2023, the GTI ranged between 0.000 (no reported events) and 8.571 (Burkina Faso), and 88 countries had a GTI higher than 0.000.

³² *Global Terrorism Index*, Institute for Economics and Peace, <http://www.economicsandpeace.org/global-terrorism-index/> (access: 06/2024).

In view of these figures, it is logical that the Chinese state initially countered the religious fundamentalist terror in Xinjiang in the 2010s with the means of criminal law. Criminal law had been the most important social regulatory structure since 1979, especially in times when the state came under political or social pressure. However, as the sanctions of the ATL and the XUAR ATL clearly show, the state relied on the above-mentioned criminal law policy of simultaneous leniency and severity. The threshold for actual criminal law remained deliberately high, and the majority of cases were penalised with significantly milder administrative sanctions. Although there were extensive possibilities for sanctioning low-threshold fundamentalist religious acts, the judiciary and law enforcement authorities endeavoured to ensure that the fight against terror did not degenerate into a fight against the population. The state obviously operated in the knowledge that in this situation a social balance – within the Uyghur population and between the ethnic groups – would only be achieved if it only prosecuted a minority. In order to reduce the emphasis on repression in the response to terrorism and fundamentalism and focus more on prevention for society as a whole, the People's Congress of the XUAR passed the *Law on Deradicalisation* 新疆维吾尔自治区去极端化条例 (DRL XJ) on 29 March 2017. Section 3 DRL XJ initially contains a legal definition of radicalisation and extremism:

*Radicalisation within the meaning of this law is the dissemination of extreme religious ideas in words and deeds that reject or disrupt normal production and everyday life. [...] Extremism within the meaning of this law is the incitement of hatred, the fuelling of discrimination and the glorification of violence in words and deeds, which is achieved through a distortion of religious teachings or by other methods. [...] The Autonomous Region shall take measures to prevent, repress and eliminate extremism; it shall take measures to prevent and repress extremist offences.*³³

³³ Chinese: 本条例所称极端化,是指受极端主义影响,渲染偏激的宗教思想观念,排斥干预正常生产、生活的言论和行为。本条例所称极端主义,是指以歪曲宗教教义或者其他方法煽动仇恨、煽动歧视、鼓吹暴力等的主张和行为。自治区预防、遏制和消除极端化,预防和惩治极端主义犯罪活动。

This legal definition can be read as a target description and thus as an outline of what the XUAR is against: if clothes are a manifestation of discrimination against women, then they are a form of extremism. If sermons or religious writings are used to discriminate against a particular gender, religion/religious belief or ethnicity, then it is a form of radicalisation. Just because some clothes are discriminatory does not mean that clothes are generally prohibited; just because some forms of religious practice contribute to radicalisation does not mean that all forms of religious practice are prohibited.³⁴

In order not to criminalise people who are accused of having fundamentalist religious views (and therefore extremist or radical views within the meaning of Section 3 DRL XJ), but to bring them back into mainstream society, Section 14 DRL XJ calls for this:

*Deradicalisation must do the work of educational change well, bringing together individual and institutional education, bringing together legal education and social engagement, bringing together mental education, psychological care, social behaviour change and vocational skills, bringing together educational change and humanitarian care to reinforce educational change.*³⁵

This paragraph makes it very clear how, from a normative perspective, the training camps set up for this purpose are initially concerned with conveying positive content. Of course, there is a certain image of humanity behind this content; otherwise the declared goal of deradicalisation would not have been achievable due to a lack of target orientation. People who were in such a training centre were supposed to learn tolerance instead of discrimination, were supposed to discover not only their own opinions but also the rights of others, were supposed to learn manual and professional skills that opened up other career opportunities/prospects than the choice between subsistence farming and jihadist

³⁴ For this reason, it is significant when representatives of Muslim countries travel to Xinjiang and speak positively about the situation on the ground; see Liu/Fan 2023.

³⁵ Chinese: 去极端化应当做好教育转化工作, 实行个别教育与集中教育相结合, 法治教育与帮教活动相结合, 思想教育、心理辅导、行为矫正与技能培训相结合, 教育转化与人文关怀相结合, 增强教育转化成效。

warrior. In our discussions on site in Xinjiang, the educational objectives of the training centres were repeatedly identified as having four main focuses:

- Basic knowledge of the standard Chinese language;
- Basic knowledge of law;
- professional skills;
- intellectual deradicalisation.

These four objectives and training focal points were justified in dialogue with the

- Opportunity to participate in mainstream knowledge and culture (language);
- Formation of an awareness that, among other things, recognises the rights of those who think differently (law);
- Solving problems on the labour market (training);
- Formation of an awareness that critically differentiates religious convictions (= deradicalisation in the narrower sense).

As mentioned, representatives of the authorities admitted during interviews that there had been breaches of the law by prison guards, caregivers etc. in the course of the actual implementation of these objectives and measures. At the same time, they emphasised that these errors had been analysed in order to improve both the relevant standards and their concrete implementation. This appeared to be quite credible in the context of the section of reality that our research group was able to experience and view in Kashgar and Ürümqi.

Another aspect that was generally missing in the reports on training centres was that admission to these institutions (with a maximum stay of three months) was originally a condition of non-indictment, meaning that the procedure itself made it clear that both sides – the PSO and those admitted – were avoiding criminal proceedings. This is precisely why it was repeatedly emphasised in reports that the admissions were voluntary – there was no admission without the consent of those concerned. One might ask what the alternative would have been and whether, from the perspective of a Western observer, this can still be

described as genuine voluntariness. But for comparison, we may look at the victim-offender mediation in the German criminal process. For the accused, one advantage of taking part in mediation is the possibility of avoiding an actual criminal trial – and here, too, voluntariness is always emphasised. In other words, admission of wrongdoing is in both cases a precondition for avoiding criminal prosecution, and both criminal justice cultures claim this is a voluntary choice. It should also be noted that the time spent by those affected in training centres was considerably shorter than in earlier (administrative) education camps. It was limited to seven days to a maximum of three months. Incarceration was not to be understood as a severe sanction, but as an opportunity for reintegration into mainstream society.

This concept has outlived its usefulness with the normalisation of the situation in Xinjiang. The training centres, which were set up with the aim of deradicalisation and as a condition of non-indictment, have since been dissolved. Instead, vocational schools have been set up and expanded in order to provide better quality training in longer courses. As the pupils who attend these vocational schools receive a regular stipend, which allows them to pass on a residual amount to their families, most families recognise that taking part in education will increase family income – not in the future but right now. Therefore, parents benefit from the education of their children beginning on day one. It is therefore no longer necessary to recruit pupils for these institutions; young people sign up voluntarily.

4. Positioning

This article has attempted to trace the legal management of terrorism in Xinjiang since the 2010s. Several phenomena stand out. First, contrary to the image often suggested in Western articles, there is no single form of “camp”, but rather a multitude of different institutions, ranging from criminal law re-education camps to criminal law deradicalisation camps (with an annual assessment of the risk of a repeat offence), administra-

tive deradicalisation camps (with a maximum detention period of up to 15 days) and training centres (with a maximum duration of three months) through to specialist schools (with courses lasting at least one year). In the case of the discontinuity in development – away from training centres and towards specialist schools – we can also see that the function has changed. While there were initially training centres that focused on deradicalisation aspects³⁶, there are now specialist schools that focus on vocational training.

Second, it becomes clear how the increasing juridification has led to two consequences: On one hand, the possibility of arbitrariness on the part of state agencies in the fight against terrorism has been significantly restricted, thus implementing constitutional concepts such as the requirement of normative certainty in substantive law. On the other hand, the perception of the accused changes from being just an administered something to being a legal subject, who can independently exercise procedural rights. This phenomenon can be seen, for example, in the fact that people who are suspected of terrorist activities or of radicalised behaviour can speak out about these accusations and not “just disappear” into a camp. As part of their statement, they can independently choose whether they wish to defend themselves against accusations in a judicial procedure or whether they confess mistakes and agree to certain conditions as a prerequisite for not being charged.

Third, the legislative development shows furthermore how the focus of Chinese anti-terrorism measures in Xinjiang has shifted from repression towards prevention. While the catchphrase *peace through justice* has repeatedly been used in the West, in the case of Xinjiang it could be changed to *peace through social development*. The fact that this policy can take hold and doesn't result in mere wishful thinking is partly due

³⁶ Cf. the reports of those affected in the CCTV report from 30.12.2018, which appear credible precisely because the aim of the reporting was not to deny the existence of these training centres or to dispute the educational objective (reflection as part of the deradicalisation strategy and not just a focus on vocational training); <http://m.news.cctv.com/2018/12/30/ARTIp3BCxmNChS7k0uAgR181230.shtml>. (access: 07/ 2024).

to the detailed requirements in Chapter IV DRL XUAR, where 15 different authorities are listed in order to give each of them specific tasks within their area of competence in the context of preventing radicalisation and terrorism.

Two further aspects of the development in Xinjiang are important because, although they are legally relevant in connection with the accusation of genocide against the Uyghurs, they are difficult to capture normatively through the legal situation. The first aspect is the question of whether China is assimilating the Uyghur population in Xinjiang and thus (possibly indirectly) provoking or planning the loss of Uyghur culture. That would be the question of a so-called “cultural genocide”, if such a crime can be raised at all in the context of assimilation. It should be noted that this alleged cultural genocide is clearly not taking place. If Uyghur is taught as a subject in schools up to the 8th grade and if 99 per cent of Uyghurs surveyed declare that they actually speak the Uyghur language³⁷, then there is no evidence of assimilation that would lead to a loss of Uyghur culture. Rather, one sees an attempt at integration, i.e. creating the opportunity to participate in society as a whole without losing one’s own culture. If you compare how few members of the First Nations speak their own language in the USA or Australia, for example, then China has a much smaller problem here than some Anglo-Saxon countries.³⁸

The second aspect to be mentioned here focuses on population development. As the increase in the Uyghur population is faster than that of Han Chinese residents in Xinjiang (including those who immigrate), there is no trace of a large-scale, state-led genocide at this level either. The very fact of a long-term increase in population, which shows no statistical breaks, should rule out a targeted attempt at physical extermination and thus genocide in the true sense of the word.³⁹

³⁷ See the study by Li/You 2024.

³⁸ For an analysis of the situation in the USA, where all (!) indigenous languages are considered to be under threat because the socialisation of young people takes place in English, see e.g. McCarty 2010, 47-65.

³⁹ Cf. the detailed contribution by Shichor in this volume.

Within the development from a state governed by law to a state governed by the rule of law, it can be seen how China is proving to be a paternalistic state in its deradicalisation programmes – with precise ideas about which actions and which patterns of thought are desirable and which are sanctioned. This may seem strange in German society, partly because the (West) German judiciary has always endeavoured to avoid any discussion of the content of, for example, the RAF: Even if they were labelled as terrorists, it was always the level of action – serious crimes against life and limb, hostage-taking, robbery, etc. – that determined whether someone was convicted. Section 129a I of the German Criminal Code (gCL) only refers to this level of action to this very day. In the case of the Baader-Meinhof etc., in this way, a debate about the ideological positions of the extreme left was avoided in the courtroom. The question of motivation was only introduced into the law later and for less serious offences following the catalogue in Section 129a II gCL. A more far-reaching rethink took place when dealing with Islamist fundamentalism and the resulting terrorist threat. Since then, the state and society have had to consider how they can positively define values in order to demand them from others. It is therefore no wonder that the subject of Islamic studies has been introduced and that there are calls for a German imam training programme. An important aim of these demands is to ensure the compatibility of Muslim preaching with the values of the German constitution. From this perspective, the German position is not so far removed from the Chinese one.

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Barry Sautman

Xinjiang: Bloodless Genocide or Blood Libel?

I. Bloodless Genocide: Unprecedented or Non-Existent?

When an unusual occurrence is thought to foretell an untoward event, analysts may ask whether the occurrence is unprecedented or non-existent. In 2023, many Western pundits said infrastructural overspending/overbuilding had created an incipient implosion of China's economy. A Hong Kong financial services firm pointed out however that markets were not signaling disaster. Unlike in all other major crises globally, the share price performance of Chinese banks had grown over the past 12 months, outperforming US banks by double digits. Chinese state bonds had bettered US Treasuries by 30% in the past three years. The analyst asked what such indicators mean for a predicted emerging market systemic financial crisis: unprecedented or non-existent? He favored "non-existent."¹

The same can be said about the asserted "Uyghur genocide" in Xinjiang. There has never been a genocide without massive killing, so a "bloodless genocide" would be unprecedented. It is more likely, however, to be non-existent: there have been no mass killings in Xinjiang and no measures that, in the absence of largescale bloodletting, sufficiently indicate an intent to destroy an ethnic group, the specific intent (*dolus specialis*) of the crime that must be proved to meet the Genocide Convention's definition.²

In not being bloodless, genocide resembles the crime against humanity of ethnic cleansing. A specialist has averred that

¹ Louis-Vincent Gave, "Trading is Not Signaling Doom and Gloom Over China's Economic Performance," *Financial Times* (FT), Aug. 29, 2023.

² *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, Art. II, 1948, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-prevention-and-punishment-crime-genocide (access: 02/2024).

*the goal of [genocide] is extermination: the complete annihilation of an ethnic, national, or racial group. It contains both a physical element (acts such as murder) and a mental element (those acts are undertaken to destroy, in whole or in part, the said group). Ethnic cleansing involves population expulsions, sometimes accompanied by murder, but its aim is consolidation of power over territory, not the destruction of a complete people.*³

A UN Commission of Experts set up after Yugoslavia's 1990s ethnic cleansings, called ethnic cleansing "a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas."⁴ Ethnic cleansing, as a whole process, includes mass murder. Spain's 1492 expulsion sought to rid it of practicing Jews, but any who did not leave could be executed and the Inquisition killed 13,000 converted Jews accused of continuing to practice Judaism.⁵ The Nazi "Generalplan Ost" sought to create "Lebensraum" by removing 30-40m people from a conquered Soviet Union. It was to be accompanied by starving to death 20-30m people.⁶

An example of a claimed "non-murderous" process to eliminate a people concerns the Stolen Generation of 20,000-25,000 "mixed-race" Australian children removed from parents in 1900-1970. A scholar has argued that removal "did not involve killing, but its ultimate objective was the same as Hitler's for the Jews, that at the end of the process the target group would have disappeared from the face of the earth."⁷ That

³ Carrie Booth Walling. "The History and Politics of Ethnic Cleansing," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 4:3-4 (2000), 47-66.

⁴ "Final Report of the Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992)," UN Doc. S/1994/674 (May 27, 1994)

⁵ "Ottoman Lands Provided Safe Haven for Sephardic Jews Expelled from Spain", *Ana-dolu Agency*, Feb. 8, 2022, www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/ottoman-lands-provided-safe-haven-for-sephardic-jews-expelled-from-spain/2651488 (access: 02/2024).

⁶ Norman Naimark, "The Nazis and the Slavs – Poles and Soviet Prisoners of War," in Ben Kiernan et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge World History of Genocide*, Vol. 3, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 358-378.

⁷ Paul Bartrop, "The Holocaust, the Aborigines, and the Bureaucracy of Destruction: An Australian Dimension of Genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research (JGR)* 3:1 (2001), 75-87; Robert Manne, "In Denial: The Stolen Generations and the Right,"

view is contested, however. Many removals were for the same reasons as white children were removed – absolute poverty and parental neglect – and many were not permanent. Only “half-caste,” indigenous/white, children and not “full-blooded” Aborigines were affected and many more girls than boys were removed.⁸

Australian forcible transfers thus differed from those in North America, where thousands of removed indigenous children were killed or died. That may be why some scholars argue that Australia’s removals were a “cultural genocide”⁹ or “non-violent genocide,” not recognized as a genocidal act by the Genocide Convention, International Law Commission or International Criminal Court.¹⁰ The Stolen Generation, like indigenous children removed in North America, were however a follow-up to a huge reduction of 19th Century native populations by mass killings and epidemics. Some 20,000 Australian indigenes were directly massacred, mainly by settlers. They were 300,000-1million in 1788, when whites first came to Australia, but by 1920, just 70,000 “full-bloods” and “half-castes” remained. The non-murderous removal of children was thus connected to a process of eliminating aboriginals by killings and other means and expecting their extinction,¹¹ a process and expectation that does not exist in Xinjiang.

in Robert Manne, *Left Right Left: Political Essays 1977-2005*, Melbourne: Black, 2001, 217-305.

⁸ Keith Windshuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, Vol. 3: *The Stolen Generations*, Sydney: Macleay Press, 2009.

⁹ Robert van Krieken, “Rethinking Cultural Genocide: Indigenous Child Removal and Settler-Colonial State-Formation,” *Oceania* 75 (2004), 125-151.

¹⁰ Vahakn Dadrian, “A Typology of Genocide,” *International Review of Modern Sociology* (1975), 201-212; William Schabas, *Genocide in International Law: The Crime of Crimes*, 2d ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 220.

¹¹ Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia*, Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1982, 122; Henry Reynolds, *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers, and Land*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987, 53.

Real-world history does not however keep some commentators from implying that genocides exist based solely on Convention Article II(e) – forcible transfer of children with the intent to destroy a protected group as such.¹² Arguing that evictions of Gaels in Scotland’s Highland Clearances (1750-1860) were a genocide, a participant said that “removing children from their parents, and bringing them up with a different language, stories, taught history, so even if 30 years later they track down their original community they cannot even talk to them” was in itself a genocide, because “it’s entirely possible to commit a genocide without killing anyone.”¹³ Rafael Lemkin, the Polish Jewish lawyer who created the concept of genocide, indicated however that “forced assimilation by moderate coercion,” involving acts designed to suppress a group’s language, was not a genocidal act.¹⁴ Genocide scholar William Schabas has explained that transfer of children “is only genocide if it can be established beyond a reasonable doubt that a transfer was conducted with the intent to destroy a group physically and to the exclusion of any other reasonable explanation.”¹⁵ Some Clearances were violent, but an intent to destroy the Highlanders as such has not been shown and, ironically, emigrated Highlanders perpetrated Australia’s largest massacre of aborigines.¹⁶ There were also other reasonable explanations for the transfers of children, which in fact occurred throughout Britain.¹⁷

¹² Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina vs. Serbia and Montenegro), [Bosnia v. Serbia]. Feb. 26, 2007, para. 186, www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/91/091-20070226-JUD-01-00-EN.pdf (access: 02/2024).

¹³ Anagach, in “On Myths of Genocide,” *Bella Caledonia*, February 21, 2018, <https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2018/02/21/on-myths-of-genocide/> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁴ Kurt Mundorff, “Other People’s Children: a Textual and Contextual Interpretation of the Genocide Convention, Article 2(e),” *Harvard International Law Journal* 50:1 (2009), 61-127 (122).

¹⁵ “What Constitutes Genocide,” *DW*, Mar. 1, 2023.

¹⁶ Don Watson, *Caledonia Australis: Scottish Highlanders on the Frontier of Australia*. Sydney: Collins, 1984), 165-170.

¹⁷ Gordon Lynch, *Remembering Child Migration: Faith, Nation-Building, and the Wounds of Charity*, London: Bloomsbury, 2016.

We argue that the non-existence of bloodless genocides includes the one the US government and several Western parliaments say is ongoing in Xinjiang, despite its proponents recognizing that there have not been mass killings or mass unnatural deaths.¹⁸ That absence may be why, in 2021, when the US government first made its accusation, an official “said the best rationale for the genocide label was the use of forced sterilizations, birth control and family separations to destroy Uighur identity.”¹⁹ A 2022 European Parliament resolution on Xinjiang also said nothing about killings, but copied the US on Uyghur birth limitations and family separations.²⁰

UK politicians and the World Uyghur Congress (WUC), which represents 50-plus émigré groups,²¹ convened a non-judicial “Uyghur Tribunal” (UT) in 2021, composed solely of UK residents. Its performance shows – as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) observes – that “partisan” reports by independent bodies that are “not the “product of a careful court or court-like process lack value.”²² An Israeli Xinjiang specialist has noted that the WUC’s “main political gravity center is in Washington, gathering political momentum primarily because of the growing Sino-American rivalry, smartly exploited by the WUC” and that “wholesale Western ‘support’” for the Uyghur émigré cause is “more as a part of the orchestrated ‘China bashing’ campaign” than

¹⁸ Gerald Roche and James Leibold, “State Racism and Surveillance in Xinjiang (People’s Republic of China),” *Political Quarterly* 93:3 (2022), 442-450; Adrian Zenz, “VOC Testifies to US Congress on Beijing’s Genocide in Xinjiang,” VOC, Mar. 24, 2023, <http://victimsofcommunism.org/voc-testifies-to-us-congress-on-beijings-genocide-in-xinjiang/> (accessed 02/2024).

¹⁹ Edward Wong and Chris Buckley, “U.S. Says China’s Repression of Uighurs Is ‘Genocide’,” *New York Times* (NYT), Jan. 19, 2021.

²⁰ “European Parliament Resolution on the Human Rights Situation in Xinjiang, Including the Xinjiang Police Files,” *European Parliament*, June 8, 2022, www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-9-2022-0310_EN.html (access: 02/ 2024).

²¹ Christopher Cunningham, *Diasporas, Ethnic Conflicts and Traumatic Events*, PhD diss., Northeastern University, 2013, 229, <http://repository.library.northeastern.edu> (access: 02/2024).

²² *Bosnia v. Serbia*, para. 227.

concern for human rights.²³ The UT had no testimony interrogating the genocide claim and no cross-examination of its proponents. Tellingly, the UT asked the US and UK governments for evidence of Xinjiang genocide but received none. The UT found “no evidence of organized mass killings” and conceded that “its genocide determination based on birth control would be at odds with popular understandings of the word,” yet it failed to note that other indicia of genocide were also absent; for example, genocides have mass killings and mass graves, but also mass flight; yet, no panicked refugee mass has fled Xinjiang.²⁴

Some Western scholars however insist genocide is other than what the Genocide Convention says it is.²⁵ James Leibold, a Xinjiang specialist at the Anglosphere governments-funded Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), recognizes that “direct killing remains, as far as we know, relatively rare in Xinjiang.” He asserts however that the Chinese state is engaged in “indirect annihilation [of Uyghurs]” by “slowly and persistently scraping away elements of their identity, memory and self.”²⁶ Even if that were true however, it would not be a crime. States have for centuries been “scraping away” ethnic identity to forge a sense of national identity; thus, James Madison or Alexander Hamilton wrote in Federalist No. 62 (1788) that disparate Americans should be made a “people thoroughly incorporated into one nation.”²⁷

²³ Yitzhak Shichor, “Elephant in the China Shop: the Uyghur Pyrrhic Victory,” *Sociology of Islam* (2023), 1-20.

²⁴ Jaq James, “The Uyghur Tribunal: People’s Justice or Show Trial?,” *Co-West-Pro, Working Paper* 3/2022, www.cowestpro.co/papers.html (accessed 02/2024).

²⁵ See, e.g., Benjamin Meiches, *The Politics of Annihilation: A Genealogy of Genocide*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019.

²⁶ Gerald Roche and James Leibold, “State Racism and Surveillance in Xinjiang (People’s Republic of China),” *Political Quarterly* 93:3 (2022), 442-450.

²⁷ Publius, “Federalist Paper No. 62,” 1788, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed62.asp (access: 02/2024).

Adrian Zenz, a German researcher at the US's Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation (VOC), is the Uyghur genocide claim's leading proponent.²⁸ The VOC's predecessor was set up by Eastern European Nazi collaborators brought to the US after World War II, led by Yaroslav Stetsko. In the early 1940s, he was second in command of Stefan Bandera's Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN-B), which fought for the Nazis and participated in the Holocaust. Stetsko headed the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations from 1946 to 1986 and was received by the US Congress and Reagan White House in 1983 as the "last premier of a free Ukraine."²⁹ The VOC was authorized by a unanimous act of Congress. Its tally of 100 million "victims" includes all Nazi soldiers and collaborators who died in World War II.³⁰

The BBC commissioned Zenz to produce a study of the "disappearance" of Uyghurs. Zenz "initially turned it down, saying it was 'too hard, too little evidence,'"³¹ but then concluded that "it's not about eliminating [Uyghurs]. It's about bringing them under control."³² In 2023

²⁸ Adrian Zenz, "Letter to Canterbury University," Oct. 5, 2020, <https://adrianzenz.medium.com/letter-to-canterbury-university-783fbfea13e6> (access: 02/2024).

²⁹ Grzegorz Rossolinski, *Stepan Bandera: The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist: Fascism, Genocide, and Cult*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, 552.

³⁰ Kristen Ghodsee, "Tale of 'Two Totalitarianisms': The Crisis of Capitalism and the Historical Memory of Communism," *History of the Present* 4:2 (2014), 115-142; Kristen Ghodsee and Scott Sehon, "Anti-Anti-Communism," *Aeon*, Mar. 22, 2018, <https://aeon.co/essays/the-merits-of-taking-an-anti-anti-communism-stance> (access: 02/2024); "Unveiling True Nature of Victims of Communism," *The International*, Aug. 4, 2021, <http://www.internationalmagz.com/articles/unveiling-true-nature-of-victims-of-communism> (access: 02/2024); Richard Sanders, "'Captive Nations': From Nazi Trope and CIA Meme to Cold-War Trump Card," *Coalition to Oppose the Arms Trade, Press for Conversion*, Issue 70, Spring, 2021, http://coat.ncf.ca/P4C/70/70_18-20.pdf (access: 02/2024); Billie Anania, "Red Scared," *Baffler*, Mar. 15, 2023, <http://thebaffler.com/latest/red-scared-anania> (access: 02/2024)

³¹ Phill Hynes, "Most Heinous Crime on Flimsiest of Evidence," Jan. 6, 2022, <http://fridayeveryday.com/most-heinous-of-crimes-on-flimsiest-of-evidence> (access: 02/2024).

³² John Ibbitson, "China Has Lost All Moral Authority as Data Suggests Suppression of Uyghur Births," *Globe and Mail*, June 10, 2021 (access: 02/2024).

however, he still spoke of a Xinjiang “slow genocide,” through reducing Uyghur population densities.³³ The phrasing is familiar: “slow genocide,”³⁴ “slow motion genocide,”³⁵ and genocide by “slow death”³⁶ are not only used by émigrés in appeals for support, because mass killings are absent.³⁷ US white racists use the same phrasing; thus, ex-Congress member Steve King (R-IA) and neo-Nazi leader Richard Spencer want the US to become an ethno-state to stop a fantasized “slow motion genocide” of whites through immigration and abortion.³⁸

American University genocide specialist Jeffrey Bachman textually analyzed data from 393 scholarly articles on incidences of genocide and found a “hegemonic understanding of genocide” that prioritizes physical destruction of a population.³⁹ International law scholars understand that: “The touchstone of genocide is committing acts of a large scale,

³³ Jasmin Chua, “What Evidence Shows About China and Uyghur Forced Labor,” *Sourcing Journal*, May 19, 2023.

³⁴ Adrian Zenz and Erin Rosenberg, “Beijing Plans a Slow Genocide in Xinjiang,” *Foreign Policy*, June 8, 2021, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2021/06/08/genocide-population-xinjiang-uyghurs/> (access: 02/2024).

³⁵ Harry de Quetteville, “China is Harvesting Hair and Organs from the Uyghurs – it’s a Slow-Motion Genocide,” *Telegraph*, May 22, 2022 (Nury Turkel, Uyghur Human Rights Project head).

³⁶ Beth van Schaak, “Genocide Against the Uyghurs: Legal Grounds for the United States’ Bipartisan Genocide Determination,” *Just Security*, Jan. 27, 2021, ustsecurity.org/74388/genocide-against-the-uyghurs-legal-grounds-for-the-united-states-bipartisan-genocide-determination/ (access: 02/2024); van Schaak is a former State Department official.

³⁷ “Exiled Leader Tells US Congress Tibet Faces ‘Slow Death’ Under China,” *Reuters*, Mar. 29, 2023.

³⁸ “Rep. Steve King Goes Full White Nationalist in Interview with Austrian Site,” *Huffpost*, Oct. 25, 2018, http://www.huffpost.com/entry/iowa-rep-steve-king-austria-whitenationalist_n_5bca4851e4b17eec6001 (access: 02/2024); “Richard Spencer: the Founder of Alt-Right Presents Racism in a Chic New Outfit,” *European Center for Populism Studies*, June 28, 2021, www.populismstudies.org/richard-spencer-the-founder-of-alt-right-presents-racism-in-a-chic-new-outfit/ (access: 02/2024).

³⁹ Jeffrey Bachman, “Cases Studied in Genocide Studies and Prevention and Journal of Genocide Research and Implications for the Field of Genocide Studies,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention (GSP)* 14:1 (2020), 2–20.

demonstrable as aiming for the physical destruction of another group, as such.”⁴⁰ – An Australian specialist has written that

*the scale of destruction is a relevant factor in establishing intent. In some cases, such as in Rwanda, evidence of genocidal intent is manifest in the number of killings. Death on such a scale simply could not occur unless it was done pursuant to an overarching plan aimed at ending the existence of the group.*⁴¹

No intent or plan to destroy Uyghurs, quickly or slowly, has ever been implied in China. Xinjiang bloodless genocide is thus fabulism – placing speculative or fantastical elements into an everyday setting – and a political stratagem used against China as a perceived adversary.

II. Idiosyncrasies of Bloodless Genocide

The International Criminal Tribunal on Yugoslavia (ICTY) regards as “well established that where a conviction for genocide relies on the intent to destroy a protected group ‘in part,’ the part must be a substantial part of that group.”⁴² The ICJ has put it that “it is difficult to establish such intent based on isolated acts.”⁴³ No substantial part of Uyghurs has been killed, so the UT ventured that the population “in future generations will be smaller than it would have been without [birth limitation] policies. This will result in a partial destruction of the Uyghurs.”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Joel Slawotsky, “Is China Guilty of Committing Genocide in Xinjiang?,” *Chinese Journal of International Law* (CJIL) 20:3 (2021), 625-635.

⁴¹ Catherine Renshaw, “Numbers Game: Substantiality and the Definition of Genocide,” *JGR* 25:2 (2023), 195-215.

⁴² *Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstic* (Appeals Judgment), 19 Apr., 2004, para. 8-9.

⁴³ *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Croatia v. Serbia)*, *ICJ Reports* 2015, 3, para. 139.

⁴⁴ Uyghur Tribunal judgment, para. 177, <http://uyghurtribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Uyghur-Tribunal-Judgment-9th-Dec-21.pdf> (access: 02/2024).

An insistent UK genocide claimant endorses that view,⁴⁵ but it misconstrues the role of a genocidal act, included as Convention Art. II(d) (“prevention of births”) to hold responsible those who proposed or carried out forced sterilizations as part of a much larger, murderous, genocide. By the UT’s logic, China committed auto-genocide intended to destroy the Chinese nation when it applied birth limits to all ethnic groups – albeit much more to Han than Uyghurs before 2017.

The claim about Xinjiang is the first major assertion of “bloodless genocide” in China since Mao Zedong, in 1952, said proposed birth control would amount to that.⁴⁶ In 1953, however, China issued a “Regulation of Contraception and Induced Abortion” and in the mid-1950s, Chinese authorities initiated a family planning campaign aimed at reducing population growth.⁴⁷ Mao abandoned his bloodless genocide view by 1957,⁴⁸ but remained pro-natalist in holding that population growth can be useful where production is increasing, a position most developing countries adopted at the UN’s 1974 population conference.⁴⁹

Black nationalist leaders of the 1970s also said birth control was intended to destroy African Americans. In 1981 however, a key leader stated that equating birth control with genocide is “an exaggerated, even paranoid, reaction.”⁵⁰ By 2013, 94% of polled African Americans agreed that “publicly-funded health services should include birth control for low-income women.”⁵¹

⁴⁵ Joanne Smith Finley, “Tabula Rasa: Han Settler Colonialism and Frontier Genocide in ‘Re-Educated’ Xinjiang,” *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 12:2 (2022), 341-356.

⁴⁶ Steven Mosher, *Broken Earth: Rural Chinese*, New York: Macmillan, 1983, 231.

⁴⁷ Frederick Carlsson et al., “Long-run Effects of Family Policies: An Experimental Study of the Chinese One-child Policy.” *Univ. of Gothenburg*, 2018, http://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/handle/2077/56461/gupea_2077_56461_1.pdf (access: 02/2024).

⁴⁸ Martin Whyte, et al., “Challenging Myths About China’s One Child Policy,” *China Journal* 74 (2015), 144-159.

⁴⁹ Michele Bruni, *China, the Belt and Road Initiative and the Century of Migration*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022, 264.

⁵⁰ Angela Davis, *Women, Race, Class*, New York: Random House, 2011 [1981], 203.

⁵¹ “Our Bodies, Our Lives, Our Voices,” in *Our Voices: National Black Women’s Reproductive Agenda*, Washington 2017, 27, http://blackrj.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/FINAL-InOurVoices_Report_final.pdf (access: 02/2024).

The president of the US's Global Justice Center and a German historian have averred that a genocide is possible without killing anyone,⁵² but bloodless genocide, like efforts to hold states responsible for attempted genocides, has been only a "theoretical possibility."⁵³ Any of the five listed Convention genocidal acts can possibly amount to a genocide, but "the actual conception of genocide" is, as Lemkin put it, "a coordinated plan of action" with a range of genocidal acts,⁵⁴ overwhelmingly deaths by killing, starvation, and medical neglect. Other genocidal acts, including prevention of births and forced transfers of children have not created genocides *by themselves*. An inference of a genocide from these acts alone is only theoretical, in the same sense that there is "the possibility of a lone-wolf genocidaire without an existing policy to act upon, but such a possibility does not appear to have been realized in fact."⁵⁵

All manner of phenomena are nevertheless now idiosyncratically called bloodless genocide. A Kurdish writer said of ISIS's attacks on Iraq's Yazidis that "The physical genocide may be over, but the women are conscious of a 'white' or bloodless genocide, as EU governments – especially Germany – try to lure Yazidi women abroad, uprooting them from their sacred homes and instrumentalizing them for their own agendas."⁵⁶

⁵² Jennifer Venis, "Genocide: China's Reported Persecution of Uighurs Exposes States' Legal Obligations Under International Conventions," *International Bar Association*, July 29, 2020, www.ibanet.org/article/bea0c9b8-08d6-42cf-8818-301d35b1bd3e (access: 02/2024); Klaus Bachmann, "How to Avoid the Genocide Trap: Genocide as a Concept in Historiography and Social Science," *AREI*, Aug. 21, 2022, <http://www.arei-journal.pl/articles/display/23> (access: 02/2024).

⁵³ Marko Milanovic, "State Responsibility for Genocide," *European Journal of International Law* 17:3 (2006), 556-604.

⁵⁴ Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, Washington: Carnegie Endowment, 1944, 79-80.

⁵⁵ Sienho Yee, "Grouphood Promotion v. Grouphood Destruction: China's Regional Ethnic Autonomy as Antithesis to Genocidal Intent," *CJIL* 22:4 (2023), 823-849.

⁵⁶ Dilar Dirik, "From Genocide to Resistance: Yazidi Women Fight Back," *ROAR*, Aug. 23, 2015, <https://roarmag.org/essays/yazidi-women-genocide-resistance> (access: 02/2024).

A Native American activist wrote that indigenous tribes' disenrollment of their own members is bloodless genocide.⁵⁷ A Hong Kong activist asserted that "to assimilate Hong Kongers into the Chinese fold" is bloodless genocide and ethnic cleansing.⁵⁸ The 2,000 descendants of the 1789 "Mutiny on the Bounty" sailors, settled on Australia's Norfolk Island, claim their lack of self-governance and birthing facilities is bloodless genocide.⁵⁹ The US "equine welfare community" even called a state plan of birth control and relocation of wild horses a bloodless genocide.⁶⁰

III. Bloodless Genocide as White Racism

"Bloodless genocide" is often racialized. Two decades before Lemkin created the term "genocide" in the 1930s, Austrian writer Anton Henssenbach posited that population decline, due to foreign-influenced immorality, was a "bloodless" *volkermord* worse than World War I's slaughter.⁶¹ Late 19th and early 20th century writers – the US's Charles Pearson and Madison Grant, France's Maurice Barres, Germany's Paul de Lagarde, and Austria's Guido von List – claimed there was bloodless white genocide, as did Nazis in the 1930s.⁶²

⁵⁷ Anonymous, "Tribal Disenrollment is Bloodless Genocide," *Original Pechanga Blog*, Dec. 22, 2014, <http://www.originalpechanga.com/2010/09/pechangas-tribal-disenrollments-is.html> (access: 02/2024).

⁵⁸ Kael'thas Kamiya, "War of Words: What's in a Name?," *Passion Times*, Jan. 30, 2018, www.passiontimes.hk/article/01-30-2018/43880 (access: 02/2024).

⁵⁹ Hayden Johnson, "Echoes of Mutiny on the Bounty in Fight for Sovereignty," *Courier Mail*, June 18, 2022.

⁶⁰ "Wild Horse Plans 'Bloodless Genocide,'" *horsetalk.co.nz*, Nov. 17, 2009, <http://www.horsetalk.co.nz/news/2009/11/114.shtml> (access: 02/2024).

⁶¹ Paul Horntrich, "Science, Sin, and Sexuality in Roman-Catholic Discourses in the German-Speaking Area, 1870s to 1930s," *Sexuality and Culture* 24 (2020), 2137-2160.

⁶² Jason Wilson and Aaron Flanagan, "The Racist 'Great Replacement' Theory Explained," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, May 17, 2022, www.splcenter.org/hate-watch/2022/05/17/racist-great-replacement-conspiracy-theory-explained (access: 02/2024).

US President Theodore Roosevelt sought restricted immigration to prevent “race suicide” and mid-20th Century US neo-Nazis said contraception was intended to curb only white births.⁶³

In the 1960s, Martiniquais physician and anti-colonial activist Franz Fanon used “bloodless genocide” as a metaphor. Deconstructing racialized subjectivities, he termed the marginalization of the colonized a “bloodless genocide which consisted in the setting aside of a half-billion men.”⁶⁴ Fanon’s usage did not, however, “mean devoid of bloodshed, but rather that colonialism’s greatest atrocity was its ‘systematic and massive abuses’ [...] against the psyche of Africa’s peoples, producing the inferiority complex to which both Fanon and [Martiniquais poet and activist Aimé] Césaire had referred.”⁶⁵ Césaire spoke metaphorically about a bloodless “genocide by substitution,” with natives of the French “overseas departments” of Martinique and Guadeloupe migrating to France, while natives of France came to these colonies as officials.⁶⁶

Ironically, a half century later, racists made literal Fanon and Césaire’s anti-racist metaphors. British National Party head Nick Griffin advocated “repatriating” non-white Britons, saying their presence was a “bloodless genocide” that denied the English their own identity.⁶⁷ French author Renaud Camus proclaimed the “Great Replacement Theory” in 2010, taking up the metaphor of “genocide by substitution” in claiming

02/2024); Friedrich Burgdorfer, *Sterben die weissen Volker: die Zukunft der weissen und farbigen Volker im Licht der biologischen Statisti*, G.D.W. Callwey, 1934.

⁶³ Rosa Schwartzburg, “No, There Isn’t a White Genocide,” *The Wire*, Sept. 10, 2019, <https://thewire.in/world/no-there-isnt-a-white-genocide> (access: 02/2024).

⁶⁴ Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* New York: Grove Press, 2004 [1961], 238.

⁶⁵ Lauren van der Rede, *The Post-Genocidal Condition: Ghosts of Genocide, Genocidal Violence, and Representation*, PhD diss., University of the Western Cape, 2018, 235.

⁶⁶ Claudine E. David, *Memory, Violence, and Detours: Strategies of Resistance to Epidermal Invisibility within the French Republic*, PhD diss., City University of New York, 2023, 7.

⁶⁷ Matthew Taylor, “Archbishop Condemns BNP Leader’s ‘Bloodless Genocide’ Claim,” *Guardian*, Apr. 23, 2009.

that non-whites are displacing European whites.⁶⁸ Camus built on a scenario of immigrants threatening a bloodless white genocide portrayed in a 1970s novel by Jean Raspail, winner of the Académie Française's Grand Prix du Roman and Grand Prix de Littérature; it sold 500,000 copies and was later promoted by Trump officials Steve Bannon and Stephen Miller.⁶⁹ Miller and Bannon were in turn praised by Richard Spencer⁷⁰ and Miller sought to use missiles against migrant ships headed to the US.⁷¹

US racists have referred to non-white immigration as a “non-violent genocide” and have said it is like what China does in Tibet.⁷² Trump stated in 2023 that immigrants from Africa, Asia and South America were “poisoning the blood” or “destroying the blood” of the US⁷³ and, in 2024, he claimed China is paying military age men to migrate illegally to the US, possibly to stage a terrorist attack.⁷⁴ In France, ultra-rightist politician Eric Zemmour stated in 2023 that there was an ongoing “Francocide” being waged by Arab immigrants and their descendants.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Grégoire Canlorbe “A Conversation with Renaud Camus,” *American Renaissance*, Aug. 7, 2020, www.amren.com/features/2020/08/a-conversation-with-renaud-camus (access: 02/2024).

⁶⁹ “Steve Bannon, Stephen Miller-cited Author Jean Raspail, Controversial Writer of ‘The Camp of the Saints,’ Dead at 94,” *New York Daily News*, June 13, 2020; Reece Jones, *White Borders*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2021, 107; Alex Lo, “On Books and Ideas that Kill,” *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), Aug. 9, 2022.

⁷⁰ Courtney Weaver, “America’s Alt-Right Champions Credit Trump with Movement’s Revival,” *FT*, Aug. 15, 2017.

⁷¹ Miles Taylor, *Blowback: A Warning to Save Democracy from the Next Trump*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2023.

⁷² “White Supremacist Flyers Posted Around Eastern Kentucky University Campus,” *Raw Story*, Nov. 22, 2013, www.rawstory.com/2013/11/white-supremacist-flyers-posted-around-eastern-kentucky-university-campus/ (accessed 02/2024).

⁷³ “Trump Defends Comments About Immigrants,” *AP*, Dec. 19, 2023.

⁷⁴ Stephanie Kaloi, “Trump Tells Fox News ‘I Believe We’re Going to Have a Terrorist Attack 100%,’ Possibly Due to Chinese Immigrants,” *y!Entertainment*, Feb. 5, 2024.

⁷⁵ Leila Abboud, “French Village Dance Killing Leads to Call for Ban on Extremists,” *FT*, Nov. 29, 2023.

Racists who tout a “white extinction” conspiracy theory based on immigration, falling birthrates, and intermarriage often focus on Jews as behind white demographic decline.⁷⁶ Camus’ “Great Replacement” replicated an idea propagated in Germany in 1982, when 15 prominent academics issued the “Heidelberg Manifesto,” demanding protection of the German identity from mainly Middle Eastern immigrants who came to Germany while it was experiencing negative natural population growth.⁷⁷ Proponents of such claims want more white babies⁷⁸ and

to substantiate the claim of a white genocide and to sanitize an ethnostate solution [they are citing] data that the white population is declining in number in the United States, asserting that [white] genocide is afoot in Africa [and] maintaining that these occurrences are orchestrated to deliberately destroy the white population – thus [purportedly] meeting the legal threshold of genocide per the 1948 Genocide Convention – and proposing homogenous states for all races as a banal, commonsense solution.⁷⁹

In 2023, Francesco Lollobrigida, Italy’s Minister of Agriculture and brother-in-law of ultra-rightist Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, said Italians are risking “ethnic replacement” through a very low birthrate and immigration. Meloni herself used the phrase when campaigning in

⁷⁶ Andy Campbell, “Alabama’s Abortion Bill is Great News for White Supremacists,” *HuffPost*, May 15, 2019, www.huffpost.com/entry/alabama-abortion-bill-white-supremacists_n_5cdc4247e4b066205c602829 (access: 02/2024); Gwen Snyder, “The Sinister Connection Between Abortion Rights, White Supremacy and Covid,” *Jezebel*, May 5, 2022, <http://jezebel.com/abortion-rights-white-supremacy-covid-great-replacement-184887664719th> (access: 02/2024); Kevan Feshami, “Fear of White Genocide,” *Lapham Quarterly*, 2017, www.laphamsquarterly.org/roundtable/fear-white-genocide (access: 02/2024); Glenn Altschuler and Stuart Blumin, “The ‘Great Replacement’ Theory Rises Again, Ending in Tragedy,” *Washington Post* (WP), June 2, 2022.

⁷⁷ Eileen Hennessy, “The Heidelberg Manifesto: A German Reaction to Immigration,” *Population and Development Review* 8:3 (1982), 636-637.

⁷⁸ Naomi Klein, “Economy and Environment, We Need a Single Global Revolution,” *La Repubblica*, June 2, 2019.

⁷⁹ Kate Temoney, “Anatomizing White Rage: ‘Race is My Religion!’ and ‘White Genocide,’” in Stephen Finley et al. (eds), *The Religion of White Rage*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020, 149-165.

2016.⁸⁰ Billionaire US entrepreneur Elon Musk endorsed Great Replacement as a Jewish conspiracy to use non-white immigration to diminish whites.⁸¹ US House of Representatives' 3rd-ranked Republican Elise Stefanik has adopted a variant of the "theory,"⁸² which also alleges diminution through "interracial marriage, reducing the birth rate and other means."⁸³

"White genocide" and "Great Replacement" are now used interchangeably.⁸⁴ Polls in 2022 found that one-third of American adults endorse a version of replacement theory,⁸⁵ as do two-thirds of Republicans.⁸⁶ Leading Fox News host Tucker Carlson did likewise, to the applause of neo-Nazis.⁸⁷ The "theory" has contributed to mass shootings in North America – the killings in 2015 of 9 African American churchgoers in Charleston, in 2017 of 6 Muslims at a Quebec City mosque, in 2018 of 11 Jewish worshippers in Pittsburgh, in 2019 of 19 Hispanic shoppers

⁸⁰ Barbie Nadeau, "Italian Minister Sparks Fury for Saying Immigration Leads to 'Ethnic Replacement'," *CNN*, Apr. 29, 2023.

⁸¹ "X Races to Contain Damage After Elon Musk Endorses Antisemitic Post," *NYT*, Nov. 16, 2023.

⁸² Greg Sargent, "How Elise Stefanik and the GOP Sanitize 'Great Replacement' Ugliness," *WP*, May 16, 2022.

⁸³ "Why is Vivek Ramaswamy Doubling Down on Conspiracy Theories," *BBC*, Dec. 8, 2023.

⁸⁴ Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner, "The Great Replacement, The Violent Consequences of Mainstreamed Extremism," *ISD*, 2019: 7, www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Great-Replacement-The-Violent-Consequences-of-Mainstream-Extremism-by-ISD.pdf (access: 02/2024)

⁸⁵ "Immigration Attitudes and Conspiratorial Thinkers: A Study Issued on the 10th Anniversary of The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research," *AP/NORC*, May 2022, <http://apnorc.org/projects/immigration-attitudes-and-conspiratorial-thinkers/> (access: 02/2024).

⁸⁶ "New National UMass Amherst Poll on Issues Finds One-Third of Americans Believe Great Replacement Theory," Oct. 25, 2022, www.umass.edu/news/article/new-national-umass-amherst-poll-issues-finds-one-third-americans-believe-great (access: 02/2024).

⁸⁷ "Deplatform Tucker Carlson and the 'Great Replacement' Theory," *Anti-Defamation League*, May 25, 2022, <http://www.adl.org/resources/blog/deplatform-tucker-carlson-and-great-replacement-theory> (access: 02/2024).

in El Paso, and in 2022 of 10 African American shoppers in Buffalo. The manifesto of the perpetrator of a New Zealand massacre of 51 Muslims opened with the line “It’s the birthrates.”⁸⁸

In the US, Great Replacement reflects a long-present “white genocide anxiety.” Responding to pre-Civil War abolitionists, slaveholders’ leader Sen. John C. Calhoun said that if slavery ended, “the next step would be to raise the Negroes to a social and political equality with whites; and that being effected, we would soon find the present condition of the two races reversed.”⁸⁹ On the eve of the Civil War in 1861, soon-to-be Confederate General Henry Lewis Benning predicted that if slaves were emancipated “we will be completely exterminated, and the land will be left in the possession of the blacks, and then it will go back into a wilderness...”⁹⁰ Of course, few whites had been or would be killed by slaves or ex-slaves, but an estimated 1.8m Africans died in the Middle Passage of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade alone and African deaths directly attributable to the institution of slavery from 1500-1900 have been put at some 4m.⁹¹

A century after the Civil War, Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett stated that “There is no case in history where the Caucasian race has survived social integration. We will not drink from the cup of genocide.”⁹²

⁸⁸ Reece Jones, *White Borders*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2021, 192-193; Khaleda Rahman, “‘Great Replacement Theory’ Has Inspired 4 Mass Shootings in Recent Years,” *Newsweek*, May 16, 2022.

⁸⁹ Randall Kennedy, “The Truth is that Many Americans Just Don’t Want Black People Get Ahead,” *NYT*, June 7, 2023.

⁹⁰ “Speech of Henry Benning to the Virginia Convention,” 1861, <http://civilwarcauses.org/benningva.htm> (access: 02/2024).

⁹¹ Aaron O’Neill, “Estimated Share of African Slaves Who Did Not Survive the Middle Passage Journey to the Americas Each Year from 1501 to 1866,” *Statista*, June 21, 2022, www.statista.com/statistics/1143458/annual-share-slaves-deaths-during-middle-passage/ (access: 02/2024); Paul E. Lovejoy, “The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on Africa: a Review of the Literature.” *Journal of African History* 30 (1989), 365-394.

⁹² “Sept. 20, 1962: James Meredith Attempts to Register at University of Mississippi,” *Zinn Education Project*, 2024, www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/james-meredith-register/ (access: 02/2024).

Today, white genocide anxiety impels US alt-right forces to distort fertility statistics to claim a “white extinction,”⁹³ popular conceptions of which have political effects: there was a strong link between the decline in various US counties’ white populations from 2015-2019 and the likelihood a participant in the Trumpist January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol would hail from one of those counties.⁹⁴

White genocide is an “accusation in a mirror.” That is a false or inaccurate attribution to an adversary of one’s own intent or deeds.⁹⁵ For example, US analysts often ridicule China’s claims to South China Sea maritime formations,⁹⁶ yet the US asserts a right to control huge Exclusive Economic Zones that its South Pacific protectorates of Palau, Marshall Islands, and Micronesia created in an area extending from Hawaii to the Philippines.⁹⁷ An accusation of white genocide in a mirror appeared in an academic journal in 2017. Alt-right lawyer John Bennett argued that Powhatan Native Americans’ 1622 attack on Jamestown, Virginia’s English settlement was a genocide. He said the attackers intended to murder all English people, killed one-fourth to one-third of the colony, and took hostages.⁹⁸

⁹³ “The Audio Doesn’t Lie: Tucker Carlson is Who We Thought He Was,” *New York Review of Books*, Aug. 16, 2018; Alexandra Stern, *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate: How the Alt-right is Warping the American Imagination*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2019), 99.

⁹⁴ Robert Pape et al., “American Face of Insurrection.” *Chicago Project on Security and Threats*, Jan. 5, 2022, 19, [http://d3qi0qp55mx5f5.cloudfront.net/cpost/i/ docs/ Pape-American_Face_of_Insurrection_\(2022-01-05\).pdf](http://d3qi0qp55mx5f5.cloudfront.net/cpost/i/ docs/ Pape-American_Face_of_Insurrection_(2022-01-05).pdf) (access: 02/2024).

⁹⁵ Gregory S. Gordon, “*Atrocity Speech Law: Foundation, Fragmentation, Fruition*,” Oxford University Press, 2017; Kenneth Marcus, “Accusation in a Mirror,” *Loyola University of Chicago Law Review* 43 (2012), 357-393.

⁹⁶ Gary Sands, “Rethinking Taiwan’s Claims in the South China Sea,” *The Diplomat*, June 28, 2019, <http://thediplomat.com/2019/06/rethinking-taiwans-claims-in-the-south-china-sea/> (access: 02/2024).

⁹⁷ Edward Hunt, “US Claims to Central Pacific Flout International Law,” *FPIF*, Sept. 18, 2023, <http://fpif.org/u-s-claims-to-central-pacific-flout-international-law/> (access: 02/2024).

⁹⁸ John Bennett, “The Forgotten Genocide in Colonial America: Reexamining the 1622 Jamestown Massacre within the Framework of the UN Genocide Convention,” *Journal of the History of International Law* 19:1 (2017), 1-49.

The massacre was part of the Second Powhatan War, itself a response to colonists' raids against Powhattan villages, their infringing expansion of planting, and attempts to subjugate Powhatan leaders and Christianize natives. The Jamestown Massacre came a dozen years after the First Powhatan War of 1610, in which colonists had ambushed and killed many Native Americans. After the 1622 massacre, settlers killed hundreds of Powhatans and seized more land. A Third Powhatan War in 1644 resulted in the deaths of some 10% of the colonists but ended in the dissolution of the Powhatan confederacy and subordination of Native Americans. The Jamestown Massacre was thus not a "white genocide" by Native Americans, but an act of resistance, however murderous, to the early phase of what was to become an encompassing genocide by whites.⁹⁹

Nazi accusations that Jews sought the "annihilation of Germany" was an accusation in a mirror.¹⁰⁰ The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) has discussed accusations in a mirror; such as Leon Mugesera's pamphlets that incited Hutus to kill their Tutsi neighbors, based on the spurious claim that Tutsis were killing or planned to kill Hutus.¹⁰¹ The Uyghur émigré genocide claim is also an accusation in a mirror, as the main evidenced "racial" killings in Xinjiang have been of Han, by terrorists, especially from 2009-2016.

The proponents of "white genocide" argue that because immigration and differential birthrates diminish the white proportion of the population, they are akin to the genocidal act of "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruct-

⁹⁹ Aoife O'Donoghue and Henry Jones, "The Jamestown Massacre: Rigor & International Legal History," *Critical Legal Theory*, Aug. 24, 2017, <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2017/08/24/jamestown-massacre-rigour-international-legal-history/> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁰⁰ Michael Berkowitz, *The Crime of My Very Existence: Nazism and the Myth of Jewish Criminality*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, 131-132.

¹⁰¹ *Prosecutor v. Akayesu*, ICTR-96-4-T (Appeal Judgment), 2 September 1998, para. 497-498, <http://ucr.irmct.org/LegalRef/CMSDocStore/Public/English/Judgement/NotIndexable/ICTR-96-04/MS44787R0000619822.pdf>

tion' and imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group." University of Kent legal scholar Eric Loefflad has pointed out however that

for one familiar with the legal dynamics of criminal liability for genocide, direct conflation of these provisions with a claim of victimization disregards the need to show a linkage between the crime's material (actus reus) and mental (mens rea) elements. As such, even if 'white genocide' believers can link criminal provisions with fears of demographic decline, they still have the burden of linking this to an agent's deliberate intention. This is made apparent by the fact that the named examples of genocidal violence in the Genocide Convention/Rome Statute [of the International Criminal Court] are prefaced by the requirement that 'the following acts [be] committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group' (Rome Statute 2002, art. 6). Without this condition of intent, any demographic decline has the potential to generate liability as an act of genocide.

Loefflad noted the ICTY Appeals Chamber overturned the genocide conviction of General Krstic, the military commander who oversaw the Srebrenica massacre, "due to a lack of evidence he directly commanded his troops to act as they did, thus resulting in a failure to show specific intent." Loefflad stated that "for the international lawyer knowledgeable of such standards, if General Krstić could not be categorically convicted for genocide, how could this type of liability extend to someone who may, in the most attenuated and unconscious manner, be contributing to white demographic decline?"¹⁰² Indeed, in Xinjiang, there has not even been a relative Uyghur demographic decline: they have been 45-49% of population for a half-century and in the Uyghur heartland's Kashgar prefecture, their proportion was 73% in the 1980s, but 87% in 2023.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Eric Loefflad, "International Law for a Time of Monsters: 'White Genocide' – The Limits of Liberal Legalism, and the Reclamation of Utopia," *Law and Critique* (2022), <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10978-022-09337-y> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁰³ William Drexel, "Kashgar Coerced: Forced Reconstruction, Exploitation and the Surveillance in the Cradle of Uyghur Culture." *Uyghur Human Rights Project*,

Beyond “white genocide” and “Great Replacement,” many US whites think they are discriminated against, based perhaps on their seeing racism as a zero-sum game.¹⁰⁴ A 2011 poll found 44% of them identifying discrimination against whites as just as serious as anti-Black prejudice.¹⁰⁵ By 2014, the same poll found 52% of whites had that idea.¹⁰⁶ In 2017, 55% of US whites agreed there is anti-white discrimination, a view negatively correlated with level of education. A very small proportion of the polled said they personally experienced discrimination however and many respondents who believe there is anti-white discrimination cannot cite a specific case.¹⁰⁷ A 2019 survey showed 75% of Republican voters, 55% of independents, and 38% of Democrats agreed there is anti-white discrimination¹⁰⁸ In 2022, nearly a third of polled whites said they have seen “a lot more” anti-white discrimination in the past five years.”¹⁰⁹

There is no proof of anti-white discrimination and even less evidence of an intent to destroy whites. US white births fell 10.8% in 1999-2016 and the non-Hispanic white birth-to-death (BDR) ratio dropped from

2020, <http://uhrp.org/report/kashgar-coerced/> (access: 02/2024); Interview with Kashgar prefecture civil affairs official, Kashgar, Aug. 2, 2023.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Norton and Samuel Sommers, “Whites See Racism as a Zero-Sum Game That They Are Now Losing,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 6:3 (2011), 215-218.

¹⁰⁵ John Blake, “Are Whites Racially Oppressed?,” *CNN*, Mar. 4, 2011.

¹⁰⁶ Joana Piacenza, “Americans Racial Disconnect on Fairness and Discrimination,” *PRRI*, Oct. 6, 2014, www.prii.org/spotlight/graphic-of-the-week-americans-racial-disconnect-on-fairness-and-discrimination/#.VfrfwildVW3 (access: 02/2024).

¹⁰⁷ Dan Gonyea, “Majority of White Americans Say They Believe Whites Face Discrimination,” *NPR*, Oct. 24, 2017, www.npr.org/2017/10/24/559604836/majority-of-white-americans-think-theyre-discriminated-against (access: 02/2024).

¹⁰⁸ “Poll: Most Republicans Think White People Face Discrimination, Democrats Disagree,” *The Hill*, Mar. 8, 2019, <http://thehill.com/hilltv/what-americas-thinking/433270-poll-republicans-and-democrats-differ-strongly-on-whether-white/> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁰⁹ Stella Rouse and Shibley Talhami, “Poll Reveals White Americans See an Increase in Discrimination Against Other White People and Less Against Other Racial Groups,” *The Conversation*, July 1, 2022, <http://theconversation.com/poll-reveals-white-americans-see-an-increase-in-discrimination-against-other-white-people-and-less-against-other-racial-groups-185278> (access: 02/2024).

1.21 to 0.98. By 2016, whites accounted for 77.7% of all US deaths, but 53.1% of births, creating a “white natural decrease.” US whites’ average age rose from 39 to 43 in 2000-2016, with whites 65 years and older up from 15 to 19% of the total, while 15-44 year-old women dropped by 12.5%. During the 2007-2009 Great Recession, white fertility was below replacement and white births fell by 9% from 2007 to 2016. All groups’ fertility dropped, but the .98 white BDR in 2016 compared to a 4.9 Latino BDR, a 3.9 Asian BDR and a 1.7 Black BDR. US whites will begin to decline absolutely by 2030 or 2040, due to falling fertility and “deaths of despair” from alcohol, drugs, and suicide and by 2050 they are projected to be 47% of Americans. In Europe in 2016, 17 countries’ deaths exceeded births. European fertility was lower, people were older, and there were fewer childbearing-age women than in the US.¹¹⁰ None of the fall in white births results from “white genocide” however. The claim resembles the one about Xinjiang however, as there are “natural” explanations for both white population decline and the temporary decreased Uyghur population growth rate in 2017-2021 that preclude resort to an assertion of genocidal intent.

Uyghur émigré assertions connect “bloodless genocide” and racism through statements by émigré leaders such as Rebiya Kadeer. Formerly “the richest businesswoman in Xinjiang,” she later headed the Munich-based WUC. Without presenting evidence, she told the US Congress in 2007 that Uyghur women are sent to factories as sex slaves and are forced to marry Han.¹¹¹ Fifteen years later, the US government-financed Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) said forced intermarriage “to wipe out the Uyghur population” is ongoing.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Rogelio Saenz and Kenneth Johnson, “White Deaths Exceed Births in a Majority of US States.” *Applied Population Lab*, 2018, <https://apl.wisc.edu/data-briefs/natural-decrease-18> (accessed 02/2024).

¹¹¹ “Uighur Activist Asks U.S. to Help Stop China Removals.” Reuters, October 31, 2007.

¹¹² Simina Mistreanu, “Chinese ‘Paid to Marry’ Uyghurs in Cleansing Plan.” *Daily Telegraph*, Nov 17, 2022; “Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act Builds on Work of NED Grantees.” *NED*, May 29, 2020, www.ned.org/uyghur-human-rights-policy-act-builds-on-work-of-ned-grantees/ (accessed 02/2024).

A similar claim had been made by the Nazi central propaganda office in its *Parole der Woche* three months into World War II, when it “asserted that the British intended to wipe out German manhood and marry German women to foreigners as a way of destroying the German race.”¹¹³

Kadeer asserted without evidence that 400 Uyghurs were killed in one day during Urumqi’s July, 2009 anti-Han pogrom and “almost 200 Uyghurs were tortured and killed at detention centers” just after the riots, but mainstream Western media immediately disconfirmed these claims.¹¹⁴ Kadeer showed photos that she said were of police pouring into Urumqi’s streets, but these turned out to be police in Shishou County, Hubei responding to a protest unconnected to Xinjiang.¹¹⁵ The WUC account of the Urumqi riot omitted mention of the murder of hundreds of Han.¹¹⁶ Kadeer also said in 2009 that “most Uyghur women of childbearing were no longer able to give birth” due to sterilization and IUD use;¹¹⁷ yet, Xinjiang’s minority population grew by 14.27% in 2010-2020.¹¹⁸ She stated in 2010 that China strictly curbs Uyghur births,¹¹⁹ but limits then were barely applied in rural Xinjiang.

¹¹³ Randall Bytwerk, “The Argument for Genocide in Nazi Propaganda,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 91:1 (2005), 37-62.

¹¹⁴ Malcolm Moore, “Urumqi Riots Signal Dark Days Ahead.” *EastWestSouthNorth*, July 8, 2009, www.zonaeuropa.com/20090708_1.htm (access: 02/2024); Julian Ryall, “Struggle for Independence.” *DW*, June 21, 2013, www.dw.com/en/we-will-fight-until-they-grant-us-self-determination/a-16897698 (access: 02/2024).

¹¹⁵ Bill Schiller, “Was Media Coverage of Riots in China Biased?,” *Toronto Star*, July 17, 2009.

¹¹⁶ “The Urumqi Massacre,” *WUC*, Dec. 8, 2009, www.uyghurcongress.org/en/the-urumqi-massacre/ (access: 02/2024).

¹¹⁷ “Prepared Statement of Rebiya Kadeer” in: US House of Representatives, *An Evaluation of 30 Years of the One-Child Policy in China*, Nov. 10, 2009, http://chris.smith.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2009.11.10_evaluation_of_30_years_of_one_child_policy_in_china.pdf (access: 02/2024).

¹¹⁸ “Main Data of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region from the Seventh National Population Census,” www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgtrt/eng/news/t1884310.htm (access: 02/2024).

¹¹⁹ Ida Karlsson, “China: On the Thousand Mothers March,” *Inter Press Service*, Oct. 20, 2010.

Even Zenz noted that “Prior to 2015, it was common practice for Uyghurs to have children in excess of state-mandated limits. Population planning offices were understaffed and local Uyghur officials frequently flouted birth quotas themselves. When caught, Uyghurs simply paid fines.”¹²⁰ In 2013, Kadeer said Uyghurs under age 80 were barred from entering mosques,¹²¹ but mosques then were overflowing and even some officials attended¹²² and in 2022, the US’s Radio Free Asia indicated China’s officials were encouraging mosque attendance.¹²³ Kadeer moreover always denies Uyghur separatists engage in terrorism,¹²⁴ yet the University of Maryland Global Terrorism Database recorded 135 attacks and 767 deaths from terrorism in Xinjiang from 1990 to 2016,¹²⁵ a gross underestimate according to scholars.¹²⁶

Kadeer told an Italian journalist in 2009, “Look, you gesticulate like me, you have the same white skin like me: You are Indo-European, would you like to be oppressed by a communist with yellow skin?” (“Io vedi, tu gesticoli come me, hai la mia stessa pelle bianca: sei indoeuro-

¹²⁰ Adrian Zenz, “Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control: The CCP’s Campaign to Suppress Uyghur Birthrates in Xinjiang,” *Jamestown Foundation*, 2021: 10, <http://jamestown.org/product/sterilizations-iuds-and-mandatory-birth-control-the-ccps-campaign-to-suppress-uyghur-birthrates-in-xinjiang/> (access: 02/2024).

¹²¹ Julian Ryall, “Struggle for Independence,” *DW*, June 21, 2013, www.dw.com/en/we-will-fight-until-they-grant-us-self-determination/a-16897698 (access: 02/2024).

¹²² Brian Spegele, “Blast at Train Station Highlights Ethnic Tensions in China’s Xinjiang Region,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 2, 2014; “China Punishes Xinjiang Official for Openly Practising Faith,” *Reuters*, Sept. 3, 2014.

¹²³ “China Appears to Ease Up on Islamic Worship in Xinjiang, But Uyghurs Aren’t Buying It,” *RFA*, Nov. 23, 2022, www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/reopened-mosques-11232022170624.html (access: 02/2024).

¹²⁴ Rebiya Kadeer, “Chinese Government Real Terrorist,” *Asia News*, July 21, 2011, www.asianews.it/news-en/Rebiya-Kadeer:-Chinese-government-realterrorist-22164.html (access: 02/2024).

¹²⁵ Results for Xinjiang, *Global Terrorism Database*, 2022, www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?expanded=no&search=xinjiang&ob=GTDID&od=desc&page=1&count=20#results-table (access: 02/2024).

¹²⁶ Interview with Prof. Ma Rong, Beijing University, July 26, 2023.

pea, vorresti essere oppressa da un comunista con la pelle gialla?”).¹²⁷ The Uyghur American Association, disrupted a 2021 Washington, DC “Stop Asian Hate” rally that responded to pandemic-related physical attacks on Asian Americans. They called for a world war to “Wipe Out China!” UAA and other émigré groups have also allied with US ultra-right, anti-immigrant, and Islamophobic forces, attacked the Black Lives Matter movement, and claimed China created the pandemic virus as a bioweapon and spread it to the world.¹²⁸ An alignment of Muslim Uyghur émigrés with Islamophobic US ultra-rightists is not inexplicable: Judeophobic ultra-rightists in Germany and the US support Israel,¹²⁹ as do Uyghur émigré groups.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Antonella Rampino, “La Leader Dei Turchi del Xinjiang: ‘La Gentilezza Ci Sta Uccidendo’ (The leader of the Turkic people of Xinjiang: ‘kindness is killing us’).” *La Stampa*, August 5, 2009, http://archivio.lastampa.it/LaStampaArchivio/main/History/tmpl_viewObj.jsp?objid=9277868 (access: 02/2024).

¹²⁸ Ajit Singh, “‘Wipe Out China!’ U.S.-Funded Uyghur Activists Train as Gun-Toting Foot Soldiers for Empire.” *Greyzone*, Apr. 5, 2021, <http://mronline.org/2021/04/05/wipe-out-china-u-s-funded-uyghur-activists-train-as-gun-toting-foot-soldiers-for-empire/> (access: 02/2024).

¹²⁹ Emma Rosenberg, “Taking the ‘Race’ Out of Master Race: The Evolving Role of the Jew in White Supremacist Discourse,” *Nationalities Papers* (2023), 1-25, doi: 10.1017/nps.2022.111.

¹³⁰ Interview: Salih Hidayar, “Uyghurs Condemn Palestinian ‘Support for Genocide’ Against Muslims In China,” *Breitbart*, June 15, 2023, www.breitbart.com/asia/2023/06/15/uyghurs-condemn-palestinian-support-genocide-against-muslims-china/ (access: 02/2024); “Uyghur Groups Condemn Hamas’s Terror Attacks on Israeli Civilians,” *Uyghur Times*, Oct. 10, 2023; <http://uyghurtimes.com/uyghur-groups-condemn-hamass-terror-attacks-on-israeli-civilians/> (access: 02/2024); “WUC Condemns Hamas Attacks on Civilians, Stands with All Those Suffering from Violence,” *WUC*, Oct. 9, 2023, www.uyghurcongress.org/en/statement-wuc-condemns-hamas-attacks-on-civilians-and-stands-with-all-those-suffering-from-violence/ (access: 02/2024).

IV. Bloodless Genocides: Fictions and Failures

Idiosyncratics, fantasists, and racists have posited that bloodless genocides have occurred, are ongoing, or should proceed. Some have no evidence of an intent to destroy a group; others do not describe a plan of genocidal acts. What is claimed for Xinjiang is as divorced from actually-existing genocides as these fictitious or aborted scenarios and is tied to notions of Chinese cruelty.

A British historian who worked for the ICTY has said “in theory you could commit genocide without killing anyone if you sterilize all adult members of a group.”¹³¹ That, however, has not occurred in any recognized genocide; instead, science fiction writers often imagine bloodless genocides. A mutant human population is extinguished through forced sterilization in a 1957 French trilogy.¹³² The 1965 US novel *The Genocides* has aliens seed Earth with massive plants that outcompete terrestrial flora, making extinction of earthly life inevitable, but they also speed up human extinction by using killing machines.¹³³ A half century later, genocidal sterilization of X-Men mutants is proceeding in the comic book series.¹³⁴ The 2018 dystopian novel *Iron Gold* recalls that after The Society of Red Rising’s “Conquering,” the moon (Luna) is the solar system’s most powerful sphere. It declares independence and wins a war against Earth.

The war is said to have ended in a casualty of 110 million lives. With so much blood on the hands of the Golds [the solar system’s Luna-based ruling “race”], they looked to a bloodless genocide to end the threat that Earth held against them once and for all ... the Golds dropped solocene in-

¹³¹ Marija Tausan, “Srebrenica: How to Prove a Genocide,” *Balkan Transitional Justice*, July 6, 2015, <https://balkaninsight.com/2015/07/06/srebrenica-how-to-prove-a-genocide/> (access: 02/2024).

¹³² Bradford Lyau, *The Anticipation Novelists of 1950s French Science Fiction: Children of Voltaire*, Jefferson: McFarland, 2011, 90.

¹³³ Thomas Disch, *The Genocides*, New York: Berkeley Books, 1965.

¹³⁴ Graeme Macmillan, “Why Marvel’s X-Men are Destined for Extinction,” *Hollywood Reporter*, Sept. 20, 2015.

*to the Earth's troposphere, sterilizing the remainder of the Earth's population. It took no less than a century for the last generation of the pre-Color humans to die out.*¹³⁵

The online science fiction game *Mass Effect* posits a “genophage” or sterility virus that the Turians use to stop the Krogan Rebellions by limiting the number of Krogan children.¹³⁶ Popular Japanese manga/anime series “Attack on Titan” (*Shingeki no Kyojin* 進撃の巨人; 2009-2023), featured a mass sterilization proposal for a “non-violent genocide” or “euthanasia.” Zeke, half-brother of main character Eren Yeager, was born a royal Eldian, believes Earth’s wars will only end if the Titan-wielding, war-making Eldians are made sterile by manipulating their genetic makeup. Eren, however, concludes that getting rid of Titans required a violent attack. He unleashes “The Rumbling,” which kills 80% of the world’s people.¹³⁷ Even in science fiction then, bloodless genocide is often depicted as an adjunct to mass killing.

Science fiction aliens are imagined as bloodlessly genocidal against Earthlings,¹³⁸ but real-world genocides are plans centered on widespread, systematic killings and expressions of a readily discernible intent to destroy a protected group as such.¹³⁹ The recognized 20th Century ones were accompanied by leaders’ explicit statements of their intent to carry out mass murder, by Germans of Herreros and Namas in

¹³⁵ Pierce Brown, *Iron Gold*, New York: Del Rey Books, 2018.

¹³⁶ Rachel Kaser, “Mass Effect: The Krogan Genophage, Explained,” *Screenrant*, May 3, 2021, <http://screenrant.com/mass-effect-krogan-genophage-cause-ration-cure-effects> (access: 02/2024).

¹³⁷ Jerry Elengical, “Attack on Titan: Would Zeke’s Plan Have Worked?,” *Game Rant*, May 20, 2023, <http://gamerant.com/attack-on-titan-would-zekes-euthanasia-plan-have-worked/> (access: 02/2024).

¹³⁸ “Panel: Planetary Self-Defense: the Ethics of Genocide in Science Fiction,” *Austin Community College*, Oct. 14, 2014, <http://liberalarts.austincc.edu/philosophy-religion-humanities/planetary-self-defense/> (access: 02/2024).

¹³⁹ Schabas, *Genocide*, 518.

Namibia in 1904-1905,¹⁴⁰ by Ottoman forces of Armenians from 1915-1922,¹⁴¹ by Nazis of Europe's Jews in 1939-1945,¹⁴² by Hutus of Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994,¹⁴³ and by Bosnian Serbs of Bosnian Muslims in 1995.¹⁴⁴ So too, with the plausible ISIS genocide of Yazidis from 2014 onwards.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Jan-Bart Gewald, "Colonization, Genocide and Resurgence: The Herero of Namibia 1890-1933," in Michael Bollig and Jan-Bart Gewald (eds.), *People, Cattle and Land: Transformation of a Pastoral Society in Southwestern Africa*, Koeln: Koppe, 2000, 187-226; Manus I. Midlarsky, *The Killing Trap: Genocide in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 32.

¹⁴¹ Taner Akcam, *Killing Orders: Talat Pasha's Telegrams and the Armenian Genocide*, New York: Palgrave, 2018); Harry Kazelian, "Taner Akcam Shares Research Revealing When Decision Was Made to Commit Armenian Genocide," *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, Mar. 14, 2023, <http://mirrorspectator.com/people/dr-taner-akcam/> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁴² Randall, "The Argument for Genocide in Nazi Propaganda," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 91:1 (2005), 37-62; Peter Longerich, *Holocaust: The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 289; Hans Mommsen, "Hitler's Reichstag Speech of 30 January 1939," *History and Memory* 9: 1-2 (1997), 147-161; Josef Goebbels, "Nun, Volk steh auf, und Sturm brich los!," in Randall Bytewerk (ed.), *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, Texas A&M University Press, 2008; Stefanos Kotsionis and Meghna Chakrabarti, "The Eichmann Tapes and the Comforting Myth of the 'Banality of Evil.'" *On Point*, July 15, 2022, www.wbur.org/onpoint/2022/07/15/the-eichmann-tapes-and-the-nature-of-evil (accessed 02/2024); Benjamin Ferencz, "Mass Murderers Seek to Justify Genocide," 2023, <http://benferencz.org/stories/1946-1949/mass-murderers-seek-to-justify-genocide/> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁴³ Narelle Fletcher, "Words That Can Kill: The Mugesera Speech and the 1994 Tutsi Genocide in Rwanda," *Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 11:1 (2014); *Prosecutor v. Ferdinand Nahimana, et al., ICTR-9-55-T, Dec. 3, 2003*.

¹⁴⁴ "Srebrenica MC Publishes 'Genocide Papers', Speeches of Karadzic, Dodik," 2021, *NI*, Mar. 2, 2021, <http://n1info.rs/english/news/srebrenica-mc-publishes-genocide-papers-speeches-of-karadzic-dodik/> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁴⁵ Robert Cryer, "International Criminal Law and Daesh." *OUP Blog*, Apr. 21, 2016, <http://blog.oup.com/2016/04/international-criminal-law-and-daesh/> (access: 02/2024); "IS Group Committing Genocide Against Yazidis, UN Says." *France24*, June 16, 2016; Alessandro Iemma, "Case Study About the Yazidi Genocide Committed by ISIL Started in 2014 From an International Law Perspective," 2019, *Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali*, <http://tesi.luiss.it/24456/> (access: 02/2024).

Genocidaire statements are radically exclusionary, but even the Uyghur émigrés supporters recognize that China’s statements about minorities are never about mass murder and are “aggressively inclusive,”¹⁴⁶ with “‘forced assimilation’ remain[ing] at the heart of the [Party’s] policy in Xinjiang.”¹⁴⁷

Convention Art. II(d), on preventing births with the intent to destroy a protected group as such, directly results from Lemkin’s 1944 discussion of “biological” acts of genocide in Poland, where one-fifth of the population was murdered. Lemkin noted that Nazi occupiers forbade marriages among Poles, separated Polish men and women through deportation for forced labor, and inhibited procreation through undernourishment. He quoted Hitler’s plan of “depopulation,” through lowering the birthrate of “inferior races,” using “bloodless” but “systematic measures to dam their great natural fertility [and] cause undesirable races to die out,” which showed obvious genocidal intent.¹⁴⁸ The “bloodless” part of this effort accompanied an extremely bloody attack on Poland’s citizenry, including the killing of 3m Jews and 1.9m non-Jews.¹⁴⁹

Because the Nazi experience was the context for Art. II(d),¹⁵⁰ Lemkin may have been aware of proposals that accorded with Hitler’s idea. Reichsfuehrer SS Heinrich Himmler asked SS-Oberfuehrer Viktor Brack in January 1941 to investigate mass sterilization by x-ray. Brack experimentally sterilized, then murdered, inmates in a “euthanasia” program. He proposed to Himmler in June 1942 to sterilize 2-3m of the 10m Jews of Europe, who were “well fit for work,” citing lethal x-ray

¹⁴⁶ James Millward, “(Identity) Politics in Command: Xi Jinping’s July Visit to Xinjiang,” *The China Story*, Aug. 16, 2022, www.thechinastory.org/identity-politics-in-command-xi-jinpings-july-visit-to-xinjiang/ (access: 02/2024).

¹⁴⁷ Adile Ablet, “China Says Its Camps are Closed, But Uyghurs Remain Under Threat,” *RFA*, Sept. 17, 2023, quoting Maya Wang, Human Rights Watch.

¹⁴⁸ Lemkin, *Axis Rule*, 86f.

¹⁴⁹ “Poles,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2022, www.ushmm.org/collections/bibliography/poles.

¹⁵⁰ Nehemiah Robinson, *The Genocide Convention, A Commentary* (New York, 1960); Leo Kuper, *The Prevention of Genocide*, New Haven, 1985), 241f.

experiments in Auschwitz. Himmler was soon told that sterilization techniques were “as good as perfected.”¹⁵¹ In the end however, a lack of a quick way to mass sterilize meant Jews were murdered instead.¹⁵² Dr. Carl Clauberg in Auschwitz also did extensive experiments involving chemical sterilization of Jewish women, killing some in the process. He too claimed to have perfected his technique, but it was not used further; instead many of the women were gassed.¹⁵³ Temporary mass sterilization of female Jewish concentration camp inmates by adding hormones to their food also occurred.¹⁵⁴ Even if during the war Lemkin did not know about mass sterilization proposals, he may have known soon after it ended, as Brack was condemned to death at the 1946-1947 Nuremberg Medical Trials, whose chief prosecutor used the term “genocide” in his opening address and consulted with Lemkin.¹⁵⁵

Nazis also planned and subjected Europe’s Roma and Sinti population to mass sterilization.¹⁵⁶ Criminal Police Dr. Robert Ritter, in charge of the “Gypsy problem” first proposed it in early 1940 but, while some sterilization victims survived, hundreds of thousands of Romani and

¹⁵¹ “Nazi Letters on Sterilization.” *Remember.org*, 2022, <http://remember.org/witness/links-le-ster> (access: 02/2024); Stanisław Kłodziński, “X-ray ‘Sterilization’ and Castration in Auschwitz: Dr. Horst Schumann.” *Medical Review – Auschwitz*, Nov. 22, 2022 (originally in *Przegląd Lekarski – Oświęcim*. Year of 1964, 105–111), www.mp.pl/auschwitz/journal/english/311389,x-ray-sterilisation-and-castration-in-auschwitz-dr-horst-schumann (access: 02/2024).

¹⁵² Christian Gerlack, *The Extermination of the European Jews: From Mass Murder to Comprehensive Annihilation*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ.y Press, 2016, 90.

¹⁵³ Sabine Hildebrandt, et al., “‘Forgotten’ Chapters in the History of Transcervical Sterilization,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 72:3 (2017), 272-301.

¹⁵⁴ Peggy Kleinplatz and Paul Weindling, “Women’s Experiences of Infertility After the Holocaust,” *Social Science and Medicine* 309 (Sept. 2022), 1-10.

¹⁵⁵ James Lesh, “The Nazis’ Voiceless Victims,” *History in the Making* 1:1 (2013), 19-28, <http://historyitm.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/lesh.pdf> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁵⁶ Hansjoerg Riechert, *Im Schatten von Auschwitz: die nationalsozialistische Sterilisationspolitik gegenüber Sinti und Roma*, Münster: Waxmann, 1995; Karola Fings, “A ‘Wannsee Conference’ on the Extermination of the Gypsies? New Research Findings Regarding 15 January 1943 and the Auschwitz Decree,” *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 27:3 (2013), 174-194.

Sinti were killed during the Romani Holocaust (*Porajamos*), in mass executions or extermination camps. Lemkin and other Convention framers may also have known of these sterilization proposals and the murders that almost always accompanied sterilizations.¹⁵⁷

And then there was the curious instance of New York Jewish small businessman Theodore N. Kaufman, who self-published a book in 1941 advocating mass sterilization of most German adults over a three-month period, followed by Germany's dissolution.¹⁵⁸ The Nazis launched a large propaganda campaign, printing 5m copies of a translation. They falsely claimed Kaufman was an advisor and co-author of President Franklin Roosevelt and that the book represented official US policy that justified Nazi killings of Jews. Goebbels and other genocidaires cited Kaufman's book as exemplifying the plot by "Jewish subhumanity" to end the white race's existence in Europe, an idea that likely stiffened German resistance to the Allies. Within a year of his book's appearance however, Kaufman abandoned his "bloodless genocide" fantasy and instead advocated teaching Germans about democracy.¹⁵⁹

Nazis and neo-Nazis nevertheless continued after the war to claim Jews had plotted mass sterilization: Adolf Eichmann, the Holocaust's "organizer," falsely told his sons that sterilization by placing a chemical in Germany's water supply was planned.¹⁶⁰ Ironically, in the 21st Century, it is asserted that North American water sources have been polluted as part of a genocide against indigenous or Black peoples.¹⁶¹ A US politi-

¹⁵⁷ Gerlack, *The Extermination*, 90; Benno Miller-Hill, *Murderous Science: Elimination by Scientific Selection of Jews, Gypsies, and Others – Germany 1933-1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, 13.

¹⁵⁸ Theodore N. Kaufman, *Germany Must Perish!*, New York: Argyle Press, 1941.

¹⁵⁹ Bytwerk, *The Argument*: 42-44; Berel Lang, "The Jewish 'Declaration of War' Against the Nazis," *Antioch Review* 64:2 (2006), 363-373.

¹⁶⁰ "Eichmann's Sons Set Up Nazi Terror Cell in Argentina to Attack Jews," *World Israel News*, Nov. 10, 2018, <http://worldisraelnews.com/eichmanns-sons-set-up-nazi-terror-cell-in-argentina-to-attack-jews/> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁶¹ Michael Muhammad, et al, "I Think That's All a Lie ... I Think It's Genocide: Applying a Critical Race Praxis to Youth Perceptions of Flint Water Contamination," *Ethnicity & Disease* 28:1 (2018), 241-246; Ingrid Waldron, *There's Some-*

cal scientist also wrote post-war that a proposal to mass sterilize Germans had been seriously advanced, but cited no evidence. He recalled an alternative proposal, to send a half-million Americans to intermarry with German women and replace “bad genes” with good ones.¹⁶² That fanciful idea may not have existed, but resembles unevidenced Uyghur émigré claims of genocidal forced intermarriage.¹⁶³

Besides the unimplemented idea of sterilizing all work-fit Jews, Nazis proposed another unrealized sterilization of a racially-defined group. Wilhelm Stuckart of the Reich Ministry of the Interior proposed to the early 1942 Wannsee Conference – which planned the extermination of Europe’s Jews – that Germans of part-Jewish ancestry (*Mischlinge*) be forcibly sterilized. The conferees, however, shelved the proposal until war’s end. Had sterilizations proceeded, they would have been an adjunct to the Holocaust and Stuckart might have been charged with responsibility for them. Instead, he became a West German regional official. Stuckart’s deputy was Hans Globke, who had drafted the Nuremberg Laws stripping Jews of their German citizenship and outlawing sexual relations between “Aryans” and “non-Aryans.” He was also chief legal advisor to Eichmann. Globke later became Chief of Staff to the West German Chancellor and West Germany’s liaison with NATO.¹⁶⁴

thing in the Water: Environmental Racism in Indigenous and Black Communities, Fernwood Publ., 2018.

¹⁶² Albert Somit, “The Historical and Geopolitical Aspects of the Berlin Crisis: A Lecture Delivered at the Naval War College 27 September 1961,” *Naval War College Review* 14:3 (1961), 22-33.

¹⁶³ Andrea Worden, et al., “Forced Marriages of Uyghur Women: State Policies for Interethnic Marriages,” *UHRP*, Nov. 16, 2022, <http://uhrp.org/report/forced-marriage-of-uyghur-women/> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁶⁴ Anne Tabb, et al., “The Effect of the Wannsee Conference on Mischlinge Experiences,” *Journal of Undergraduate Research and Scholarly Excellence* 5, s.d. 11-15, <http://jurpress.squarespace.com> (access: 02/2024).

Based on the Nuremberg Laws, the Nazis did forcibly sterilize the so-called “Rhineland bastards” (“*Rheinlandbastarde*”) born in 1920-24 to German women and soldiers from a force of 5,000 French colonial soldiers, mainly North Africans, in the occupied Rhineland. There were some 800 such offspring. In 1937, SS anthropologists recommended forcible sterilization of 385 of them, all 13-16 years old. After the war, the lead anthropologist, University of Berlin Professor Wolfgang Abel, was not prosecuted. The victims received no compensation or apology from the West German state. Scholars who studied their fate did not claim a genocide was perpetrated, most likely because none of the sterilized were murdered or sent to a concentration camp; indeed, some went on to serve in the Wehrmacht.¹⁶⁵

The Afro-German population, mainly immigrants from pre-World War I German colonies in Africa, numbered some 25,000 at the Nazis ascension in 1933.¹⁶⁶ Although there is no recognition of a genocide, solely based on forced sterilization of a small part of that population, they might instead be regarded as victims of a crime against humanity, but only if the prohibited acts were widespread, systematic and intentionally directed.¹⁶⁷

In Australia in 1934, the Under-Secretary of Queensland’s Home Department Lothar Gall proposed that all “half-castes” of mixed Aboriginal and white parentage be sterilized. His idea was rejected and for a few years in the late 1930s and early 1940s, aboriginal affairs officials thought that “half-castes” should be biologically absorbed. After World

¹⁶⁵ Paul Weindling, “The Dangers of White Supremacy: Nazi Sterilization and Its Mixed-Race Adolescent Victims,” *AJPH*, Feb. 2022, 248-254, <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2021.306593> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁶⁶ Konrad Kwiet, “Black Lives Didn’t Matter: The Afro-German Experience,” Sydney Jewish Museum, July 2, 2020, <http://sydneyjewishmuseum.com.au/holocaust/black-lives-didnt-matter-the-afro-german-experience/> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁶⁷ “Belarus Report Finds Systematic, Widespread and Gross Human Rights Violations,” *OHCHR*, Mar. 23, 2023, www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/03/belarus-report-finds-systematic-widespread-and-gross-human-rights (access: 02/2024); “U.S. Declares Russia Committed ‘Crimes Against Humanity’ in Ukraine,” *Reuters*, Feb. 18, 2023.

War II however, they shifted to cultural assimilation of the whole indigenous population, so that by then “the genocidal dimension in the thinking of the inter-war generation of aboriginal administrators had passed.”¹⁶⁸

As for forced sterilizations of Uyghurs in 2017- 2021, no such acts have been proved. Even if some were proven, if the acts were few, scattered, and performed in contravention to China’s regulations, they could not be accounted a crime against humanity. They would instead be a crime under Chinese law.

Assertions of genocide by birth control without mass killings are now largely seen as conspiracy theories, as birth control used to destroy a protected group, outside a process of systematic murder, has only been imagined. Such claims are akin to other fantastical ideas, such as the auto-genocide said to be exemplified by Khmer Rouge killings of Khmers. On that score,

[using] the legal definition, we would have to say that with this ethnic conception of genocide that genocide did not occur, much less auto-genocide, as that would mean that the Khmer Rouge indiscriminately killed Khmer because of them being Khmer (we are not talking about the ethnic minorities here, just the Khmer majority). Instead, they killed specific people who were against the Khmer Revolution, people they felt to be enemies of the people and people who were traitors to any of their ideals.

In fact, the perpetrators not only did not kill Khmer because they were Khmer, they even said that the Khmer they killed had detached themselves from the Khmer people. As a former ICTY prosecutor has noted, “there was not genocide [of Khmers] because they were murdered for political reasons, and not on racial, ethnic or national grounds.” Auto-genocide thus did not exist in Cambodia – or elsewhere.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Manne, *In Denial*,: 249-250.

¹⁶⁹ Timothy Williams, “The Cambodian ‘Auto-genocide’ – Musings on a Concept that Needn’t Exist,” *Heinrich Boell Stiftung*, Cambodia, Jan. 13, 2015, <http://kh.boell.org/en/2015/01/13/cambodian-autogenocide-musings-concept-neednt-exist> (access: 02/2024); Tausan, *Srebenica*.

The cases discussed show that, historically, forced sterilization has not by itself instantiated a genocide. Had a forced sterilization of the *mischlinge* occurred, it would have been a genocidal act because it was set in the larger Holocaust. Forced sterilization of Afro-Germans arguably also showed genocidal intent, but was not deemed a genocide, as it was not set in a program of mass killing of members of a protected group, which all genocides have had as their key feature.

Bloodless genocide via sterilization is still fantasized by individuals from time to time. In 2012, pro-Israel Dutch neo-conservative writer Leon de Winter, commenting on the high Gaza birthrate, remarked “Maybe we should, secretly, add an anti-conception agent to the fresh-water in Gaza.”¹⁷⁰ During the Israel/Palestine War in late 2023, co-founding and managing partner of US investment firm Oyster Ventures Kenneth Ballenegger said of Gazans:

*“Sterilizations. It’s warranted and the only way to pacify the jihadi population. They reproduce like rabbits and raise them [children] to be terrorists, creating more poverty misery and terrorism. Why should we allow that? The world would be a much better place if they didn’t reproduce.”*¹⁷¹

The notion of bloodless genocide is akin to claims that a small-scale conflict, crisis, or dispute between rival groups is a “bloodless war.” Such claims are an oxymoron, as wars are defined by bloody violence;¹⁷² indeed, millions died in Cold War proxy conflicts.¹⁷³ In the 1960s, while Fanon served as a doctor in the North African anti-

¹⁷⁰ Ali Abunimah, “Sterilize the Palestinian People, Dutch Writer Leon de Winter Says with Israeli Ambassador Listening,” *The Electronic Intifada*, Nov. 22, 2012, <http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/sterilize-palestinian-people-dutch-writer-leon-de-winter-says-israeli-ambassador> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁷¹ “A Tech Investor was Fired After Making Offensive Remarks on the Israel-Hamas Conflict,” *Business Insider*, Nov. 14, 2023.

¹⁷² Andrew Marshall, “What is a Bloodless War.” *Bootcamp and Military Fitness Institute*, Nov. 17, 2020, <http://bootcampmilitaryfitnessinstitute.com/2020/11/17/what-is-a-bloodless-war/> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁷³ Stephanie Schopert, “Six of the Deadliest Proxy Wars of the Cold War,” *History Collection*, Jan. 8, 2017, <http://historycollection.com/six-deadliest-proxy-wars-cold-war/2/> (access: 02/2024).

colonial struggle, he represented the social and psychological damage done to the colonized as “bloodless genocide.” Gambian surgeon Lenrie Peters then used “bloodless war” in his best-known poem to describe the same damage done to Africans who studied in colonizing countries.¹⁷⁴ Both phrases were metaphorical, because virtually every war, like every genocide, has been sanguinary.

V. Uyghur Birthrate Decline as a Blood Libel

US officials spread the idea that, based on “mass imprisonments and forced sterilizations,” Xinjiang “is the clearest example of genocide in our world today,” as former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Hayley put it in 2022.¹⁷⁵ The US itself famously presided over mass imprisonment that contributed to its loss in Iraq; it dominated Afghanistan when its prison population grew 500% from 2004 to 2018, falling sharply only after the Taliban returned to power in 2021.¹⁷⁶ The US imprisonment rate in 2024 was 5.3 times China’s.¹⁷⁷ US Black men are imprisoned at 5.5 times the rate of White men; their chances of imprisonment during their lifetime are 1 in 3 for Black men born in 1981 and 1 in 5 for those born in 2001.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Lamin Njie, “Analyses of Lenrie Peters Poem ‘We Have Come Home’;” *Njie Baa*, Nov. 9, 2020, <http://njiebaa.wordpress.com/2020/11/09/analyses-of-lenrie-peters-poem-we-have-come-home/> (access. 02/2024).

¹⁷⁵ “Hayley Says UN Human Rights Council Must Investigate Chinese ‘Genocide’ as UN Commissioner Visits Xinjiang;” *Fox News*, May 24, 2022.

¹⁷⁶ Aaron Glantz, *How America Lost Iraq*, New York: Penguin, 2005; Haroum Rahimi, “Incarceration Under the Shadow of the Taliban.” *Himal Southasian*, Jan. 17, 2024, www.himalmag.com/afghanistan-incarceration-prison-systems-taliban-takeover-history-justice/ (access. 02/2024).

¹⁷⁷ “Incarceration Rates by Country,” 2024, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/incarceration-rates-by-country> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁷⁸ “Incarceration Rates for Black Men and Women Have Been Declining Since 2001,” *19thNews*, Oct. 31, 2023, <http://19thnews.org/2023/10/black-men-women-incarceration-rates-criminal-justice-reform/> (access: 02/2024).

Imprisonment grew during the Xinjiang security campaign waged up to 2021. A prominent Chinese scholar has related that a Xinjiang police official told him in 2023 that many thousands of convicted terrorists, separatists, and religious extremists were being released.¹⁷⁹ “The round up an entire ethnic group into mass concentration camps” claimed by Uyghur émigrés in 2024¹⁸⁰ is however a fantasy. Western supporters of the émigré cause also allege imaginative numbers: a 2024 UHRP report a UK Xinjiang specialist co-authored asserts that “hundreds of thousands of women have been exposed to the abuses of the camp system.”¹⁸¹ Assuming that means 300,000-400,000 women and noting that 8.6% of China’s prisoners¹⁸² and <15% of those in Xinjiang’s Vocational and Education Training Centers (VETC) system in 2017-2019 have been women,¹⁸³ UHRP’s claim means 3-4m of the 7.7m Uyghur adults were “in the camp system”; yet, a Xinjiang specialist reckons that detaining even 1m would have collapsed the region’s economy.¹⁸⁴

In 2021, Australian biostatistician Stuart Gilmour compared rates of imprisonment of Australian aborigines, Canadian indigenous people, African Americans, and Native Americans to rates for Xinjiang claimed by the Xinjiang government, the émigré-run US propaganda agency RFA, and the *New York Times*. Some rates reflect the “incidence” (number of members of a cohort admitted to prison for the first time at a specified age, or “flow”) and others the “prevalence” (the sum of inci-

¹⁷⁹ Interview, Beijing, June 25, 2023.

¹⁸⁰ Elizabeth Palmer, “The Re-Branding of Xinjiang,” *CBS News*, Jan. 7, 2024, www.cbsnews.com/news/the-rebranding-of-xinjiang-china-crackdown-on-muslim-uyghur-population/ (access: 02/2024).

¹⁸¹ Rachel Harris and Abduweli Ayub, “Twenty Years for Learning the Koran: Uyghur Women and Religious Persecution.” *UHRP*, Feb. 1, 2024, <http://uhrp.org/report/twenty-years-for-learning-the-quran-uyghur-women-and-religious-persecution/> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁸² “China,” World Prison Brief, 2024, <http://www.prisonstudies.org/country/china> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁸³ Adrian Zenz, Testimony to the Uyghur Tribunal, June 7, 2021, 268, <http://uyghurtribunal.com> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁸⁴ Shichor, *Elephant*.

dence over the years, or “stock”) of prisoners, both per 100,000 relevant people.¹⁸⁵ Gilmour, by the way, has little confidence in the rates of imprisonment for Xinjiang adumbrated by genocide claimants, which he describes as “fake statistics.”¹⁸⁶

Gilmour’s tables indicate an all-Xinjiang rate of 500-1,000 per 100,000, a smaller rate than among the Anglosphere minorities to which the Xinjiang rate is compared. The Norway-based émigré Uyghur Transitional Justice Database reported in 2023 that 12,600 Uyghurs were “being held in camps,”¹⁸⁷ or about 100 per 100,000 of the Uyghur population, while China’s sentenced prisoners, plus detainees were, in late 2018, 165 per 100,000.¹⁸⁸ Even the rate RFA claimed for Kashgar prefecture in 2017, 2,500 per 100,000, is much lower than the 6,412 per 100,000 for African-American males aged 30-34 around 2015, a figure that means one in every 16 US black males of that age were imprisoned.¹⁸⁹ African American imprisonment moreover does not reflect a national security emergency but, as Gilmour shows, it has been high over many years.

The evidence on birth limits in Xinjiang is also far from proof beyond a reasonable doubt of intent to destroy an ethnic group as such. Xinjiang’s birthrate was 22.55 per 1,000 in 1978, 26.44 in 1990, but 10.69 by 2018. It fell further to 6.53 in 2022, slightly lower than China’s national birthrate of 6.77,¹⁹⁰ but a leading demographer of Xinjiang re-

¹⁸⁵ William Rhodes, et al., “Estimating Incidence and Cumulative Incidence of Incarceration Using NCRP Data,” *Abt Associates*, 2021, www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/bjs/grants/252678.pdf (access: 02/2024).

¹⁸⁶ Stuart Gilmour, Twitter, September 19, 2021, <http://threadreaderapp.com/thread/1439514890020868099.html> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁸⁷ Ablet, *China Says*.

¹⁸⁸ “China.” *World Prison Brief*, 2024, <http://www.prisonstudies.org/country/china> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁸⁹ “Incarceration Rates in International Perspective,” *The Sentencing Project*, June 28, 2017, www.sentencingproject.org/policybrief/incarceration-rates-in-international-perspective/ (access: 02/2024).

¹⁹⁰ Li Xiaoxia, An Analysis; “Population: Birth Rate: Xinjiang,” CEIC, 2023, www.ceicdata.com/en/china/population-birth-rate-by-region (access: 02/2024).

ported and a Kashgar health official confirmed that the 2023 H1 birthrate in that 95% Uyghur populated prefecture was up by about 50% over that in 2022 or around 11.76.¹⁹¹ China's 2023 birthrate was 6.39.¹⁹² Such data will likely not stop unevidenced statements like that made by a "white savior" US lawyer in 2024, that the Chinese government had *forced* "millions of Uyghur women to be sterilized."¹⁹³

Xinjiang's birthrate drop was due to several factors: 9,000 points for dispensing free contraceptives had recently been set up in a region where contraception was previously limited or unavailable.¹⁹⁴ Birth norms changed as education, urbanization and childrearing costs rose. Some spouses were temporarily separated in 2017-2019 when VETCs existed.¹⁹⁵ Birth limits were applied to rural Uyghurs for the first and only time in 2017-2021. The pandemic intervened. The 2023 H1 Uyghur birthrate increase was related to elimination of all birth limits from mid-2021.

Unlike most recognized genocides, which reduced populations of protected groups by 50-80% through mass murder, the Uyghur population has not fallen. There was a still-positive Uyghur natural population growth rate (NPGR; births exceeding deaths) in Kashgar in 2018 and 2019, even as birth limits were finally implemented throughout Xinjiang.¹⁹⁶ In 2018, the NPGR was positive in all heavily minority prefec-

¹⁹¹ Interviews in Urumqi and Kashgar, July 27, 2023 and August 3, 2023.

¹⁹² Christina zur Nedden, "China's Population Shrank by 2.75 million in 2023," *Die Welt*, Jan. 18, 2024.

¹⁹³ Elizabeth M. Lynch, "China's Living Dead," *Commonweal*, Jan. 29, 2024, <http://www.commonwealmagazine.org/china%E299s-living-dead> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁹⁴ Walther Bucklers, "China, Xinjiang and Genocide," *Nachdenkseiten*, Dec. 15, 2021, <http://eastandwest.me/2021/12/15/china-xinjiang-and-genocide-nachdenkseiten> (access: 02/2024).

¹⁹⁵ Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, "Assessment of Human rights Concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China," Aug. 31, 2022: 13 (interviewees stayed 2-18 months in VETCs), www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ohchr-assessment-human-rights-concerns-xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region (access: 02/2024).

¹⁹⁶ Linda Lew, "China Census: Migration Drives Han Population Growth in Xinjiang," *SCMP*, June 15, 2021.

tures: in Kizilsu it was 11.45, in Aksu 5.67, in Kashgar 6.93, and in Hotan 2.96.¹⁹⁷ Notably, in 2018 in Gulbagh sub-district of Hotan City, where Han concentrate, the NPGR was only 1.2, while in overwhelmingly Uyghur Hotan County, the figure was 5.29.¹⁹⁸ In later years, there has been an overall Xinjiang Han negative NPGR (NNPGR; deaths exceeding births).¹⁹⁹

There have been few, if any, confirmed reports of mass forced sterilization in Xinjiang in 2017-2021. One testimonialist highly-publicized in the West is Qelbinur Sidik, an ethnic Uzbek who says she taught in a Xinjiang woman's detention facility. Sidik claimed in 2021 to have been "subjected to forced sterilization," but in 2023 she said she had left for the Netherlands in 2019 after receiving a notice to report for sterilization.²⁰⁰ Sidik also averred that "In 2019 they [Xinjiang authorities] said there is an order from the government that every woman from 18 years to 59 years old has to be sterilized."²⁰¹ There was however Uyghur natural population growth in 2020 and 2021 and in Uyghur-dominant Kashgar prefecture, the birthrate increased in 2022 and soared in 2023 H1. That would have been impossible if "every woman" of childbearing age had been sterilized. As a former head of the Hong Kong Bar Association has remarked, "one can hardly rely on the testimonies of people who probably have a grudge against the system as the only empirical evidence to support an allegation as serious as crimes against humanity."²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ China Statistical Yearbook, 2019.

¹⁹⁸ "Slanderer Adrian Zenz's Xinjiang-Related Fallacies Versus the Truth." *Xinhua*, Apr. 30, 2021.

¹⁹⁹ Zenz, testimony, Uyghur Tribunal, June 7, 2021: 276, <http://uyghurtribunal.com/uploads> (access: 02/2024).

²⁰⁰ "'Uyghur Tribunal' Opens with Testimony of Alleged Rape, Torture," *Al-Jazeera*, June 4, 2021; "Testimony of Qelbinur Sidik: Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party March 23, 2023, Hearing on the Chinese Communist Party's Ongoing Uyghur Genocide."

²⁰¹ Emma Graham-Harrison and Lily Guo, "Uighur Muslim Teacher Tells of Forced Sterilization in Xinjiang," *Guardian*, Sept. 4, 2020.

²⁰² Ronny Tong, "UN Report Goes Too Far in Its Conclusions," *SCMP*, Sept. 7, 2022.

With no confirmed reports of mass forced sterilization available, Zenz has only asserted that “*it is possible* that Xinjiang authorities are engaging in the mass sterilization of women with three or more children.”²⁰³ More likely, many Xinjiang women with three-plus children, who had reached the then-existing birth limit, did not want more children and *chose* sterilization.²⁰⁴ The proportion of Uyghur women with three or more children likely fell in 2010-2018, but the one-fifth of them who had three-plus children in 2010 contrasts with the 1.3% of women in 98.2% Han-populated Shanghai who had three children in 2018.²⁰⁵ Indeed by 2022, only 13% of women with a Shanghai *hukou* had even two children. The total fertility rate was 0.7 and falling.²⁰⁶

An increasing number of Chinese women elect to not have any children or more than one child. Only a small number have three or more; indeed, as of 2015, only 1 in 4 women of fertile age had two children.²⁰⁷ That reflects the change in birth norms in China. As University of Rhode Island demographer of China Melanie Brasher has observed,

*The one-child policy was in effect for more than a generation, and now it is part of the culture to have only one child . . . [P]arents invest a lot of time and effort into that one child – to secure their education, for example. Many parents can’t imagine doing that for multiple children.*²⁰⁸

²⁰³ Zenz, Sterilizations, IUDs: 15-19; UNICEF, “Population Demographics,” 2019, 22, www.unicef.cn/sites/unicef.org.china/files/2019-06/01EN-Population%20demographics%20Atlas%202018.pdf (access: 02/2024).

²⁰⁴ Population and Family Planning in Xinjiang; Porter and Blumenthal, US State Department; “Xinjiang: a Report and Resource Compilation,” *Qiao Collective*, Sept. 2021, www.qiaocollective.com/education/xinjiang (access: 02/2024).

²⁰⁵ Zhang Yan, et al., “Third Birth Intention of the Childbearing-age Population in Mainland China and Sociodemographic Differences: a Cross-sectional Survey,” *BMC Public Health* 21 (2021), 2280; “Shanghai Women Balk at Third Child.” *CD*, Sept. 6, 2018.

²⁰⁶ Luna Sun, “China’s Wealthiest City Explores Why Only 1 Out of 8 Mothers from Shanghai Have a Second Child,” *SCMP*, Sept. 27, 2022.

²⁰⁷ Isabel Attane, “China’s New Three-Child Policy: What Effects Can We Expect?,” *Population & Societies* No. 596 (2022), 2, www.ined.fr (access: 02/2024).

²⁰⁸ “URI Demographer Discusses China’s First Population Decline in Decades,” www.uri.edu/news/2023/01/uri-demographer-discusses-chinas-first-population-decline-in-decades/ (access: 02/2024).

That scenario may also apply to Uyghur women, with fewer wanting another child. Change in their birth norms is unlikely to have put them in the “low fertility trap” associated with Han however.²⁰⁹ During the last year of birth limits, a higher percentage of minority new births were third-or-above children. A mid-2021 survey of more than 15,000 Chinese women, one fourth of them minorities, found that “The third birth intention of minority nationality is stronger than that of Han nationality.”²¹⁰ Overwhelmingly Han-populated Guangdong, the country’s wealthiest and most populous province, is where a larger proportion of the population is willing to have more than one child, yet a 2023 survey indicated that only 6.5% of respondents wanted three or more.²¹¹ Because the intent to have a third child is also more prevalent among those who already have two children, Xinjiang minorities likely will continue to have higher fertility than Han.

Sterilization and implants are popular in many countries. A 2018 study of 72.7m US women found “permanent female methods” – sterilization by tubal ligation or tubal implants – is the number one form of contraception, used by 18.1% of all women and 27.7% women aged 15-49 who use contraceptives. Other methods that women aged 15-49 use are pills (21.4%), male condoms (12.9%), IUDs (12.9%), and partner vasectomy (8.6%). Use of permanent methods varied by age: <10% for 15-30-year-olds; 46% for 40-44-year-olds; 61% for 45-49-year-olds. It also varied by ethnicity, income and education level, and number of children: 31% of Black female contraceptive users aged 15-44m, but only 21% of whites, used permanent methods. Permanent methods among female users aged 15-44 “was more common at lower levels of income and education.” Moreover, “about two in five contraceptive users aged 15-44 who had had three or more children relied on female permanent

²⁰⁹ Dudley Poston, “China Needs Immigrants,” *The Conversation*, July 18, 2023, <http://theconversation.com/china-needs-immigrants-208911> (access: 02/2024).

²¹⁰ Zhang Yan, *Third Birth Intention*.

²¹¹ Lena Sun, “China Population: Province Bucks Trend with Surveyed Interest in Bigger Families,” *SCMP*, Oct. 17, 2023.

contraception.”²¹² Gilmour has said that Zenz stated that 2.5 of every 1,000 adult women in Xinjiang have been sterilized – presumably the 2018 figure Zenz presented.²¹³ Zenz sees that as confirming a forced sterilization campaign, but Gilmour pointed out that “In the 1990s UK, five per 1,000 adult women were sterilized every year, and recent surveys find between three and seven percent of UK women are sterilized.”²¹⁴

International courts hold there is no genocide if acts do not have as their only reasonable explanation an intent to destroy a protected group.²¹⁵ Genocide can only be found if a pattern of conduct “could only point to the existence of such intent” and “this is the only inference that could reasonably be drawn from the acts in question.”²¹⁶ Reasonable explanations exist for birth limits being systematically applied – largely for the first time – to rural Uyghurs from 2017-2021. The state adopted in 2017 an “equalization” policy of applying to minorities the birth limits it had applied to Han for decades. The intent was to reap developmental benefits from a lower child dependency ratio, create educational and employment opportunities for minority women, and counter jihadi Salafist forces who demanded Muslim women maximize births.²¹⁷

Claiming Chinese deprive minorities of children due to their ethnicity is thus a “blood libel” bound to incite anti-Chinese racism. US anthropologist Darren Byler frames that libel as the Chinese government, driven

²¹² “Contraceptive Use in the United States by Method,” *Guttmacher Institute*, May 2021, www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/contraceptive-method-use-united-states (access: 02/2024).

²¹³ Zenz, Sterilizations, IUDs, 18.

²¹⁴ Nuri Vittachi, “Friday” blog, June 26, 2021, <https://fridayeveryday.com/statistician-demolishes-genocide-claim/> (access: 02/2024).

²¹⁵ *Prosecutor v. Milomir Stakic* (Judgement), Case No. IT-97-24-T (31 July 2003), para. 55; *Prosecutor v. Radoslav Brdanin*, (Judgement) IT-99-36-T (1 September 2004), para. 970; *Prosecutor v. Akayesu*, para. 523; *Prosecutor v. Clement Kayishema and Obed Ruzindana* (Judgment) IT 99-36-T (21 May 1999), para. 93.

²¹⁶ *Croatia v. Serbia*, para. 148.

²¹⁷ See “Xinjiang Population Dynamics and Data.” State Council Information Office, Sept. 16. 2021, http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2021-09/26/content_77775276_6.htm (access: 02/2024).

by “virulent ethnonationalism” and having “an impulse to colonize others as a way of extirpating the stain of colonial victimhood,” doing to Xinjiang minorities what colonialists did, by applying “colonial norms and racialized categorizations” in limiting births.²¹⁸ No official statements of virulent ethnonationalism, colonial norms, or birth limits related to China’s “century of humiliation” are cited, because none exist. Rather, these are fantasized views, gratuitously imputed to the Chinese state. The illogicality of the fantasies is shown by actual colonialists *not* having applied the same policies to their metropolitan and colonial populations; for example, forced sterilization was not generally enforced in the UK and France, but applied in colonies. In contrast, Han had strict birth limits from 1982 to 2021, Xinjiang minority birth limits were scattered before the early 2000s, as Byler recognizes, and hardly enforced in rural Uyghur before 2017, with most Uyghurs officially allowed more children than most Xinjiang Han. That approach is the opposite of a colonial policy and the assertion that it was an ethnic-based conspiracy amounts to a blood libel of Chinese, including the many Uyghurs who enforced birth limits – when they were actually enforced.

The classic blood libel was against European Jews. Many famous cases were in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, but blood libels have been spread in the US and Europe in the 20th and 21st centuries.²¹⁹ Christians elites had long accused Jews of killing Biblical prophets and Christ, of host-desecration and well-poisoning. They later added that Jews murder Christian children to use their blood in rituals.²²⁰ An early promi-

²¹⁸ Darren Byler, “Eliminate All Illegal Births: Negative Eugenics and Uyghur Women as Objects of Contestation.” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 12:3 (2022), 367-371.

²¹⁹ Abraham Duker, “Twentieth Century Blood Libels in the United States,” in Alan Dundes (ed), *The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991, 233-260; Elissa Bemporad, “On the Words and Silences and What They Teach Us About the History and Memory of Blood Libel.” *Anti-Semitism Studies* 5:2 (2021), 319-329.

²²⁰ Jeremy Cohen, “The Jews as the Killers of Christ in the Latin Tradition: from Augustine to the Friars.” *Traditio* 39 (1983), 1-27.

ment case in England arose when a boy, William of Norwich, was murdered in 1144. A study has argued that the unproven claim he was murdered by Jews arose as a strategy of aristocrats, especially Crusader knights, to escape debts to Jewish money lenders and to extort Jews. It was grounded in the medieval Christian belief in a cult of the Innocents, with whom children were associated as victims in an era of high child mortality.²²¹ Another instance was of “Little St. Hugh,” an English boy supposedly murdered ritually in 1255 by Jews, 18 of whom were executed on orders of Henry III. The likely spurious accusation and the cult of this pseudo-saint reflected envy of Lincoln’s well-off Jewish community.²²²

The most notorious blood libel case involved the 1475 killing of a boy, Simon of Trent, in northern Italy. There was no evidence his murderers were Jews or that Jews ever intended to destroy non-Jews, but the story of Simon’s “ritual murder” was spread by the newly-invented printing press. Trent Jewish community members were arrested, tortured, and executed, with pogroms and sanctions against Jews elsewhere. The Holy Roman Emperor took up the claims and the Church beatified Simon. In later centuries, books and pamphlets incited hatred of Jews based on the blood libel, with the mid-18th Pope Benedict XIV repeatedly speaking of child martyrs “cruelly killed by Jews in hatred of the Christian faith.” Blood libel claims largely waned in parts of Enlightenment Europe, although there was a “ritual murder” case in Germany as late as 1900.²²³ Libels continued further east. In Ukraine, rightwing anti-Jewish groups promoted the Beilis case in 1911. Nazi publications of the 1930s depicted Jewish ritual murder of children and

²²¹ E.M. Rose, *The Murder of William of Norwich: The Origins of Blood Libel in Medieval Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

²²² “Hugh of Lincoln,” Oxford Reference, 2023, www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095949312;jsessionid=6AD367DBDD9532DF61D8980EFF4A8705 (access: 02/2024).

²²³ Helmut W. Smith, *The Butcher's Tale: Murder and Anti-Semitism in a German Town*, New York: Norton, 2002.

the 1946 Kielce Pogrom in immediate post-Holocaust Poland was based on blood libel. The latter ironically happened just when the Genocide Convention was being formulated.²²⁴

Contemporary racist discourse still deploys the Jews-as-child-murderers theme.²²⁵ A 2021 poll found 15% of Americans (23% of Republicans) agree with the QAnon conspiracy theory that “the government, media, and financial worlds in the U.S. are controlled by a group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who run a global child sex trafficking operation.”²²⁶ Some QAnon supporters serve in the US Congress.²²⁷ Studies show that QAnon lore referring to elites who secretly rule the world and engage in ritualistic drinking of the blood of children are beliefs rooted in longstanding blood libel myths. QAnon often focuses on Jewish financiers George Soros and the Rothschild family as central to these elites.²²⁸ Many QAnon supporters, like the medieval English aristocrats, believe that when the QAnon movement triumphs,

²²⁴ Magda Trent, *Blood Libel: On the Trail of an Antisemitic Myth*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020; Hannah Johnson, *Blood Libel: The Ritual Murder Accusation at the Limit of Jewish History*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012; Robert Weinberg, *Blood Libel in Late Imperial Russia: The Ritual Murder Trial of Mendel Beilis*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013; Louis Snyder, *Hitler's Elite: Biographical Sketches of Nazis Who Shaped the Third Reich*, New York: Hippocrene Books, 1989, 47-51.

²²⁵ Julie Nathan, “Dominant Themes in Contemporary Antisemitic Discourse.” *ABC Religion and Ethics*, Apr. 4, 2017, www.abc.net.au/religion/dominant-themes-in-contemporary-antisemitic-discourse/10095908 (access: 02/2024).

²²⁶ “Three Components of the QAnon Conspiracy Movement.” *PRRI*, May 27, 2021, www.prii.org/research/qanon-conspiracy-american-politics-report (access: 02/2024).

²²⁷ Katherine Tully-McManus, “QAnon Goes to Washington: Two Supporters Win Seats in Congress,” *Roll Call*, Nov. 5, 2020, <https://rollcall.com/2020/11/05/qanon-goes-to-washington-two-supporters-win-seats-in-congress/> (access: 02/2024).

²²⁸ Will Sommer, *Trust the Plan: The Rise Celeste of QAnon and the Conspiracy That Unhinged America*, New York: Harper Collins, 2023; Celeste Florentin, *The QAnon Conspiracy and its Potential Risks to Public Health and Political Discourse*, MSW thesis, California State University, Northridge, 2021, 12-13; “What You Need to Know About QAnon.” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, 2020, www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2020/10/27/what-you-need-know-about-qanon (access: 02/2024).

their debts will be abolished by Trump, who often uses QAnon tropes.²²⁹ QAnon promoter and blood libeler Scott McKay was prominent in 2023 through participation as a speaker in the Trump-endorsed ReAwaken America tour organized by Trump's sons Eric and Donald Jr. and his former Chief of Staff Michael Flynn. "ReAwaken America" is a variant of "*Deutschland Erwache!*" (Germany Awake!), a stormtrooper slogan during Hitler's rise to power, often accompanied by the further phrase "*Jude verreck!*" (Jews, perish!). McKay, a "wellness industry entrepreneur" has said,

*Jews were behind 9/11 and the assassinations of Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy, that they set up a banking system 'in exchange for the blood sacrifice of a child' . . . [H]e's praised Hitler for 'actually fighting the same people that we're trying to take down today.'*²³⁰

The lack of a logical basis for the "prevention of Uyghur births" blood libel is seen in China's "history of high-reliance on IUDs [intra-uterine devices] and female sterilization."²³¹ From 1980-2014, 107m Chinese women were sterilized. Sterilization prevalence reached 35.9% of married women aged 15-49 by 1992. Some 324m IUDs were fitted. These methods remain popular among rural and older women who do not want additional children.²³² Proponents of a Xinjiang "demographic

²²⁹ Charlie Sykes, "Will Sommer: The Power of QAnon," *The Bulwark*, Feb. 21, 2023, www.thebulwark.com/podcast-episode/will-sommer-the-power-of-qanon/ (access: 02/2024).

²³⁰ "Team Trump's Axis with Hitler's American Friends: The Ex-president's Family and Allies are Teaming Up with Nazis and Antisemites," *New York Daily News*, May 10, 2023.

²³¹ Jessica Gipson, et al., "Nomadic Tibetan Women's Reproductive Health: Findings From Cross-Sectional Surveys with a Hard-to-reach population," *Reproductive Health* 63 (2021), <http://reproductive-health-journal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12978-020-01052-0> (access: 02/2024); Jane Bertrand, et al., "Contraceptive Method Skew and Shifts in Method Mix in Low and Middle-Income Countries," *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 40:3 (2014), 144-153.

²³² Sam Rowlands and Ramod Regmi, "The Use of Forced Sterilisation as a Key Component of Population Policy: Comparative Studies of China, India, Puerto Rico and Singapore," *Indian Journal of Public Administration* 68:2 (2022), 271-284; Hanna Teeram, "IUDs in China: The Legacy of the One Child Policy," *US-China Today*, Dec. 13, 2021, <http://uschinatoday.org/features/2021/12/13/iuds-in-china-the-legacy-of-the-one-child-policy> (access: 02/2024).

genocide” have not shown *systematic* forced sterilization, abortion, or IUD implantation or anything like the murderous Holocaust sterilizations or coerced contraception among indigenes. Zenz partly bases his assertions of forced sterilization on stories told by a few émigrés whose reliability even some Westerners hostile to the Chinese government question.²³³ Thus, Gene Bunin, head of the US-based Uyghur Victims Database has said that

*eyewitness reporting may sometimes be unreliable because eyewitnesses often go public with the help of Uyghur or Kazakh activist groups. Since these groups have a certain agenda, coaching of eyewitnesses may occur to maximize media effect. Ex-detainees also may have conflicts of interest, for instance, the desire to raise awareness of their ethnic group’s struggle, or to obtain asylum in a new host countries. Testimonies may also ‘evolve,’ with ex-detainees adding significant details over time that did not appear in original accounts. For these reasons, testimonial evidence alone may be considered comparatively weak evidence unless supported by documentation.*²³⁴

Tubal ligations and implants, IUDs and vasectomies are favored as least likely to result in contraceptive failures.²³⁵ Economic and political factors also influence the prevalence of various methods; thus in the US vasectomies increased by 34% during the 2007-2009 Global Financial Crisis. They increased again after the US Supreme Court allowed states

²³³ Eduardo Baptista, “Human Rights in China: Activists Say Sensationalist Reports on Xinjiang Do More Harm Than Good,” *SCMP*, May 24, 2021; Rune Steenberg, “Suppression of the Uyghurs: Let’s Stick to the Facts,” *Geneva Solutions*, July 26, 2021, <http://genevasolutions.news/peace-humanitarian/suppression-of-the-uyghurs-let-s-stick-to-the-facts> (access: 02/2024); Yi Fuxian, “Why is the Uyghur Population Shrinking?” *Project Syndicate*, July 12, 2022, www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/xinjiang-uyghur-crackdown-population-decline-by-yi-fuxian-2022-07 (access: 02/2024).

²³⁴ Joanne Smith Finley, “Why Scholars and Activists Increasingly Fear a Uyghur Genocide in Xinjiang,” *JGR* 23:3 (2021), 348-370 (357, fn. 66).

²³⁵ “Contraceptive Effectiveness in the United States,” *Guttman Institute*, April 2020, www.guttman.org/fact-sheet/contraceptive-effectiveness-united-states (access: 02/2024).

to outlaw abortion.²³⁶ It is unremarkable that when birth limits were enforced among Xinjiang minorities in 2017-2021, many women chose sterilization, with no need for widespread force likely, beyond the coercion needed to apply any law that creates an obligation. After all, no stigma attaches to sterilization in China, unlike in the US. University of Connecticut Professor Elizabeth Hintz has observed that “perceptions of sterilization in the US have been marred by a dark history of eugenics, in which racist ideas about who ought to have children have shaped reproductive policies and doctors’ reproductive counseling.” That included “promoting the proliferation of those who were white,” and “widespread federally-funded involuntary sterilizations” up to 1979. Hintz also notes that US doctors who object to sterilization are not required to perform it and sterilization services are often not offered at religiously-affiliated hospitals. Sterilization remains racialized, with doctors twice as likely to disapprove voluntary sterilization for white women than black and Hispanic women.²³⁷ Yet, with all that, many US women choose sterilization. The proportion is in the range Zenz claimed were the targets for two Xinjiang counties in 2019.²³⁸

The claim of widespread sterilization in Xinjiang in 2017-2021 ceases to be ominous when it is known that sterilization is less common there than in the US. Saying that is not to the “whataboutism” that rightwing forces often decry when their attacks on non-Western states are answered by references to Western states’ malfeasances. Whataboutism is A excusing its bad conduct by pointing to worse conduct by B.²³⁹ Comparisons with the US, Australia, etc. about sterilizations, imprisonment,

²³⁶ Kate Morgan, “Vasectomy: the US Men Embracing Permanent Birth Control,” *BBC*, Oct. 27, 2022.

²³⁷ Elizabeth Hintz, “What is Voluntary Sterilization?,” *The Conversation*, Dec. 9, 2022, <http://theconversation.com/global/topics/voluntary-sterilization-58012> (access: 02/2024).

²³⁸ Zenz, Sterilizations, IUDs, 2.

²³⁹ Benjamin Curtis, “Whataboutism: What it is and Why it is Such a Popular Tactic in Arguments,” *The Conversation*, May 20, 2022, <http://theconversation.com/whataboutism-what-it-is-and-why-its-such-a-popular-tactic-in-arguments-182911> (access: 02/2024).

removed children, etc. are not made to excuse wrongful conduct in Xinjiang, as the alleged misconduct in Xinjiang (genocide, crimes against humanity settler colonialism, etc.) has not been substantiated. China thus has no need for whataboutism: it is A responding to B's accusations not by saying that B is doing is worse, but rather by arguing that A is not engaged in wrongdoing, while B is. Thus, for example, allegations that China engages in whataboutism when it criticizes the Canadian government for its former system of indigenous residential schools²⁴⁰ are off the mark: China argues it has done the opposite of genocide, by substantially raising the educational levels and living standards of Uyghur children.

VI. Conclusion: Bloodless Genocide as “Murder Without Death”

The Holocaust is the paradigmatic example of a genocide²⁴¹ and, like it, all widely-recognized genocides have been sanguinary plans of action that authorities approved based on their intent to destroy a protected group as such.²⁴² Prudential concerns require that idiosyncratic framings of “bloodless genocide,” “genocide without killing,” “non-violent genocide,” etc. not be substituted for judicial understandings of the Convention. To do so diverges from the Convention's intended purposes and often reflects a morally-infirm political stratagem to impugn an opponent whose conduct or intent does not meet Convention standards. As German-Polish historian Klaus Bachmann, analyzing colonialist mass killings in Africa, has argued,

²⁴⁰ Xia Xiyuan, “Why China Cares About Canada's Indigenous Residential Schools: From Whataboutism to Internal Denial,” *GSP* 17:1 (2023), 1-17.

²⁴¹ Aleida Assmann, “The Holocaust – a Global Memory? Extensions and Limits of a New Memory Community,” in A. Assmann and Sebastien Conrad (eds.) *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 97-116.

²⁴² Schabas, *Genocide*, 245-246.

Bloodless Genocide or Blood Libel?

Applying the legal genocide notion to real-world cases [the] purpose is twofold: to obtain a means to distinguish different cases of mass violence, and to avoid a normatively driven inflationary use of the genocide label, which threatens to deprive this notion of any precise meaning, making it instead a tool for victims' groups (and sometimes perpetrator communities) in the fight for access to scarce resources and symbolic capital ... [Scholars] need to adopt the only concept which is currently available, is rooted in law and jurisprudence, and is narrow and precise enough to provide them with a tool for the unbiased assessment of mass violence.²⁴³

After the convictions of Eichmann, for “directing births be banned and pregnancies terminated among Jewish women in the Terezin Ghetto with intent to exterminate the Jewish People,”²⁴⁴ and Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Hoess, for murderous forced sterilization experiments,²⁴⁵

There were no convictions for imposing measures intended to prevent births in relation to any subsequent atrocities, including genocides that took place in the 1990s in Rwanda and Srebrenica. In its submissions to the [ICJ], Bosnia and Herzegovina accused Serbia and Montenegro . . . of genocide by imposing measures intended to prevent births. However, the ICJ judges found that those accusations were not supported by sufficient evidence ...²⁴⁶

That result is because, even if one has genocidal intent,

not every crime committed by him or her that may affect the birth rate within the protected group would qualify as imposing measures intended to prevent births, if such offender does not commit it with the intent to affect that birth rate [or if the offender] does not do so to destroy the group.

²⁴³ Bachmann, How to Avoid.

²⁴⁴ District Court of Jerusalem, Israel, *Attorney General v. Adolf Eichmann*, No. Criminal Case No. 40/61 (Judgment 11 December 1961).

²⁴⁵ *Trial of Obersturmbannführer Rudolf Franz Ferdinand Hoess*, Case No. 38, Judgement (Supreme National Tribunal of Poland), 11-29 March 1947, reported in United Nations War Crimes Commission, *Law Reports of Trials of War Criminals*, Vol 8 (1948), 24- 25.

²⁴⁶ Mackenzie Austin, et al., “Memorandum” [to Professor Van Schaak], Stanford Law School Human Rights and International Justice Policy Lab, Jan. 23, 2021: 24, www.justsecurity.org.

*Therefore, social birth control programs, such as so-called one-child policy in China, even though its purpose is to impose measures to prevent births within the group, do not amount to the acts of genocide due to the lack of the specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, one of the protected groups.*²⁴⁷

Two renowned US international law scholars have also averred that “The clear purpose of the Chinese measures is not and never was to ‘destroy in whole or in part’ the Uyghur group by suppression of births but reflects a general population-control strategy in a country that already has 1.4 billion human beings and has long experimented with various kinds of population control and sterilization policies and practices.”²⁴⁸

Western constituencies that speak of a Xinjiang bloodless genocide ignore law and history and contribute to applying to Chinese a variant of the Nazi-era slogan: *Die Juden sind am allem schuld* (the Jews are guilty of everything). Indeed, the much-promoted, self-contradicting émigré testimonialist Zumrat Dawut has put it that “Any kind of crime you can think of is happening to Uyghurs.”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ Monika Zakrzewska, “A Different Approach Towards Srebrenica Genocide – Can Killings of Bosnian Muslim Men Amount to Imposing Measures Intended to Prevent Births within the Protected Group?,” LLM thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2020, 7, 11, 12 (quoting *Prosecutor v Popović et al.* (Case No. IT-05-88-T), Judgment, 10 June 2010, para. 818) and citing Schabas, *Genocide*, 294 and Florian Jessberger, “The Definition [and the Elements of the Crime of Genocide,” in Paola Gaeta (ed.), *The UN Genocide Convention: A Commentary*, Oxford University Press 2009, 102].

²⁴⁸ Alfred de Zayas and Richard Falk, “The Unjustified Criticism of High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet’s Visit to Xinjiang.” *Pearls & Irritations*, June 18, 2022, <https://johnmenadue.com/alfred-de-zayas-and-richard-falk-the-unjustified-criticism-of-high-commissioner-michelle-bachelets-visit-to-xinjiang-in-china/> (access: 02/2024).

²⁴⁹ Helen Davidson, “‘Our People are Still Trapped’: Uyghur Exiles Demand Action on Abuses,” *Guardian*, Sept. 5, 2022.

Western forces also disregard the precept of the great scientist Laplace, that “the more extraordinary the event, the greater the need of its being supported by strong proofs,” where the extraordinary is “those classes which include a very small number.”²⁵⁰

Uyghur émigré groups offer not even ordinary corroborating evidence of genocide,²⁵¹ while praising politicians who attack China’s policies in Xinjiang; for example, Germany’s Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock.²⁵² Prominent Western think tanks²⁵³ and human rights groups²⁵⁴ also support the émigrés. So too do a few Xinjiang specialists, whose pronouncements disregard basic tenets of scholarship. Thus, Georgetown University historian James Millward has said events in Xinjiang are “reminiscent of the worst past colonialist depredations against indigenous peoples as well as ethnic pogroms, the Holocaust, and South African apartheid.” He denounces “PRC assimilationism and Han supremacy,” though such phenomena, if they existed, would hardly equate with the massively murderous campaigns he lists.²⁵⁵ Zenz has said that in Xinjiang there has been “an internment of an entire ethnic group” and makes “as bad as the Nazis” assertions, such as “what is happening in Xinjiang is one of the worst mass cases of human rights

²⁵⁰ Pierre-Simon Laplace, *A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities*, New York: Wiley, 1902 [1812].

²⁵¹ Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act Builds.

²⁵² “World Uyghur Congress Welcomes German Foreign Minister Stance on Uyghurs,” *European Interest*, Apr. 14, 2023, www.uyghurcongress.org/press-release-world-uyghur-congress-welcomes-german-foreign-minister-baerbocks-statement-on-uyghurs/ (access: 02/2024).

²⁵³ Marcus Reubenstein, “Dungeons and Dragons: The China Threat Fiction,” *APAC News*, Sept. 6, 2021, <https://apac.news/dungeons-and-dragons-the-china-threat-fiction/> (access: 02/2024).

²⁵⁴ Christian Azzolini, “Chinese Genocide of Uyghurs in Xinjiang Continues.” *Genocide Watch*, 2023, www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/chinese-genocide-of-uyghurs-in-xinjiang-continues (access: 02/2024).

²⁵⁵ James Millward, “What Should Americans Know About Human Rights Violations in Xinjiang, and What are US National Interests There?” *The China Questions 2: Critical Insights into US-China Relations*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2022, 219-229.

abuses in the world today ... Even though there is no mass killing or death camps, there are sadly many similarities to the oppressions of the 1940s in Germany ...”²⁵⁶

Zenz and other academic Uyghur genocide claimants formerly contributed to China ethnic studies, but are now part of two “industries” tied to Western governments. One is the “white-savior industrial complex”: Nigerian/American writer Teju Cole coined the phrase in 2012 to describe privileged whites seeking personal catharsis by attempting to liberate, rescue, or otherwise uplift underprivileged people of colour. He said the complex “is not about justice [but] about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege” and adds that “A ‘nobody’ from America or Europe can go to Africa and become a divine savior, or, at the very least, satisfy their emotional needs under the banner of ‘making a difference.’”²⁵⁷ White saviorism has been called a career-enhancing “pervasive thing in American culture.”²⁵⁸ Savior claims of Xinjiang genocide are now part of Western identity and involve notions of superiority that even some opponents of China’s government have recognized.²⁵⁹ At the same time, those who criticize Uyghur émigré claims can expect to be marginalized in the West – accused of “genocide denial” and even “aiding imperialism.”²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ “VOC Testifies to US Congress on Beijing’s Genocide in Xinjiang,” *VOC*, Mar. 24, 2023, <http://victimsofcommunism.org/voc-testifies-to-us-congress-on-beijings-genocide-in-xinjiang/> (access: 02/2024).

²⁵⁷ Teju Cole, “The White Savior Industrial Complex,” *Atlantic*, Mar. 21, 2012.

²⁵⁸ Christopher Kuo, “The Director of ‘Savior Complex’ on the Perils of ‘White Saviorism,’” *NYT*, Oct. 4, 2023.

²⁵⁹ Perry Link, “Introduction,” in Liu Xiaobo, et al., *No Enemies, No Hatred: Selected Essays and Poems*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012, xvi.

²⁶⁰ Gerald Roche and Mychal Smith, “Xinjiang Denialists Are Only Aiding Imperialism,” *The Nation*, July 6, 2021; Zhang Chi, “Competing Narratives of the Xinjiang Question and China-West Geopolitical Rivalry,” in Shixin Ivy Zhang and Altman Yuzhu Peng (eds.), *China Media, and International Conflicts*, London: Routledge, 2023, 58-73.

The saviors are also part of the “genocide industry.” Herbert Hirsch, a pioneering US scholar of genocide studies, observed that

*There is now a genocide industry in Washington, DC – a smallish offshoot of its foreign policy counterpart – where members are brought into the fold and recycled as they demonstrate their willingness to go along with the party line of whatever the ruling administration’s genocide/human rights policy happens to be ... A very common and apparently useful strategy is to invite vetted ‘experts’ – hand-picked by the administration or by the leadership in Congress – to testify in front of various committees. Here, it is important to ask ourselves why some appear while others do not. Is it related to how much one knows about a particular topic or how well acquainted one is with a given situation, or is it that each side of any argument calls on those who will justify the policy they wish to pursue?*²⁶¹

Another leading genocide scholar, Germany’s Dominik Schaller, speaking of the genocide industry has noted that

*As a result of political exploitation, the term “genocide” [has] degenerated into a rhetorical weapon . . . genocide sells. Book manuscripts related to mass violence need to carry “genocide” in their titles in order to be published and sold . . . [R]esearchers [should] keep a critical distance from both activists and profit-oriented actors in the field. The most important task is to elude instrumentalization in any form . . . [by] constantly scrutiniz[ing] the terms, concepts, categories, and methods that are commonly used in genocide studies.*²⁶²

There are, however, scholars who dissent from the misuse represented by “bloodless genocide” claims. University of Michigan Native American psychologist Joseph Gone, at a conference on colonial genocide in indigenous North America, observed that

²⁶¹ Herbert Hirsch, “Preventing Genocide and Protecting Human Rights,” *Genocide Studies International* 8:1 (2014), 1-22.

²⁶² Dominik Schaller, “From Lemkin to Clooney: The Development and State of Genocide,” *GSP* 6:3 (2011), 245-256.

*The term [genocide] is strongly linked to the Holocaust, which provides a prototype denoting the extremes of human behavior. To apply it to a wide range of other cases ... would dilute its meaning and reduce its potential power and impact. 'Genocide without killing' ... is like murder without death.*²⁶³

Even some China-hostile politicians seem to at least recognize that a genocide must be murderous: in 2024, German Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck said the concept entails the deliberate will to exterminate an ethnic or religious group (“das gezielte Auslöschenwollen von Ethnien oder religiösen Gemeinschaften”).²⁶⁴

The Xinjiang blood libel is the latest iteration of the hoary theme of “Chinese cruelty,” a trope that parallels notions of “Jewish cruelty” propagated over hundreds of years. This cruelty is said to disregard the value of human life, particularly the lives of other peoples, but where seen as necessary, even the lives of one’s co-ethnics.²⁶⁵ The accusation about Xinjiang goes even a step further, by asserting that Xinjiang Han would disapprove state cruelty to fellow Han, but actively approve it as to minorities.²⁶⁶ Chinese can view unfounded charges of genocide as the ultimate dehumanizing denigration, but these charges also frame China as the “Red Menace” in a new Cold War. They are an excuse for

²⁶³ Alexander Laban Hinton, “Afterword: A View from Critical Genocide Studies,” in Andrew Woolford, et al., (eds.), *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2014, 325-332.

²⁶⁴ “Uyghur Tribunal Judgment,” Dec. 9, 2021, 7, 24, 55-56, <http://uyghurtribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Uyghur-Tribunal-Judgment-9th-Dec-21.pdf> (access: 02/2024); Owen Churchill, “China Committed Genocide in Xinjiang, Says UK Independent Body.” *SCMP*, Dec. 10, 2021; “Habeck zu Vorwürfen gegen Israel: ‘Völkermord ist etwas anderes’,” *RND*, 11 January 2024, <http://www.rnd.de/politik/habeck-zu-vorwuerfen-gegen-israel-voelkermord-ist-etwas-anderes> (access: 02/2024).

²⁶⁵ Barry Sautman, “Big Thunder, Little Rain: The Yellow Peril Framing of the Pandemic Campaign Against China,” *CJIL* 21 (2021), 395-424.

²⁶⁶ Darren Byler, “When Does Cruelty Become Brutality? On State Violence in Northwest China,” *China Project*, Apr. 5, 2023, <http://thechinaproject.com/2023/04/05/when-does-cruelty-become-brutality-on-state-violence-in-northwest-china/> (access: 02/2024).

potential violence against China and Chinese as a people, if the time comes, just as the classical blood libel was time and again used to incite anti-Jewish violence.

Xinjiang as a bloodless genocide is as much a fantasy as a 2018 novel in which criminals try to take over the world by starting a nuclear genocide to wipe out geopolitical competitors China and Russia.²⁶⁷ That novelistic imagining at least recapitulates an actual Cold War plan of 50-70 years earlier, when US military leaders war-gamed a nuclear attack to kill 500m persons in Communist-ruled states, mainly the USSR and China, plus 100m in adjacent countries.²⁶⁸ A new Cold War is now “the organizing principle of US foreign policy,”²⁶⁹ with China framed as an aggressor that must be curbed or extinguished, leading half of Americans to regard it as the US’s greatest enemy.²⁷⁰ Europe, through “a process of vassalisation,” is expected to fall into line behind the US.²⁷¹ Preventive war is not popular in US domestic politics, but US officials did consider launching one against China in 1964, despite most Americans disfavoring it.²⁷²

²⁶⁷ Andrew Pulliam, *The Laws of Time*, Conneaut Lake: Page Publishing, 2018.

²⁶⁸ Matthew Connelly, *The Declassification Engine: What History Reveals About America’s Top Secrets*, New York: Penguin, 2023; Lorraine Glennon, “What Declassified Government Documents Reveal About America’s Dark Secrets.” *Columbia Magazine*, 2022-23, <http://magazine.columbia.edu/article/what-declassified-government-documents-reveal-about-americas-dark-secrets> (access: 02/2024).

²⁶⁹ Trita Parsi, “The US is Not the Indispensable Peacemaker Anymore,” *NYT*, March 21, 2023.

²⁷⁰ Jeffrey Jones, “Terrorism, Nuclear Weapons, China Viewed as Top U.S. Threats,” *Gallup*, March 7, 2022, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/390494/terrorism-nuclear-weapons-china-viewed-top-threats.aspx> (access: 02/2024).

²⁷¹ Jeremy Shapiro and Jana Puglierin, “The Art of Vassalisation: How Russia’s War on Ukraine has Transformed Transatlantic Relations,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, Apr. 4, 2023, <http://ecfr.eu/publication/the-art-of-vassalisation-how-russias-war-on-ukraine-has-transformed-transatlantic-relations/> (access: 02/2024).

²⁷² Miroslav Nincic, “Preventive War and Its Domestic Politics,” in Kerstin Fisk and Jennifer Ramos (eds.), *Preventive Force: Drones, Target Killing and the Transformation of Contemporary Warfare*, New York: NYU Press, 2016, 58-87; Karl Mueller, et al., *Striking First: Preemptive and Preventive Attack in US National Security Policy*, Santa Monica: Rand, 2006, 152-170.

Today, they still want to destroy the “socialism” that most House of Representatives members voted to wholly condemn in 2023, even though 38% of polled Americans favor it over capitalism.²⁷³ US elites’ who seek regime change and China’s territorial dissolution²⁷⁴ might justify a war by citing the Convention’s demand that states prevent genocides and the international law exception allowing external self-determination for minorities subjected to genocide.²⁷⁵ Proffering such justifications for war is not unimaginable: after the Ukraine war began, US commentators imagined Vladimir Putin launching a “nuclear genocide,”²⁷⁶ despite the “madman theory” of threatening use of nuclear weapons being associated with the US.²⁷⁷

Neither the Special Adviser of the [UN] Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide nor the UN’s High Commissioner of Human Rights has alleged a Xinjiang genocide. That does not mean there have been no human rights violations in Xinjiang. Large-scale mobilizations against violent entities have violations; for example, El Salvador’s recent, popular, and successful drive against gang depredations, where 1.7% Salvadorans were imprisoned, with 10% of them found to be in-

²⁷³ Jeffrey N. Jones, “Socialism, Capitalism Ratings in US Unchanged.” *Gallup*, Dec. 6, 2021, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/357755/socialism-capitalism-ratings-unchanged.aspx> (access: 02/2024); John Nichols, “The Immense Irony of the GOP’s Anti-Socialism Vote,” *The Nation*, Feb.6, 2023.

²⁷⁴ Edward Luce, “Containing China is Biden’s Explicit Goal,” *FT*, Oct. 20, 2022.

²⁷⁵ Brian Grodsky, “When Two Ambiguities Collide: The Use of Genocide in Self-Determination Drives,” *JGR* 14:1 (2012), 1-27.; Barry Sautman, “Secessionism as a United States Foreign Policy Lever: Tibet in Context,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 20:2 (2014), 179-200.

²⁷⁶ Nina Tannenwald, “Is Using Nuclear Weapons Still Taboo,” *Foreign Policy*, July 1, 2022, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2022/07/01/nuclear-war-taboo-arms-control-russia-ukraine-deterrence/> (access: 02/2024).

²⁷⁷ Stanley Karnow: *Vietnam: A History*. New York: Viking, 1983, 582-583; Kelly Greenhill, “Of Wars and Rumors of Wars: Extra-factual Information and (In) Ad-vertent Escalation,” in Harold Trinkunas, et al., *Three Tweets to Midnight: Effects of the Global Information Ecosystem on the Risk of Nuclear Conflict*, Stanford: Hoover Institution, 2020, 113-135.

Bloodless Genocide or Blood Libel?

nocent.²⁷⁸ What has occurred in Xinjiang is, however, the opposite of US campaigns in the Dar al-Islam, such as Afghanistan (70,000-plus direct civilian deaths) and Iraq (281,000-315,000 deaths).²⁷⁹ In its bloodlessness, Xinjiang has had anything but a genocide.

²⁷⁸ Mary Beth Sheridan and Carmen Escobar, “‘World’s Coolest Dictator’ Reelected in El Salvador: What to Know,” *WP*, Feb. 7, 2024.

²⁷⁹ “Afghan Civilians,” and “Iraqi Civilians,” Watson Institute, 2023, <http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/civilians/afghan>; <http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/civilians/iraqi> (access: 02/2024).

Yitzhak Shichor

Elephant in the China Shop: the Uyghur Pyrrhic Victory

Professor Yitzhak Shichor's contribution in the German edition of this book was published under the same title, "Elephant in the China Shop: the Uyghur Pyrrhic Victory," in the journal Sociology of Islam, Vol. XX (2023), pp. 1-20, by Brill Publishers; it is also available online at http://brill.com/view/journals/soi/9/3-4/article-p230_003. In this English language open-access edition of this volume, we are publishing only the postscript that the author added for the German edition of this book, and we refer readers to the aforementioned article.

Postscript: The Ill-Conceived Uyghur International Genocide Offensive in Retrospect

On December 6, 2023, my article "Elephant in the China Shop" was published, first online, in the Brill journal *Sociology of Islam*. Submitted in early March 2023, the manuscript had earlier been rejected by a number of US academic journals whose editors did not even bother to send it to reviewers – perhaps a coincidence. However, given the wall-to-wall identification of the US (and most Western countries), as well as academics, with the widespread Uyghur genocide campaign, this rejection looked like an orchestrated *political* China-bashing policy, overlooking reasonably objective research, and collectively "forgetting" crimes against humanity performed by all of these countries, without exception. Moreover, few, admittedly very few, "Uyghur-conscripted" academics attacked me personally, unable or unwilling to confront real facts and analysis. For example, on June 29, 2023, Magnus Fiskesjö, an Associate Professor at the Department of Anthropology, Cornell University, threatened: "I will now write to Brill and ask why they permit the publishing such rueful garbage. Are there no rules?" and added: "That is indefensible and disgraceful. Shame on you. *Cancel the article*

at once, or the journal *Sociology of Islam* should be terminated at once” (emphasis added). As soon as he was added to the Global China List, he wrote: “I just noted that you retweeted a piece of ugly genocide denialism by a *certain* Yitzhak Shichor” (emphasis added). “Now you are suddenly unilaterally subscribing me to your gang? I am a decent person, I do NOT want to get mixed up with *such lowlife pseudo-scholars*” (emphasis added).¹ He was immediately unsubscribed. Fiskesjö went on to tweet:

*That is a truly contemptuous, callous, disgusting piece of genocide denialism. We don't often see such abominations from Israeli Jewish people. Why is he doing this? Is he a paid agent? [...] An Israeli professor's disgusting genocide denialism: While hundreds of thousands of Uyghur families remain torn apart by the Chinese regime, as their people is exterminated, their culture razed, Mr. Shichor sits in his posh Haifa office and pens propaganda for the CCP. What for?*²

Here is something for Cornell University, Department of Anthropology: to become an (obviously tenured) associate professor, one should demonstrate elementary research before rushing to expose his stupidity. I do not have a “posh office”, definitely not at Haifa (University, I presume). Actually, I don't have any office, anywhere, and I am professor emeritus at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Although I can resign myself to being “a certain Yitzhak Shichor”, Mr. Fiskesjö may be surprised to know that I have over 25 academic publications on Xinjiang and the Uyghurs – about ten percent of my total publications; that, unlike him, I visited Xinjiang several times; and that, as I mentioned in my article, I know most of World Uyghur Congress leaders, including its three presidents, personally. Also, unlike him, I have always tried to *solve* the problem, not to *aggravate* it. A first step in this direction is to be objective, to understand reality, and to uphold the truth, all that is missing in Fiskesjö's, and some of his colleagues' work.

¹ This was sent in an email to Professor Tugrul Keskin, former editor of the *Sociology of Islam*, and Hakan Yavuz, the current editor.

² http://twitter.com/Magnus_Fiskesjo/status/167415236266975232 (access: 04/2024).

A similar vicious attack was conducted against an Australian scholar, Maureen Huebel, who, since March 2021 expressed doubts about an ongoing “genocide” in Xinjiang. She strongly challenged these allegations, notably made by the German Adrian Zenz, but also by many other “scholars”, as well as politicians and journalists, which had not been based on field research. After Huebel said that she was planning to go to Xinjiang in 2024 to research poverty alleviation, she has been hounded by trolls and attacked by people insulting her on Twitter (including Zenz who questioned her academic credentials), even receiving death threats. These vilifications led to the suspension of Huebel’s Twitter account for a while for “impersonation”, and accusations of being a “bot”.³

Needless to say, there is no evidence whatsoever that “hundreds of thousands of Uyghur families remain torn apart”, let alone of the “extermination” of the Uyghur people by the Chinese regime, the ultimate meaning of the term “genocide”, still promoted by the WUC,⁴ and enthusiastically approved by Western parliaments, leaders and governments: “11 national parliaments/senates and one government have adopted resolutions recognizing the Uyghur genocide.”⁵ Most of them hardly understand who the Uyghurs are, where Xinjiang is, and what the significance of China is. Also, there is no real evidence that a million Uyghurs have been incarcerated in “concentration camps”, a claim circulated by some Western “scholars” headed by Adrian Zenz (refuted,

³ Ma Chi (2023), “Attacks Won’t Scare Me off from Xinjiang Research: Australian Scholar,” *China Daily*, April 28, 2023; Staff Reporters (2023), “Eleven Chinese Institutes Welcome Australian Scholar’s Planned Xinjiang Visit in Joint Letter,” *Global Times*, May 15, 2023; Yang Zekun (2023), “Letter Backs Researcher’s Proposal on Xinjiang,” *China Daily*, May 17, 2023; Xinhua Feature, “Australian Woman Defies Online Attacks after Questioning Rumors about Xinjiang,” *People’s Daily*, June 19, 2023.

⁴ World Uyghur Congress (2024), “World Uyghur Congress Commemorates Uyghur Genocide Recognition Day,” *January Newsletter 2024*

⁵ World Uyghur Congress (2024), “World Uyghur Congress Celebrates its 20th Anniversary,” *Press Release*, March 21, 2024

and not only by me).⁶ Unfortunately, practically all academics who *should* know, have remained silent – to this very day. In fact, this “silence of the lambs” is just another indication that the political, let alone the economic, gap between China and Western democracies, notably the US, is not as deep as claimed. *All* faithfully follow the “party line”, whatever party it is.⁷

So, who are the Uyghurs? – One of China’s Muslim origins nationalities, they account for about half (approximately 12 million) of Xinjiang, the northwestern so-called “Autonomous Region” (less than one percent of China’s total population). Although vague notions of Uyghur “nationalism” had already emerged in the 19th century,⁸ it has been only since the early 1980s that the Uyghur *diaspora* first attempted to get organized, something China’s Uyghurs could not have done. Yet the Uyghur communities abroad could not agree on one representative organization, which has led to a host of Uyghur Diaspora organizations, each headed by a “president”. Unable to reach a common understanding, it was only on April 16, 2004, that they managed to establish the World Uyghur Congress, an overarching organization. Sectarianism, however, dies hard. On September 14, 2004, another “overarching organization”, the Eastern Turkestan Government in Exile (ETGE) was established, as well as a few others. So, who represents the Uyghurs? And what aspirations do they uphold?

Since this article had been submitted to the *SOI*, developments have further underlined and even reinforced its conclusions. When the WUC had launched its China’s Uyghur Genocide worldwide campaign, it has

⁶ See also a detailed study: Ajit Singh and Max Blumenthal (2019), “China Detaining Millions of Uyghurs? Serious Problems with Claims by US-Backed NGO and Far-Right Researcher ‘Led by God’ against Beijing,” <http://thegrayzone.com/2019/12/21/china-detaining-millions-uyghurs-problems-claims-us-ngo-researcher/> (access: 04/2024)

⁷ Zhang Zhouxiang (2023), “West’s ‘Academic Freedom’ Only a Myth,” *China Daily*, May 17, 2023

⁸ David Brophy (2018), *Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier*, Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2016. Also see my review in: *Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 45:1, 115-118.

never elaborated its goals and what it wanted to achieve, but these could be easily guessed. “Eastern Turkestan Independence”, the highest priority goal was, however, out of the question and carefully omitted. All countries which maintain diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China, automatically and inevitably recognize its territorial integrity, including Xinjiang. Some (like Germany) do not allow the promotion, on its land, of separatism in a country with which it maintains diplomatic relations.⁹ So the unarticulated goals of the WUC Campaign have been to apply pressure on Beijing to terminate the so-called “Uyghur Genocide”, as well as other oppressive actions, demographic, political, economic and cultural. To do this, the WUC urged the West to force the Chinese to comply by imposing political, economic and cultural sanctions on Beijing. A year after the article was submitted, it is time to evaluate the achievements of the WUC China’s Uyghur Genocide Worldwide Campaign – so far.

Such evaluation is related to the timing of the WUC campaign and to the diversified international attitudes toward China, and its behaviour at home and abroad, and toward Islam. Criticism and even condemnation of China in recent years are not necessarily, let alone mostly, determined by Beijing’s “genocide”, abuse, or persecution of the Uyghurs. There have been other reasons, much more important. They include Washington’s rivalry and competition with China; Beijing implied threat to take over Taiwan by force; accusation of China’s spreading COVID-19 all over the world; Beijing’s abuse of human rights in Tibet and Hong Kong; Chinese spying activities and dumping economics; and so on. On the other hand, the emergence of Islamic radicalism, fundamentalism and Jihadism (al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, Daesh [ISIS], Hamas, Hezbollah, Hizb al-Tahrir, Turkistan Islamic Party [TIP] and more), makes it difficult to defend the Uyghurs, given their historical and contemporary terrorist acts in China, e.g. by the East Turkestan

⁹ Yitzhak Shichor (2013), “Nuisance Value: Uyghur Activism in Germany and Beijing- Berlin Relations,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, 22:82, 624.

Islamic Movement (ETIM).¹⁰ Also, while the West was quick to express support of the Uyghurs, it could hardly ignore that Uyghurs collaborated with ISIS in Syria and elsewhere.¹¹ Indeed, even Muslim countries have chosen not to identify with the Uyghurs complaints, let alone genocide claims. WUC president, Dolkun Isa, confirmed that “the Muslim-majority countries have failed to even mention the persecution of Uyghurs, except a few, like Kuwait and Türkiye. It is shameful.”¹²

Consequently, it is difficult to isolate the Uyghur issue from other issues in trying to evaluate the effectiveness of the WUC Uyghur Genocide Campaign. Western support of this campaign may, therefore, reflect not only hostility to China but also an opportunity to deny Islamophobia, which is undeniable. Given the fragmentation of Uyghur organizations and their multiple objectives, it is unclear which Uyghurs Western countries support and what exactly they support. Still, in this postscript I shall attempt to evaluate the achievements of the WUC campaign in its assumed goals: undermining China’s economy; political cornering of China; and consequently, improving the Uyghurs situation and life in China.

Most important, the Uyghur impact on China’s (and Xinjiang’s) economy proved to be marginal, hardly mentioned. More and more it seems that the sanctions imposed on China, not to mention the criticism, had little to do with the Uyghur Campaign, let alone with any fabricated “genocide”, and much more to do with Western attempts to limit China’s spectacular economic expansion, and political rise. Uyghur human

¹⁰ Yitzhak Shichor (2016) “Crackdown: Insurgency, Potential Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Modern China,” in: Beatrice Heuser and Eitan Shamir (eds.), *Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies: National Styles and Strategic Cultures*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 95-112. See also: Martin I. Wayne (2008), *China’s War on Terrorism: Counter-Insurgency*, London/New York: Routledge.

¹¹ Colin P. Clarke and Paul Rexton Kan (2017), “Uighur Foreign Fighters: An Underexamined Jihadist Challenge,” *ICCT Policy Brief*, The Hague: Internat. Centre for Counter-Terrorism; Raffaello Pantucci (2018), “Uyghur Terrorism in a Fractured Middle East,” in: Michael Clarke (ed.) *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in China: Domestic and Foreign Policy Dimension*, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 157-172.

¹² World Uyghur Congress (2024), “Geneva: Governments Call Out Widespread Atrocities at UN Human Rights Review of China,” *Press Release*, Jan. 23, 2024.

rights grievances have been appropriated as an official excuse to impose sanctions on China, which would have been imposed anyway. However, ultimately, improving economic relations between China and the West prove considerably more important than the Uyghur complaints and, furthermore, inevitable. Western governments, let alone non-Western, cannot ignore China's share in the international economy and mutual dependence. To harm China's economy means to harm their own. Thus, in the first half of 2023, Xinjiang's trade with BRI countries (many of them Muslim, expected to identify with the Uyghurs) reached \$19.1 billion, according to PRC customs statistics, an increase of 68.2 percent compared to 2022.¹³ Still under sanctions, in the first half of 2023, Xinjiang's GDP reached \$118.43 billion (more than the GDP of Slovakia, Ecuador and Oman), up 5.1 percent year-on-year (or three-four times *more* than the GDP growth of the countries which had imposed sanctions on Xinjiang).¹⁴

Still, the main sector of Xinjiang's economy that has allegedly suffered damage has been cotton. China provides about 20 percent of the world cotton, mostly by Xinjiang. But in 2023 Xinjiang's cotton output fell by around 11 percent. Apparently, this was an outcome of the US' June 2022 Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, intended to block imports of all products, wholly or partly originated in Xinjiang. Yet the truth is somewhat different and not necessarily related to the Uyghurs. It could be an outcome of bad weather conditions, of China's decision to prefer growing quality cotton over quantity, and its emphasis on food security by growing grain (whose market has increased following the Ukraine War). Whatever cotton (and other products) the US decline to buy from China, have been sold to BRI countries. Though slowing down a bit, China is still the leading world producer of apparel.¹⁵

¹³ Mo Jungxi (2023), "Envoys Hail Xinjiang Role in Reviving Silk Road," *China Daily*, August 14, 202.

¹⁴ Reality of Xinjiang Contrary to Claims Made by Western media," *China Daily*, August 9, 2023.

¹⁵ "China's Cotton Output Set to Fall 1 Year after US' Xinjiang Ban as Focus Shifts to Food Security, Quality," *South China Morning Post*, August 25, 2023.

In its wish to harm Xinjiang's economy, the WUC Campaign demonstrated sheer stupidity since Uyghurs, and other Muslim minorities, constituted over half of Xinjiang's workforce,¹⁶ and it was they who stood to lose. Fortunately (for Uyghurs) but unfortunately (for the WUC) the sanctions failed. Indeed, in the first two months of 2024, while the European Union was moving to finalize two laws aimed at tackling Uyghur human rights complaints, imports from Xinjiang reached \$312 million, a huge increase over \$98 million in 2023. At the same time, EU-China trade turnover fell by 4.1 percent, of which EU exports to China declined by 9.4 percent while China's exports to the EU fell only by 1.3 percent,¹⁷ thereby harming the European economy more than China's.

While Europe plays a major role in China's economy, the US is the dominant player, also in terms of the WUC-inspired economic sanctions against China. However, considering the size of China's economy and its sophistication, their effectiveness is insignificant at best, ludicrous at worst. In 2023, China's GDP growth reached 5.2 percent (5.3 percent in the first 2024 quarter),¹⁸ compared to 2.5 percent of the US. China's 700 million tons grain output surpassed that of the US by 1.2 times, and its 9.2 trillion kilowatts power generation was 2.3 times greater. Production and sales of Chinese cars, 30.16 million, tripled those of the US. Chinese steel production was 19 times greater than the US', cement 20 times, and shipbuilding 70 times! Foreign investment in 2023, though slightly lower than in 2022, was still the third-highest influx in history, a little less in labor-intensive industries and a little more in high-tech enterprises. While US investments in China did decline (not necessarily because of the Uyghurs), other Western countries increased investments in China: France (25 times); Sweden (11 times); Germany (212 percent); Australia (186 percent); and Singapore (77

¹⁶ "Population and Employment," *Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook 2015*. Beijing: China Statistic Press, 2015, 92-136.

¹⁷ "EU Sees 200% Surge in Imports from China's Xinjiang Region Despite Human Rights Concerns," *South China Morning Post*, March 21, 2024.

¹⁸ "China's GDP Growth Shows Better-Than-Expected Results," *Nikkei Asia*, April 16, 2024, at: nikkeiasia-d-nl@namail.nikkei.com (access: 04/2024).

percent). Sino-European trade in 2023, reaching \$1.2 trillion, just one percent below 2022, is still the second highest in history. While US-China trade dropped by 11.6 percent in 2023, it was still the third highest in history, as US companies have managed to find creative ways to bypass the sanctions. Surveys show that, notwithstanding the “Uyghur genocide”, 80 percent of multinational corporations still prefer to continue, and even increase their business, in China.¹⁹

Apparently, China-US trade has declined in recent years, but this is not only an illusion intended (maybe by tacit understanding) to sidestep the sanctions but has practically nothing whatsoever to do with the Uyghur campaign. Most of that decline came after Trump implemented high tariffs in 2018. However, contrary to the US-planned decoupling, “the economies of America and China are not coming apart. Indeed, some changes to supply chains may be binding the two countries even closer together.”²⁰ Statistics could be misleading. China’s exports to the US may indeed have declined, yet much less than assumed. Americans have an incentive to underreport imports from China in categories covered by tariffs, leading to understating US imports from China by 20-25%. Moreover, Beijing smartly expanded trade in intermediate products (those used to make finished goods) to other countries, mainly Vietnam, India and Mexico. These, and many other countries, import Chinese intermediate products goods, and even finished goods – only to reexport them to the US. “The overall picture is therefore clear: Chinese supply chains may be less visible, but they remain extremely important to the American economy.”²¹

¹⁹ Wang Wen (2024), “Busting 6 ‘Peak China’ Myths”: A Nuanced Look at China’s Economic Indicators Is Necessary to Understand Current Trends,” *Diplomat*, March 9, 2024, <http://thediplomat.com/2024/03/busting-6-peak-china-myths/> (access: 04/2024).

²⁰ “How Trump and Biden Have Failed to Cut Ties with China,” *The Economist*, February 27, 2024.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Those countries, which take part in this exercise, led by the US, could not care less about Uyghurs, let alone about their *fictional* genocide. Even other countries, that were quick to support the Uyghur offensive against Beijing, and to condemn China for a fictional “genocide”, have changed their mind, often parallel to a change of government. Australia is one. Initially, deterioration of its relations with China had begun under Morrison’s Liberal Government, which had nothing whatsoever to do with Uyghurs and Xinjiang. Friction had originated in Australia calling for an independent inquiry into the allegedly Chinese spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to Sinophobia, suspicions of Chinese interference, concerns about China’s expansion in the Pacific, the banning of Huawei and Beijing’s reaction which blocked Australian exports.²²

Germany, which hosts the WUC headquarters and is also under US pressure to “derisk” relations with Beijing, “has proven time and again that it isn’t willing to sacrifice its prosperity on the altars of human rights, Washington’s security concerns, or even the European Union.”²³ Although two-thirds of German companies recently surveyed by the German Chamber of Commerce in China complained about unfair competition, only two percent said they would leave China.²⁴ China has become a gate to worldwide business for companies such as Siemens and Volkswagen, whose investments in China go back 40 years. “Trade with China brings us prosperity and is practically irreplaceable in the short term,” said Moritz Schularick, president of the Kiel Institute for World Economy.

²² “Australian Businesses and Academics Welcome the Prospect of More Partnerships with China as Key to Boosting Bilateral Ties and Social and Economic Benefits,” *South China Morning Post*, March 20, 2024

²³ Matthew Karnitshnig (2024), “Why Germany’s Scholz is Bowing to the Chinese Dragon,” *Politico*, April 12, 2024, www.politico.eu/article/why-germanys-scholz-is-bowing-to-the-chinese-dragon/ (access: 04/2024).

²⁴ <http://china.ahk.de/publications/flash-surveys> (access: 04/2024)

According to a recent study by the Institute, a major break with China would shrink the German economy by about five percent. In terms of trade turnover, China is Germany's biggest partner. Moreover, Germany *increased* its direct investment in China to some €12 billion in 2023, a record. Berlin invested more in China between 2021 and 2023 than in the five-year period between 2015 and 2020, according to IW Köln, a leading economics institute. Germany is not just a key prize for China but still needs China, Uyghurs (and Washington) notwithstanding. Huawei still operates in Germany.

Although economics play a dominant role in the Western (let alone the non-Western) pursuit of relations with China, whatever the Uyghur grievances, international and domestic politics also play an important role. Uyghur attempts to isolate China, at least from the West, have failed. It proved to be impossible to deal with international affairs without Beijing. In addition to ordinary bilateral meetings between Chinese and Western representatives, and meetings in international organizations, there have been occasional high-level meetings between the presidents, premiers, and ministers. China, a UN Security Council Permanent Member (wielding veto power), is also a member in the UN Human Rights Council, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as the International Court of Justice. Under these circumstances, how exactly does the WUC expect to raise international support? How effective could its international genocide campaign be?

Every year, Jews all over the world celebrate Passover, which starts by collective reading of the Haggadah (the tale of Israel's exodus from Egypt) and asking: "Why is this night different from all the other nights." If China's Uyghurs would have asked this question now, the answer should be: it hardly is (different). If the WUC leaders believed that their Genocide Campaign would force Beijing to improve the Uyghurs situation overnight, they are dead wrong. In fact, Beijing has been expanding its treatment of the Uyghurs to the religious symbolism of Islam all over China. Begun by Xi Jinping as early as 2015, this policy of "Sinicizing religion" has been directed to undermine "Islamization" and "Arabization" by reconstructing "Arab style" mosques, re-

moving Arabic script from public signs, and banning public calls for prayers, Arabic classes and private religious schools as well as Arabic books and Korans. Although Xi's policy had been launched before the Uyghur's Genocide Campaign began, it has gathered momentum and increased pressure parallel to – and probably in response to – the expansion of the WUC campaign.²⁵

While the Western sanctions are still applied to Xinjiang (with the so-called “genocide” more as an excuse than the real reason), the victims, in a counter-productive way, are primarily Uyghurs. One lesson that the WUC, which had initiated the international “genocide” campaign against China, must have learned, is Washington's hypocrisy and double standards. It is about time that the Uyghurs understand that US (and other Western governments) support is, but a cover-up based on fake news and a tragic century-old misunderstanding of “China”. Furthermore, the WUC choice of Washington as the launching pad of the “genocide” campaign (rather than the alternative choice of Munich, the WUC official headquarters), was based on the assumption that Washington's growing hostility to China would initiate effective deeds, and not just words. However, the WUC has totally failed to understand the US, the West, and – what they should have best, based on long and painful experience – China, and not for the first time. In its triple miscalculation, the WUC has failed to understand China's growing power and turned a blind eye to China's success in building international dependencies which have increased its invulnerability. Under these circumstances, the WUC anti-China campaign will inevitably reach a dead end. It is about time that the Uyghurs realize that, ultimately, they do

²⁵ Yitzhak Shichor (2018), “China's Islamic Challenges: Perceptions and Realities,” *Asia Dialogue* (Asia Research Institute, University of Nottingham, June 15, 2018); FT Reporters (2023), “Thousands of Mosques Have Been Altered or Destroyed as Beijing's Suppression of Islamic Culture Spreads.” *Financial Times*, November 27, 2023, <https://fig.ft.com/china-mosques/> (access: 04/2024). See also: Human Rights Watch (2023), “China: Mosques Shuttered, Razed, Altered in Muslim Areas,” November 22, 2023, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/22/china-mosques-shuttered-razed-altered-muslim-areas> (access: 04/2024).

not count. They are no more than an excuse for Washington, and its reluctant followers, to pursue an offensive against China, which it will lose. There are already signs that the US (and others) would soon withdraw their sympathy and “support” for the Uyghurs, as they had done before on a number of occasions such as South Vietnam, Taiwan, Afghanistan, and Iraq – to name a few examples. In sum, while diaspora Uyghur leaders, primarily those behind the Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP), the main drivers of the worldwide genocide campaign, enjoy life abroad, China’s Uyghurs may bang their head on the Great Wall.

Mechthild Leutner

Scholars and Sinologists as “China-Friends” and so-called “China-Understanders”

A traditional means of appreciation and devaluation from the 17th century to the present

The current China controversy and the reactions to the Xinjiang study trip of some China scholars in May 2023 show the continued impact of narratives and clichés in the academic community, as they have developed since the early phase of the Enlightenment in the 17th century and have been modified and passed on in subsequent periods of German history, adapted to the respective scientific and political interests. The following article attempts to show this and the respective contexts.¹

Since the 17th century, China as a reality and as a construct of perception has played an important role, especially in times of political and ideological upheaval², in which scholars and politicians in Germany, Europe and around the world argue about new ways of explaining the world and new political orders.³ In academic discourse and disputes over opinion, in the battles for academic authority and interpretative sovereignty as well as for political power and influence, this not only

¹ If cited once, the cited sources are reproduced in full in the footnotes; otherwise, they are abbreviated in the text and can be found in the bibliography.

² The term “period of upheaval” follows the understanding of Reinhart Koselleck, who sees these as phases of condensed and newly experienced time and as a category of historical science: cf. Koselleck (2006), *Begriffsgeschichten. Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp.

³ “Streitlust – durch Umbruchzeiten befeuert? (Bellicosity – fuelled by times of upheaval?)” – according to *Evangelisches Sonntagsblatt* of 9 Oct. 2023. The title refers to an exhibition at the Francke Foundation in Halle, which deals with historical and contemporary transgressions of the boundaries of academic dispute through discrediting, vilification and verbal and visual degradation of persons and positions; see Susanne Borée, <http://www.evangelisches-sonntagsblatt.de/2023/10/09/streitlust-durch-umbruchzeiten-befeuert/> (access: 02/2024).

manifested itself verbally, sometimes violently, for example, in academic and personal discrediting, but also led in part to academic marginalisation and political exclusion, to discrimination and persecution.

Those in favour of new scientific approaches and models of order – ideologically and politically – ascribe China (or certain aspects of China) equal or even superior value to Germany/Europe and also use their findings about China to strengthen their critical positions towards political, social and ideological developments in their own society. In contrast, their opponents tend to direct their counter-arguments and verbal attacks on the one hand at the construct of China (or partial aspects of it) and on the other hand at the scholars and scientists who present their knowledge about China and incorporate it into their overall analysis. Given the fundamental importance of the disputes, the latter seems to be the main issue. The opponents seek to devalue the China analyses and academic qualifications of the proponents of new explanatory models as a whole, dubbing them – in the contexts under discussion, this is certainly meant pejoratively – as “China-friends” and “China-understanders” as well as “propagandists of China”, accusing them of “Chinese-isation” or an overall emotional, ideological or political proximity to China. Scholars and social scientists are portrayed as personifications of China or “China’s interests” in the Enlightenment period and in the colonial era, also visually with so-called Chinese attributes in corresponding caricatures.

The narratives that can be observed partly conceal the fact that it is about dealing with major global and philosophical issues: the acceptance of the equality of all people⁴ and the equality of cultures, states and peoples and, on the scholarly-ideological level, the tolerance of different explanations of the world and differing patterns of interpretation.

⁴ The philosopher Omri Boehm recently addressed the current decline of this “self-evident” truth in his work *Radikaler Universalismus: Jenseits von Identität*, Berlin: Propyläen, 2022, which defends universalism against “identity politics and self-righteous liberal democrats”, summarises Jens-Christian Rabe; see *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 15 Sep. 2022.

These are questions that have preoccupied scholars in Germany since the 17th century and which have been reflected in scholarly enquiry into China in later periods of upheaval right up to the present day – modified according to time. Today it is about existential questions, about the necessity of co-operation to solve the major global political and ecological crises. To put it in a nutshell: The positive and negative China narratives and explications are each part of the scholarly-ideological-political self-image of their protagonists and also serve to conceal academic, political and personal interests (Pierre Bourdieu). The struggles for the basic goals of politics and for scientific knowledge and interpretative sovereignty are closely intertwined.

In the following, I distinguish between four ideological-political periods of upheaval in which “China” plays an important role as a projection and political factor or actor in the debates. In the first and in the current phase, China is even more important than other factors.

1. The upheaval of the early Enlightenment and the Enlightenment in the pre-phase of the French Revolution in the 17th and 18th centuries
2. The upheaval of the Vormärz and the bourgeois revolution of 1848
3. The upheaval of the Weimar Republic
4. Upheaval in the present: the collapse of the unilateral world order and debates on the new world order

The political contexts and general philosophical debates are outlined in the article where necessary for understanding. The China debates of scholars are at the centre of the explanations, also with regard to their specific figures of representation. What different roles are attributed to “China” in the respective times of upheaval, and what significance does “China” have in the ideological and academic concepts of the opponents in the debates? Last but not least, the question arises as to the continuities and discontinuities in the China debates over the long period covered here.

1. “Idolatry” and “China-Friends”: The role of China in the age of Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries

During the upheaval of the early Enlightenment, which is also referred to as a “crisis of the European spirit” (*Krise des europäischen Geistes*)⁵, China played a central role in German and European discourse for the first time. Since European expansion from the 16th century onwards, the real and the perceived China played a special role compared to other countries in the conceptualisation of the new world view and in the shaping of politics. The “discovery” of a wealthy, technologically highly developed economic world power, a society with an advanced ancient intellectual culture, with social mobility, a civil service system and a well-organised administration (Chang 1994, 80)⁶, represented a comprehensive challenge and at the same time an opportunity, initially for those scholars who wanted to question the biblical world view with its narratives of the origin of history, of the primal language and of the determinants of scientific interpretation and social organisation.

In this period of the “collapse of medieval ordo thinking, caused by a bundle of factors, including the progress of knowledge of nature, the discovery of new worlds in the course of colonial expansion and the tearing apart of the unity of Christian civilisation in the course of religious conflicts”, the Enlightenment thinkers “sought a freer form of religiosity or, more radically, the liberation of religion altogether against the claim to authority of the Christian denominations, which had led to the bloody suppression of all dissent. In both respects, China opened up an option” (Roetz 2021). The early Enlightenment philosophers in particular played a key role in the long process of secularisation of the world view and the development of science. As a result of

⁵ This is the title of Paul Hazard (1939), Hamburg: Hoffmann u. Campe.

⁶ With their activities in China and the wealth of their reports, Jesuit missionaries in particular determined a largely positive perception of the country; in a decisive period of ideological and political upheaval, they provided critical reformers in their home countries with an argumentative source base. Between 1650 and 1700 alone, 38 monographs on China were published; see S. John Parker (1978), *Windows into China: The Jesuits and their Books*, Boston: Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston.

the interactions between Jesuit China reports and early China scholars and politicians pushing for reform and change, Enlightenment thinkers “discovered China as an ally in the struggle against the monopoly of Christian revelation” (Roetz 2021).

Andreas Müller and Christian Menzel: “Abgötterey”

This also applied to the orientalist Andreas Müller (1630-94).⁷ He dealt extensively with texts by travellers and Jesuit missionaries about China, including Chinese-language texts, and attempted to develop new knowledge and make it accessible to the scholarly world, most recently on behalf of the Elector of Brandenburg, Friedrich Wilhelm (1620-88), who flanked his trade plans with regard to China by building up a library of Chinese books. Müller made a significant contribution to supplementing the “ever more sharply defined European image of China”, for example, by carefully editing a new Latin edition of Marco Polo’s report on his journey to China in the 13th century in 1671 (Noack 1995, 7), which, as is well known, portrayed China very favourably as a rich and prosperous country. Müller’s 1672 publication on the rediscovered Nestorian Stele of Xi’an from 781 AD also caused a “great stir because it provided evidence of early Christian missionary activity in the Far East” (Noack 1995, 8).

It was precisely this preoccupation with a positively portrayed China and its script – and not primarily Müller’s unrealised plan for a “Chinese key”, a supposedly simple method for learning the Chinese characters⁸ – that served as a public polemic for Müller’s political opponents in the heated confessional disputes between Lutherans and the Reformed. Müller’s appointment as provost had already been seen as a

⁷ For a detailed account of Müller’s extraordinary scholarly activity and his involvement in European scholarly networks, see Noack 1995.

⁸ In particular, experts on China, including Leibniz and Kircher, criticised this; see Noack 1995, 12.

weakening of Lutheran influence by the Elector. Müller had been labelled a “syncretist” and had even asked, in vain, for his dismissal (Noack 1995, 6). These “quarrels” now escalated.

The professor of theology Elias Grebnitz had already polemicised against Müller and the use of Chinese characters in 1678, as it violated a reformed commandment in mentioning the name of God and was therefore the work of the devil. Even before Müller had made his response to Grebnitz public⁹, the latter had written the pamphlet *Verthädigung Gegen den Anzüglichen Tractat / Worinnen M. Andreas Müller Praepositus Berlinensis seine ungelährte Anstechung des Unterrichts von der Reformirten und Lutherischen Kirchen unter der Decken Eines Unterrichts von der Chinäsischen Schrift und Druck verbergen wollen*. Grebnitz discredited Müller “in particularly abusive terms, not only of unlearnedness and false explanation of the characters, but also of image worship and hypocrisy, and finally even accused him of lèse majesté and blasphemy” (Noack 1995, 13). He characterised the Chinese characters as having been “introduced by the devil through God’s fate in order to keep the wretched people all the more entangled in the darkness of idolatry”.¹⁰

⁹ ANDR. MÜLLERI Greiffenhagii (1680) *Besser Unterricht Von der Sineser Schrift und Druck / Als etwa in Hn. D. ELIÆ Grebenitzen Unterricht Von der Reformirten Und Lutherischen Kirchen enthalten ist. Psalm LXIX.21. I waited / whether anyone would lament / but there is no one*. Berlin.

¹⁰ Quoted from Bräuner 1987:15 Müller only replied after Grebnitz’s death: ANDREÆ MÜLLERI GREIFFENHAGII (1683) *Unschuld wieder Hn. Dr. Elias Grebnitzen Beschuldigungen*. (Title p. 2) ANDREÆ MULLERI Greiffenhagii *Unschuld / gegen die hefftige Beschuldigungen / die in Herrn D. Elias Grebnitzen / Professoris, und der Theologischen Facultät Senioris, auff der Churfl. Brandenburg. Universitet zu Francfurt an der Oder / so genandten Verthädigung / enthalten seyn / numehro mit gnädigster Genehmigung Sr. Churfl. Durchl. zu Brandenburg / etc. etc. An des Tages Licht gebracht. 1. Pet. III.9. Vergeltet nicht Schelt = Wort mit Schelt = Wort. Phil.IV.5. Eure Lindigkeit lasset kund seyn allen Menschen. Matth.V.44. Segnet / die euch fluchen. Szczecin / publ. by the author, printed by Seel. Michael Höpfner / Königl. und Rahts = Buchdruckers / nachgelass. Wittwen / in 1683.*

Even if this polemic, which probably led to the Elector’s ban on printing and ultimately to Müller’s resignation from his office as provost of the Nicolai Church and de facto China expert to the Elector in 1685 (Bräuner 1987, 12ff; Noack 1995, 13), was also about power struggles between different ecclesiastical groups, it was based on the far greater problem that China represented for the upholders of the biblical explanation of the world: The description of Chinese characters as a “pictorial script” – and therefore of the devil – was intended to uphold the biblical idea of the origin of the world, a biblical universal historical tradition, and a primordial language. This is precisely what the Jesuit reports and translations of Chinese texts, in which the existence of a separate Chinese chronology and an independent development of language and characters had become clear, had cast doubt on.¹¹

Christian Mentzel’s (1622-1701) studies of China as Müller’s successor should also be seen in the context of the early Enlightenment. In his work on Chinese chronology¹², following and adopting the data of Philipp Couplet (1623-93), he sought to resolve the contradictions between biblical and Chinese chronology, which was based in particular on the biblical Great Flood, by interpreting the accounts of the ancient emperor Fu Xi as traditional legends in which traces of biblical truth could be found. Thus, Couplet/Mentzel had Chinese history begin about 300 years before the Great Flood and sought to establish a correlation in order to – once again – defend biblical truth against the heretical theses of Isaac de la Peyrere (1596-1676) of 1655 on the preadamites – i.e. the thesis that humans had already existed on earth before Adam (Bräuner 1987, 18f.).

¹¹ In the years that followed, Müller was unable to find support to continue his studies and take over his manuscripts and extensive library, so that he – extremely embittered – destroyed most of his documents and correspondence towards the end of his life; see Noack 1995:16f.

¹² Id. (1696), *Kurtze Chinesische Chronologia oder Zeit-Register/ Aller Chinesischen Käyser: Von ihrem somit vermeinten Anfang der Welt bis hieher zu unsern Zeiten/ des 1696sten Jahres; In einer richtigen Ordnung von Jahren zu Jahren/ ... auch mit zween Chinesischen erklärten Tafeln der vornehmsten Geschichten von ihrem Anbeginn der Welt/ Gezogen aus der Chineser Kinder-Lehre Siao Ul Hio oder Lun genandt*, Berlin: Rüdiger.

Kircher and du Halde: images of China and Jesuit portraits

Athanasius Kircher's widely distributed work *China Illustrata* (1670) played a central role in these feuds. Kircher had also attempted to harmonise the new knowledge that China represented with the biblical tradition. He had put forward the theory that China was colonised by Noah's third son, Cham, who had settled the country with his tribe from Egypt, and supported the thesis that Chinese writing was descended from Egyptian hieroglyphics (Bräuner 1987, 9f.).

However, Kircher's work also played an important role in the depiction of China as a model of state sovereignty in contrast to the exercise of ecclesiastical power in the absolutist corporative states of Europe (Chang 1994, 42f. and 85). The depictions of learned Jesuit missionaries of the 17th century played an important role in his perception of China. They were, after all, the decisive mediators of the new knowledge and thus the basis of legitimisation for the emerging ideas of the Enlightenment and reforms of society.

In particular, their visual representation as high officials of the Chinese empire was – in the positive China narrative – at the same time an expression of their social and cultural appreciation as scholars. Kircher thus established the topoi of Europeans in Chinese garb and, in a figurative sense, of the “assimilation” of Europeans to China, i.e. their adaptation to Chinese culture (Chang 1994, 63).

The central element of the upgrading was the splendid Chinese clothing, including the headgear. They usually corresponded to the respective official ranks of their wearers. The portrait of Adam Schall von Bell (1591-1666), probably the best-known portrait of a European working in China to this day, is prototypical.¹³ The head of the Imperial Astronomical Office, who among other things implemented the central calendar reform in China (Chang 1994, 42f.), was depicted in precious

¹³ The engraving is probably based on a Chinese model; cf. *Europa und die Kaiser von China*, 1985, 112 and 273.

Chinese robes¹⁴ of the 5th official rank and with a corresponding head-dress, albeit with European facial features. For Kircher, his portrait symbolised cultural tolerance (Chang 1994, 76) and underlined China’s exemplary character as a whole – including its fascination with the country. Schall von Bell was also portrayed as a modern scientist, clearly symbolised by the European instruments added to the portrait, which stand for new technologies. The portrait thus evokes Schall’s great influence at the imperial court and corresponding feelings of pride, as well as the European ideal of scholars, “according to which the state utilised the skills of educated literati and philosophers” (Chang 1994, 15 and 45).

Jean Baptiste du Halde’s work *Ausführliche Beschreibung des Chinesischen Reichs und der großen Tartarey* (Detailed Description of the Chinese Empire and the Great Tartary)¹⁵, a summary of Jesuit knowledge production on China, follows in Kircher’s tradition. The book is accompanied by a full-figure engraving of the three most important Jesuit missionaries, who, like Kircher, represent the Jesuit mission and intercultural exchange up to the present day. In addition to Schall, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) and Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-1688), counsellor to the Kangxi Emperor, were depicted with their scientific instruments and in splendid official dress, and Ricci with the cross and in the dress of a Confucian scholar (*Europa und die Kaiser von China*, 1985, 138 and 271). This visual representation continued the appreciation of the Jesuits established by Kircher. This also applied to depictions of other Jesuits, such as the Kircher student, cartographer and civil servant Martinus Martini (1614-61)¹⁶, and Ignaz Kögl (1680-1746), who had been imperial court astronomer and civil servant of the second rank since 1720.¹⁷

¹⁴ The cut is quite close to the Chinese original, but the ornamentation is not Chinese or Manchurian, but a creation of the artist; see Chang 1994, 9f.

¹⁵ Vol. 1-3, Rostock: Koppe 1747-49; first published in French in 1735.

¹⁶ Portrait of Martino Martini from the 17th century: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Martino_Martini_\(1614-1661\).jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Martino_Martini_(1614-1661).jpg) (access: 03/2024).

¹⁷ Kögler, like other Jesuits, saw his superiority in the scientific field as proof of the superiority of Christianity; see Hans Holzhaider (2017), "Ein Bayer deutet dem Kaiser von China die Sterne", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 4 Jan. 2017, <http://>

These visual representations were also based on the Jesuits' self-representations as Chinese. Ricci, for example, had expressed this to a friend:

*We have become Chinese in dress, mien, ceremony, and all outward appearances.*¹⁸

The address as “Emperor of China” in some of Voltaire’s letters to Frederick the Great (1712-1786) can also be placed in this valorising tradition of the appropriation of “China” and “Chineseness”. The latter not only took up the attribution (Hsia 1985, 374), but also imagined himself in his writing as a Chinese travelling through Europe. The Marquis d’Argens, who belonged to Frederick’s circle, served as a model for him with his influential 150 *Chinesische Briefe* (Chinese Letters), which were distributed throughout Europe in 1739/40. D’Argens reinforced the Enlightenment view that “men of all cultures and countries are equal members of a universal civilisation of reason”. The “Chinese man” was not only seen as “his image”, but also as “his ideal”: “The Chinese man is who he would like to be” (Friemuth 2012, 39 and 47). Prussia was even declared the “China of Europe”.¹⁹

The early Enlightenment philosopher Kircher, whose criticism of European despotism is symbolically condensed in the Schall portrait, and the representatives of the Enlightenment as a whole were harshly criticised – sometimes with political consequences. On the one hand, they were met with the argument that a function as a civil servant in a non-Christian state and participation in the Chinese calendar reform were incompatible with that of a Catholic missionary (Chang 1994, 69); secondly, the accusation that the system of Chinese ethics, which was appropriate to human needs, was on a par with Christianity (Chang 1994, 74) or even the assumption of Chinese superiority in the field of “practical

www.sueddeutsche.de/bayern/historische-reisen-ein-bayer-deutet-dem-kaiser-von-china-die-sterne-1.3228220 (access: 03/2024).

¹⁸ Quoted from G. Wright Doyle, “Matteo Ricci”, <http://bdconline.net/stories/ricci-matteo> (access: 05/2024).

¹⁹ Thus, the French physician who belonged to Frederick’s circle in his polemic *Ouvrages de Pénélope*, Berlin, 1750, cited in Friemuth 2012, 28.

philosophy”, as advocated by Leibniz and Christian Wolff (1679-1754), “who set the course for the philosophy of the Enlightenment”²⁰ (Bräuner 1987, 23).

Christian Wolff: Banishment and “damage to the university”

This was precisely the problem: the equal treatment of Chinese philosophy, namely Confucius, with Western philosophy, namely Socrates²¹, or with Christianity or aspects of it and the related criticism of the European political and social system, in which China was portrayed as a positive counter-image. The Enlightenment philosophy of the “dangerous innovator” Christian Wolff became attractive to students at the University of Halle, who “no longer found the piety” of the “school-master”, i.e. Joachim Lange, “to their liking”, especially as the Pietists were unable to “scientifically refute” Wolff.²²

In his speech on the Chinese “philosophia practica”, Wolff – when handing over the prorectorship to the professor of theology Joachim Lange (1670-1744) – had spoken of a Confucian ethics on a par with his own philosophy, which was not “bound to the certainties of revelation of the Judeo-Christian tradition” (Jäger n.d.), but sought to “derive moral truths from rational grounds” (Alwast 1982, 548). For him, this was proof that morality was possible without religion and was directed against the “zeal of the Lutherans and Catholics” (Roetz 2021). After many years of efforts by Wolff to establish philosophy as the leading science, he now confidently proclaimed the universality of a philosophy independent of theology with the China argument (Hänßler/Stiller 2022, 34).

²⁰ Henrik Jäger (2012): „Konfuzianismusrezeption als Wegbereitung der deutschen Aufklärung,“ www.uni-hildesheim.de/media/fb2/philosophie/JägerAZP-Artikel.pdf (access: 04/2024).

²¹ The equation of Confucius with Socrates goes back to Nicolas Trigault in 1615; see Friemuth 2012, 62ff.

²² Tschackert 1883, 634f.

His opponents, who defended theology as the leading science, interpreted this as an alliance with a pagan doctrine against the prevailing theology that would necessarily lead to atheism (Roetz 2021). They considered it as incompatible with the Christian-based fundamental values of the state.

The representative of an “aggressive Franckean pietism” (Alwast 1982, 548), the professor of theology Lange accused Wolff of “godlessness”²³ and wrote, among other things, his *Causa Dei adversus atheismum* (1723) against Wolff, in which he “emphasised the binding of thought to predetermined reality, especially religious and moral reality” (Alwast 1982, 548). He thus stood alongside August Herman Francke (1683-1727), who understood Christianity as a “constitution of personality” and wanted to make “individual piety the exclusive purpose of man’s life”, while “science, church and culture were ignored”.²⁴ Francke used his political influence at the Prussian court and obtained a cabinet order from Frederick William I, who removed Wolff from office in 1723 and banished him under penalty of hanging. Wolff left Halle immediately.

In the same year, Lange succeeded in having his eldest son appointed as Wolff’s successor.²⁵ Another opponent of Wolff, Daniel Strähler (1690-1750), was given the professorship of a philosopher, who had originally been sponsored by Wolff but had now been dismissed. In the following years, Francke was also able to install colleagues close to him in theological and philosophical matters and have others dismissed. Wolff’s writings were banned from Prussia (Edelmann 2022, 87ff.). Of course, the ostensibly philosophical conflict had its material and personal aspects. The *causa Wolff*, which was carried out in the academic public, was determined in its forms of dispute by a personalisation of the conflict, by mutual “denial of competence and authority”, ironic ridicule and – after banishment – the attempted legitimisation of the same with Wolff’s character traits.

²³ Presented by the pietist Lange, cited in Bräuner 1987, 24.

²⁴ Tschackert 1883, 634f.

²⁵ It was not until 1740 that Wolff was allowed to return to Prussia or Halle, see Alwast 1982, 548f.

At the same time, proclamations of alleged impartiality were made (Brodthage/Voß 2022, 43 and 47). The Faculty of Theology spoke of the “damage to the university” that Wolff had caused with his writings and “lectures” (Edelmann 2022, 78f.). Students who attended Wolff’s lectures were asked by Francke for talks (Bölke/Großmann 2022, 68). Mocking poems were also written and later published.²⁶ Wolff sought to defend himself against the “blasphemies and slander” that were particularly prevalent in the *Hallische and Jenaische Streitschriften*:

But I have sufficiently shown that there is not one true word in it, but such obvious slander that one must wonder how people can commit such offences. (Ludovici 1737: 62)

Behind the accusations of Wolff’s opponents was the fear that by making a moral concession to China’s equality – in conjunction with the spread of the new heliocentric world view – Christianity could lose its identity and its authority of interpretation in science. During this political debate, which was particularly important for European scholars and culminated in the so-called Rites Controversy, the Kangxi Emperor emphasised the universality of ethical principles and spoke of “a principle that was common to the whole world” (Chang 1994, 74ff.).

Other critics of the emerging fundamental ideological and political changes also focussed on the China narrative and its protagonists of the Enlightenment. The philosophers Montesquieu (1689-1755) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) sought to establish a counter-narrative in 1748 and 1750, respectively, based, among other things, on the report published in 1748 by the world traveller Lord Anson (1697-1762). Based on descriptions of the practical behaviour of the Chinese, he had attributed negative characteristics to them, as well as to China as a whole. Contrary to the positive Jesuit reports, China for him was a

²⁶ Ludovici 1737, 182 The poem was written on the occasion of a doctorate in Leipzig with the title *Von der höchstgefährlichn, Seel und Leib schädlichen neuerlichen mechanischen Philosophie*: “Verläumdung, Lästerung, nebst Schimpffen, Lügen, Schmähn / Sind lauter Tugenden, sofern sie nur geschehn / Um die verdammlichen aus Noth ergriffnen Lehren / Von einer bösen Welt, voll Kühnheit zu zerstöhren”.

nation with a “deceitful and selfish disposition”. It was also a nation of cowardice, which was paralleled by a “savagery of morals”. Montesquieu considered this in turn to be “a mitigated form of despotism – that is, rule by fear”. Rousseau, in turn, inferred from the cowardice attributed to the Chinese a state of slavery in China (Friemuth 2012, 55ff.).

Other opponents of the Enlightenment China narrative pointed out contradictions in the Jesuits’ portrayal of China after the publication of their multi-volume letters and reports and sought to revise the Jesuit version of the rites controversy. For example, the philosopher and anti-Kantian Christoph Meiners (1747-1810), who placed the beginning of the Chinese nation “only one or two generations before the Yao”²⁷ and thus again harmonised Chinese chronology with the biblical one. He polemicalised against the “exaggerated admiration of these Asians” and “praisers of the ‘Sines’²⁸, against the Jesuits’ attempts “to cover China and the Chinese with a beautifying veil” and against the “presumptions” of the “China-friends”.²⁹ The term “China-friends” was intended to discredit the Jesuits, a cliché that was repeatedly used also in subsequent periods.

The Enlightenment-humanist cultural relativism expressed in Kircher’s work and in his Schall portrait – and the inherent rejection of Christian Eurocentrism – dominated the ideas of the Enlightenment in the 18th century and the accompanying process of secularisation of science.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) also played a part in this with his ambivalent perception of China. It is true that he spoke favourably of the society and politics of the Chinese empire, following the Jesuit depictions, and spoke of the “most cultivated empire in the world”. However, he assessed the morals and attitudes of the Chinese negatively, also follow-

²⁷ Bergmann/Meiners 1778: 317f.

²⁸ Ibid., 3f.

²⁹ Christoph Meiners (1796), *Betrachtungen über d. Fruchtbarkeit, oder Unfruchtbarkeit, über d. vormahligen und gegenwärtigen Zustand d. vornehmsten Länder in Asien*, vol. 2, Lübeck/Leipzig: Bohn, cited in Bräuner 1987, 25.

ing the descriptions of travelling salesmen. Kant now denied the Chinese virtue and regarded the entire nation, including the philosopher Confucius, as incapable of professing honour and duty (Hsia 2001).³⁰

Kant’s ambivalence was an expression of the political and ideological transition from the Enlightenment and the idea of equality of the French Revolution to the colonial age, which was already underway. This was characterised by a legitimising perspective on the peoples to be colonised, now including China, as being of a lower rank that needed to be civilised. Almost a hundred years later, when Nietzsche labelled Kant the “Chinese von Königsberg” and spoke of “Königsberg Chineseness”,³¹ colonial expansion and exploitation was already at its peak, and the view of China and Chinese scholars had fundamentally changed: the attribution of “Chinese” now had negative connotations.

2. Caricatured as “Chinese”: Neumann versus the “Hegelian Party”, 1830s/40s

In 1846, in the tradition of Jesuit portraits as “Chinese” officials, one of the first sinologists in Germany, Karl Friedrich Neumann (1793-1870), was depicted as a “Chinese” by the poet and caricaturist Franz von Pocci (1807-76). However, it is a caricature with a new, exoticising and, at the same time, derogatory meaning. The “Chinese” Neumann wears an ornate Chinese conical hat, which also appears in other caricatures from this period and visually represents “Chinese” or “Chineseness”. In another of Pocci’s caricatures, Neumann is also drawn as a Chinese man, again with the conical hat from which a long plait protrudes, and in a splendid official’s dress, the colourfulness of which is modelled on

³⁰ Kant is probably referring here to Pierre Sonnerat (1748-1814), who in *Voyage aux Indes Orientales et à la Chine* (1782), (German: *Reise nach Ostindien und China 1774-81*, publ. 1783) had rejected the Jesuit image of China and, with his negative depictions, including the devaluation of Confucius, had helped “form” the new colonial view of China; see Hsia 1985, 384f.

³¹ Friedrich Nietzsche (1990 [1887]), “Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Zur Genealogie der Moral”, in: *Das Hauptwerk*, vol. III, Munich: Nymphenburger, 662.

a “Punch and Judy” character. In this caricature, Neumann sits on a high pedestal with a few lines – probably representing characters – and the word “Tscho” symbolising China. The pedestal is “shat upon” by a small European-looking figure on the right-hand edge. Although the tall Neumann and the “China” pedestal are not toppled, they are disgracefully devalued by the “small” Europeans.

Neumann’s face is drawn in a half-Chinese style with implied “slit eyes”, but with a large hooked nose, which, according to the now widespread racial stereotypes, stood for Jewishness. Like Neumann, Pocci was a member of the Munich Society of the Unconstrained (*Gesellschaft der Zwanglosen*), a moderate constitutional group of poets and writers who sought to combine a freer intellectual life with liberal political endeavours (Dickerhof 1978, 309f.).

The caricature of Neumann as an exotic “Chinese” by a poet friend is not merely a collegial joke by Pocci, writer of the *Punch and Judy* shows. Rather, it shows the tendency in the post-Enlightenment age that the exoticisation of China and Europeans dealing with China was also inherently devalued.³²

The latter was reinforced by the fact that it was combined with a Jewish cliché – Neumann was a Jew who had converted to Protestantism. The portrayal of Neumann as an educated Chinese man in colourful robes ties in with the positive depiction of the Jesuits. However, the entire visual representation depicts the now dominant devaluation of China: a “Chinese” Neumann watching as China is “shat upon”. In the subsequent restoration phase, and after the politically motivated dismissal from his professorship, Neumann himself was also to join the new view of China as a haven of despotism and as a colonial object.

³² This devaluation can also be seen in other caricatures from this period. The authorship is unclear, but it may also be Pocci. A caricature from 1846 entitled *Deutsch-chinesische Stiftung zu Cassel zur Bekehrung und Beglückung der Chinesen* mocks the mission and the missionaries: On a podium, men and women dressed in German attire, albeit with the conical hats symbolising China and/or long plaits and a large donation kettle, address spectators below. The caption reads: “The directorate invites its happy compatriots to participate”. (See *Fliegende Blätter*, 4:86, 112.)

However, the period of upheaval before 1848 was still characterised by fierce political and ideological polarisation around revolution and maintaining the status quo internally and dealing with China and other cultures externally. In domestic politics, the struggles were for republican, bourgeois, democratic freedom, especially freedom of the press, social emancipation and national unity, against the unequal estate-based society and autocratic rule, in which China served as an argument of reference. In terms of dealing with other cultures, especially China, it was no longer just about the status of China and its utilisation in systems of world explanation, but also about concrete policy towards China, namely the question of nation states and their colonial expansion plans. These debates also took place within the emerging small group of academics who defined themselves as sinologists primarily through their knowledge of the written language. They claimed interpretative power over China within the discipline and the academic community as a whole. The new view of China as not on a par with Europe ran parallel to the beginning of the professionalisation of the academic study of China, i.e. sinology. In addition to efforts to gain recognition in the academic community as sinologists, where the core competence was an understanding of the Chinese written language and correspondingly “correct” translations of texts³³, there was a second aspect. This is related to the ideological-political level, namely the view of China, the China narrative, and the significance that was attributed to China as a basis for argumentation in the pursuit of one’s own professional and political goals in Germany. Maintaining the Enlightenment narrative of China, which was characterised by ideas of equality, became part of political resistance to dominant structures and ideas with the “colonial” narrative, which did not want the principle of equality to apply to non-European peoples.³⁴

³³ For details see Leutner 2013, 47ff.

³⁴ In addition to Neumann, these were Heinrich Kurz and Johannes Plath (1802-1874), who were marginalised in the history of sinology for a long time; cf. Leutner 2001. On Plath, see Herbert Franke (1960), “Zur Biographie von Johann Heinrich Plath (1802-1874)”, *Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, no. 12, 5-70.

When Neumann returned from China in 1831 and negotiated for a professorship in Berlin, he had studied under well-known experts in the field in Paris, had already produced two smaller translations and writings on China and had an influential supporter in Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859). He was also the first scholar who, in addition to his knowledge of the Chinese language, had also familiarised himself with the real China in 1829/30, meaning that his knowledge of China was not based solely on the texts available in Europe, as was the case for his colleagues. He was also able to offer the Royal Library more than 12,000 additional volumes of Chinese writings that he had acquired in Canton, beyond the volumes he had already purchased for them. In the end, however, all this was insufficient for a professorship, as Neumann did not receive the support of the “Hegelian Party”, which set the tone in Prussian Berlin. Neumann had tried to remain neutral in the disputes between Hegelians and Pietists on the one hand and the historical school on the other.³⁵ However, his ideological and political positions were well known. He had already been dismissed from his teaching position in the 1820s because of his republican statements. And while he was still on his trip to China, there was fierce public criticism – and thus negative publicity – from his former fellow student in Paris, Heinrich Kurz (1805-1873), who was trying to establish himself at Munich University (Leutner 2001, 10ff.), and the leading German expert of the time, Julius Klaproth (1783-1835).

Kurz rejected Neumann’s accusations of plagiarism against their mutual teacher Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788-1832) and in turn accused Neumann of serious translation errors and complete misjudgements and misclassifications of titles in Humboldt’s Sinica collection. It can be assumed that Kurz’s questioning of Neumann’s competence as a translator was also based on competition for university positions and was about positioning himself as a “better” sinologist.³⁶ However, the estab-

³⁵ Thus Dickerhof 1978, 300, based on statements from Neumann’s estate.

³⁶ See Heinrich Kurz (1830), *Über einige der neuesten Leistungen in der Chinesischen Literatur: Sendschreiben an Herrn Professor Ewald in Göttingen*, Paris, and Anonymous [= H. Kurz], “Berichtigung”, *Berlinische Nachrichten von Staats- und*

lished sinologist Klaproth, who supported Kurz in his criticism of Neumann, had more at stake: he insisted on his 30 years of Chinese studies in Paris, which gave him “a certain right” to judge “superficial studies and immature works” strictly.³⁷ Moreover, Klaproth may have envied Neumann his experience of China, as he himself had only managed to travel as far as China’s borders. Klaproth even emphasised that Neumann in particular had made it clear that his stay in China was “nothing ahead of his stay in Paris in terms of the study of Chinese literature”.³⁸ In fact, Neumann’s travel to China had not only expanded the Chinese text corpus for sinologists in Europe both quantitatively and qualitatively, but also stood for a new understanding of scholarship that was still in its infancy, namely the study of the real China, not just Chinese texts.

Last but not least, Klaproth was an ideological representative of the now dominant Hegelian China narrative: he “vulgarised Hegel’s devaluation of China and thereby made it convenient and mouth-watering for

gelehrten Sachen, No. 91, 20 April 1830, 5f. Again in: *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*. Anzeigeblatt, no. 3, March 1830, pp. 5ff; and Anonymous [= H. Kurz], “Berichtigung”, *Berlinische Nachrichten von Staats- und gelehrten Sachen*, no. 104, 8 May 1830, 5. Alexander von Humboldt also responded to Kurz’s criticism, defending Neumann. These were disputes about professional competence and about public establishment as a scholarly authority. See also Neumann’s reply: *Gazette d’État de Berlin*, No. 166, 17 June 1831. For a refutation of the criticisms of Neumann, see Thomas Nehrlich (2021), *Alexander von Humboldt (1830-1835): Eine Publikationsbiographie*, Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 96ff., <http://www.aisthesis.de/WebRoot/Store20/Shops/63645342/MediaGallery/Open-Access/978384981758.pdf> (access: 04/2024). See also “Emma Neumann und Karl Friedrich Neumann (1798-1870): Biographische Skizze”, in: Hartmut Walravens (1999), *Zur Geschichte der Ostasienwissenschaften in Europa: Abel Rémusat (1788-1832) und das Umfeld Julius Klaproths (1783-1835)*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 173-183.

³⁷ Heinrich Klaproth (1831), review of Hyazinth Bitschurin: *Abrege du catechisme chinois intitule Thian Chin Hoei Kho (Tianshen huike)*, *Nouveau Journal Asiatique*, No. 8, 66ff.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 77. The prevailing opinion was that “there was little to be gained from China for the study of language”, according to the sinologist Antoine-Pierre-Louis Bazin to Heyman Steinthal, 1856; cf. Ingrid Belke (ed.; 1971), *Moritz Lazarus und Heymann Steinthal: die Begründer der Völkerpsychologie in ihren Briefen*, vol. 1, Tübingen: Mohr, 288-293.

the German bourgeoisie of the 19th century”. He degraded the Chinese as a whole (as a race) and ascribed to them lies, cunning and slyness as systemic characteristics.³⁹ It was a new construction of China as totally degenerated and as a “denaturalised nation” (Hsia 2001, 22), a philosophical and political legitimisation strategy⁴⁰ of China’s political role as a colonial object.

Kant and Johann G. Herder (1744-1803) – based on their pietistic worldview – had already construed the image of a stagnating China, which was inferior to European development and therefore needed to be civilised and proselytised. Their conviction was that the “whites” constituted the most perfect people in the world and that Chinese and East Asians were half white and half yellow and therefore inferior (Hsia 2001, 10). Herder, who to some extent still followed Jesuit China narratives, rejected racist attributions. However, he classified Chinese as a “defective language” and saw the Chinese as having the “genes of a nomadic Mongolian tribe” and a degeneration of Chinese culture into a “slave culture” due to their non-mixing with other peoples. Contemporary China was an “embalmed mummy” and was still in the infantile stage (Hsia 2001, 23). This dictum was solidified with Hegel’s dictum on the lack of a spiritual movement in China – it was supposedly “static” and “outside of world history” – to form a lasting China narrative. As such, it reinforced (colonial) ideas of the necessity of the externally promoted civilisation of China as a country that did not possess the power to do so itself.

Neumann’s China narrative, on the other hand, was still characterised by the ideas of the Enlightenment and its constructions of China. Not least due to his experiences of social discrimination, he had an Enlightenment-republican and, at the same time, socially critical attitude, which can be characterised as “rebellious” in the broadest sense – both

³⁹ Stumpfheldt, Hans (2007), "Sinologiegeschichtliche Einblicke: Neuere Veröffentlichungen zur Geschichte der deutschen Sinologie", *Oriens Extremus*, No. 46: <http://archiv.oriens-extremus.org/46/OE46-16.pdf> (access: 03/2024).

⁴⁰ Hsia 2001 speaks of a construction of the Far East in the service of its own world view, which was fuelled by the historical forces behind trade with East Asia.

politically and personally. Based on these experiences of the struggle for equality, he also rejected the proto-racist and racist categorisations that were now becoming increasingly prevalent in the course of colonial expansion, instead assuming the “natural equality of all races” (Dick-erhof 1978, 330). Like the Enlightenment thinkers before him, China also served him as a “means of instrumentalising his own socio-political ideas”⁴¹, as a form of “self-assurance”⁴² to consolidate his own positions in relation to Germany. At the same time, Neumann applied his republican ideas of equality to his dealings with China. He was far removed from Hegelian thinking with its ethnocentric, partly racial-theoretically based ideas of the superiority of the “progressive” West over the stagnating, semi-barbaric, semi-civilised China. Neumann had already set out his ideas in this regard in 1829 in a 25-page critical review of the China volume by the influential philosopher Carl Windischmann (1775-1839). It was a resolute positioning in the China discourse. Neumann confidently and clearly distanced himself from the idea of a stagnation of China, of its forms of government or of its moral code:

The generally held opinion of the immutability of Chinese forms must be contradicted by those who know. [...] Even in the most important state functions, changes have also taken place in China over the course of time.
(Neumann 1829a, 330)

For Neumann, however, the history of Chinese philosophy only began during the Song dynasty (960-1279), because the “incoherent aphorisms calculated for practical use” of the classical books could not be described as philosophy, as they did not contain a philosophical system (Neumann 1829a, 348). In contrast to the Jesuits with their high regard for Confucianism, Neumann also accords Daoist and Buddhist works a

⁴¹ Such a functionalisation can also be stated for the travelogues on China, see Mechtild Leutner and Dagmar Yu-Dembski (eds.; 1990), “Einleitung”, in: *Exotik und Wirklichkeit: China in Reisebeschreibungen vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*. Munich: Minerva, 8.

⁴² Münkler notes this for John Mandeville’s travelogue of 1480; see Marina Münkler (2000), *Erfahrung des Fremden. Die Beschreibung Ostasiens in den Augenzeugenberichten des 13. u. 14. Jh.* Berlin: Akademie, 146.

high status in Chinese literature⁴³ and also rates popular literature highly (Neumann 1829b). Neumann's rejection of a God-given order is also clear: he agrees with "newer ideas" that are of the opinion that the "human race" has "gradually risen so high from its animal state" (Neumann 1829a, 327). This negation of divine power in human history, understood as an evolutionary process, is also evident in his analysis of society. Neumann opposed the "social hierarchy" of "rulers" and "subordinates" and advocated morality and "equally distributive justice" as two fundamental pillars of society. For him, hierarchy was nothing other than the unrestricted rule of a class over the physical and spiritual goods of a society (Neumann 1929a, 336).

Neumann contrasted the hierarchical concept of society, also legitimised by the work of God, with China as a model and contradicted Windischmann, who also believed that the work of a god and his priests could be observed here.

*No and never again, there are as few traces of a theocracy or theocratic wisdom in China as there are of the descendants of Noe and of the connection between the progenitors of the Chinese people and the holy patriarchs.*⁴⁴

In China, Neumann continued, everything is "human". This sets China apart from all other nations. "Never and never has a god appeared to the Chinese people; there is no trace of a revelation in this nation, which has abandoned all fantasy games" (Neumann 1829a, 336f.).⁴⁵ He recognises no signs of deism in either the Confucians or the Daoists. The Chinese were characterised by "the common sense and clarity" that can be observed throughout the works of antiquity (Neumann 1829a, 343).

⁴³ Karl Friedrich Neumann (1831), "The Catechism of the Shamans; or the Laws and Regulations of the Priesthood of Buddha in China", in: *Translations from the Chinese and Armenian*, Pt. 2, London, 35-152.

⁴⁴ Neumann 1929a, 336, quoted here Windischmann, 510.

⁴⁵ For the anti-Catholic Neumann, such interpretations were still an expression of the Jesuits' attempts at assimilation: "They sought to impose a sacred meaning on the profane and to harmonise the sacred with the existing views and customs". Thus, "the fathers had ascribed a belief to the ancient Chinese [...] that would never have occurred to them" (Neumann 1829a, 339 and 341).

Neumann’s view of science as a whole was characterised by optimism about progress, which was evident both in the overcoming of “conventional forms of thought” and in the discovery of new sources that shed new light on other civilisations. The high regard for Chinese scholarship and its contribution to the establishment of a factual world history through its literature on other peoples played an important role in this. To put it in today’s terms, he gave the individual peoples the power of interpretation and allowed them to write their own history. The task of the historian – as he saw himself – was “to understand the various forms of human life and history [...] according to their nature and origin”:

The barbaric prejudice, which regards everything that is not conceived in our conventional forms of thought, everything that is not represented in our way, as barbaric and unworthy of attention, is disappearing more and more in the field of scientific research; the narrow-mindedness that concedes true feeling and penetrating insight only to some peoples, and wants to judge and reshape everything according to its highly praised monotony, is gradually disappearing from life and history, to the salvation of both. (Neumann 1829a, 403f.)

Neumann’s understanding of “world history” was a clear vote against Hegel. However, he overestimated the “new ideas” that were spreading in the wake of the March Revolution and underestimated both the conservatism of most scholars and the colonial narratives about peoples, including China, that were already becoming dominant, as well as the prevailing latent anti-Judaism, which was also directed against himself, as Alexander von Humboldt suspected.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Humboldt: “Since I love publicity above all, I wish that Mr Neumann’s mistakes be corrected, that he be attacked as a sinologist, but not as a Semitic person, which would seem to me neither just nor worthy of our century, which we dare to praise as enlightened” (Honigmann quoted from Humboldt’s letter to Spiker, 1997, 55). As late as Jan. 1832, Humboldt pointed this out in a letter to the Prussian Minister of Culture, Altenstein, and stated that the few who dealt with Chinese literature “accuse each other of total ignorance”; cited in Peter Honigmann (1997), “Alexander von Humboldt und die Juden”, in: *Zur Freiheit bestimmt: Alexander von Humboldt – eine hebräische Lebensbeschreibung von Chaim Selig Slonimski*, ed. by Kurt-Jürgen Maaß, Bonn: Bouvier, 55.

The fact that Neumann did not receive the Berlin professorship primarily because of the public debate about the validity of his knowledge of Chinese is also clear in view of the appointment of Wilhelm Schott instead. Wilhelm Schott had also been heavily criticised by Klaproth for his translation of the *Lunyu*⁴⁷, after Schott had criticised Klaproth in a review. This also resulted in a fierce public controversy about Chinese and China expertise and interpretative power. From this controversy between Klaproth with his sarcastic exaggerations and Schott with his admission that he had orientated himself on an English translation, the latter ultimately emerged as both victim and “victor”. Schott’s scholarly misconduct and abusive behaviour towards Klaproth were virtually excused by colleagues as “youthful indiscretions”.⁴⁸ The fact that Schott formulated the aim of his China studies as wanting to open up Chinese literature and, at the same time, correct the “most outlandish and perverse views of the Chinese”⁴⁹ is part of the claim to academic authority, as can be observed in the founding phase and, to this day, with the topos of correcting prejudices about China.

Schott’s positions were simply better suited to the Berlin university, which was dominated by Hegelian ideas. He, who had tried in vain to study in Paris – the Mecca of sinology at the time – had been in charge of the Chinese book collection of the Royal Library from 1830, which had been considerably expanded by Neumann’s book purchases. In 1832, i.e. the year in which Neumann found a position at the University of Munich, he received an extraordinary professorship in Berlin.

⁴⁷ See Heinrich Klaproth (1828), *Dr W. Schott’s vorgebliche Uebersetzung der Werke des Confucius aus der Ursprache, eine litterarische Betrügerei, dargestellt von W. Lauterbach*, Leipz., Par. 1828, see also Hartmut Walravens (2001), *Wilhelm Schott (1802-1889). Leben und Wirken des Orientalisten* (= Orientalistik Bibliographien und Dokumentationen, 13), Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 78.

⁴⁸ See in detail, Michael Schön (2022), “Die Klaproth-Schott-Kontroverse. Anmerkungen zu einem (nicht nur) akademischen Streit”, *Notizen 2022*, publ. by OAG Deutsche Gesellschaft für Natur und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, 30-52. http://oag.jp/img/2022/01/Notizen-2202_Feature_Klaproth.pdf (access: 04/2024).

⁴⁹ Wilhelm Schott (1826): *Werke des tschinesischen Weisen Kung-Fu-Dsü und seiner Schüler. I. Part Lun-Yü*, Halle: Renger, V.

By and large, Schott shared the dominant China narrative, namely that the country was in a state of torpor and in need of a moral rebirth and a fresher life. This could ultimately only come from outside: through the influence of European nations.⁵⁰ Later, he also argued with racial categories. The peoples of the Mongolian race, for example, were unimaginative and “materially” orientated in comparison to the Indo-European tribe.⁵¹ The fact that Schott also assumed a great ancient culture of China and the ethics of Confucius – in contrast to pernicious Buddhism –⁵² was in line with the thesis of degeneration. There were also differences with Neumann with regard to the content of the scholarly study of China. While Neumann focused more on culture and society than on language, Schott’s methodological approach was characterised by general linguistics, which acted as the leading discipline. With its assumption of the historicity of language and the comparability of languages in general, it played a decisive role in the suppression of theological-religious explanations and the separation of Oriental Studies from theology and its integration into the Faculty of Philosophy (Leutner 1987, 31).

In contrast to Schott, Neumann sought from the outset to leave “sterile philology” behind and to realise a social science approach with a focus on politics and history (Dickerhof 1978, 301 and 316). From this, he developed questions that transcended China, anchored in the overall context of world history and based “in the Enlightenment and liberalism”. Neumann advocated his universal-historical, evolutionary view of history in well-attended lectures, contrary to the now prevailing nation-state trend.

⁵⁰ Id. (1830): “China”, in: J.S. Ersch and J.G. Gruber (eds.): *Allgemeine Encyclopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste*. 21st part, Leipzig: Gleditsch, 176.

⁵¹ Wilhelm Schott (1842), “Skizze zu einer Topographie der Produkte des chinesischen Reiches”, *Abhandlungen der Kgl. Akademie der Wissensch.*, Berlin, 245.

⁵² Wilhelm Schott (1840): *Verzeichniss der chinesischen und manschu-tungusischen Bücher und Handschriften der Königl. Bibliothek zu Berlin: eine Fortsetzung des im Jahre 1822 erschienenen Klaproth’schen Verzeichnisses / von Wilhelm Schott, außerordentlicher Professor des Chinesischen und der Tatarischen Sprachen an der Königlichen Universität zu Berlin*. Berlin: Royal Academy of Sciences, 45.

With his understanding of China's history, as well as that of the other peoples of Asia, as part of world history (Dickerhof 1978, 290 and 329), he adopted anti-Hegelian positions, rejected common Eurocentric prejudices (Neumann 1837d, 152f.) and assumed the "natural equality of all races" (Dickerhof 1978, 330). At the same time, he also advocated politically anti-colonial positions: He analysed the economic and political causes of the Opium War and sharply criticised the British actions as an act of immorality and a lack of humanity:

"It will shame every European and Christian to the depths of his soul. This is truly not the way in which the inhabitants of the Middle Kingdom would like to be converted to European civilisation and Christianity" (Neumann 1855, 30).

With the failure of the 1848 revolution and the strengthening of restorative political forces, Neumann's scholarly and political views were no longer acceptable to the majority of his "old Bavarian-conservative colleagues on the teaching staff at Munich University" (Dickerhof 1978, 306f.).⁵³ In 1852, his opponents succeeded in forcing Neumann's forced retirement – at a considerable financial cost. Significant for the forced reorientation of history at the University of Munich was the appointment of Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) to his chair, which was intended to coincide with Neumann's dismissal, as he was Neumann's academic and political antithesis.

In his later years, Neumann – struggling to make a living as a freelance writer – joined the dominant China narrative. He now stylised the USA as a model of democracy, while he portrayed China as a despotic state (Neumann 1857, II, 684), as a country of "arrogance" in which the idea of a "China that makes itself alone" prevailed (Neumann 1861, 314). He also joined in with racist characterisations, speaking of "obsolete,

⁵³ Neumann can be counted among the "liberal scholarly opposition" (Dickerhof 1978, 311). He was involved in "moderate constitutional groupings", including – in addition to the "Gesellschaft der Zwanglosen" – the "Vereinigung der ehrlichen freisinnig-literarischen Männer", which he founded, and the "Bauhof-Club", which "united workers, students and artists under a democratic-unitarian programme in sharp criticism of the government"; *ibid.*, 309f.; 312. He had also taken part in the Frankfurt pre-parliament.

dull, brooding masses” in China that were incapable of “forming a higher, progressive humanity” – they had to have “youthful, lively life” breathed into them by the Occident. These and similar arguments served to legitimise the European, Christian civilising mission in the colonial China narrative, using military force if necessary. Neumann now showed understanding for England’s military action in China (Neumann 1857 II, 695ff.) and favoured the establishment of a navy and a role for Germany as a colonial power (Neumann 1861, 320).

In the following decades, China studies, like oriental studies as a whole, ran parallel to the political interests of expanding the “occidental sphere of power” into the “Orient”. They now appeared “like a reflection of these movements in the political world: just as political Europe undertook the conquest of the Asian continent there, so scientific Europe undertook the conquest of the Asian continent here”.⁵⁴ China was now also defined primarily in comparison to its own existence, as the “other”, as a counter-world to the West. For sinologists, the “conquest” of China did not only mean the “scholarly conquest” of the country, but also included military conquest, as was the case with Schott and later advocates of colonial policy. The Berlin sinologist J.J.M. de Groot (1854-1921), for example, wanted to enforce the “civilisation” of China without any reservations by all means, including military means, and from this perspective he constructed the Chinese state as the epitome of intolerance, fanaticism and persecution. He held it responsible for the persecution of Buddhists and other followers of non-Confucian beliefs, including Christians. This virtually demanded the intervention of the European powers in China to protect the missions and the Chinese Christians, including through the use of force.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Max Lenz (1910), *Geschichte der Kgl. Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin*, 2nd vol. 1st half, Halle: Verl. der Buchhandl. des Waisenhauses, 491.

⁵⁵ De Groot 1904, 515; see also Leutner 1989, 164.

3. “Almost Chinese-ised”: Eduard Erkes and Richard Wilhelm in the Weimar Republic

The hegemonic and racist colonial policy of the German Empire (and other colonial powers) was not fundamentally questioned by individual academics until the period of upheaval after the First World War, when, parallel to the collapse of the feudal monarchy and the establishment of the democratic Weimar Republic, academics were once again concerned with the development of equally important (research) perspectives on other countries, including China. This clashed with the world view of the leading representatives of the now established discipline of sinology. The sinologists, like the majority of academics, were nationally conservative and supported colonial policy as a civilising mission. For them, the republic was also about creating national identity and demarcation, not about turning away from the superiority thinking of the empire.

They therefore regarded the academic and political-social endeavours of the sinologists Eduard Erkes (1891-1958) in Leipzig and Richard Wilhelm (1873-1930) in Frankfurt – quite rightly – as a challenge to their own fundamental convictions. They sought to devalue them academically, politically and socially by characterising them as “Chinese” or accusing them of preaching “the introduction of Chinese culture in Europe” – with negative consequences for their academic careers. The Nazi dictatorship led to a resurgence of racially legitimised colonial superiority thinking and the devaluation of others, including “the Chinese” – a disastrous line of tradition that would continue to have an influence after 1945.⁵⁶

Before 1918, China scholars such as Wilhelm Grube (1855-1908)⁵⁷ and Otto Franke (1863-1946) had already spoken out against colonial “excesses”, partially criticised the violent actions in China (Leutner 1998,

⁵⁶ See Yu-Dembski 2022 and Neddermann 2022a.

⁵⁷ Although Grube shared colonial hegemonic thinking and the idea of a Christian civilising mission, he strongly criticised the military aggression and brutal behaviour of foreigners in China; see Leutner 1991, 167.

4ff.), and attempted to counter the colonial narrative with positive elements of Chinese culture. However, it was not a fundamental rejection of colonial policy and its idea of the superiority of Western society and the construction of inferior otherness. This culminated in the depiction of China (and also Japan) as the “Yellow Peril”: the racially, culturally, politically and economically based image of China as an enemy had already legitimised the further expansion of the imperialist powers in China before the turn of the century and served to secure the superiority of the white race and the political and economic structure dominated by it, as well as the production of ideology and knowledge in general (Leutner 2022, 13). Chinese people were devalued in writing and images as the embodiment of this enemy image, almost “dehumanised”.

It was initially Social Democratic politicians who vehemently opposed colonial policy and in 1900 denounced the atrocities committed by German troops during the colonial war (“Boxer War”). August Bebel (1840-1915) and Paul Singer (1844-1911), who condemned the war in the Reichstag, were portrayed as partisans of China. A caricature by Lyonel Feininger from 1900 shows the two Reichstag deputies as Chinese, with implied ‘slit eyes’ and other external attributes for Chinese: long plaits, official hats, and flowing robes. They are sitting in a sailing boat with two fierce dragons drawn on the side. There are other smaller “Chinese-ised” SPD figures in the boat as sailors, and a copy of the SPD party organ *Vorwärts* is sewn into the sail. To make the message clear, the title reads: “With Fo for Kwang-Sü and the double dragon”, and the subtitle: “Judging by the attitude of the ‘Vorwärts’, the socialist leaders will soon be organising themselves as a Chinese protection force”.⁵⁸ With this caricature, Bebel, holding a pistol in his hand, and Singer are being dragged down to the perceived inferior status of the Chinese and devalued.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *Lustige Blätter*, issue 39, 1900, 7.

⁵⁹ The pejorative term “Chinese-isation”, commonly used in literature and academia, can be found, for example, in the sinologist Alfred Forke, who mocked Richard Wilhelm as “Chinese-ised” (Forke 1926).

The Leipzig sinologist August Conrady (1864-1925) had also argued at the time of the colonial war, when anti-Chinese sentiment in Germany was at its peak, that the “cultural pride” he observed on both the German and Chinese sides should be discarded (Conrady 1901, 324f.). He was against the characterisation of the Chinese as “barbarians” and advocated a just appreciation of the “much-maligned” Chinese people, an “understanding”, a “learning to understand” China (Conrady 1903, ed., 4 and 40), or at least mutual respect (Conrady 1901, 324f.). For him, China was an autochthonous, independently developed culture on a par with the West, which did not require civilisation.⁶⁰

Conrady’s student Eduard Erkes and Richard Wilhelm, who worked as a missionary in China for many years, were part of this tradition of demanding equality of perspective and understanding for the other culture. The latter had developed critical colonial and anti-hegemonic positions by studying Chinese culture and philosophy and on the basis of his own experiences in colonial Kiautschou. Based on fundamental humanist and enlightenment ideas in their academic work and as *public intellectuals*, they advocated an attitude of equality towards China – towards the real China of their day and towards China as an object of research – as well as efforts to view Chinese academics as cooperation partners and not as mere “assistants”.⁶¹ They rejected ideas of the superiority of Western culture over China. Despite their professional and ideological differences, this is expressed in their China narrative: in their research questions and findings, as well as in their socio-political activities and opinions expressed in public discourse.

⁶⁰ See Leutner 2003a, 94f.

⁶¹ See in detail: Leutner (2013), “Chinesische Lektoren und ihre zentrale Rolle für die Professionalisierung des Chinesischunterrichts, 1887-1945”, in: *Dreihundert Jahre Chinesisch in Deutschland: Annäherungen an ein fernes Land*, ed. by Mechthild Leutner and Dagmar Yu-Dembski, Münster: Lit, 117-156.

Eduard Erkes: “Preacher” of Chinese culture

After his stay in China in 1931/32, Erkes sent a photograph to colleagues and friends showing him in Daoist garb to demonstrate his affinity with Chinese culture. In a way, he equated himself with “Chinese” or Daoists and continued the tradition of Jesuit portraits with this self-representation – ignoring the negative representations of social democrats during the colonial era. The historian of religion and sinologist Heinrich Hackmann (1864-1935), professor at the University of Amsterdam, assessed the portrait accordingly in his letter to Erkes dated 21 February 1932: “Your photograph in Chinese garb is nice and harmonises completely with your point of view as a whole”.⁶²

For the dominant representatives of the small discipline of sinology, Erkes’ scholarly and ideologically anti-colonial, socially critical and democratic positions represented a challenge, which they met with the denial of academic competence, political discrediting and – in the subsequent period of the Nazi dictatorship – with approval of political persecution (Leutner 2023, 310ff). Erkes not only set a counterpoint to the “Western Occident” with his thesis of the “circumpacific cultural sphere”⁶³, but also turned the colonial civilisation paradigm “on its head”. With the autocracy of the German Empire and the devastation of the world war in mind, he presented China as a positively connoted counter-society. To this end, he used central concepts of the Enlightenment and early bourgeois and socialist concepts of society – reason, democracy, socialism – and constructed China as a political system that was exemplary for Germany (Leutner 2003, 87ff.). Drawing on Enlightenment traditions, he spoke of Confucianism as an “intellectualist religion of reason” and a “rationalist way of thinking” (Erkes 1918, 162, 148), saw a “collectivist social order” and social equality for all citizens in China as early as the beginning of the imperial era and also spoke of the continued existence of “democratic ideas from prehistoric

⁶² UAL, Conrady-Erkes estate, box 82, Nachl. Erkes, Letters 1932 G-Z.

⁶³ Philip Clart (2016), “Eduard Erkes und die Leipziger Forschung zur chinesischen Religionsgeschichte”, in: *100 Jahre Ostasiatisches Institut der Univ. Leipzig, 1914-2014*, ed. by S. Richter, Ph. Clart and M. Roth, Leipzig: Leipziger Univ.-Verl., 78f.

times” in contemporary China (Erkes 1920, 97ff.). According to Erkes, at the beginning of the Weimar Republic, China’s “popular and democratic, indeed downright socialist tendencies” could also teach “us” something for the development of the West (Erkes 1918, 155).

Indeed, inherent in Erkes’ China narrative was a fundamental critique of colonial policy and racist traditions of thought. Erkes denounced “the grotesquely sad caricature as which the Chinese haunt the minds of most Westerners” and attributed this to the “misleading, sometimes downright indecently slanderous writings of Protestant missionaries” (Erkes 1918, 80). The avowed atheist and social democrat wanted to support the republic, also through his search for alternative social models and by rejecting the prevailing colonial images of China. The criticism from his German nationalist-conservative colleagues culminated in the accusation that Erkes was “preaching” the introduction of Chinese culture in Europe (cited in Schmitt 1924 430ff.). In 1922, his book *Chinesische Literatur (Chinese Literature)* was criticised, accusing him of “catastrophic derailments”; Erkes’ volume *Chinesen* (1920) was also rejected. The Berlin sinologist Erich Schmitt (1893-1955) drew a direct link between Erkes’ views on China and his political positions:

From the outset, a pamphlet such as this one, which even exceeds the bounds of decency, deserves no criticism at all. The author begins by complaining that most European writers on Chinese conditions display a disgusting, unjustifiable arrogance towards China’s semi-wild civilisation; but what does he do? From the very first line, one senses the tendency to brand the European character as a disguised Jesuit hypocritical endeavour to destroy Chinese culture in order to exploit the country, which has become defenceless, all the more easily. But instead of giving as objective an account of Chinese culture as possible, as was the publisher’s intention, the author abuses the opportunity to spout his sometimes directly manoid anarchist fervour about Europe and to preach the introduction of Chinese culture in Europe. (Schmitt 1924, 432)

Erkes’ interpretation of the term “Dao” – which is certainly open to academic debate – is also attributed by the reviewer to the author’s political and ideological position. It is a “revolutionary-radical interpretation of the philosophical concept of Tao [*Dao*], which is so absurd

that it is nailed down once and for all” (Schmitt 1924, 432). In 1924, the influential Otto Franke⁶⁴ also moved away from earlier positive assessments of Erkes’ scholarly qualifications and saw parallels between his questionable academic weaknesses and his “character traits”. In particular, Franke declared Erkes’ fundamental criticism of de Groot’s and Grube’s works on Chinese religion to be “completely misguided in its approach and conception” and as evidence of Erkes’ “unscientific nature”. Franke complained that in his review of de Groot’s work *Universismus*, Erkes “did not judge the studies of a highly deserving older scholar, but (rather) vilified them”. This would be unseemly even if the criticism were factually justified. Erkes even dared to characterise de Groot’s translation as ‘hair-raising’. Franke accused Erkes overall of “flat half-truths, skewed opinions, unproven hypotheses and gross inaccuracies” and at the same time sought to discredit him personally: “Erkes will [...] still have to practise a good deal of self-education, both to a greater extent of his knowledge and, to a greater extent, of personal modesty”.⁶⁵ With his vote, Franke prevented Erkes from being awarded an adjunct professorship in 1924, despite other favourable reports⁶⁶ being available.

⁶⁴ In his report on Erkes’ dissertation on 20 Feb. 1917, Franke had still attested to Erkes’ academic nature, writing: “However, he undertook the task with great diligence and in a methodically scholarly manner”. He had also expressed his appreciation of Erkes’ remarks in the disputation (UAL, PA 445 Eduard Erkes, film no. 516, pp. 53ff., 61).

⁶⁵ UAL, PA 445 Eduard Erkes, film no. 516, pp. 81f.

⁶⁶ Alfred Forke also reviewed Erkes on 22 July 1924, describing him as a “fully-fledged representative of his field” whose “achievements are thoroughly recognised by specialist critics” (UAL, PA 445 Eduard Erkes, film no. 516, sheet 78). The sinologists Paul Pelliot (1878-1945) and Jan J.L. Duyvendak (1889-1954) also wrote favourable reviews. The latter refers to the academic and political component of the procedure: “Erkes belongs to the school of Prof. Conrady, which endeavours to apply the results and methods of modern religious history to China. The views it represents are in part very different from the generally accepted ones and are by no means recognised as correct by all leading sinologists.” Duyvendak also criticises a lack of “reverence” towards older scholars, including de Groot, as well as Erkes’ positive views on China and his assessment of the Opium War and the work of the English missionaries, citing the fact that the book was written during the war as a possible “excuse” (UAL, PA 445 Eduard Erkes, film no. 516, pp. 94f.).

It was only at the second attempt that Erkes was awarded an associate professorship at Leipzig University in 1928 alongside his work at the Museum of Ethnology.

The fact that Erkes was in opposition to leading sinologists made his professional acceptance as well as his academic career difficult even during the Republican era. In 1933, he was dismissed as head of the Asian department of the Ethnological Museum because of his SPD membership, following denunciation by Otto Kümmel (1874-1952), then director of the Berlin Museum of East Asian Art. The university revoked his teaching licence.⁶⁷ His attempts to find employment abroad failed. In 1945, Erkes, who was (over)living in precarious circumstances, was rehabilitated and appointed to the Chair of East Asian Philology in Leipzig in 1947. In the years that followed, he played a key role in shaping the development of Sinology in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). His appointment was also made in 1947 against the opinions of Sinologists: Otto Franke once again rejected Erkes' research approaches as "not very fruitful" and criticised his personality, namely his "rather authoritarian behaviour". Erich Haenisch (1880-1966) also criticised Erkes. He does not see him as a philologist, but only as a "problem researcher", and that "only with regard to minor problems".⁶⁸ Fritz Jäger (1886-1957), a "well-known Nazi figure" against whom denazification proceedings were underway at the same time⁶⁹, attributed "a certain one-sidedness" to Erkes.⁷⁰ The interweaving of personal and political factors with scholarly positions in these post-war reports is also striking.

⁶⁷ Personnel sheet E. Erkes, in UAL, PA 445 Eduard Erkes, film no. 516, sheet 7.

⁶⁸ UAL, Nachfolge Wedemeyer, vol. 2, pp. 1-10.

⁶⁹ Anton F. Guhl (2019), *Wege aus dem "Dritten Reich": Die Entnazifizierung der Hamburger Universität als ambivalente Nachgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 118, 137, 176, 259, 276 u. 303.

⁷⁰ UAL, Nachfolge Wedemeyer, vol. 2, pp. 1-10.

Richard Wilhelm: “almost Chinese-ised”

At the same time as Erkes’ first failed attempt to establish himself at Leipzig University, Richard Wilhelm was awarded an endowed professorship at the left-liberal, reform-oriented Frankfurt University in 1924. He received this after making a name for himself with his translations of Chinese classics and was then to write mainly general analyses of Chinese culture in Frankfurt. His numerous publications and public appearances alone, as well as his institutional base, the China Institute he founded, and its publications, posed a challenge to his colleagues. All the more so because, like Conrady and Erkes, he challenged the dominant China narrative with a plea for equality and understanding and for cooperation with Chinese colleagues and acceptance of their research.

Wilhelm’s more spiritual-cultural view of China was characterised by the idea of the equal status of Western and Eastern culture.⁷¹ Wilhelm saw China, with its high culture and timeless spiritual and moral values, as a complement to the materially and technically orientated West. Accordingly, he was more closely involved in the alternative currents of ideas of this time of upheaval, whose representatives were shaken in their belief in progress by the devastating world war and the great destructive power of technology visible here (cf. Yu-Dembksi 1990, 53f.). They regarded thought and philosophy in China (and India) as an inspiration for the individual organisation of life and as a “spiritual” antithesis to the material West. Important for these currents, as for Wilhelm, who in turn promoted these currents with his China narrative, was the idea of “universal humanity” (Wilhelm 1926, 21) or the ideal of a humanity in which both – the spiritual East and the material West – are united.

With these highly suspect ideas, Wilhelm had placed himself outside the Western cultural heritage for his colleagues. His plea for an “ideal of humanity” and for equality was dismissed as a lack of demarcation

⁷¹ For detailed information on Wilhelm’s positions and the controversies in sinology, see Leutner 2003b, among others.

from China and a supposed abandonment of German identity and loyalty, as well as an immersion in Chinese identity and a questioning of the central content of academic self-image. Moreover, Wilhelm took sides with the national revolutionary movement in China – which was also not welcomed by his colleagues (Leutner 2003b, 52 and 64). Berlin colleague Ferdinand Lessing (1882-1961), for example, criticised Wilhelm for dedicating his book *Die Seele Chinas* to Cai Yuanpei, who had “enthusiastically campaigned for China’s entry into the world war” and who had thus turned against Germany. He had even called him a “fighter for justice and freedom”. Overall, Lessing criticised Wilhelm for “going too far”:

*Wherever there is talk of the Chinese, optimism and benevolence lead the way. [...] In contrast, we Europeans come off worse.*⁷²

A key point of the fierce criticism from his colleagues was Wilhelm’s positive assessment of Confucius and, since the Chinese state was identified with Confucius, of the Chinese state as well. This stood in stark contrast to de Groot’s and, to a certain extent, Franke’s negative assessment, which had legitimised Germany’s colonial policy. Here too, academic and political dimensions are intertwined in the accusations. Wilhelm’s positions on Confucius were “false” and historically untenable; they were “historical fantasies” (Schmitt 1928, 759f.). Franke accused Wilhelm of placing Confucius above Christ (Franke 1926, 701), of being completely immersed in the Confucian system and of having founded a community of “Confucius admirers” in Germany.⁷³ Forke, on the other hand, sought to disparage Wilhelm as being “completely under the spell of the Conrady school” (Forke 1929a, 944f.), partly because of his attribution of Confucius to northern China and Laozi to a southern Chinese culture. Wilhelm felt similarly to a Confucian scholar; he had lost his critical sense through his “absorption in Chineseness”. Forke characterised Wilhelm as “almost Chinese”: He saw China and

⁷² Ferdinand Lessing (1927/28), review: Wilhelm, Richard, *Die Seele Chinas*, Berlin 1926a. *Ostasiatische Zeitschrift*, N.F. No. 4, 79f.

⁷³ Otto Franke (1924), “Der geschichtliche Konfuzianismus”, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, N.F. No. 3, 163-191.

Chineseness through “rosy spectacles”, kindly overlooking “serious shortcomings and grave grievances” and instead discovering them in his own culture (Forke 1926, 242ff.). Wilhelm’s devaluation culminates in this attribution as “almost Chinese-ised”.

Forke’s explicit criticism of Wilhelm’s anti-colonial stance makes it clear that it was not just about scholarship: Wilhelm had labelled the “acquisition” of Kiautschou as “robbery”. Wilhelm was also devalued by Forke with the (negatively connoted) characterisation as a “good republican and pacifist” – Luther and Bismarck were missing from Wilhelm’s list of important personalities, while Rathenau⁷⁴ was mentioned. Wilhelm’s idea of equality, which was also expressed in the equal status of Chinese people and works with those of Germany/Europe, was rejected by Forke with the argument of a prevailing basic consensus to the contrary: “The equalisation of Chinese culture with European culture is unlikely to meet with general approval” (Forke 1929a, 945). Thus, Wilhelm was also denied scholarship *sui generis*, and his translations were devalued as “not scientific”⁷⁵, as not making “highly scientific claims” (Lessing 1927, 80) or as not profound (Forke 1929b, 1382).

Wilhelm died in 1930, and his pupil and successor, Erwin Rousselle (1890-1949), had difficulties continuing Wilhelm’s intellectual and institutional legacy. He was dismissed in 1941 for political reasons. The German-Belgian Carl Philipp Hentze (1883-1975), who was subsequently appointed to the Frankfurt Chair of Sinology, was committed to ideas of “Germanness” and had been a member of the Flemish SS. Even after 1945, he presented himself as a representative of “pure scholarship”, postulated political neutrality (as an absence of social or political commitment) and rejected any cultural mediator function, as

⁷⁴ As a left-wing liberal foreign minister, Walter Rathenau was responsible for the implementation of the Treaty of Versailles; right-wing nationalist circles accused him of participating in the so-called “fulfilment policy” of the victorious powers.

⁷⁵ Erich Hauer (1924), Review: “Gespräche / Kung-Futse. Aus d. Chines. verdeutscht u. erl. v. Richard Wilhelm, Jena: Diederichs 1923”, *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*, 27:19, 542.

represented by the Frankfurt China Institute.⁷⁶ Accordingly, Hentze also spoke out against the Wilhelm/Rousselle approach to classical studies. He regarded it as “completely unscientific”, as “frothing at the mouth”. Other German sinologists agreed with him.⁷⁷

During the Nazi era, which was characterised by racist superiority politics and persecution, there was a serious break with ideas of equality, also in relation to China and the Chinese.⁷⁸ Ideas of superiority were also passed on in the Federal Republic of Germany during the Cold War, although now not predominantly on racial grounds, but essentially politically: as a defence of liberal democracies against “communism”. In addition, due to persecution and forced emigration – none of the almost 40 China scholars and experts who had emigrated returned after 1945⁷⁹ – representatives of emancipatory ideas were rare in academia. The small community of sinologists and China scholars with their, sometimes, far-reaching personal continuities hardly played a role in the establishment of the China narrative. In the public sphere, this continued to be characterised by racist stereotypes in conjunction with updated colonial narratives. The image of the “Yellow Peril” as the enemy was reinterpreted as the “Red Peril”, and the Chinese population was portrayed as an “ant nation”, i.e. as a uniform mass that threatened to overrun the “Western world” (Neddermann 2022a, 100ff.).

This China narrative was only called into question in the course of the 1968 student movement, in which China once again became relevant as a projection surface, and with the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the People’s Republic of China. Counter-narratives to the Cold War rhetoric were developed, also in academia. Despite differing positions in terms of professional

⁷⁶ For details on Rousselle, see Leutner 2023.

⁷⁷ Cf. Hans van Ess (2023), “History of Pre-Modern Chinese Studies in Germany”, *Journal of Chinese History*, no. 7, 491-524, fn. 52.

⁷⁸ In detail: Yu-Dembski 2022, 75ff.

⁷⁹ In detail: Mechthild Leutner and Martin Leutner (2015), “Verfolgte Chinawissenschaftler 1933-1945: Die fehlende Generation – Eine längst überfällige Bestandsaufnahme”, *Berliner China-Hefte*, No. 45, 115-139.

analyses and perspectives, however, these did not reach the level of a broad debate that has developed in recent years in the context of new global power constellations. This applies both to the discussions within the small discipline of Sinology and China studies from the 1960s onwards in the Federal Republic of Germany with regard to the use of long or short characters. But it also applies to the pro- and anti-China positions in the course of the student movement of the late 1960s as well as to the period of upheaval after 1989 and the subsequent liquidation of GDR Sinology.

4. “China-Understanders” and “Propagandists of Beijing”: Disintegration of unilateral world order and current debates

In the current period of upheaval, characterised by ecological crises, the transition from the industrial to the digital age, the shift in global power relations to the detriment of Western claims to hegemony and the search for new models of world order, the Chinese factor also has a central role to play. “Time of upheaval” refers both to its real existence as an economic power and as a political actor – the latter in contrast to previous times of upheaval – as well as to the global function attributed to China.⁸⁰ The latter becomes clear in theses about a “Chinese 21st century” or an “Asian century”.⁸¹ China’s economic power and the country’s adherence to an independent development path that is understood as socialist form the starting point for the view of China as a competitor and threat that is now widespread in Western countries. This is translated into strategies aimed at deciding the “mode of globalisation and the distribution of power in the international system”⁸² for

⁸⁰ See Neddermann 2022b.

⁸¹ Konrad Seitz (2000), *China. Eine Weltmacht kehrt zurück*. Munich: Siedler; Karl Pilny (2005), *Das asiatische Jahrhundert: China und Japan auf dem Weg zur neuen Weltmacht*, Frankfurt: Campus; “Duell der Giganten”, *Spiegel*, 08 Aug. 2005, 74.

⁸² See Schmalz, who draws on Mearsheimer, among others: Schmalz (2022), “Sociology of Deglobalisation”, *Berlin Journal of Sociology* 32, 349-361, <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11609-022-00483-9> (access: April 2024).

themselves and against China, which is challenging the global supremacy of the USA. In contrast, China and other states of the Global South, all victims of former Western colonial policies, are demanding more participation in the multilateral world order. It is in this political context that the current general debate on China is taking place, which will be explained below in order to relate it to the China discourse in academia.

US politicians and their masterminds describe the new global constellation as the “hegemonic conflict of the 21st century” between the USA and China and as a systemic conflict between a democratic (economic) liberal and authoritarian system. The narrative of a systemic bipolarity and a threat to the democratic-liberal social order and the value system ascribed to it⁸³ is also becoming increasingly prevalent in European countries, including in Germany. It is being anchored in the media discourse. The coronavirus pandemic and the anti-Asian racism evident here⁸⁴, supply chain problems and wars in Ukraine and Gaza, as well as China’s strong position in technologies, are intensifying debates about decoupling from autocracies, i.e. China, and about a containment policy and, accordingly, a construct of China as a threat. It is about the “battle for the world” – the sensationalist title of a German television documentary: There is already an “invisible war”⁸⁵, globalisation has proven to be fragile and is entering a “warlike” phase. For the export country Germany, one of the biggest beneficiaries of globalisation, there is a dilemma as to which is given priority: values or prosperity.⁸⁶

⁸³ This ties in with S. Huntington’s 1990s dictum of a “clash of civilisations”, i.e. an antagonism between Western and Chinese/Sino culture; see Thomas Mayer (2021) “Clash of Civilisations. Der ‚Kampf der Kulturen‘ tobt, doch die Wahlkämpfer ignorieren ihn”, *Wirtschaftswoche*, 11 Nov. 2021.

⁸⁴ Zhou Ruirui (2022), “Diskriminierung von chinesischen Migrantinnen in Deutschland im Spannungsfeld von Globalisierung und Deglobalisierung während der Corona-Pandemie”, *Berliner China-Hefte*, No. 54, 130-144, and Xiao Minxing (2022), “Anti-asiatischer Rassismus in Deutschland und seine Widerspiegelung in deutschen Medien 2020/ 21”, *Berliner China-Hefte*, No. 54, 145-157.

⁸⁵ Wolfgang Hirn (2024) headlines: *Der Tech-Krieg. China gegen USA – Und wo bleibt Europa?* Frankfurt/M.: Campus.

⁸⁶ “Kampf um die Welt”. ZDF doc. by Michael Wech, broadcast on 6 March 2024.

The adjustment of China strategy and policy in Germany is continuing.⁸⁷ This is being done in close coordination with the USA; some also speak of political pressure from the strongest NATO ally. The triad of China as a partner, competitor and systemic rival set out in the German government’s China Strategy 2023 needs to be further interpreted and negotiated in real-world relations. While some pursue a protectionist course of decoupling and demarcation with the argument of a normative foreign policy and give preference to a US-led world order, others rely on a multipolar and still globalised world order that also relies on cooperation with China and do not recognise a threat from China – similar to Russia, for example.⁸⁸ Cooperation with China is in Germany’s interest, it is economically necessary and contributes to Germany’s prosperity and social stabilisation. The idea of a multipolar world also envisages equal participation by all countries and rejects hegemony. The concept of bloc formation or bipolarity is thus countered by new scenarios,⁸⁹ for example, by the political scientist Herfried Münkler, who, in view of the end of Western hegemony by the USA, is in favour of a new world order that promises to be more peaceful than the “transitional phase” that can currently be observed. Münkler is in favour of a “pentarchy”, “an order of the big five”, namely the USA, the EU, Russia, China and India, which would “refrain from trying to impose their order on each other, but instead agree on rules.”⁹⁰

⁸⁷ The special characteristics of the China debates in other European countries or beyond cannot be discussed here.

⁸⁸ This concerns, among other things, the view of technology transfer; see Margot Schüller (2023): “Disengagement from China: US and European Policies Compared”, *Giga Focus*, 1:4, 7f.

⁸⁹ This is in view of the situation in the USA, where “the danger of a second American civil war” is being discussed (interview with Heinrich August Winkler, *TSP*, 29 Nov. 2023, 25).

⁹⁰ Interview with Herfried Münkler, *TSP*, 13 Dec. 2023. In detail: Herfried Münkler (2023), *Welt in Aufruhr: Die Ordnung der Mächte im 21. Jahrhundert*, Berlin: Rowohlt.

In the current period of upheaval, the advocates of the Western hegemonic order are seeking to defend it by (almost) all means. This applies not only to the selective and largely negative portrayal of China in the media⁹¹ and a generalised view of “Chinese researchers as possible spies” of the CCP⁹², which is based on anti-communist and racist elements, but is also directed against all those who counter the threat narrative with cooperative approaches and other explanations, regardless of whether they are politicians, business representatives, journalists or China researchers.

Debate in China Studies

The debate in China studies⁹³ is in the tradition of the above-mentioned debates between (China) scholars in earlier times of upheaval. An increasingly tense political climate and a threat to academic autonomy from “both sides of the spectrum”, i.e. China and Germany, are being observed in China studies.⁹⁴ “Committed enlighteners” are confronted with “‘humanly concerned’ demagogues” – this is how it is formulated for parts of the debate (Döring 2023). In terms of argumentation – and reinforced in scope and sharpness by social networks and the media – patterns of academic and personal disparagement are used. Discourse rules of objectivity and honesty are violated (Döring 2023), and questions of the scholarly search for knowledge, empirical evidence and historical contextualisation are covered up by demands for ideological

⁹¹ Cf. quantitative and qualitative media analysis: Jia et al. 2021.

⁹² According to the Federal Minister of Education and Research, Starck-Watzinger (FDP): “Hinter jedem chinesischen Forscher kann sich die kommunistische Partei verbergen” [Behind every Chinese researcher, the Communist Party may be hiding], *Die Welt*, 31 Oct. 2023, <http://www.welt.de/wirtschaft/article248256370/hinter-jedem-chinesischen-Forscher-kann-sich-die-Partei-verbergen.html> (access: 04/2024).

⁹³ I will refrain from citing every author of derogatory and discriminatory claims, especially in social media (e.g. linked-in, twitter/X).

⁹⁴ Habich-Sobiegalla/Steinhardt 2022, 116.

and moral positioning (Alpermann/Schubert 2022). The latter strive to commit academics to a new basic consensus, a new uniform China narrative, rather than promoting plurality and diversity of positions as knowledge.

A position paper by Didi Tatlow on the website of the *Centre for Liberal Modernity*, which stands “for the defence and renewal of liberal democracy”⁹⁵, opens the criticism of China scholars in particular. She accuses them, whose “dreamy vision of China stems from their idealistic Enlightenment tradition”, of a “New Orientalism” and writes:

The irony is that while late Orientalism attempts to reject and correct Western ignorance and arrogance, it actually reproduces it by underestimating the Chinese party-state’s will to power.

Few China experts, she complains, seem willing to “draw conclusions from the fact that the defence of liberal values requires more than just understanding” (Tatlow 2018).

The dictum of the defence of liberal values, the upholding of Western values and (unilateral) world order against the anticipated encroachments of the illiberal Chinese party state was thus set and was to be increasingly demanded as a consensus position.

The *Spiegel* bestseller, *Die lautlose Eroberung. Wie China westliche Demokratien unterwandert und die Welt neu ordnet* [transl.: The silent take-over. How China is infiltrating Western democracies and reorganising the world.], with its narrative of “China as the enemy” and attacks on those who question this enemy image, played an important role. Of all the enemies of human rights, democratic decision-making and the rule of law, China is described as “probably the most threatening of

⁹⁵ <http://libmod.de/> (access: 04/2024). The organisation was founded in 2017 by Marieluise Beck and Ralf Fücks (both Alliance 90/The Greens); it has been funded by the federal budget, among others, since 2019. The “opponent analysis” project has been criticised in particular: party colleague Antje Vollmer describes the CLM as an “instrument of ideological lobbying”, while others accuse it of targeting “all alternative views that disrupt the consensus [...]”; see http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zentrum_Liberale_Moderne (access: 04/2024).

these enemies” against which we must defend ourselves.⁹⁶ Accordingly, people from all areas, including academics, who advocate cooperation with China are labelled as “Beijing’s henchmen”, as “useful idiots” who represent the interests of the CCP (Hamilton/Ohlberg 2020). They are also framed as “agents of influence” of the CCP or Mao, such as Gerhard Flatow (1910-80) with his involvement in China during the Cold War.⁹⁷ “Agent of influence” comes close to the term “secret agent”, but in contrast, it is arbitrarily elastic in terms of content and cannot be legally defined.

An important role in the discourse is played by the negative reinterpretation of the concept of understanding and sympathy for China, which had such a positive connotation in the post-colonial period of upheaval in the wake of the First World War and was intended to replace ignorance and misunderstanding. “Understanding” and “sympathy” are currently paired with the negatively understood terms “accommodation”, “appeasement” and “cultural relativism”.

This reinterpretation, namely the “denunciatory use of the word ‘understanding’”, is a “rejection of the legacy of the Enlightenment” (Brie 2024, 33). It culminates in the negative attribution of people who hold these positions in relation to China as “China-understanders”. Anyone who tries to understand China’s positions as part of the analysis of the Other is discredited: “He is declared an enemy of democracy and human rights, an opponent of the ‘world community’, which stands for a

⁹⁶ Hamilton/Ohlberg 2020, blurb. The negative image is producing results: 60 per cent of the German population now see China as a country “from which the greatest threat to world peace will emanate in the coming years”. China ranks after Russia (82%) and ahead of North Korea (52%), cf. Renate Köcher and Klaus Schweinsberg (2023), *Der 14. Sicherheitsreport. Eine Studie zur inneren und äußeren Sicherheit in Deutschland im Jahr 2023*, <http://www.sicherheitsreport.net/wp-content/uploads/pmsicherheitsreport.pdf> (access: 04/2024).

⁹⁷ Bernd Ziesemer (2023), *Maos deutscher Top Agent. Wie China die Bundesrepublik eroberte*. Frankfurt/New York: Campus. Ziesemer overarches Flatow’s biography with the narrative spread by Hamilton/Ohlberg of the “silent conquest” of the world through the infiltration of Western democracies, thereby devaluing Flatow. The dictum of the “silent conquest” by China is thus characterised as “communist” (and “Chinese”) per se.

‘rules-based order’ and freedom” (Brie 2024, 33). As early as 2011, the China journalist Frank Sieren was dubbed a “compliant China apologist” who sounded “like the appeasement politicians who believed they could steer the rising power in the right direction by being accommodating and understanding”.⁹⁸ In 2013, journalist Sabine Pamperrien defines the term even more broadly:

*The following is about the questionable arguments of the, let’s call them: China-understanders. These include friends of the giant empire who move in the grey area between vision and truth and attempt to reject demands for freedom from the West in a culturally relativistic manner. In their defence of the People’s Republic, they also oscillate between old relaxationist phrases and unconcealed model expectations of the changes in the country.*⁹⁹

Initially, Chinese academics were portrayed as “victims” of the CCP’s totalitarian regime, which would control the autonomy of German academia in Germany (Fulda 2021, 206 and 225). The hybrid (psychological, financial/economic, political) influence exercised by the CCP led to self-censorship among Western academics, to a “general unwillingness to face up to the changed political realities in Xi’s authoritarian China”. With reference to a proclaimed consensus in a democratic society, China scholars are called upon to “begin to question rule-stabilising, culturally relativistic and culturally essentialist as well as anti-praxeological traditions in Chinese studies”. These traditions run the risk of “reducing democratic resilience” (Fulda 2021, 225f.).

This victimisation of China scholars in conjunction with the demand to question culturally relativist positions, which have prevailed in regional studies in recent decades, especially in the fight against neo-colonial perspectives in research, goes hand in hand with the demand for a basic consensus on the perception of China and the shaping of relations with

⁹⁸ Klaus Methfessel (2011), “Zwischen Kritik und Kniefall”, *Wirtschaftswoche*, 16 Nov. 2011, <http://www.wiwo.de/politik/konjunktur/china-china-versteher/5838226-2.html> (access: April 2024).

⁹⁹ Sabine Pamperrien (2013), “Die China-Versteher und ihre demokratischen Feinde”, *Deutschlandfunk*, 10 March 2013, <http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/die-china-versteher-und-ihre-demokratischen-feinde-100.html> (access: 01/2024).

China as a systemic rival. Those who do not share or adhere to this “basic consensus” show blindness towards China’s expansive power politics and ultimately an inability to understand that China is challenging the democratic order worldwide, according to the argument following Tatlow’s contribution.

The accusation of cultural relativism is prominently linked to accusations that China scholars are concerned about their own careers¹⁰⁰ and/or are acting in a non-scientific manner. The accusation of “playing down valid empirical evidence” and suppressing it in order “to appease Chinese authorities”. The appeasement theorem (with its echoes of 1938) is renewed, as is the accusation of taking sides with the authoritarian dictatorship of the People’s Republic (Fulda 2021, 215ff.). At the same time, positions that want to remain neutral in the current debate on China or allow minority positions are discredited¹⁰¹. Outside the so-called ‘basic consensus’ of perception and analysis of China – it is suggested – blindness and an inability to recognise prevail.

Related to this is the thesis of the “hybrid interference of the Chinese Communist Party” and its “globalised censorship regime (which) aims to neutralise the independent academia at home and abroad”. It is claimed that “the CCP’s rule by fear has already induced self-censorship among many Western academics”. China scholars, classified according to six “discourses”, are accused overall of “an unwillingness to face up to the changed political realities of Xi’s hard authoritarian China” (Fulda 2021, 205ff.). This implies an unwillingness on the part of the “others” to gain scientific knowledge.

However, German academics are not only denied an unwillingness to gain knowledge, but also an intellectual capacity for analysis and judgement in general, as they are exposed to “multiple threats”: namely, from actors and institutions in Germany itself, but above all “on the international stage through the globalised censorship regime of the Chi-

¹⁰⁰ Thorsten Benner (2018), “Die romantischen Jahre sind vorbei”, *LibMod*, 18 Dec. 2018, [http:// bit.ly/3AU6QO3](http://bit.ly/3AU6QO3) (access: 07/2018).

¹⁰¹ Statement of the DGA Executive Board, 2021.

nese Communist Party (CCP), dubious party-state funding from China, the ‘weaponisation’ of informal Chinese social networks and an unhealthy dependence of Western China scholars on ‘official China’” (Fulda/Missal 2021, 1). China scholars had “failed to properly identify – let alone mitigate – threats to academic freedom emanating from state and non-state agents under control of the CCP”. In addition to these calls for certain findings of scientists, the authors also emphasise that they do not “advocate a hegemonic view of ‘correct’ ways of knowledge production – Mode 1 and Mode 2 will co-exist for the foreseeable future – nor do (they) prescribe a particular political position that academics should take” (Fulda/Missal 2021, 15).

A year later, Fabian and Fulda call for the departure of China scholars from – in their opinion – prevailing paradigms and interpretative frameworks as overdue and a “must”. These were once set by Andrew Nathan: With Nathan’s thesis of authoritarian resilience¹⁰², he had portrayed the CCP as capable of learning and open to innovation and to market-economy reforms under the control of the party state; the experimental style of government had stimulated the economy, raised the standard of living and, in turn, secured support for the political regime with the positive output. This narrative is not accurate and needs to be revised (Fabian/Fulda 2022, 70ff.).

The sweeping accusations levelled at experts in this way and, ultimately, demands for them to abandon certain academic positions when analysing China, in turn, provoke reactions. On the one hand, the attempt to put science at the service of politics and changing political goals and to replace analysis with moral arguments is rejected. In 2020, the board of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Asienkunde (German Association for Asian Studies) issued a statement emphasising scientific plurality:

Scientists are expected to take a stand, to take sides. The attempt to remain neutral in the current situation and to create understanding instead of contributing to fuelling the conflict is interpreted as either weakness or even

¹⁰² See Andrew Nathan (2003), “China’s Changing of the Guard: Authoritarian Resilience”, *Journal of Democracy*, 14:1, 6-17.

*moral decadence. Of course, we accept it when academics engage in political discourse or reflect on their own position on critical issues of our time. However, we oppose scientists being attacked because they question certain positions, look behind the scenes or take positions that are contrary to the “mainstream”.*¹⁰³

The demand for mutual acceptance and tolerance of different positions in academic discourse is also shared by others who resist attempts to create uniformity and discredit divergent positions.¹⁰⁴ These reactions are determined by the premise of the freedom and neutrality of science and, to a certain extent, also imply a perspective of equality in the approach to China. Schubert and Alpermann, for example, describe the accusations of self-censorship and opportunistic appropriation in China research as “moral crusading” – this runs parallel to the dictum of value-led foreign policy. They see in this the danger of an ethical (moral) “aptitude test” and are in favour of objectifying the “controversial and sometimes polemical debate” about “academic and university policy discussions with the authoritarian China of the present”. They are not calling for insinuations, but for credible evidence. According to their credo, “science is not at the service of political convictions, but must be pursued independently of them”. “Science is in the service of truth, not a political canon of values” (Schubert/Alpermann 2022, 95 and 104).

In their view, the “moral (moralising) focus on so-called Western values that are violated by the Communist regime” does not lead anywhere, nor do “coercive measures imposed from outside”, but rather a responsible example of values such as academic freedom.¹⁰⁵ In this sense, they oppose “decoupling narratives” in academia and the view that any desire to understand China automatically means a justification of the “authoritarian regime” (Schubert/Alpermann 2022, 98).

¹⁰³ Statement of the DGA Board 2021.

¹⁰⁴ Including Alpermann/Schubert 2022 and Döring 2023.

¹⁰⁵ Nadine Godehardt and Björn Alpermann (2022), “Every good garden wants to be fertilised”, *TSP*, 09 Sep. 2022.

On the other hand, academics refuse to follow certain paradigms and reject others. In the attempts to narrow the discourse space, the description of China as an “increasingly authoritarian CP regime” or even as “totalitarian” is the point of reference and the framework within which analyses are declared to be “scientific”. It is evident that fundamentally different analyses of China’s society and politics, e.g. the question of the “socialist” or/vs. “capitalist” system¹⁰⁶, are excluded or not debated. Recently, there have also been calls to always include the Taiwan perspective when positioning oneself in the China debate – it is declared to be the “crucial question” for every sinologist (Diefenbach 2022, 123).

The narrowing of the discourse space relates to individual topics and the revitalisation of the image of China as an enemy that can be observed overall. The media depiction of China as a threat, namely as a “one-party state that violates human rights” with its increasingly aggressive policies, its aggressive propaganda, its disregard for international conventions in Hong Kong and its threatening gestures against Taiwan (cf. Jia et al. 2021, 17), finds parallels in the attributions made by China scholars.

A number of academics oppose the creation of a new image of China as an enemy. They point to – both in the media and in academic articles – continuities with the defamatory colonial China narrative, analyse media, economic and political contexts and reject the use of double standards in assessments.¹⁰⁷ The reaction to this is not primarily a refutation or questioning of the analyses and main theses, such as the narrative of China as a threat, but rather the authors are primarily criticised and – at least tentatively – discredited. For example, it is claimed that colleagues tend to “downplay the repressive side of the Chinese government” or

¹⁰⁶ For detailed information on different definitions of the social system of the People’s Republic of China: Wolfram Elsner (2020), *Das chinesische Jahrhundert. Die neue Nummer eins ist anders*, Frankfurt/M: Westend, 304ff.

¹⁰⁷ For example, the special issue of the academic journal *minima sinica. Zeitschrift zum chinesischen Geist*, No. 22 (2020), with a dossier on the topic of China as a threat, edited by Roderich Ptak and Ylva Monschein. Seven articles are dedicated to this thematic focus.

fail to address it in their academic analyses with their “thoroughly provocative counter-speech” to the prevailing consensus in the German press (Diefenbach 2022, 120). Such articles, which seek to suggest a middle position in the China debate, occasionally deny authors of “counter-speeches” academic expertise on China’s current policies or “representativeness” for German China studies.¹⁰⁸

The fact that the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of science must also be demanded for China scholars and defended against political “normativity postulates” is also evident in the recent debate surrounding the Xinjiang trip of some colleagues. It once again highlights the fundamental dimensions of the debate and the attempts to narrow the discourse space.

Xinjiang discourse in academia

In the context of the attempted establishment of a new uniform narrative of China as a systemic rival and as a threat, the reactions in China studies to the Xinjiang trip by two colleagues and their report on it in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ) should be categorised. In the article, Thomas Heberer and Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer primarily highlight current changes in the province and refer to the many initiatives to improve the situation of the Uyghur population with a new development push, for example, through state-subsidised healthcare and fifteen years of free education in kindergarten, school and vocational training. After the peak phase of the fight against terrorism, after the state of emergency and repressive measures, according to the authors, “signs of a return to ‘normality’ are recognisable”. Their conclusion: “If the human rights situation continues to demonstrably normalise, the EU should enter into dialogue and reconsider the sanctions imposed on China over Xinjiang”.¹⁰⁹ The attempt to define a differentiated position and make a

¹⁰⁸ Habich-Sobiegalla/Steinhardt 2022, 111f.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Heberer and Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer (2023): “Jenseits von Hass und Zorn. Nach der erfolgreichen Kampagne gegen Terrorismus und Islamismus sollen

plea for a “rethink” of certain China-strategic measures has triggered fierce debates and a strong polarisation in China studies, which transcend the character of an argumentative and objective discussion and are an indication of the eminently ideological and political significance of China in the current period of upheaval.

Opponents of the Heberer/Schmidt-Glitzler positions are dominated by the accusation that the authors’ statements are in line with the “government’s official narrative” and are unreflectively close to the CCP.¹¹⁰ Criticism states that the authors have “adopted the term ‘terror’ in the sense of Beijing” and are propagandists for Beijing. The negative term “China-understander”¹¹¹ corresponds to this. The propagandist accusation goes hand in hand with the denial of the scholarly and rational nature of the positions. For example, the NZZ authors are accused of “relying one-sidedly on one type of source”, thus corresponding strikingly closely to the government’s official narrative. The authors are accused of violating “good scientific practice”.¹¹² The tone of the article is already pejorative: The article

*is brimming with CCP terminology. Both have obviously internalised the jargon so well that it does not occur to them – especially as academics – to critically reflect on the Party’s presentation. [...] These two men are not sinologists, but simply party hacks.*¹¹³

sich nach dem Willen Pekings die Verhältnisse in Xinjiang wieder normalisieren.” [Beyond hatred and anger. After the successful campaign against terrorism and Islamism, Beijing wants conditions in Xinjiang to return to normal], *NZZ*, 11 Sep. 2023.

¹¹⁰ Marcel Grzanna (2023), “Kommunismus und Klassenkampf holen die deutsche Sinologie ein”, *China.Table*, 2 Oct. 2023 (access: 12/2023).

¹¹¹ Martin Ahlers in an interview with Thomas Heberer: “Partnerschaft Duisburg-Wuhan: „Städte führen keine Kriege””, *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1 July 2022. Ahlers points out that Heberer is being attacked as a “China-apologist”. A discussion of the term can be found in Alpermann/Schubert 2022.

¹¹² 11 Sep. 2023, <http://lnkd.in/eVTteWzg> (accessed: 04/2024).

¹¹³ LinkedIn, 13 Sep. 2023.

In *China.Table*, in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the criticism of the Xinjiang trip and the NZZ report is forced, while in the magazine *Cicero*, in contrast, these critics are problematised from a philosophical-sinological perspective. The cultural philosopher and sinologist Ole Döring concedes that the authors expressly did not see their interest in investigating “the undeniable accusations with regard to the human rights situation”. Rather, the aim of their exploratory trip was to “specifically investigate local and regional development instruments; the situation of employment and labour remuneration; state institution building and the state of the legal system” as well as education, culture, religion and language policy. The critics of the NZZ article did not provide a compelling explanation as to “why this question is not serious – or why it might not even indirectly lead to indications of the current ‘human rights situation’” (Döring 2023).

Academics who hold similar positions to Heberer and Schmidt-Glitzner in this debate are also heavily criticised. Döring, for example, is accused of “ignoring empirical evidence”.¹¹⁴ There are accusations of being “shamefully gullible”, “politically blind” or having an unreflective affinity with the CCP.¹¹⁵

The denial of academic rigour, or even the ability to gain academic knowledge at all, is accompanied by a call for institutions and the academic community to distance themselves. The NZZ article discredits “the entire field of Chinese studies in German-speaking countries, which already has to defend itself against restrictions imposed by the Chinese state and at the same time against all kinds of accusations of corruption”. There is not only talk of a “failure of individual sinologists, but a declaration of bankruptcy of the sinology they stand for”. It continues: “What happens when sinologists, obeying philological in-

¹¹⁴ A comment on Döring 2023.

¹¹⁵ Kai Strittmatter (2023), “Aufruhr in der deutschen Chinawissenschaft: Beschämend leichtgläubig”, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 24 Sep. 2023; Vogelsang 2023; Marcel Grzanna: “Kommunismus und Klassenkampf holen die deutsche Sinologie ein”, *China.Table*, 02 Oct. 2023.

stinct, nevertheless adhere to ‘the Chinese perspective’, ignore Western terms and persistently search for traditions is shown by the contributions mentioned above” (Vogelsang 2023).

The disparagement of the substantive positions and, above all, of the authors as academics is combined with demands not only to distance themselves from “these colleagues” within the discipline and the institutions, but also to deny them any academic right to exist. In addition, “measures” are sometimes demanded from the relevant universities. The discrediting also relates to the personal level. Commentators on social media not only express their personal displeasure, but also think they can hit their “emeriti” colleagues with the provocative question, “Why not just enjoy your retirement and just write a good book?” The NZZ article is described as a “human” and “moral scandal”. Assumptions are made about personal or career-related reasons for the trip and the article. Colleagues or their positions are disparaged with negative attributes like “cold-hearted”, “whitewashing” or “trivialising”. Accusations of possible “opportunism”, possible “old-left attitudes”, possible “solid financial interests” or possible “cynicism” are made on social media.¹¹⁶ There are no substantive, object-related arguments here either. According to Döring, such “aggression against scapegoats” is directly linked to the “general mood of fear and disorientation” (Döring 2023).

The fact that the criticism is also used to once again question the sense and purpose of academic cooperation with Chinese organisations¹¹⁷ points to their function in the political-media debate on China strategy. The ideas of decoupling are accompanied by considerations of developing a “remote ethnography” as a “scientific” research plan, which some propose as a new form of research on China, from outside the country and without (PR) Chinese academics¹¹⁸, while others describe this as an

¹¹⁶ Vogelsang 2023 suspects that the cause of the “fatal political misjudgements” lies in the subject itself, which is biased towards philology, namely an analysis of China based on texts.

¹¹⁷ Vogelsang 2023.

¹¹⁸ See Björn Alpermann’s website: <http://www.phil.uni-wuerzburg.de/sinologie/team/lehrstuhlinhaberinnen/prof-dr-bjoern-alpermann/> (accessed: 03/2024).

“anachronistic scurrility” (Döring 2023). The decoupling from the research field is also justified with the argument of wanting to protect Chinese colleagues (and students) from possible political consequences to which they would be exposed if they made critical statements, also in the context of collaborations.

The narrative of systemic conflict and the difference in values, of the distance between China and “us”, is thus also promoted in parts of China studies and proclaimed as a basic consensus. As in earlier times of upheaval in the 19th and 20th centuries, the attribution of “taking sides” with China is seen as turning away from one’s own country, to which “we” are committed. From this perspective, scholarly production once again becomes a nation-state project serving German interests. Chinese studies are supposed to follow the proclaimed new basic consensus of a necessary defence against the systemic enemy China.

On the other hand, there is the freedom and plurality of science and the necessity (and fact) of global knowledge production. Scientific knowledge is not one-dimensional, but has complex facets. It has to be compared with reality, not with dominant media or political ideas. The perspectives and methodological-theoretical starting points of academics are not uniform either. Subordination to any kind of so-called basic consensus in China studies among “us in Western democracies” leads to a standstill in scientific knowledge. The postulated new basic consensus assumes that – as a result of the authoritarian character of the party state – Chinese sources are generally (!) party propaganda and therefore scientifically useless and that “we”, who – in contrast to China – have a liberal democracy with corresponding values, also have the “correct” (scientific) knowledge. Ultimately, this is again based on the postulate of the unequal status of the system of society/state and the value system and a hierarchical relationship, as was the case in earlier phases of upheaval.

So there is also a struggle for scientific knowledge and interpretative sovereignty. With the question of interpretative sovereignty, the real China and the Chinese academic community also come into play in the present. China and the Global South are no longer colonies, but are

independent (enough) to oppose the current renewed claim of Western global leadership, just like advocates of equality and plurality in Western countries: China, as well as other states, regards interfering in internal affairs as “Western value imperialism”¹¹⁹; they no longer want “teachers from the West”.¹²⁰ From this perspective, it is a misguided idea to assume that “the presumed sovereignty of interpretation and power to act with regard to our ‘China’ has anything to do with genuine understanding”; on the contrary, the “structural adherence” to misleading images of China paralyses the search for knowledge and leads to a “disconnection from any reality” (Döring 2023).

5. Summary

All four periods of upheaval were characterised by far-reaching philosophical-ideological and political-social ruptures, which were reflected in the debates between scholars. Firstly, the role that “China” played as a construct and a reality differed in each case. Secondly, in all four periods of upheaval, two ideal-typical opposing positions and their respective forms can be distinguished. The content and formal elements of historical debates have been passed down through the centuries and, in some cases, to the present day.

During the early Enlightenment and Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries, China was the philosophical and political counter-model to theological thinking and the autocratic estate-based society. “China” as an advanced civilisation comprised two components: the rational philosophy of Confucianism as the basis of political rule and the political system of an enlightened empire with a strong civil service system

¹¹⁹ Jens Münchrath (2023), “Europa war zu selbstgerecht beim Handel”, *TSP*, 06 Dec. 2023, 14. The statement refers to the Mercosur states.

¹²⁰ Qin Gang to Annalena Baerbock, quoted by Michael Maier (2023): “China zu Baerbock: Wir brauchen keine Lehrmeister aus dem Westen”, *Berliner Zeitung*, 14 April 2023.

based on it, which enabled social mobility. Even if China's real strength as the world's largest economic power at that time may have played a role in the perception, it was not China as such an actor that was attributed importance, but rather a philosophical China and a China of political rule derived from it – the model of a secular society that was central to the thinking of the Enlightenment thinkers and advocates of egalitarian forms of society.

This narrative was continued after the revolution of 1789 in the bourgeois revolutionary era before 1848. During this period of upheaval, "China" continued to stand for a country with an overall ancient high culture, which was made up of several high-ranking philosophical currents, not just Confucianism but also Buddhism and Daoism. In addition, due to the extensive acquisition of Chinese books and the promotion of Chinese language skills, "China" became a knowledge resource for insights into Asia as a whole. The China debate of these years already had the shaping of China into a (real) colonial object as a point of reference and paved the way for colonial aggression, exploitation and oppression with the marginalisation of egalitarian/equal thinking in relation to China.

In the China debate of the Weimar Republic, when – at least in Germany – China had been forcibly abandoned as a colonial object and the focus was on breaking with China as a colonial political object and turning away from colonial superiority thinking, "China" once again essentially referred to the old philosophical-cultural China, supplemented by elements of the political organisation of antiquity. Reference was also made to tendencies towards the establishment of republican structures in contemporary China. China once again became a counter-world, on the one hand in relation to a democratic or even socialist political system that was exemplary for Germany, and on the other as a "spiritual" antithesis to the material West. The ideological point of reference for both currents was the idea of a universal and equal humanity, in which China, as a real country and with its high philosophical qualities, was equal to Germany/Europe.

In contrast to earlier periods of upheaval, in the present debate China itself is in the foreground for the first time as a “reality”, as an independent subject and actor in the international system of states. This is the starting point and an essential component of the debate. In the present, China is primarily equated with the political system of the present and its ideology. Philosophy and high culture, whether ancient or contemporary, are no longer included in this China. The central point of contention is the new role that China should be granted in the international system: an equal role as a sovereign state with its own system of development and values, or a subordinate role derived from the narrative of China as an “authoritarian party-state” that despises human rights and threatens the world with its aggression.

Despite the different political and ideological contexts and the different China narratives, all four periods of upheaval always centred on the question of the acceptance of and approach to China, as Germany and Europe, i.e. the Christian Occident or the West, were of equal rank and equal value. Ideally, two positions can be distinguished. On the one hand, there are the representatives of an equal view of China: initially, these are the representatives of the Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries, who stand for ideas of equality and demand this – in their own country. In China, they are already considered to have been realised. To a certain extent, they are successful: the China narrative ultimately helps them to introduce rationality in thinking and equality in society and to push through a departure from the despotic corporative state.

It was not until the 19th century, at the beginning of the colonial era, that scholars such as Karl Neumann transferred the demand for equality and equal status beyond their own country, their own society, to China. The ideas of the Enlightenment were now expanded to include criticism of colonisation, the view of China and the Chinese as inferior, and their devaluation and degradation, individually as a race and collectively as a culture and state. The enlightened colonial critic Neumann fails, also with consequences for his academic career. He was unable to avert

colonial rule over China; his opponents now determined the perception of China, which culminated in the racist and disparaging concept of the “Yellow Peril” at the height of colonialism.

This in turn evoked opposing positions. In the Weimar Republic, sinologists took up discourses critical of colonialism, openly advocated cultural relativist positions and, with the idea of a united humanity that also included China as an equal, designed a new model of world order beyond colonial and racist hierarchies. This met with resistance from their national conservative colleagues who were still attached to colonial thinking, and, after 1933, the racist policies of the Nazis led to the persecution of such positions and their representatives. During the decades of Nazi rule and the subsequent period of the Cold War, fundamental debates focussing on China were not observed for a variety of reasons.

The major political upheavals and debates on world order in the present day, with China at the centre, are once again provoking a heated debate among China scholars. Some are linked to Enlightenment ideas of equality in the sense of understanding one humanity, but with different cultures and political systems. They reject models of order that are characterised by hierarchy and devalue China (as well as other countries, peoples and ideas) politically, socially and ideologically as “other” compared to their own. The others emphasise precisely the superiority of their own system and their own values, proclaiming the universality of these values and the need to implement them worldwide.

The China narratives and visual representations also exhibit elements of continuity. The first representatives of Enlightenment secular ideas provoked their opponents simply by presenting the new knowledge associated with China. This also included depicting the missionaries working in China in Chinese clothing. The positive portrayal of China and the Jesuits as “Chinese” prompted their opponents to launch vehement verbal attacks on their positions, but also on the Enlightenment philosophers themselves, who were discredited as scholars and, as was particularly evident in the case of Christian Wolff, persecuted.

This discrediting of positive China narratives and their representatives continued in the transition from the Enlightenment to colonialism, in the phase before 1848. On the one hand, Enlightenment thinkers such as Neumann wanted their demands for equality to also apply to China and other countries and justified this accordingly. There were fierce public disputes about China’s competence. Neumann, for example, was also portrayed as “Chinese”, but now, unlike the Jesuits before him, in derogatory caricatures. Enlightenment positions became a minority position in the face of the colonial disparagement of the country, and their representatives were academically marginalised or, like Neumann, dismissed from their professorships – not because of China, but because of their politically unpopular political involvement. The caricaturing of politicians critical of colonialism who had taken opposing positions during the heyday of colonialism as “Chinese” was intended to ridicule and belittle them as individuals.

After colonial China narratives had also dominated the social sciences for decades, anti-colonial positions were only increasingly articulated after the political end of colonialism in the Weimar Republic. Following on from their Enlightenment predecessors, equality postulates were related to China in conjunction with in-depth studies; Erkes’ dissemination of a self-portrait in Chinese garb also visually echoed the Jesuit portraits. The explicit colonial-critical positions, as well as the studies on Chinese philosophy that supported them, were rejected by their national-conservative critics, also in polemics directed against the individuals and against their academic establishment. Accusations of being “almost Chinese-ised” or “preachers” of Chinese culture support the devaluation of Chinese scholars by equating them with the Chinese, who are still classified as “inferior”. The fact that representatives of these positions of equality were persecuted during the Nazi dictatorship continues the “traditions” of the 19th-century Pre-March and Restoration periods.

Even if there are no disparaging caricatures of academics as “Chinese” circulating in the current China debate¹²¹, discrediting and devaluing positions and individuals as unscientific or as “China apologists” and “propagandists of Beijing” is once again taking place. The disintegration of the unilateral world order and corresponding debates on world order centred on China are reflected in the polemics of China studies. “Deeper and older prejudices” (Döring 2023) become visible, and even argumentative figures of colonial and racist images of China appear and are, consciously or unconsciously, in the tradition of central China debates since the 17th century. Today, it is once again about acceptance of the other, about the demand for dealing with China as an equal, as equals. It is not just a matter of proclaiming multipolarity, but of realising it. In view of the existential challenges of global development, this is more urgent for politics and society today than in previous phases. Cooperation, mutual acceptance and plurality are indispensable for academia, which is committed to the logic of global knowledge generation as well as a cultural mediating function. The following also applies to the China debate among academics: “Freedom is always the freedom of those who think differently” (Rosa Luxemburg).

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¹²¹ Close to such caricatures is a montage of politicians of different party affiliations who are criticised for being “too China-friendly”. They are positioned in front of a red and white curtain with a hammer and sickle, with the Reichstag in the background, flanked by the headline “Reisen nach Peking und ein geheimer Verein: Wie deutsche Politiker sich für Chinas Regime starkmachen”, by Claudia von Salzen/Cornelius Dieckmann, *TSP*, 16 June 2023. See similarly *Die Welt*, 29 April 2022.

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Hauke Neddermann

In the crosshairs

Xinjiang coverage in the German media

“I am seeing a militarisation of foreign reporting”, declared television journalist Sonia Mikich in 2000, referring to her own craft.¹ When Mikich criticised her profession as a speaker at a Friedrich Ebert Foundation conference on *Media in Conflict*, she was still under the immediate impression of the Kosovo war: in war and crisis reporting, journalists were routinely “allowing themselves to be taken in”, using “too much black and white language”, and adopting “the vocabulary of the military” too readily.² And further:

*Reporting from abroad – that has to be sensational. Tragic or colourful. [...] Listen to the language used in the reports. It is being escalated: ‘butcher, murder machine, deportation, concentration camp, genocide, associations with Auschwitz’. Ambivalences, shades of grey and contradictions are virtually shot out of existence in the headlines and special broadcasts. [...] Doubters? Sceptics? Realists? They can only be traitors or naïve peaceniks.*³

The previous year, Mikich had already complained in a letter to the editor of *Der Spiegel* that the space for democratic and journalistic debate had shrunk alarmingly in the war furore: “critics of the Nato bombings” were accused across the board of being “devoted to Milosevic in acquiescence”, lacking in empathy for the Kosovo-Albanian side – they were “probably smearing the halo of the new Nato crusaders. So, hit them in Ayatollah style”.⁴ Due to such criticism of the usual belliose bias, Mikich, especially as “half Yugoslav, half Serb”, was considered “partly suspect” in the “hysterical public debate”.⁵

¹ Mikich 2000, 96.

² Op. cit. 95.

³ Op. cit. 96.

⁴ Letter to the editor by S. Mikich, in: *Der Spiegel*, 25 Apr. 1999, 8.

⁵ Mikich 2000, 98.

Around a quarter of a century later, it is clear that the problems that Mikich pointed out using the contemporary example of the disintegrating Yugoslavia have not disappeared. Instead, they have solidified, deepened and accelerated in the context of the new millennium, characterised by new fronts, new media and new opinion leaders.

Also, at the turn of the millennium, the 18th edition of the *Berliner China-Hefte*, published in May 2000 at the East Asian Seminar of the Freie Universität Berlin, posed the question of the relationship between *Sinology and the Media*. In the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the mass media image of China in Germany, one reads there, is "characterised by rejection and a lack of differentiation".⁶ China operates – to quote Wolfgang Kubin⁷ – as the "new empire of evil"; in the media society it serves as an easily "evocable enemy image".⁸ In the media debate, the mediating perspective of Chinese studies/sinology is at best only rarely called upon. Instead, reporting is determined by the opposing mechanisms of the journalistic field under the conditions of the dominance of Western news agencies and increasing media competition: in addition to "dramatization and sensationalization", Berlin media and China scholar Dagmar Yu-Dembski includes the "reduction of complexity", as well as "dualization or polarisation [...] (good vs. evil)" and "stereotyping".⁹

In her discourse-historical "reflections on a tense relationship" in the same volume, Mechthild Leutner works out how China is repeatedly constructed in the mass media as a hostile other and as an untouchable

⁶ Trampedach 2000, 9.

⁷ Cf. Kubin 1998, 38.

⁸ Mühlhahn 2000, 36 – The conjunctural negative stereotyping of China in the German media system tends to follow certain patterns. For example, during the 20th century Cold War, older anti-Chinese devaluation motifs and narratives – including colonial ones – were revived and given an anti-communist twist. The situation appears similar today in the global West-North/ East-South confrontation: historically and politically derived notions of inferiority and otherness are used as premises for enmity, while the claimed differences are partly biologized and partly culturalized as 'mentality-related'; see Neddermann 2022.

⁹ Yu-Dembski 2000, 19f.

entity – and how anyone who gets too close to it is excluded from discourse, now in turn as untouchable as the pariah China. “In sinology”, she writes, “it seems that associations and images of a different, incomprehensible China also rub off and are transferred to the people who deal with this country”.¹⁰ Leutner’s contribution in this current volume shows that the mass media’s negative portrayal of China is still prevalent in Germany decades later and that it has become even more destructive in light of systemic competition and the formation of new blocs: China scholars and experts – acting as mediators – who contradict the devaluation narrative are denounced as “China-understanders” and sidelined as Beijing’s “fifth column”, no less suspicious than the “half Serbian” Mikich during the Kosovo war.¹¹

And yet, as Michael Brie points out:

*There could hardly be a worse indication of the complete abandonment of the legacy of the Enlightenment than the denunciatory use of the word ‘understanding’. Immanuel Kant described Enlightenment as ‘man’s exit from his self-imposed immaturity’ [...]. But today, as soon as someone attempts to actually understand and comprehend why China holds certain positions, he or she is denied the right to legitimate expression of opinion. [...] If citizens of Western societies continue to allow this to happen, they are allowing themselves to be deprived of the use of their own intellect, condemning themselves to a new immaturity.*¹²

¹⁰ Leutner 2000, 12.

¹¹ At this current turning point – framed as a “Zeitenwende” under the pretext of systemic competition between authoritarianism and democracy –, the academic approach to China is fundamentally questioned. There seems to be no room and no tolerance for the tentative, exploratory approach of a kind of sinology, which seeks to go beyond (and remain different from) “opposition research” to generate functional knowledge about the enemy. The situation is exacerbated by the progressive disassociation and ‘desolidarisation’ within Chinese studies: China experts increasingly participate in the anti-pluralistic rejection of unpopular positions – whether out of identification with power or in capitulation to power remains to be seen. In any case, no one can currently hope for, let alone count on collegial solidarity, as everyone monitors the X/Twitter feeds of the spokespeople, hoping not to be affected by their powerful ban.

¹² Brie 2024, 33f.

On the journalistic discovery of Xinjiang

As Max Frisch once said, enemy images are at their most insurmountable when they are projected into the future as “anticipatory enemy images”.¹³ The anticipatory enemy image of China, determined by the breathless expectation of a Chinese century, i.e. a global power shift from the previously hegemonic West-North to the East-South with Beijing at the centre of events, combines orientalisising foreign images, colonial and racist perspectives¹⁴, and political defensive reflexes. This is in response to a Chinese counter-model that is perceived as stubborn and described as threatening, especially given the sometimes ostentatious non- or anti-liberalism of the systemic rival.¹⁵ Despite its specificity, this is reminiscent of the discourse patterns of the Cold War in the 20th century: today, as then, what Frisch described as the “logic of power politics” rules – instead of a “policy of détente”, which could possibly lead to the weakening of one’s own power position. Instead of “peace [...]”, one strives for “power expansion [...] through the threat of war”.¹⁶

Accordingly, the German book market is flooded with titles such as *Die lautlose Eroberung: Wie China westliche Demokratien unterwandert und die Welt neu ordnet* (Hamilton/Ohlberg, 2020; Engl. orig.: *Hidden Hand: Exposing How the Chinese Communist Party Is Reshaping the World*), *Das Feuer des Drachen: Was Chinesen antreibt, wo sie dominieren und warum sie über uns lachen* (Reichart, 2020; Engl. transl.: *The Dragon’s Fire: What Drives China, Where It Dominates, and Why It Laughs at Us*), or *Drachentanz: Chinas Aufstieg zur Weltmacht und was er für uns bedeutet* (Naß, 2021; Engl. transl.: *Dragon Dance: China’s Rise to World Power and What It Means for Us*) – Behind the buzzwords, including the “we” that is used everywhere against “them”, there is neither understanding nor a desire to understand. The authors

¹³ See Frisch 1976, 17.

¹⁴ See Suda/Mayer/Nguyen 2020.

¹⁵ Vukovich 2019, 27ff.

¹⁶ Frisch 1976, 17.

are not interested in a differentiated, i.e. contextualising and historically situating, analysis of Chinese conditions, but rather in providing rhetorical ammunition in the imaginary war between “us” and “them”.¹⁷

“The daily press is also full of resentment, fear and hatred towards the dangerous upstart”, notes sociologist Stephan Lessenich in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Study after study shows that only condemnatory positions, not relativising ones, are considered socially and politically acceptable.¹⁸ According to Lessenich, “China” is used as a “cipher for the multipolar disruption of the formerly prevailing global political balance”.¹⁹ The aim appears to be judgement, not reporting: China expertise and research-based analyses are losing importance; instead of going into depth, stereotypes are reproduced, and an “enemy image of China with one-dimensional and Eurocentric facets” is constructed.²⁰

¹⁷ In some cases, the alleged threat from China has become a pretext for imposing intellectual martial law: *qui enim non est adversum vos pro vobis est* – “you are either with us or you are against us”. Ideologues of the “free world”, donning a familiar disguise in their new frontline position, demand what has always been demanded in confrontations: the renunciation of thinking in contradictions and contexts. Wolfgang Fritz Haug notes that it is as if “we have entered an Orwellian New World in which our personal reliability as comrades-in-arms in the struggle is judged by the extent to which we exclude the past when discussing the present” (Haug 2003, 209).

¹⁸ Cf. e.g. *Die China-Berichterstattung in den deutschen Medien* im Auftrag der Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2010, and *Die China-Berichterstattung in deutschen Medien* im Auftrag der Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, 2021, and, more selectively, Meinhof 2020.

¹⁹ Lessenich 2020, 17.

²⁰ Jia/Leutner/Xiao 2021, 10 – At the same time: “Media work is complex; many different actors are involved or influence it, and target groups, readerships and even the market play an important role in the dissemination of news and analyses” (Heberer 2010, 262). The unjournalistic consonance of “China criticism” in the leading media is therefore likely not the result of a conspiracy, but rather of “self-alignment” (Ruß-Mohl 2020) due to increasing journalistic pressure to conform in the field of tension between the algorithm-based attention economy and economising in the media crisis. The absurd and inflammatory consequences that this situation produces are regularly visible even in quality media, cf. Neddermann 2025.

When Michael Brie states that the discourse on China is now characterised by “a language policy with Manichean traits”²¹, this applies to reporting on the People’s Republic in general, but also (and especially) to reporting on Xinjiang in particular. Looking at German journalism on China over the last decade, it is noticeable that the trend towards a shrinking opinion corridor contrasts with a significant increase in the number of texts published on Xinjiang issues. This development applies practically across the board to the German press, but it can only be illustrated here by way of selected highlights.²² In 2015, for example, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* published 24 Xinjiang-related texts; in 2016, the number fell to just 14, but by 2019 it had more than doubled to 60 articles and then continued to grow, reaching a provisional peak of 111 texts in 2022. In the *taz*, the number of texts quintupled from 10 in 2015 (2016: 4 texts) to over 50 pieces in 2022 (2019: 23). In 2015, *Die Welt* even only published 7 articles in which Xinjiang played a role (2016: 1); in 2019 there were 30, and one year later, the number remained relatively stable at 27. The fact that the tabloid press also discovered the topic of Xinjiang for itself in the period under review should at least be noted in passing – especially in view of the unbroken power of Germany’s highest-circulation daily newspaper and the publishing house behind it, which is headed by a zealously ‘China-critical’ figure.²³ The newspaper *Bild*, which paid no attention to Xinjiang in 2015 and 2016 (0 texts each), mentioned the region in 4 texts in 2019 and 7 in 2022.

²¹ Brie 2024, 34.

²² The quantitative content analysis was based on digitized data in online databases for science and research, in particular *genios* and *wiso*. Initial statistical results were consolidated by accessing full texts.

²³ Mathias Döpfner, CEO of the Springer publishing group, regularly sets the anti-Chinese tone of his publishing house; for example, in 2020 in *Welt am Sonntag*: It is necessary to confront China as a “totalitarian world power”, Döpfner claims, to “finally set limits”, to move “Germany and Europe” towards “a consistent decoupling from China” in lockstep with the US – otherwise, according to Döpfner’s scenario, we would be “on the creeping path to becoming a Chinese colony” (Döpfner 2020, 11).

In the crosshairs: Xinjiang coverage in the German media

The quantitative findings continue when looking at the leading weekly newspapers: in 2015 and 2016, Xinjiang is mentioned in 3 *Spiegel* reports each; in 2019 it appears in around twice as many reports (7); and in 2022, the term ‘Xinjiang’ is mentioned in 33 texts. A similar picture emerges in *Focus* magazine: no Xinjiang-related text in 2015, a single one in 2016, the same in 2019, then 12 Xinjiang-related articles in 2022. In *Die Zeit* there were 10 texts (2022); in 2019 there were 14, after no Xinjiang-related text had appeared in 2015 and 2016. – A largely congruent word-frequency cycle can be observed when the newspaper corpus is analysed for mentions of the term “Uyghurs” (in this and other spellings).

Word progression curve: “Xinjiang” and “Uyghurs” in the German press



Note: All data derives from the Digital Dictionary of the German Language (www.dwds.de). The Dictionary's information is based on the DWDS newspaper corpus, which consists of a large number of nationally significant daily and weekly newspapers, including all those mentioned in the above article.

In view of this significant increase, the question arises as to whether Xinjiang has now taken the place of Tibet in the German mass media, after all, Tibet has become a far less prominent topic in China coverage in recent years. In 2008, according to the study at the time, more than 11 per cent of all reports on China in the German media dealt with Tibet. Thomas Heberer felt that this reporting at times resembled “a kind of hysteria”.²⁴

The prosecution and its witnesses

The parallels between the Tibet discourse at the time and the current Xinjiang discourse continue on the content and linguistic level. Looking back: Again and again, Heberer notes of the Tibet reporting of 2008, “there was premature talk of ‘occupation’, ‘annexation’ or the PRC as an ‘occupying regime’, [and] the armed forces stationed in Tibet [were] characterised as ‘butchers’ or ‘masters of destruction’”.²⁵ *Der Spiegel*, among others, declared that the “brutal, unyielding treatment of Tibet” was “characteristic of the policy of an aggressive state that had already supported the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, attacked socialist Vietnam and unleashed a border war with India”.²⁶ And a commentary in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* even saw “the de-luded in Beijing” in a “final battle against the national minorities in China”.²⁷

The panorama that the German media currently paint of the situation in Xinjiang is rendered in similarly bold colours. Some excerpts appear even more glaring. It seems oblivious to any subtlety or nuance.

²⁴ Heberer 2010, 275.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “Der Knüppel”, *Der Spiegel*, 17 March 2008, 104-106, here: 105.

²⁷ “Verblendet”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 03 April 2008, 10.

At least, that is the impression anyone must get who opens *Welt am Sonntag* on 30 July 2023. Under the headline “Gräuel vor aller Augen”, two journalists – editor Daniel-Dylan Böhmer and trainee Rixa Fürsen – take an in-depth look at the topic of Xinjiang. Even the opening paragraph leaves no doubt about the thrust of their article:

*China has sent millions of Uyghurs to camps; there are forced marriages, rapes, sterilisations and murders. Two activists who fled talk about their homeland – and about Germany’s responsibility.*²⁸

The ostensible purpose of the text is therefore to make two Uyghur voices heard, speaking from exile in the US – their safe haven – about the situation in their homeland of Xinjiang. What the piece conceals, however, is that the two “escaped activists”, the married couple Rushan Abbas and Abdulkakim Idris, have not lived in China since their departure in the 1980s, and can thus only assess the current situation in Xinjiang to a limited extent based on their personal experience.²⁹ In this respect, the article belongs to the category of partly real, partly ostensible Xinjiang memoir texts³⁰, recorded by professional authors and “woven into the prevailing repression and genocide narrative in terms of content and intention; they borrow the relevant patterns of interpretation from it and simultaneously reinforce it by contributing to it”.³¹ For this reason, the article is particularly suitable for a case study of the narratives and motifs it condenses, which permeate and dominate mass media discourse on Xinjiang as a whole.

²⁸ “Gräuel vor aller Augen”, *Welt am Sonntag*, 30 July 2023, 7.

²⁹ The biographical information is available online: see www.uyghurstudy.org and www.wikipedia.org. – The article also omits the close ties between the two “activists” and the US security apparatus. For instance, Rushan Abbas reportedly worked as an interpreter for the US military during interrogations of Uyghur prisoners at Guantanamo Bay in 2002, and she has maintained close connections with top politicians and government authorities in Washington.

³⁰ Not dissimilar: Sauytbody/Cavelius 2020 and Haitiwaji/Morgat 2021.

³¹ Leutner 2021, 199.

In their text, Böhmer and Fürsen appear to look at Xinjiang through the eyes of Abbas and Idris and discover a place of nameless horror³²: people disappear for no reason, innocent individuals are interned for “political and cultural re-education”, and they are imprisoned “en masse in state camps”: “Estimates assume up to five million people, almost half of the eleven million Uyghurs”. The stated aim is to “change the demographics” in order to implement and secure the New Silk Road initiative – which the text characterizes as Beijing’s “plan for world domination”: “That is why Xi decided on a final solution to what Beijing sees as the Uyghur problem at the same time as the New Silk Road. Xinjiang was to become Chinese”. “Some independent experts” recognise this as “genocide”. The list of alleged Chinese crimes in the Central Asian border region cited in the text is long:

Since 2017, around two-thirds of all mosques in the province have been destroyed. According to various reports, attempts are being made to force people in the camps to abandon their Muslim religion by means of compulsory labour. According to these reports, the inmates have to perform forced labour; they are tortured and live in inhumane conditions. According to estimates, five to ten per cent of the inmates die every year. There are reports of mass forced sterilisations and state-mandated abortions. [...] Children are taken away from their families and sent to boarding schools for re-education. [...] Uyghur women seem to be particularly hard hit. They are systematically raped in forced marriages with Han Chinese, say Abbas and Idris. ‘China’s government gives Chinese men money, accommodation and work if they marry Uyghur women. If a woman refuses the forced marriage, she and her family are sent to concentration camps because of their ‘radicalised Muslim faith’, Abbas reports. There is no protection even within the immediate family circle. Chinese state officials are sent to Uyghur families’ homes to stay with them, observe them and submit reports. They check whether the residents speak Chinese at home; even minor deviations, such as the customary Uyghur greeting ‘Salam alaikum’, are punishable by law. Idris speaks of 1.1 million Han Chinese intruding into the privacy of the Uyghurs, monitoring them even in their bedrooms [...].

³² All quotations in the following passage are taken from: “Gräuel vor aller Augen”.

In terms of language and content, the text thus reads for long stretches as an anti-Chinese indictment. The authors sprinkle the names Abbas and Idris generously throughout. The two “escaped activists” serve as the key points of reference for the indictment. At the same time, they are the article’s only witnesses – elevated to the witness stand by virtue of their Uyghur origin rather than as eyewitnesses – who authenticate and personalize charges that are scarcely substantiated and remain largely unexamined by the authors. Within this dramaturgy, the article inevitably culminates in its closing statement: it declares that decoupling is the order of the day – after all, “genocide is a profitable business for China”, in which “German companies”, including Volkswagen, are also implicated.

The mass media rules of war

Xinjiang reporting demonstrates that Sonia Mikich’s critique of mass media foreign reporting in conflict situations remains highly topical even after a quarter of a century. It is true that no shots have yet been fired in the global West’s – and, by extension, Germany’s – dealings with China. However, by rhetorically positioning the “Western model” and the “Chinese model” in antagonistic opposition, the world finds itself in the pincer of a belligerent confrontation between two blocs, which can certainly be understood as an imaginary war.

Thirty years after the Cold War of the 20th century ended in a historical rupture with the implosion of the Soviet bloc, some observers speak of a “new Cold War” (Prashad 2021), while others see a “modern war” that “is not fought with bombs and soldiers”, but with completely different weapons (Döpfner 2020). In any case, the historical precedent shows that communication and mass media play a crucial role in the confrontation: symbolic violence and physical violence have always

intertwined – time and time again, the media have “established, maintained and expanded systems of global domination and dependency” in the conflicts between the West North and the rest of the world.³³

The “black and white painting” that Mikich noted and criticised in 2000 as a feature of war coverage by mass media is equally evident in the confrontation with China, however one chooses to characterize the struggle for hegemony in detail. Moreover, as communication expert Kai Hafez emphasises, mass media primarily influence “*what people think about*” through their selection of topics – the selectivity of topics is therefore directly related to the recipients’ attention economy and is “highly image-shaping”.³⁴ In Xinjiang reporting – as the text by Böhmer and Fürsen demonstrates – the anti-Chinese negative and enemy image is radicalised to the maximum.

Just one example: since the publication of Kai Strittmatter’s bestseller on the digital “reinvention of dictatorship” (2015), the characterisation of China as an authoritarian surveillance state has been one of the typical tropes of China reporting in Germany; and it has further solidified during the coronavirus crisis. The same motif appears in Xinjiang reporting – linguistically intensified. In June 2018, for example, *Der Spiegel* described Xinjiang not as an “authoritarian” but as a “totalitarian” panopticon: Beijing had “created a totalitarian surveillance apparatus to control the Uyghurs in Xinjiang” – an Orwellian dystopia of “digital surveillance, arbitrary arrests and political re-education”. Such recourse to the vocabulary of the totalitarianism doctrine characterises a considerable part of the reporting on Xinjiang. Among other things, this echoes the formulations and positions of Adrian Zenz – Senior Fellow of the conservative (anti-Chinese, anti-socialist) Washington think tank “Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation”³⁵ – who is equally

³³ Fejes 1981, 281; see also Kannapin et al. 2018, 373-388.

³⁴ Hafez 2010, 238 – *emphasis in original*.

³⁵ Zenz is cited here as a particularly prominent representative of a broader constellation of actors – think tanks, policy advisors, and media commentators – whose interpretations have become highly influential in Western reporting on Xinjiang.

omnipresent in Xinjiang reporting in both the USA and Germany.³⁶ As was already observed in reporting on China around the turn of the millennium, balanced, mediating assessments of the situation rarely prevail in the media chorus against one-sidedness and polarisation. Instead, the most striking judgements dominate the debate.

The aim of the reporting does not seem to be to objectify the debate, but rather to outdo the competition. This becomes clear whenever numbers enter the journalistic arena: in the mid-2010s estimates still tended to refer to “thousands” or “tens of thousands” of internees, but as the media discourse progressed – more sensationalist than evidence-driven – figures escalated first to “hundreds of thousands”, then to “several million”:

*The communist regime’s view of humanity is currently most evident in the province of Xinjiang, where around 15 million Uyghurs live in the world’s largest open-air prison. Total surveillance through facial recognition software, movement tracking and censorship is a daily reality there. Similar to Stalin’s Soviet Union, the ultimate punishment is the ‘re-education camp’, in which up to two million people have already been subjected to torture and brainwashing. Because the population composition of Uyghurs and Han Chinese is not optimal in the eyes of the cadres, Uyghur women have been forcibly sterilised en masse.*³⁷

The *Frankfurter Rundschau* reports “between around 1.5 and three million” detainees³⁸, while in *Die Welt* – as mentioned above – even figures of “up to five million people” are cited. The data basis underlying these estimates in the reports generally remain entirely opaque.

³⁶ Zenz, like other “China critics”, routinely refers to the Chinese People’s Republic as a whole as “totalitarian”; see Zenz 2020. However, since the media attention is primarily focussed on Zenz’s Xinjiang viewpoints, this is the area where journalists most frequently use direct and indirect quotations. – In the reporting, it remains unclear which concept of totalitarianism is being referred to.

³⁷ “Im Reich der totalen Kontrolle”, *Die Welt*, 29 July 2022, 7.

³⁸ Cf. “Genozid in China: Millionen Uiguren und andere Minderheiten interniert und gefoltert”, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 24 Oct. 2021, <http://www.fr.de/politik/genozid-china-uiguren-interniert-gefoltert-minderheiten-lager-umerziehung-internierung-vergewaltigung-xinjiang-91071083.html> (access: 05/2024).

The Chinese “war on terror” is not invoked as a frame of reference to categorise or contextualize the repression. Where it is mentioned at all, it is rejected and discredited as a mere Communist Party justification narrative.³⁹ This is likely also because the global “war on terror” – beyond any systemic competition – involves states of the Global West North, including the USA and Germany, at the cost of a high number of civilian casualties, including in Xinjiang’s immediate neighbourhood. Instead, within a discursive framework strongly shaped by actors such as Zenz, the repression is framed as a “genocide”. Here, too, reporting follows biased, clearly anti-Chinese speakers, especially in Washington. The accusation of “genocide” against the Uyghurs has long been one of the sharpest instruments of US containment policy towards China, i.e. in the context of systemic competition. A weapon that US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo sharpened again on 19 January 2020, roughly 24 hours before the end of his term, with a (global) public statement and passed on to his successor, Anthony Blinken:

For the past four years, this Administration has exposed the nature of the Chinese Communist Party and called it what it is: a Marxist-Leninist regime that exerts power over the long-suffering Chinese people through brainwashing and brute force. We have paid particular attention to the CCP’s treatment of the Uyghur people, a Muslim minority group that resides largely in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in Western China. [...] The [CCP authorities’] morally repugnant, wholesale policies, practices, and abuses are designed systematically to discriminate against and monitor ethnic Uyghurs as a unique demographic and ethnic group, restrict their freedom to travel, emigrate, and attend schools, and deny other

³⁹ Cf. “Kein schöner Land”, *Der Spiegel*, 24 Apr. 2021, 82. The text reads: “Under the pretext of combating terrorism and separatism, hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other minorities were locked up in camps”. Mareike Ohlberg also characterizes the narrative as pretextual in the *Berliner Zeitung*: “Anyone who looks [...] at what the Chinese government considers ‘terrorism’ and ‘extremism’ in practice quickly realises that this is a completely normal expression of religious, ethnic and linguistic identity”; “Sinologin über Lage der Uiguren in China: Peking will sich Ressourcen Xinjiangs aneignen”, *Berliner Zeitung*, 27 Jan. 2024, <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/politik-gesellschaft/sinologin-mareike-ohlberg-ueber-lage-der-uiguren-in-china-pekings-will-sich-ressourcen-xinjiangs-aneignen-li.2166359> (access: 05/ 2024).

basic human rights of assembly, speech, and worship. PRC authorities have conducted forced sterilisations and abortions on Uyghur women, coerced them to marry non-Uyghurs, and separated Uyghur children from their families. [...] Since the Allied forces exposed the horrors of Nazi concentration camps, the refrain “Never again” has become the civilised world’s rallying cry against these horrors. [...] The People’s Republic of China (PRC), under the direction and control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), has committed crimes against humanity against the predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and other members of ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang. These crimes are ongoing and include: the arbitrary imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty of more than one million civilians, forced sterilisation, torture of a large number of those arbitrarily detained, forced labour, and the imposition of draconian restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression, and freedom of movement. The Nuremberg Tribunals at the end of World War II prosecuted perpetrators for crimes against humanity, the same crimes being perpetrated in Xinjiang. [...] The PRC, under the direction and control of the CCP, has committed genocide against the predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang. I believe this genocide is ongoing, and that we are witnessing the systematic attempt to destroy Uyghurs by the Chinese party-state.⁴⁰

In addition to the demonising motifs, it is the historical framing that links the speech of the “America First” Secretary of State with the Xinjiang coverage in the German media. Either, as Pompeo insinuates in his striking reference to the “Marxist-Leninist regime”, a connection is drawn to the Stalinist phase of the Soviet Union: the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, for example, describes Xinjiang as the “largest archipelago gulag in the world” with “hundreds of camps”⁴¹; *Spiegel Online* speaks of a “gulag for Muslims”⁴²; and in *Zeit*, *FAZ*, etc. the wording “Chinese

⁴⁰ Pompeo 2021.

⁴¹ “Sie sind Muslime, doch die islamische Welt lässt sie allein”, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 27 Nov. 2019, 4. Texts by the same author, Martin Gehlen, appear with partly identical wording at *Zeit Online* (26 Nov. 2019), among others.

⁴² “Jetzt rächt sich auch noch die deutsche Chinapolitik”, *Spiegel Online*, 24 May 2022, <http://www.spiegel.de/ausland/xinjiang-police-files-china-uiguren-angela-merkel-ukraine-a-fe40ed15-b0dc-451c-ad66-24a40aa0bd11> (access: 05/2024).

gulag” appears multiple times, sometimes also “high-tech gulag”.⁴³ Xinjiang is also frequently described to as a communist “open-air prison”. In this way, anti-communist resentment is mobilised, a sentiment which has been closely linked to eastern imperialist, i.e. anti-Asian and anti-Chinese, resentment since the middle of the 20th century. According to Wolf-Dieter Narr, anti-communism forms a “totalising world view” in which “all one’s own interests directed against others are [glorified] across the board, while all self-made problems, difficulties and failures are [projected] onto the ‘realm of darkness’”. In the (West) German version, which has followed in the footsteps of the US American hegemon since the post-war period⁴⁴,

*[t]he fear and hate figure of Asia/China – that Far Eastern shadowy figure greedily reaching out its spidery fingers for the “West’s” most sacred goods – is forever lurking in the pale half-light of a completely foreign, completely different, completely hostile world, now designated as a communist world.*⁴⁵

Alternatively – or in addition – Pompeo also suggests a connection between the situation in Xinjiang and the crimes against humanity committed under German fascism, in particular the Nazi policy of extermination against the Jews of Europe. The German taboo of relativising the Holocaust as a singular breach of civilisation is conveniently bypassed in this case. Mostly non-German speakers are given a platform: in a guest article in *Welt am Sonntag* in 2019, Chinese dissident

⁴³ See e.g. “Der chinesische Gulag”, *Zeit Online*, 27 Nov. 2019, <http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2019-11/uiguren-china-xinjiang-unterdrueckung>, and “Xinjiang: Repression geht weiter”, *FAZ*, 21 Apr. 2023, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/politische-buecher/die-repression-geht-weiter-18832807.html> (access: 05/2024).

⁴⁴ By following and participating in the foreign and domestic policy of U.S. anti-communism of the post-war period from the outset, Bonn aligned itself closely with Washington: the joint struggle against ‘Eastern’ communism became the starting point for the stable “anchoring of the FRG in the Western alliance” (Kleßmann 1988, 256 f.). This is also why anti-communism, writes Wolfgang Wippermann, at times became the West German “state ideology” (Wippermann 2012, 22-29). – It stands to reason that the rediscovered enmity towards system rival China should unite the Western-Northern bloc of states in a similar way today and bind them to Washington’s side.

⁴⁵ Neddermann 2022, 102.

Yang Jianli speaks of “camps [...] that can be called the concentration camps of the 21st century”, as the “inmates [...] serve as slave labourers”.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, the *FAZ* and *Spiegel* have the head of Asia policy at the Pentagon, Randall Schriver, report that the term “‘concentration camp’, which stands for the labour and extermination camps during the time of German National Socialism”, is an “appropriate description”.⁴⁷ And when Böhmer and Fürsen write in their *Welt am Sonntag* article that Xi is planning “a final solution to what Beijing sees as the Uyghur problem”, it is hardly by chance that they are drawing on the ‘final solution’ vocabulary of German fascism.⁴⁸

Mikich’s decades-old critique applies doubly to the Xinjiang discourse in the German media in this regard: not only is “the vocabulary of the military”, including that of the Pentagon, adopted unfiltered, but the war-ready escalation of language (Mikich: “concentration camps, genocide, associations with Auschwitz”) could hardly be clearer.

Conclusion

“Paper commands weapons. We were disabled by the rotary presses before there were victims of cannons”, Karl Kraus has his ‘grumbler’ say in *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit*. And he continues: “In the end was the word.”⁴⁹ – In the current confrontation with China, mass media opinion-shaping plays a pivotal role. Mediating positions – understand-

⁴⁶ Cf. “Der Preis der Freiheit”, *Welt am Sonntag*, 10 May 2020, 20.

⁴⁷ “Washington: China sperrt Muslime in ‘Konzentrationslager’”, *FAZ*, 4 May 2019, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/uiguren-xinjiang-china-sperrt-muslime-in-konzentrationslager-16170188.html> (access: 05/2024), and “US-Verteidigungs-politiker kritisiert ‘Konzentrationslager’ für Uiguren”, *Spiegel Online*, 4 May 2019, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/china-us-verteidigungs-politiker-kritisiert-konzentrationslagern-fuer-uiguren-a-1265754.html> (access: 05/ 2024).

⁴⁸ The point here is not to assess the historical validity of such analogies, but to analyse their discursive function. Their repeated invocation marks a rhetorical escalation that draws on the strongest available moral symbols in historical memory.

⁴⁹ Kraus 1921, 691.

ing and the desire to understand – are routinely discredited by the majority of the self-aligned leading media outlets. As the analysis of Xinjiang coverage in the German press shows, this destructive dynamic is particularly pronounced here: the negative image of China is maximally one-sided, and the corridor of alternative opinions is narrow. There seems to be little room for a pluralistic debate, for example, regarding the question of the connection between the global ‘war on terror’ and the reported repression in Xinjiang.

The ‘China-critical’ or anti-Chinese advocates of decoupling (disguised as ‘de-risking’) have long discovered Xinjiang as a lever for their cause. In 2024, German companies such as BASF and Volkswagen are withdrawing from the region after their activities in Xinjiang were scandalised in the German press.⁵⁰ It is striking that the situation in Xinjiang regularly becomes a prominent media topic immediately prior to key China policy events and decisions. For example, the EU-China trade agreement was put on hold in December 2020 following media reports about the “genocide” of the Uyghurs. Proponents of cooperative relations with China are put under pressure – campaign journalism prevails. Mareike Ohlberg, one of the leading proponents of anti-Chinese policy measures, openly admits in the *Berliner Zeitung*

*[i]t is absolutely legitimate, for example, to link the publication of research findings to major events. This was also the case at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. Of course, events [...] are used to draw attention to human rights violations in China. They have the world’s attention and want to show the Chinese government that there is a cost to massively repressing its own population. [...] As a strategy, this is in principle completely legitimate.*⁵¹

⁵⁰ This article’s reference to Volkswagen’s impending withdrawal from Xinjiang was criticised as a factual error in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on 8 Oct. 2024; the review claimed VW had no such plans. In fact, Volkswagen confirmed the withdrawal on 27 Nov. 2024, following months of corporate signalling. – No correction was issued by the FAZ. The episode is illustrative of a broader pattern in media debates on China-related issues: isolated statements are discredited while the underlying analytical argument remains largely unaddressed.

⁵¹ “Sinologin über Lage der Uiguren in China”, *Berliner Zeitung*, 27 Jan. 2024, <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/politik-gesellschaft/sinologin-mareike-ohlberg->

In such an approach, science, policy advice, activism and journalism merge with little transparency. The question remains: What comes first and when? And who speaks in what role and with what objective?

From a media-historical perspective, the motives used to paint a picture of the situation in Xinjiang in the German press resemble the recurring patterns of moralising wars and conflicts – as a way to cloak political (or economic) interests – particularly those seen in the Kosovo war coverage, which had served as the starting point for Sonia Mikich’s media critique in 2000. The Holocaust analogy was already part of the rhetorical arsenal at the time: Serbs were said to keep their victims in “concentration camps” and “burn them in ovens [...] similar to those used in Auschwitz”.⁵² The intention to carry out planned mass extermination or genocide was emphasised from the outset. And reports of misogynistic sexualised violence and crimes against children, suspiciously similar to those that appear today in Böhmer and Fürsen’s Xinjiang report (rapes, forced marriages, forced abortions, and forced adoptions), were of key importance: Serbian soldiers, as German Defence Minister Rudolf Scharping dictated to the press, “play football with decapitated heads, they dismember corpses, cut the fetuses out of the wombs of pregnant women who have been killed and grill them”.⁵³ The fact that many supposedly airtight “pieces of evidence” from this series were later proven to have been manipulated for the purpose of influencing public opinion underscores the need for critical distance and an objective, critical and controversial debate.

ueber-lage-der-uiguren-in-china-pekings-will-sich-ressourcen-xinjiangs-aneignen-
li.2166359 (access: 05/2024).

⁵² “Das Märchen vom Hufeisenplan”, in: *Le Monde diplomatique*, 11 Apr. 2019, <http://monde-diplomatique.de/artikel/!5584546> (access: 05/2024).

⁵³ Ibid.

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Central Asia as a continental bridge or Thucydides' trap?

When the Western press and media report on Xinjiang, they tend to focus on the situation of the Uyghurs in this autonomous region of China. The fact that Xinjiang is of the highest strategic importance for China as a raw materials base, gateway to Central Asia and starting point of the New Silk Road, which is orientated towards Europe, and that real geopolitics is about precisely these things, is often neglected. Of course, the starting point of the New Silk Road is in the strategists' crosshairs, and it goes without saying that Central Asia and the South Caucasus are also targeted. After all, the shortest transport corridors to Europe run through these areas, now that the transport routes via Russia have been cancelled by Russia's war in Ukraine. This is where the Chinese New Silk Road and the European Global Gateway meet. What is the situation in Central Asia? What role does the International Trans-Caspian Transport Route play? How are China, the USA and Europe acting where the future of the New Silk Road is ultimately at stake? This article aims to provide a few answers to these questions, which should therefore only be understood as an approach to the topic of "Central Asia as a continental bridge or Thucydides' trap?"

The USA as the hegemonic pacemaker in Sino-American relations

When Zbigniew Brzezinski published his *Strategic Vision* in 2012, the US President was still able to lean back in his chair in the Oval Office. Brzezinski stated that no state had "the necessary combination of economic, financial, technological and military power" to "even consider assuming America's leadership role".¹ He therefore also considered it

¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski (2012), *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power*, New York: Hachette, 77.

“unlikely” that any state would actually do so. Nevertheless, in 2008, the National Intelligence Council estimated in its *Global Trends 2025* study, under the then current impression of the global financial crisis caused by the USA, that the USA would remain the most powerful single player, but that its influence would become weaker. A more pessimistic view was that “the international system as it emerged after the Second World War would be almost unrecognisable by 2025”.² The analysts described China and Russia as “key states” and referred to “a growing unease among neighbours about the rise of China”.³ They regarded the People’s Republic and India as “status quo powers that focus on their own development, take advantage of the current system and are not too keen on the US and others seeking radical changes to the international order”.⁴

However, the results of globalisation and the global financial crisis had already shifted the existing balance in the global economy considerably to the disadvantage of the USA and to the advantage of China. While the USA and China had previously formed the development axis of the global economy, with China producing goods and the USA buying them on credit, China and Germany now formed the new axis. This had “the advantage that two countries were working together that were financially stable – and both were exchanging real products”.⁵ Vladimir Putin commented:

*The core problem is the accumulation of global imbalances. The model whereby one regional center piles up bonds and consumes goods without restraint while the other produces cheap goods and buys up debt has failed.*⁶

² “Geheimdienste prophezeien Niedergang der USA”, *Der Spiegel*, 20 Nov. 2008.

³ National Intelligence Council (2008), *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*. Washington, 93; [http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Reports and Pubs/2025_Global_Trends_Final_Report.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Reports%20and%20Pubs/2025_Global_Trends_Final_Report.pdf) (access: 05/2024)

⁴ Op. cit. 94.

⁵ Frank Stocker, “Neue Achse des Wachstums,” *Die Welt*, 07 Aug. 2010.

⁶ “Putin: Plädoyer für Wirtschaftsgemeinschaft: Von Lissabon bis Wladiwostok,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 25 Nov. 2010.

Henry Kissinger admitted at this point that the emerging China was not the result of its military strength, but the result of a US competitive position that had fallen behind due to a dilapidated infrastructure, inadequate research and development and “a seemingly dysfunctional government process”.⁷ Added to this was the gigantic debt of the USA abroad, in the state and in private households. The USA had to react if it did not want to lose its hegemony. The policy change was announced with the spectacularly staged inauguration of US President Barack Obama and his loudly proclaimed “Yes, we can!” It was also accompanied by an unprecedented media campaign worldwide.

In 2011, Obama announced the formation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), to which the “status quo power” China – which had not only integrated itself into the global economy since the 1990s, but had also become the “world’s workbench” – would only be granted access “as soon as it can fulfil the market economy conditions for doing so”.⁸ Also in 2011, Obama’s Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared in an article with the unassuming title *America’s Pacific Century*: “We will embed our relationship with China in a broader regional network of security alliances, economic alliances and social ties”.⁹ Even back then, “embedding China” meant wanting to contain China, step by step of course and without jeopardising our own economic interests. Josef Braml comments:

*America’s approach to China is ambivalent. The US strategy is a mixture of containment and engagement, i.e. a dual strategy of so-called conengagement. [...] On the other hand, the US is already vulnerable in terms of economic and trade policy and is dependent on financial policy cooperation with China.*¹⁰

⁷ Henry A. Kissinger (2012), “The Future of U.S.-Chinese Relations. Conflict is a Choice, not a Necessity”, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2012, 44-55.

⁸ Johnny Erling (2011), “Chinas Angst vor den ‘Tricks’ der USA in Asien”, *Welt-Online*, 18 Nov. 2011.

⁹ Hillary Clinton (2011), “America’s Pacific Century”, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/> (access: 05/2024).

¹⁰ Josef Braml (2012), “Die Rückkehr der USA: Obamas Asienpolitik”, *Asien* 122, 59.

In 2011, Obama finally announced the “Pivot to Asia”, which envisaged the transfer of 60 per cent of the US Navy to the Pacific region. The Obama administration adopted a tougher stance towards China, albeit as a “leader from behind” who was happy to impose some of the burdens on his allies. Kenneth Lieberthal (Brookings) pointed out that the USA intended to be a long-term leader in Asia. They were ready:

China’s further development as long as this does not lead to behavior that challenges America’s overall position or vital interests in the region”.¹¹

China’s President Xi Jinping, on the other hand, presented his New Silk Road initiative in a speech in the Kazakh city of Astana in 2013. Xi Jinping gave his Central Asian partner countries the impression that China would act as equals and treat them as partners within the framework of this initiative. The fact that China had underpinned the New Silk Road with a geopolitical concept in a Eurasian dimension became clear at the latest during Xi Jinping’s state visit to Germany in 2014, when he declared in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*:

China and Germany are located at the two ends of the Eurasian continent and are both outstanding representatives of Eastern and Western civilization. [...] As China and Germany are the most important economies in Asia and Europe respectively, their increased integration will mean the combination of two powerful forces, the combination of the growth poles of Asia and Europe.¹²

China moved swiftly to implement its New Silk Road initiative. One step was the conclusion of the Joint Declaration on Cooperation in Building the Eurasian Economic Union and the Silk Road Economic Belt between China and Russia on 8 May 2015, in which both sides agreed to work together in bilateral and multilateral formats within the

¹¹ Kenneth G. Lieberthal (2011), “The American Pivot to Asia”, <http://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-american-pivot-to-asia/> (access: 05/2024).

¹² Xi Jinping, “Deutsch-chinesische Beziehungen: Gut für China, Europa und die Welt”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28 March 2014.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in specific directions.¹³ The extent to which the declaration was only intended to feign a greater geopolitical dimension, especially towards third parties, cannot be assessed here. However, despite its enormous transit potential, China surprisingly excluded Russia from China's most important economic and geopolitical project, the New Silk Road. Also in 2015, Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed the formation of a "Great Eurasian Partnership", which would also be open to EU member states.

The inauguration of US President Donald Trump in 2016 represented a radical break in US politics, even at first glance. However, most of what was now expressed more openly, more ruthlessly and also more aggressively had already been considered and planned by the Obama administration, which certainly indicated a certain degree of strategic continuity despite Trump. However, it was to become particularly typical of Trump to use trade policy as a weapon that could be used worldwide, coming up with threats and being prepared to break every existing rule. He focussed on China, Russia and, surprisingly, Germany. None of this was really just a whim of the president; everything was planned relatively carefully and with foresight. The clinch between the USA and China was no longer just the result of bilateral competition. It was about the geopolitical order for the 21st century, about who would emerge victorious from the fourth industrial revolution and determine the new world order. However, climate change, which was essentially caused by the greed generated by the US-dominated economic system, also characterised the global disputes. The US *National Security Strategy* adopted in 2017 made the current assessments transparent. It states:

¹³ Совместное заявление Российской Федерации и Китайской Народной Республикой о сотрудничестве по сопряжению строительства Евразийского экономического союза и Экономического пояса Шелкового пути (Joint Declaration of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on Cooperation in Building the Eurasian Economic Union and the Silk Road Economic Belt), 08 May 2015, <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/4971> (access: 05/2024).

*China and Russia began to reassert their influence regionally and globally. Today, they have military capabilities designed to deny America access in times of crisis and challenge our ability to operate freely in critical trade zones in peacetime. In short, they are challenging our geopolitical advantages and trying to change the international order in their favour.*¹⁴

China and Russia were now defined as “revisionist powers” and, together with “rogue states” and transnational terrorist organisations, were identified as those who would challenge US power. China was accused of wanting to “displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, extend the reach of its state-led economic model and reorder the region in its favour”.¹⁵ The strategy continues: “China is collecting and utilising data on an unprecedented scale” and “building the most powerful and best-funded military in the world, second only to our own”.¹⁶

In reality, however, the USA had come under pressure. Braml points out that China had freed itself from its dependence on the USA and thus reduced its vulnerability. The New Silk Road connected China with East Asia, West Asia and Europe. China made its infrastructure, trade and information routes available worldwide as “public goods”, creating its own dependencies but also offering everyone the advantages of a win-win situation.¹⁷

The USA attached particular importance to the Indo-Pacific region, in which, according to its assessment, “a geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order” would take place, which would require a “sustained US leadership role” in the entire region. Maintaining military supremacy in this region was seen as the top priority. As a way forward, the US saw the strengthening of its alliances with Japan, Australia, and New Zealand and the expansion of quadrilateral

¹⁴ “National Security Strategy of the United States of America 2017”, <http://trump.whitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf> (access: 05/2024).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Josef Braml (2022), *Die Transatlantische Illusion, Die neue Weltordnung und wie wir uns darin behaupten können*, Munich: Antaios, p. 40.

cooperation with Japan, Australia and India, with Washington intending to develop India as a strategic and defence partner. The US continued its close relations with Taiwan “in accordance with our ‘One China’ policy” and in fulfilment of its obligations under the Taiwan Relations Act. The Philippines and Thailand were seen as “important allies”, while Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore were seen as “growing security and economic partners”.¹⁸ The US stated its firm intention to “work with the Central Asian states to ensure access to the region to support our counterterrorism efforts”.¹⁹ Considering the intensification of “competing” US diplomacy in China’s neighbouring states, the strategic positioning of NATO troops in Afghanistan and the US military bases in East Asia or nearby regions, the impression of a strategic encirclement of China was certainly not unjustified.

The *National Security Strategy* published after US President Joseph Biden took office in 2022 went one step further: it made it clear that powers such as Russia and China, “which combine authoritarian governance with a revisionist foreign policy, [...] would pose the most urgent strategic challenge to our vision”. While Russia was seen as an “imminent threat to the free and open international system”, the US analysts described China as an “imminent threat to the free and open international system”.

*The only competitor that has both the intention to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military and technological power to achieve this goal.*²⁰

The challenges posed by China were described as “systemic”. Beijing wants to expand its sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific region, the “epicentre of 21st-century geopolitics”, and become the leading world

¹⁸ “National Security Strategy of the United States of America 2017”, <http://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf> (access: 05/2024).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “National Security Strategy 2022”, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administration-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf> (access: 05/2024).

power itself. The US, its allies and partners would therefore “shape the external environment of the PRC and Russia to influence their behaviour, even as we compete with them”.²¹ However, as China plays a central role in the global economy, competition is “most pronounced” in the Indo-Pacific region, but is now also taking place globally. In addition to other measures, the USA would

*hold accountable for violations – genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang, human rights abuses in Tibet, and the curtailment of Hong Kong’s autonomy and freedoms.*²²

Regarding Taiwan, the strategy states: “We remain committed to our one-China policy, which is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act, the Three Joint Communiqués, and the Six Assurances”.²³ In the Eurasian region, the US would “continue to support the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Central Asia” and promote “resilience and democratic development” in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

While the US intends to strategically incapacitate Russia by making the war in Ukraine a strategic failure, restricting Russia’s strategic economic sectors, excluding Russia from “enjoying the benefits of global integration”, weakening its conventional military and deterring Russian actions that threaten key US interests, the “security strategy” for China envisaged a different approach in view of its role in the global economy. The USA would “endeavour to achieve greater strategic stability” in the military sphere with China. They would be interested in cooperating with China “on priorities” such as climate, pandemics, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, combating illegal drug trafficking, the global food crisis and macroeconomic issues, the security strategy stated.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Nevertheless, President Biden decided to build a large coalition of allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region, as he did in Europe in the case of the war in Ukraine, not least in order to share the financial burden. Conceptually, however, Brzezinski's *Strategic Vision* may also have played a role, which states:

*In contrast to America's favourable geographical position, China is potentially threatened by strategic encirclement. Japan blocks China's access to the Pacific Ocean, Russia separates China from Europe, and India towers over an ocean that bears its name and is China's main access point to the Middle East.*²⁴

This is probably how the planning was actually done, except that in practice the work was much more intricate, and detailed and also took networking aspects into consideration.

In his speech at George Washington University on 26 May 2022, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken emphasised that the US will focus on China as “the most serious long-term challenge to the international order” in the near future and “shape Beijing’s strategic environment in a way that promotes our vision of an open, inclusive international system”.²⁵ Blinken continued:

*[We] will defend our interests against any threat. To that end, President Biden has directed the Department of Defence to look to China as a pace-setter to ensure our military stays ahead. We will seek to keep the peace through a new approach we call ‘integrated deterrence’. By engaging allies and partners, working across the conventional, nuclear, space and information domains, and building on our strengths in economics, technology and diplomacy.*²⁶

²⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski (2012), *Strategic Vision*, 85.

²⁵ <http://www.state.gov/secretary-blinken-to-deliver-remarks-at-george-washington-university-2/> (access: 05/2024).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

And China? How is China responding? The Chinese foreign policy expert Yao Zhongqiu describes China's position, which is likely to be shared in the same or a similar way in other BRICS countries, in a few, but accurate words:

*The Pax Americana will only allow China to develop in a way that is subordinate to the rule of the United States, so China has no choice but to embark on a new path and work towards creating "a new international order."*²⁷

Geographical and geopolitical aspects

As the USA increasingly gained the impression that its hegemony was under threat and that its strategic competitor China could gain the upper hand as a "systemic rival", it began to develop global strategies and regional planning games to enable it to take countermeasures. Naturally, this also included the development of military options with a hybrid approach, which analysts and strategic planners usually start with "a look at the map".

A look at the map reveals the special feature that China has a north-south extension of 4,500 kilometres and an east-west extension of 4,200 kilometres, and thus a very large strategic depth. 33 per cent of the territory is crossed by mountains and 21 per cent by deserts. Characterised by deserts, so these areas are difficult to negotiate, impassable terrain. China borders 14 countries²⁸ and has the longest land border in the world at 22,457 kilometres. In the southwest, west and north of the

²⁷ Yao Zhongqiu, "Five Centuries of Transformation", *Wenhua Zhongheng* 1, <http://thetricontinental.org/wenhua-zongheng-1-five-centuries-of-transformation/> (access: 05/2024).

²⁸ State borders of China: Afghanistan 91 km, Bhutan 477 km, Burma 2,129 km, India 2,659 km, Kazakhstan 1,765 km, North Korea 1,352 km, Kyrgyzstan 1,063 km, Laos 475 km, Mongolia 4,630 km, Nepal 1,389 km, Pakistan 438 km, Russia (north-east) 4,133 km, Russia (north-west) 46 km, Tajikistan 477 km, Vietnam 1,297 km; see <http://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/china/> (access: 05/2024).

People's Republic of China, the Tibet Autonomous Region (founded: 9 Sep. 1965), the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (founded: 1 Oct. 1955) and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (founded: 1 May 1947) cover the Chinese heartland. Tibetans, Uyghurs and Mongols are the titular nationalities of these administrative units. Tibetans (Zang) live in Tibet, Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu and Yunnan, Uyghurs in Xinjiang and Mongols in Inner Mongolia, Liaoning, Jilin, Hebei, Heilongjiang and Xinjiang. There are traditionally close cultural and religious ties between Tibetans and Mongols. Recognition of the Dalai Lama as the head of Lamaist Buddhism is widespread among Tibetans and Mongolians.

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is the largest of the three autonomous administrative units mentioned, accounting for 17.3 per cent of China's territory. Xinjiang is followed by the Tibet Autonomous Region and Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, whose territories account for 12.8 per cent and 12.43 per cent of China's territory, respectively. This means that these three autonomous regions account for 42.53 per cent of China's total national territory. According to the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics, 26.5 million people lived in Xinjiang, 3.7 million in Tibet and 24.6 million in Inner Mongolia at the end of 2022. No information was provided on the number of Uyghurs, Tibetans and Mongols living there. Various sources refer to approx. 48 per cent Uyghurs in Xinjiang, approx. 4 million Mongols in Inner Mongolia and more than 90 per cent Tibetans in Tibet, although some of these figures appear questionable and often do not take into account mixed marriages or the degree of ethnic assimilation of these people. Whereas in the past the titular nationalities made up the absolute majority of the population in these areas, today the Han Chinese clearly dominate, and their numbers continue to rise with the expansion of infrastructure, industrialisation and the provision of housing and work.

All three autonomous administrative regions have national borders. Tibet borders Bhutan, Nepal and India; Xinjiang borders India, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Russia; while Mongolia and Inner Mongolia border Mongolia and Russia.

China was divided into seven military districts until 2015. The three autonomous regions fell under the jurisdiction of the Lanzhou and Chengdu military districts. In 2016, five *theatre commands* were formed, of which the Western Command focuses on Tibet and Xinjiang and therefore also on the borders with Burma, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Mongolia. The biggest real challenge in an emergency would be a conflict with India, but an open war currently seems unthinkable: Both countries are nuclear powers, and the extreme geographical conditions of the potential theatre of operations would hardly allow the deployment of ground combat troops. This may be one of the reasons why the main combat troops of the People's Liberation Army are deployed in the far east of the theatre of operations. Nevertheless, the troops stationed in the Western Command are among the best in the People's Liberation Army in terms of armament, equipment and structures.²⁹ The Northern Command covers Inner Mongolia and the land borders with Russia, Mongolia and North Korea, as well as maritime borders.

In the “National Security Situation” section, the authors of the 2015 Military Strategy of the People's Republic of China categorised the Western Command area as problematic due to “separatist” activities. In this document, they mentioned the existence and activities of organisations campaigning for the independence of “East Turkestan” or Tibet. For this reason, “intensified efforts in operations against infiltration, separatism and terrorism in order to maintain China's political security and social stability” was defined as a strategic task for the Chinese armed forces.³⁰

After 9/11, China intensified its fight against the Islamic Party of East Turkestan, for example, as an expression of the fight against terrorism. By means of excellent relations with Pakistan, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, the most important sponsors of Sunni Islamic radicalism, Beijing is

²⁹ http://nvo.ng.ru/concepts/2022-10-27/4_1212-wildwest.html (access: 05/2024).

³⁰ The State Council Information Office. “China's Military Strategy”, <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/Publications/WhitePapers/4887928.html> (accessed 05/2024).

endeavouring to keep the extent of Uyghur terrorism as small as possible. Beijing's main concerns probably stem from the fact that the movements, which only have a small number of members, are primarily fuelled by ethnic separatism. This affects the interests of different sides.

There are also border problems with India, which have not been resolved through negotiations to date and have even led to the expansion of military infrastructure on both sides of the border. Hopes that India's accession to the Shanghai Organization (SCO) would change this have not been fulfilled, not least because of China's close partnership with Pakistan.

The fact that Xinjiang has become the starting point of the New Silk Road is undoubtedly of particular and strategic importance. The two international railway crossings of Horgos and Alashankou are located on the border with Kazakhstan and are the starting point for freight transport from China to Europe as part of the New Silk Road. The Horgos freight station (opened in 2016) connects China with 18 countries and regions, while Alashankou (opened in 2013) connects China with 25 countries and regions. Since 2013, 36,622 China-Europe goods trains have been handled in Alashankou and 33,403 in Horgos since 2016, which illustrates the scale of this freight traffic. In 2023, 6,260 China-Europe trains passed through Alanshankou, and 7,268 China-Europe trains passed through Horgos as of 11 December. The dwell time of a China-Europe freight according to the China Railway Ürümqi Group: the dwell time of a China-Europe freight train was minimised from more than 12 to 6 to 8 hours by improving transport efficiency and optimizing operating processes at both railway crossings. The total volume of China-Europe goods trains now accounts for more than half of the country's total railway volume. This illustrates that the Alanshankou and Horgos border crossings are neuralgic points on which the functioning of the New Silk Road essentially depends.

Xinjiang's foreign trade increased by 45.9 per cent in 2023 and reached a volume of USD 50.25 billion. The autonomous region's imports/exports with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan increased by 50 per cent year-on-year and accounted for 79.4

per cent of Xinjiang's total foreign trade. Xinjiang mainly exports labour-intensive and electromechanical products to the Central Asian region.

During his visit to Ürümqi (Xinjiang) in August 2023, President Xi Jinping emphasised the need to “anchor Xinjiang’s strategic position in the overall national situation”, as this relates to “the overall task of building China into a strong modern socialist country in all respects and promoting the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”. Xi Jinping gave top priority to “maintaining social stability” and economic development in Xinjiang. He called for strengthening the rule of law “to lay a solid legal foundation for lasting stability”, improving the “mechanism to prevent and mitigate major risks and potential threats”, and integrating “the fight against terrorism and separatism with the law-based and constant work to maintain stability.”³¹

As the starting point of the New Silk Road, Xinjiang is a neuralgic point of great strategic importance and, like Tibet, an Achilles’ heel. Measured against the situation that has arisen since the start of the war in Ukraine, the continental New Silk Road would lose both its economic importance and its strategic clout without transit to Europe via Central Asia.

Snapshot of Central Asia

If Xinjiang is the starting point of the New Silk Road, the Central Asian region is the geographical area through which the “New Silk Road” transits.

³¹ “Xi stresses greater efforts to build beautiful Xinjiang in pursuing Chinese modernisation”, <http://en.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA2163/TopStories209189/16247966.html> (access: 05/2024).

Russia in Central Asia

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, which are generally subsumed under the term “Central Asia”, belonged to the Soviet Union as Soviet republics and are still claimed by Russia as its traditional sphere of interest. Russia maintains close political, economic and military relations with these states, as the following table of memberships shows:

	Common-wealth of Independent States (CIS)	Collective Security Treaty	Shanghai-Organisation for Co-operation	Eurasian Economic Union
Kazakhstan	X	X	X	X
Kyrgyzstan	X	X	X	X
Tajikistan	X	X	X	-
Uzbekistan	X	-	X	-
Turkmenistan	X (assigned)	-	X	-

Nevertheless, Russia’s influence on the Central Asian states has waned considerably. The Russian war in Ukraine has reinforced this trend. Alexei Malašenko (Centre for Situation Analysis, IMEMO Moscow) points out that the countries of Central Asia do not support Russia’s actions in Ukraine. They do not recognise the integration of the Lugansk and Donbass regions into the Russian Federation, but also reject the sanctions against Russia, which ultimately led to a significant increase in their imports from Europe and exports to Russia. Scepticism in Central Asia towards organizations under Russian patronage is growing, not least because other options are tempting. This means that these states are increasingly focusing on their own interests.³² The younger generations in Central Asia have no memories of a shared historical past in the Soviet Union and no sense of gratitude towards Russia. The experiences of Central Asian labour migrants in Russia are reflected in

³² Алексей Малашенко (Alexei Malashenko), “Как быть с Центральной Азией” (On dealing with Central Asia), http://www.ng.ru/vision/2022-11-21/8_8595_asia.html (access: 05/2024).

rather negative emotions in Central Asia. This trend is reinforced by the drastic decline in labour migration in Russia due to the COVID pandemic, which increased unemployment in Central Asia.

The fact that Russia is now perceived as rather weak is increasingly leading to the conclusion in Central Asia that less can be expected from Russia. People are not prepared to listen to a weakening power. The young elites of Central Asia, some of whom still speak Russian, are reacting in a friendly but pragmatic and coolly calculating manner, but if Russia were to regain its strength, they would nevertheless turn to it just as pragmatically.

According to *RIA Novosti*, the volume of Russia's trade with Kazakhstan in 2023 was USD 26 billion, with Uzbekistan USD 9.9 billion, with Kyrgyzstan USD 2.9 billion and with Tajikistan USD 1.7 billion (no information on Turkmenistan).³³

China in Central Asia

Over the decades, China has been the only country in Central Asia to realise major economic projects such as the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan motorway, the China-Tajikistan motorway, the China-Kazakhstan crude oil pipeline and the China-Central Asia pipeline.

It has rapidly expanded its economic relations with Central Asia in recent years. In 2020, the bilateral trade volume totalled USD 38.6 billion, while China's trade surplus amounted to over USD 3.8 billion in 2020. While the Central Asian countries export raw materials at often fluctuating world market prices, they mainly import high value-added manufacturing products from China. In 2021, 7,700 Chinese companies were active in Central Asia. One important instrument of influence for China is investment, which totalled USD 40 billion at the end of 2020

³³ <https://rosmigrant.ru/press-center/news/novosti/tovarooborot-rossii-i-stran-tsentralnoy-azii-dostig-rekordnowo-urovnnya/> (access: 05/2024).

and was mainly made in the energy sector. Kazakhstan accounted for half of this. China is an important lender. 45 per cent of Kyrgyzstan's foreign loans (= USD 1.7 billion) come from China, while in Tajikistan this figure is as high as 52 per cent (= USD 1.2 billion). Liabilities to China amount to 16.9 per cent of GDP in Turkmenistan, 16 per cent in Uzbekistan and 6.5 per cent in Kazakhstan.³⁴ As the countries are hardly in a position to repay these debts, they are increasingly being forced to make concessions to China.

China has learnt to expand its influence in Central Asia with a great deal of soft power. It establishes and expands flexible connections with the elite of the countries whose demands, structures and weaknesses it has studied well, adapting itself locally by accepting and adapting existing practices and norms in its actions there. At least openly, it does not interfere in internal affairs and talks primarily about joint business deals, which are generally centred on natural resources and infrastructure development. The resource requirements of intensive Chinese production are very high, but also China's real neuralgic point. The transport of natural gas and crude oil to Xinjiang via pipelines is efficient and now also cost-effective. As the first section of the New Silk Road lies in Central Asia, China is investing in transport and logistics and is working on the expansion of a third border crossing with Kazakhstan and the Trans-Caspian railway transport route. As far as infrastructure development is concerned, there is a focus on energy infrastructure such as thermal power plants, hydroelectric power plants, pumping stations, water supply systems, the development of solar and wind energy, as well as the expansion of telecommunications. However, these undoubtedly positive trends say little about the internal attitude of Central Asians towards China and the Chinese. The war in Ukraine has once again opened a useful window of opportunity for China in Central Asia. Despite all assurances to the contrary, China will try to take over the positions previously occupied by Russia itself.

³⁴ Azimzhan Khitakhunov, "Economic Cooperation between Central Asia and China", <http://www.eurasian-research.org/publication/economic-cooperation-between-central-asia-and-china/> (access: 05/2024)

Central Asia

In the West, Central Asia is often referred to as Russia's "soft underbelly", which on the one hand points to the fragility of this region and on the other to the fact that Russia itself is highly sensitive in this region. It is therefore a key interest of Russia to maintain security and stability in Central Asia, while the West sees opportunities in Central Asia to stage political games against strategic rivals.

In fact, the states of Central Asia are still quite fragile, which is due to imperfect nation-building. The best example of this is Kazakhstan, which is actually considered to be relatively strong and stable, where traditional clan, family and tribal structures play a very influential role. Its president, K.-J. Tokaev, who took over from his predecessor Nursultan Nazarbaev in 2019, who had ruled for decades, only instructed a meeting of the National Khuriltai in March 2024 to rewrite Kazakhstan's national history. It is supposed to trace the origins of Kazakhstan back to the Mongolian Golden Horde, which does not exactly speak in favour of a firmly established Kazakh nation. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan also see important origins of their history in the time of the Mongol Empire.

The Central Asian states are autocracies that are primarily customised to the person of their presidents, but which guarantee social cohesion in these countries. Given the current trend towards Islamization, there may indeed be no alternative to these autocratic forms of government if the internal stability of the countries and the region is not to be called into question. Nevertheless, there is an undeniable fragility caused by social instability and corruption. While social instability could still be mitigated a few years ago by labour migration to Russia, this option has essentially been exhausted following the coronavirus pandemic. The following table at least gives an impression of the fragility and perception of corruption in these countries.

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Fragile States Index (FSI, 2022) and Corruption Perceptions Index (KWI, 2022)³⁵

	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan	Turkmenistan
FSI (rank)	111/179	69/179	72/179	95/179	104/179
KWI (Rank)	101/180	140/180	150/180	126/180	167/180

FSI: Rank 1=most fragile country, 179 most stable country; KWI: Rank 1 as least corrupt country, rank 180 as most corrupt country.

The political elites in Central Asia are not interested in the dominance of any powers in their region and, where possible, use intelligent variants of the political game to avoid restricting their sovereignty. With the help of the multi-vectoral approach in their foreign policy, they have so far understood quite well how to be both open to the outside world and to distance themselves flexibly if they gain the impression that their influence at home or in their region could suffer as a result. They admire China's development and are naturally also prepared to develop together with China if this appears to be advantageous, but would rigorously curb China's excessive influence locally. For a long time, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) was not only a security alliance that allowed them to keep certain powers at a friendly distance, but also an important instrument of internal stability. The SCO summits took place at various levels, with the heads of state meeting with the heads of state of Russia and China as well as with and among themselves. The SCO thus compensated for the lack of a Central Asian alliance format. In their dealings with the USA and the EU, they are open and willing to engage in economic and ecological cooperation, including projects to promote sustainable connectivity, but some discussions of values may well trigger reactions of retreat. The memory of colour revolutions keeps political mistrust alive. Central Asia has many fragile aspects, which have also been mentioned here, but the states have always proved to be more stable than their reputation, which once again indicates that the existing form of government is not unsuitable for guaranteeing the existence of the state.

³⁵ The information was taken from the websites <http://fragilestatesindex.org/global-data/> and <http://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022>.

Kazakhstan

Politically and economically, Kazakhstan is the leading state in Central Asia. In 2022, the country had the highest gross domestic product in Central Asia at USD 225.5 billion. Kazakhstan has rich mineral resources and exports in the order of their export shares: crude oil (48.2 per cent), gold (9.86 per cent), copper concentrate (3.85 per cent), ferroalloys (3.33 per cent), radioactive material (2.89 per cent), etc. Exports, which totalled USD 98.7 billion in 2022, have highly diversified regional characteristics. China accounted for 13.6 per cent of exports, Italy for 12.6 per cent, Russia for 8.9 per cent, the UK for 8.11 per cent, the Netherlands for 5.55 per cent and Turkey for 5.08 per cent. Imports reached USD 57.9 billion in 2022. 28.5 per cent was accounted for by Russia, 27.9 per cent by China, 4.96 per cent by Germany, 3.91 per cent by South Korea and 2.89 per cent by Turkey. Kazakhstan is the world's largest exporter of uranium (2020: 62 per cent of 44,900 tonnes worldwide). It exported 84.2 million tonnes of crude oil in 2022, of which over 70 per cent was delivered to the EU.

Kazakhstan's foreign trade balance is positive. The well-developed metallurgical industry processes black and non-ferrous metals, which are generally extracted from the country's own deposits. Kazakhstan is China's most important Central Asian partner in the energy trade. The Chinese National Petroleum Company (CNPC) came to Kazakhstan back in 1997 and not only acquired the majority of shares in the Kazakh company Aktyubinskneft' JSC, but it is now one of the largest taxpayers in the country. This clearly distinguishes the company from Western investors, whose profits often simply flow away. Today, China buys 16 per cent of Kazakhstan's entire oil production, and 70 per cent of the uranium imported by China comes from Kazakhstan. Kazakh head of state K.-J. Tokaev has said that Kazakhstan plans to invest around USD 20 billion in diversifying transit and transport routes and introducing integrated logistics solutions by 2025. And for good reason. At the Bo'ao Forum in March 2024, K.-J. Tokaev pointed out the important role his country plays as a transit bridge between East and West as part of the New Silk Road. The freight volume between Kazakhstan and

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China reached 30 million tonnes in 2023. Kazakhstan accounted for 80 per cent of all continental traffic between China and Europe with a total volume of 3 million tonnes. Kazakhstan intends to increase these volumes to 10 million tonnes per year by expanding logistics and new routes and developing the north-south corridor with its neighbours.³⁶

Gross domestic product in the Central Asian countries (2022, in USD billion)

	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	Turkmenistan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan
GDP (2022) according to the World Bank	225,5	80,39	56,54	11,59	10,49
Forecast for 2023 (Statista)	259,29	90,39	81,82	12,68	11,82

Uzbekistan

Economically, Uzbekistan ranks second among Central Asian countries in 2022 with a GDP of USD 80.39 billion. The country exports gold (30.7 per cent), cotton yarn (8.26 per cent), natural gas (5.53 per cent) and copper concentrate (3.53 per cent). 25.4 per cent of its exports go to Switzerland, 15.4 per cent to Russia, 11.7 per cent to China, 9.39 per cent to Turkey and 7.43 per cent to Kazakhstan. The most important import partners are China with 24.3 per cent, Russia with 18.8 per cent, Kazakhstan with 12.3 per cent, South Korea with 7.58 per cent and Turkey with 6.34 per cent. The country has a negative foreign trade balance. Russia's economic influence in Uzbekistan is still very strong. More than 3,000 companies with Russian participation operate there. Russian capital investments amount to USD 13 billion, while other

³⁶ "The head of State addressed the plenary session of the Boao-Forum for Asia", 24 March 2024, <http://www.akorda.kz/en/1-2825827> (access: 05/2024).

economic projects under development are targeting a total value of USD 28 billion. The Lukoil Group is working in the Kandym and Gissar fields and has built a gas processing complex in Bukhara.

Foreign trade of the Central Asian countries (2022, in USD billion, according to

	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	Turkmenistan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan
Export	98,7	16,9	12,5	2,5	2,41
Import	57,9	29,9	n.a.	21,3	6,57

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan is in third place with a GDP of USD 56.54 billion. Turkmenistan has large deposits of natural gas and oil. The country exports 73.9 per cent natural gas, 10.3 per cent refined petroleum and 3.16 per cent crude oil. The most important export countries are China with 71.3 per cent, Turkey with 7.09 per cent, Uzbekistan with 5.32 per cent and Azerbaijan with 3.69 per cent. No statements can be made about the foreign trade balance, as no reliable import data is available.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

These countries are the economically weakest countries in the region. Their exports are insignificant compared to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Both have a negative foreign trade balance. Kyrgyzstan's high level of imports from China can be explained by the country's role as a hub for Chinese goods, including textiles. Kyrgyzstan has borrowed USD 1.7 billion from China, making China Kyrgyzstan's most important investor. More than 40 per cent of the country's foreign debt is held by the Export-Import Bank of China. China's main objective is the construction of the 454 km long China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway line. 280 kilometres of this will run through Kyrgyz

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territory. The project, estimated at USD 3 to 7 billion, will reduce the distance from East Asia to the countries of the Middle East and Southern Europe by 900 kilometres, which will shorten delivery times and enable a freight transport volume of 12-15 million tonnes per year thanks to higher capacity utilisation. China has signalled its willingness to assume construction costs of USD 2 billion and would expect Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to guarantee the remaining amount. China would also be prepared to invest in the construction of small hydro-power plants on favourable terms if the electricity were to be supplied to China.³⁷

Share of Russia and China in Central Asia's exports/imports (2022, according to www.oec.world)

	Kazakhstan		Uzbekistan		Turkmeni- stan		Kyrgyzstan		Tajikistan	
	Exp.	Imp.	Exp.	Imp.	Exp.	Imp.	Exp.	Imp.	Exp.	Imp.
Russia	8,9	28,5	15,4	24,3	-	-	42,9	10,4	-	22,2
China	13,6	27,9	11,7	18,8	71,3	-	-	63,5	16,8	32,8
RU+CN total	22,5	56,4	27,1	43,1	71,3	-	42,9	73,9	16,8	55,0

Russia and China dominate imports from Central Asian countries, accounting for over 50 per cent in some cases, and also play a key role in exports. In 2022, the volume of trade between China and Central Asia totalled USD 70 billion, and Russia also achieved a trade volume of more than USD 42 billion in the same year. Nevertheless, China has overtaken Russia in all key foreign trade positions in Central Asia since the 2000s. Some believed that China would act as a tough competitor to Russia in Central Asia. That there is competition is undisputed, but there are also increasing signs of a kind of co-operation that has a mutually compensatory character in the region. For example, when Uzbekistan's natural gas supply obligations to China jeopardised the supply of

³⁷ See <http://www.ng.ru/cis/2023-08-16/5-8801-kyrgyzstan.html> (access: 05/2024).

gas to its own population, it had to suspend its gas supplies. At the presidential summit with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, Russia therefore agreed on gas supplies to Uzbekistan via Kazakh pipeline networks, for the transit of which Kazakhstan provided quantities of 1.5 to 10 billion cubic metres.

Trans-Caspian International Transport Route

During the 3rd Belt and Road Forum, President Xi Jinping made a statement on “Building a Multidimensional Belt and Road Connectivity Network” in his keynote speech on 18 October 2023. He said:

*China will accelerate the high-quality development of the China-Europe Railway Express, participate in the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor, align the China-Europe Express cooperation form, and make joint efforts to build a new logistics corridor on the Eurasian continent, connected by direct rail and road transport. We will vigorously integrate ports, shipping and trade services under the ‘Maritime Silk Road’ and accelerate the construction of the new international land-sea trade corridor and the Air Silk Road.*³⁸

Two aspects of this statement were of particular importance:

[1] Concentrating on the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), which was also favoured by the EU, for example, was tantamount to rejecting both the China-Kazakhstan-Russia-Belarus-Poland northern corridor and the east-west corridor via the Russian Trans-Siberian Railway as the main transport route of the New Silk Road as far as China-Europe transport was concerned.

The China-Russia-Ukraine-Poland New Eurasian Land Bridge project was cancelled due to the war in Ukraine, although this route was clearly more cost-effective. The Russian railway has been sanctioned by the

³⁸ “Full text of Xi Jinping’s keynote speech at 3rd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation”, *Xinhua*, 18 Oct. 2023, <http://english.news.cn/20231018/7bfc16ac51d443c6a7a00ce25c972104/c.html> (access: 05/2024).

West, so international insurance providers are less willing to insure transports over it. The Trans-Siberian Railway comprises a fully electrified railway line of approximately 10,000 kilometres with a freight volume of up to 100 million tonnes per year, including 200,000 to 300,000 TEU of container traffic. Transport via the Trans-Siberian Railway therefore enables cost savings of up to approx. 30 per cent. The transport route China (Xinjiang)-Kazakhstan-Russia-Belarus-Poland also has a clear advantage, as Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan are in a customs union.

[2] The construction of a “new logistics corridor on the Eurasian continent”: The previously known six land routes of the New Silk Road were also located in different regions of Eurasia. During the 3rd Belt and Road Forum, President Xi Jinping presented eight steps that China intends to take “to support high-quality Belt and Road cooperation”. One key component will be the establishment of new transport and logistics lines with the accompanying infrastructure in the Eurasian region, which also has a geostrategic component. In addition, pilot zones for e-commerce cooperation, the conclusion of free trade agreements and investment protection agreements, “small but smart” livelihood programmes, green development, etc. will play a decisive role. According to Xi Jinping, China will provide “financing windows” of 350 billion yuan each through the Chinese Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China.

The TITR, which is also referred to as the “middle corridor”, is multi-modal compared to the continental routes through Russia, which implies an alternation of rail, ship and sometimes even car transport. The TITR goes back to the founding of a consortium in 2013. The state railway companies of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Georgia participated in this consortium. It could therefore be seen as a direct result of the speech by Xi Jinping, who presented the New Silk Road initiative in Astana in the same year. The transport takes place by rail and ship, passing through Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Black Sea, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Austria and the Czech Republic before reaching its final destination, Germany. In other words, the

route connects Europe, the South Caucasus, Central Asia and China. The China-Europe transport on this approximately 11,000-kilometre route began in 2017.

As one of the most important initiators, Kazakhstan faced major challenges right from the start. It had to quickly expand the handling capacity of its port of Aktau on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea. This port provides access to sea routes to Turkmenistan, Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia. Aktau, which is operated by a state-owned Kazakh port company, quickly offered an increase in container throughput (see table). Since 2015, the Kazakh railway has also had the port of Kuryk built, which is located 70 km south of Aktau. (Both Aktau and Kuryk are located in a special economic zone that offers tax breaks to investors).

Container throughput in the Kazakh port of Aktau (in TEU)

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 (Jan.-April)
2.484	14.324	17.969	27.624	30.708	7.470

The limited transport capacities on the Caspian Sea and the age of the ships in use repeatedly lead to a backlog in the transport flow in the port of Aktau. This results in costs and delivery times that cannot be reliably met. Transport via the TITR was also considered too expensive for a long time, while the established northern route via China-Kazakhstan-Russia-Belarus and Poland was considered more cost-effective. However, “transport giants” such as the Danish company Maersk, the Finnish company Nurminen Logistics Services Oy and the German company Dachser Cargoplus seem to want to switch to the TITR route due to the war in Ukraine.

Azerbaijan and Georgia play an important role in further transport. The port of Baku in Alat, 70 kilometres away, was completed in 2018. It has an annual handling capacity of 15 million tonnes of freight, including 100,000 TEU containers. As the utilisation of the north-south corridor is also included in the calculations in Baku, work soon began on a second expansion phase of the port of Alat. The economically weak, politi-

cally unstable country of Georgia, with the limited possibilities of its ports of Poti and Batumi, is undoubtedly the bottleneck on the TITR route.

The TITR still has many unresolved problems due to its multimodality, national borders, uncertainty and instability in the South Caucasus, which is the focus of various interests, as well as poorly optimised logistics. Nevertheless, the interested parties seem to want to concentrate on this transport route, which will increase the geopolitical significance of the transport area. For China, the TITR route represents a central section due to the elimination of European routes via the territory of the Russian Federation, the loss of which would jeopardise the continental route of the New Silk Road.

Russia and China are now working intensively on the Arctic Blue Economic Corridor, which will open up transport routes for China to the north-western parts of Russia and northern Europe. Vladimir Putin made it clear during the 3rd Belt and Road Forum in Beijing in Oct. 2023 that the navigation of ice-going cargo ships along the entire length of the Northern Sea Route would be possible all year round from 2024. Russia would be prepared to offer interested parties reliable ice navigation (icebreakers, ice freighters), communication and supplies.³⁹ Russia itself sees the route as an opportunity for the unhindered transport of hydrocarbons (natural gas, oil, coal) to Asia, Africa and South America. Negotiations between Russia and Japan over the Kuril Islands are therefore likely to have come to an end, which suggests that Japan will soon join the AUKUS military alliance (USA, UK, Australia).

³⁹ Вали Каледжи, "Пояс и путь" и транспортная связность в Евразии, <http://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/poyas-i-put-i-transportnaya-svyaznost-v-evrazii> (access: 05/2024)

China and Central Asia

The hasty withdrawal of NATO and the West from Afghanistan and Russia's war in Ukraine considerably changed the status of both the Central Asian region and its individual countries in the eyes of the powers. Interest in Central Asia grew by leaps and bounds. While some saw economic opportunities, others had to compensate for self-inflicted energy bottlenecks as quickly as possible, while for others Central Asia became a terrain for staging power games against economic competitors, strategic opponents and rivals. Some simply wanted to remain geographically close to Afghanistan in order to "reshuffle the cards" there if necessary. The unrest in Kazakhstan in January 2022, which was obviously intended to spread to Uzbekistan, also appeared to have various objectives that extended beyond Kazakhstan. In this complicated situation, the main objective was to maintain stability in Central Asia.

Since 2013, China has maintained relations with all Central Asian countries at the level of strategic partnerships, which have been continuously expanded and developed over the years. In addition to bilateral relations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation offered a corresponding multilateral format. Central Asia became the focus of China's Silk Road policy. Russian analysts estimated at the end of 2014:

The most important task to ensure China's national security will be to find ways to diversify transit routes and energy supply sources. Central Asia, which has considerable potential for the transit of goods by land and the extraction of hydrocarbons, will take centre stage.⁴⁰

On 25 May 2022, President Xi Jinping opened a virtual China-Central Asia summit on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the five Central Asian states, which was still under the impression of the unrest in Kazakhstan and its suppression by troops of the Collective Security Treaty. In his keynote speech, Xi emphasised the importance of stability for Central

⁴⁰ "Международные угрозы" (International Threats), 2014, [http://www. Foreignpolicy.ru/reports/mezhdunarodnye-ugrozy-2014/](http://www.Foreignpolicy.ru/reports/mezhdunarodnye-ugrozy-2014/) (access: 05/2024).

Asia. He assured Central Asia of Chinese support for “development paths (...) tailored to their national realities” for safeguarding sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity as well as in the “quest for national revitalisation and greater strength through unity”. He spoke out against “attempts by external forces to instigate colour revolutions in Central Asia” and “against interference in internal affairs under the pretext of human rights”. China is focussing on strengthening economic stability in Central Asia and increasing imports of “high-quality goods and agricultural products” from the region.⁴¹ Xi Jinping proposed a bilateral trade target of USD 70 billion for the year 2030. In terms of major bilateral projects, the acceleration of the expansion of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway and the D-line of the China-Central Asia gas pipeline, the further development of transport corridors between China and Central Asia and the expansion of the energy industry chain were given high priority.

In June 2022, China and the Central Asian countries agreed at their 3rd Foreign Ministers' Meeting to establish a special China-Central Asia Summit mechanism as a new format in relations. One year later, President Xi Jinping met with the Central Asian heads of state for a China-Central Asia Summit on 19 May 2023 in Xi'an, the starting point of the historic Silk Road. The Chinese president spoke out in favour of a “stable, prosperous, harmonious and interconnected” Central Asia, respecting “the choice of development paths of their people” and safeguarding “the sovereignty, security, independence and territorial integrity of the Central Asian countries”. Under the aspect of “a harmonious Central Asia”, he emphasised that “ethnic conflicts, religious disputes and cultural alienation” should not be the defining characteristics of the region, but rather the pursuit of “solidarity, inclusivity and harmony”. With unusual candour, he warned: “No one has the right to sow discord or stir up confrontation in the region, let alone pursue selfish political

⁴¹ “Remarks by President Xi Jinping at the Virtual Summit to Commemorate the 30th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between China and Central Asian Countries”, <http://english.www.gov.cn/news/topnews/202201/27/contentWS61f203b4c6d09c94e48a4589.html> (access: 05/2024).

interests”.⁴² He emphasised the “right foundations, prerequisites and capabilities” of Central Asia “to become an important hub for connectivity”. The president promised trade concessions, improvements to investment agreements and optimised customs clearance for agricultural products and by-products at all border crossings. Deepening connectivity remains an important concern. China wants to “increase the volume of cross-border freight transport, support the development of the Trans-Caspian Transit Corridor, increase the traffic capacity of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan and China-Tajikistan-Uzbekistan motorways and advance consultations on the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway line”. Other objectives included opening up the air transport market, building a regional logistics network and assembly centres for the China-Europe Railway Express, and building overseas warehouses and a comprehensive digital service platform. China and the Central Asian countries also agreed on a partnership for energy development. The Chinese approach thus encompassed the entire Central Asian region in a complex way and utilised the vacuum left by Russia.

The establishment of a China-Central Asia summit as a new format for regional relations alongside the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation would have been unthinkable before the war in Ukraine due to Russia’s concerns. From now on, a Permanent Secretariat was to be set up alongside the bilateral summit as a permanent institution. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi emphasised that the summit in Xi’an had “completed the platform building and overall planning of cooperation between China and Central Asia and opened up a new channel for the further development of cooperation at the highest level”.⁴³ The *Global Times* commented that with the withdrawal of US troops from Afghani-

⁴² “Working together for a China-Central Asia Community with a shared Future Featuring Mutual Assistance, Common Development, Universal Security and Everlasting Friendship”, 19 May 2013, http://mk.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zgyw/202305/t20230519_11079941.htm (access: 05/2024).

⁴³ Wang Yi: “The China-Central Asia Summit Creates a New Platform for Good-neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation in the Region”; http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb663304/wjbz_663308/activities663312/202403/t202403191126316.html (access: 05/2024).

stan, “disruptive forces in the Central Asian region have been reduced” and “the willingness of Central Asian countries to cooperate with China has increased”, “as their position in the US geostrategic sphere of influence had diminished.”⁴⁴

At the 3rd Belt and Road Forum on 18 October 2023, Xi Jinping took stock of the New Silk Road: China has built a global connectivity network under which 150 countries, and 30 international organisations have signed cooperation documents. The network is made up of various economic corridors, international transport routes and information highways, railway lines, roads, airports, ports, pipelines and power grids, and has set in motion the flow of goods, capital, technology and human resources with China as the starting point and China at the centre of the network. It has been realised on a global scale in a historically short time. Xi Jinping announced eight steps to realise the “construction of high-quality Belt and Road cooperation”. TOP 1 included the construction of a multidimensional Belt and Road connectivity network, which included the acceleration of the China-Europe Railway Express, Chinese participation in the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor and the construction of a “new logistics corridor on the Eurasian continent, connected by direct rail and road transport”.⁴⁵

Central Asia’s further development was and is primarily linked to this TOP 1, but its success will largely depend on the USA and Europe, which represent both common and conflicting interests.

⁴⁴ “Upcoming China-Central Asia Foreign Minister’s Meeting to pave way for leaders’ summit”, www.globaltimes.cn/page/202304/1289789.html (access: 05/2024).

⁴⁵ “Full text of Xi Jinping’s keynote speech at 3rd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation”, *Xinhua*, 18 Oct. 2023, <http://english.news.cn/20231018/7bfc16ac51d443v6a7a00ce25v972104/v.html> (access: 05/2024).

China in the trouble spot Afghanistan

After NATO and the West left Afghanistan in a hurry, a very favourable window of opportunity opened up for China, allowing it to expand its influence in the country and the region with the help of Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The China-Afghan Commercial Committee was founded in Kabul in 2021 with the primary aim of opening up and paving the way for Chinese business in Afghanistan. China is pursuing its own security interests and very specific economic interests in Afghanistan, primarily in gold, copper, oil, lithium and rare earths, but also interests of a far-reaching nature that take into account Afghanistan's potential role as a strategically important hub. A year later, China began construction of the industrial park agreed upon with the Taliban government. In 2022, China started mining and processing copper in the Aynak deposit and gemstones and gold in Badakhshan province and created conditions for oil production in Sari-Pul province.

After the major earthquake in Afghanistan, China was one of the few countries in the country to provide serious emergency aid. On 28 July 2022, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Amir Khan Muttaqi, the acting Foreign Minister of the Afghan Interim Government, at the SCO Foreign Ministers' Meeting. Wang Yi expressed China's interest in "promoting the alignment of the Belt and Road Initiative with Afghanistan's development strategies, supporting the expansion of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan, and sharing China's development opportunities".⁴⁶ China expressed its willingness to resume visa issuance for Afghan nationals from 1 Aug. 2022. China also granted zero-duty treatment for Afghan export products, especially "high-value special products", in 98 per cent of customs tariffs. At the beginning of 2023, the Taliban government and the company Xinjiang Central Asia Petroleum and Gas signed a contract for oil production in the Amu Darya river area, which provides for investments totalling USD 150

⁴⁶ "Wang Yi meets Acting Foreign Minister of Afghan Interim Government Amir Khan Muttaqi", http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/gjhdq_665435/2675_665437/2676_663356/2678_663360/202207/t20220729_10730548.html (access: 05/2024).

million in the first years of the 25-year term. The oil reserves there are estimated at up to 87 million barrels. In May 2023, both sides agreed to include Afghanistan in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. China also intends to build a road to Pakistan through Afghanistan. In return for its concession, the country expects the Afghan side to fight resolutely against all terrorist forces, especially the Islamic Movement for East Turkestan.⁴⁷ The Taliban then relocated all Uyghurs living near the Chinese border to more remote areas and also severed their relations with the East Turkestan Islamic Movement. On 29 Jan. 2024, the special envoy for Afghanistan, Yue Xiaoyong, visited the Afghan capital Kabul together with representatives from Russia, Pakistan and Iran. One day later, Afghanistan's ambassador, Mawlawi Asadullah Bilal, presented his credentials to Xi Jinping in Beijing.

Whether China remains successful in Afghanistan depends largely on how stable and predictable the Taliban regime will be in the coming years. It should not be overlooked that for China, security and economic policy form a mutually dependent unit in the case of Afghanistan. China's fear that Islamic extremists could seep into Xinjiang from Afghanistan cannot be dismissed out of hand. The activities of some secret services in the West, which are reactivating old security structures in Afghanistan, are also likely to fuel fears in China. In this respect, China is making intensive use of the opportunities offered by the SCO security structures and also welcomes the cooperation of the Central Asian countries within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Although the Central Asian states do not officially recognise the current Afghanistan, they are making efforts to stabilise it internally. Kazakhstan has set up a trade office there, and Uzbekistan is continuing fieldwork in preparation for the construction of a trans-Afghan railway.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

USA and Central Asia

Central Asia has very rarely been of interest to the USA in recent decades. However, there were three moments when Central Asia was recognised by US foreign and security policy:

[1] All Central Asian states took part in the founding of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in 2001. Its documents reflect the principles of the *Treaty on Good Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation* between Russia and the People's Republic of China of 16 July 2001, which led Washington to believe that it needed to keep an eye on this organisation and its members.

[2] After the anti-terror operations of the USA and NATO in Afghanistan, the USA positioned itself as a “Eurasian power”, just as it later proclaimed itself to be an “Indo-Pacific” power.

[3] As the political, economic and military incompatibility between the USA on the one hand and Russia and China on the other deepened and China was perceived by the USA and the European Union as a “systemic rival”, both the Central Asian region and Iran gained in geostrategic importance for the USA.

When the US adopted its *2019-2025 United States Strategy for Central Asia* in 2019, it could already point to significant achievements in Central Asia. The United States had provided more than USD 9 billion in direct assistance and, with the help of the international banks it led, had provided more than USD 50 billion in credits, loans and technical assistance “to promote the development of the region”, while the US private sector had invested around USD 31 billion in commercial projects. US companies, of which there are around 600 in Kazakhstan alone, are mainly active in the oil and gas sector as well as in mining. They include giants such as Exxon Mobil, Chevron, General Electric, Honeywell and Schlumberger. In addition, funding was provided for the exchange of 40,000 students and skilled workers, investments of USD 90 million in border security and the training of 2,600 border guards. This must be mentioned here, as the statistical figures on trade between the

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USA and the Central Asian countries, with the exception of Kazakhstan, give a rather modest impression, as the following table shows.

US foreign trade in Central Asia (2022, in USD million)

	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	Turkmeni- stan	Kyrgyz- stan	Tajikistan
Export	1.100,0	273,0	49,0	61,0	124,0
Import	2.700,0	59,0	46,0	9,0	1,0
Direct Invest- ments (FDI, etc.)			51,0	62,0	122,0

Source: <http://ustr.gov/countries-regions/south-central-asia> (ref. no.: 05/2024).

The adoption of the US strategy for Central Asia in 2017 was preceded by a thought process that determined the state of relations between Central Asia and the US and redefined the interests in this region and the vision of American policy. US President Donald Trump, like his predecessors, sought to preserve US supremacy in the Indo-Pacific region and to roll back Chinese influence worldwide. Given that China was expanding its economy towards Europe via the New Silk Road, Central Asia was almost bound to fall into the crosshairs of Washington's strategists. The USA now regarded Central Asia as a "geostrategic region of importance to the national security interests of the United States". They saw "domestic and foreign terrorism" as a "priority security problem" that would affect the stability of the Central Asian countries. In the background, of course, the influence of Russia and China on these countries played a significant role in the strategic calculations.

The US therefore saw strengthening "resilience to short- and long-term threats to its stability" and improving "independence from malign actors" in Central Asia as the main directions of its engagement. They formulated the following goals:

[1] "Support and strengthen the sovereignty and independence of the Central Asian states, both individually and in the region". The USA wanted to become involved "in the areas of economy, energy, security, democracy and governance", i.e. it was striving for

political change, but in return was also prepared to support the development of, for example, a standardised electricity grid throughout Central Asia.

[2] “Reducing the terrorist threat in Central Asia”.

[3] “Expanding and maintaining support for stability in Afghanistan”.

[4] “Promoting connectivity between Central Asia and Afghanistan”.

[5] “Promoting the reform of the rule of law and respect for human rights”.

[6] “Promoting United States Investment and Development in Central Asia”.⁴⁸

The goals of the US strategy for Central Asia were particularly geared towards promoting the US security position in the region and, as the vision clearly states, “counterbalancing the influence of regional neighbours”.⁴⁹ However, the sudden withdrawal of NATO troops and the West from Afghanistan in the summer of 2021 devalued important parts of this strategy and partially called into question what had been achieved through diplomacy. In addition, Russia’s war in Ukraine forced US diplomacy to rethink its concepts in the case of Central Asia as well.

The basis for the “reset” in relations between the USA and Central Asia was the regional diplomatic platform “C5+1” (Central Asia + USA). This was established in 2015 to exchange views at the foreign minister level at annual meetings on the three areas of security, the economy and the environment, but in fact primarily on security problems in the wider region (Afghanistan, Syria, etc.). The participants thus identified and

⁴⁸ “United States Strategy for Central Asia 2019-2025: Advancing Sovereignty and Economic Prosperity”, <http://www.state.gov/united-states-strategy-for-central-asia-2019-2025-advancing-sovereignty-and-economic-prosperity/> (access: 05/2024), and <http://www.tj.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/143/United-States-Strategy-for-Central-Asia-2019-2025.pdf> (access: 05/2024)

⁴⁹ Ibid.

compared their positions on issues relevant to them. From the US perspective, however, the meeting was also intended to be an instrument of influence directed against Russia. The first meeting of foreign ministers took place in 2015 on the margins of the 70th session of the UN General Assembly. US Secretary of State John Kerry then paid the first visit by a US chief diplomat to each of the five states since 1992. The second meeting in 2016 included a regional dialogue as part of the Global Counterterrorism Forum and a project to develop the transport corridor. None of the foreign ministers' meetings held in Central Asia between 2017 and 2019, which were primarily dedicated to security issues, were attended by a US Secretary of State, which was seen in Central Asia as an expression of low esteem by the standards of similar formats, e.g. with its geographical neighbours.

This situation changed in the late phase of the Trump administration. On 22 Sep 2019, US Secretary of State Pompeo met with his five Central Asian counterparts in New York. They discussed the expansion of trade and investment relations and infrastructure development in the region as well as security issues with a focus on Afghanistan and the fight against terrorism/extremism. During the talks, Mr Pompeo drew attention to the issue of repatriation, prosecution and reintegration of foreign terrorist fighters and their families. The US Secretary of State also addressed related issues in Xinjiang. He stated:

*And further on the subject of terrorism, I would like to make it clear that China's repressive campaign in Xinjiang is not about terrorism. It is about China's attempt to eradicate the Muslim faith and culture of its own citizens. We call on all countries to resist China's demands to repatriate the Uyghurs.*⁵⁰

On 30 June 2020, the next meeting of foreign ministers took place, also under the leadership of US Secretary of State Pompeo, but this time under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the beginning of

⁵⁰ "Pompeo offers new areas of cooperation with Central Asia", <http://www.newscentralasia.net/2019/09/24/pompeo-offers-new-areas-of-cooperation-with-central-asia/> (access: 05/2024).

the meeting, Pompeo emphasised the USA's willingness to support the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of each Central Asian country and to jointly support "strong civil societies in Central Asia through the protection of human rights and respect for international law". Among the following statements on the willingness to cooperate economically were topics such as connectivity between "the C6 and other countries in the region" in the energy sector, e.g. in the Central Asia Regional Electricity Market (CAREM), as well as improving infrastructure for air, water, land and rail transport. The USA was prepared to hold consultations on sanctions issues in order to "avoid unintended consequences for the economies of Central Asian countries".⁵¹ Meetings in the first half of 2021 had a similar agenda, but brought up "connectivity between the Central and South Asian regions through trade, transport and energy links" as a new aspect.

After the withdrawal of US and NATO troops from Afghanistan, the US preferred to engage with Central Asia on climate policy issues, but it was decided (following the Chinese model?) to provide the "C5+1" diplomatic platform with a permanent secretariat "to further deepen engagement to advance common goals."⁵²

The "C5+1" meeting with US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken on 28 February 2023 in Astana, Kazakhstan, made it clear how much the concrete fields of bilateral cooperation had narrowed. Words such as "considered one", "recognised the importance", "addressed the issue" and "expressed their willingness" were frequently found in the text of the *Joint Declaration* and indicated that the fields of cooperation were rather sparse. The definition of the basic lines of security co-operation was also limited. The previously established Permanent Secretariat was now assigned working groups for the economy, energy, environment

⁵¹ "US-Chair: Statement of the June 30, 2020 C-5+1 High Level Dialogue", <http://2017-2021.state.gov/bureau-of-south-and-central-asian-affairs-releases/u-s-chair-statement-of-the-june-30-2020-c51-high-level-dialogue/index.html> (access: 05/2024).

⁵² "Joint Statement on the C5+1 Meeting during UNGA 77", <http://www.state.gov/joint-statement--on-the-c51-meeting-during-unga-77/> (access: 05/2024).

and security. The US side urged the Central Asian partners to comply with the sanctions against Russia. According to the *Joint Declaration*, the participants pledged to “work together to mitigate the unintended effects of sanctions on the C5+1 economies”.⁵³ In Central Asia, this side was taken very seriously, especially as there were fears that access to certain markets for Central Asian states could be blocked by secondary sanctions.

The real significance of the foreign ministers' meeting in Astana was the preparation of the first summit of the “C5+1” heads of state, which took place on 21 Sep 2023 in New York City on the margins of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly. The heads of state adopted a *Joint Declaration* entitled *Resilience through Security, Economic and Energy Partnership*. At the outset, they spoke of a shared vision of “sustainable cooperation to address the complex challenges and new threats in the region”. They reaffirmed: “Together we are committed to the C5+1 goal of finding regional solutions to global challenges”. They emphasised their desire to “enhance security, improve economic resilience, support sustainable development, combat climate change and promote peace” in Central Asia.⁵⁴ A “lasting partnership” is to be established on this basis.

Security cooperation has always been at the centre of the “C5+1” activities. Once again, it encompassed a wide range of issues from defence, law enforcement and counter-terrorism to border security, safe migration (repatriation of northern Syrians) and the US commitment to prioritise security assistance instruments. The State Department and the Centre for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) will create a “C5+1” economic platform to complement the existing diplomatic “C5+1” platform. Investments are to be made in the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route and in the expansion of transport networks connecting

⁵³ “Joint Statement on the C5+1 Ministerial in Astana”, 9 March 2023, <http://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-the-c51-ministerial-in-astana/> (access: 05/ 2024).

⁵⁴ “C5+1 Leader’s Joint Statement”, 21 Sep. 2023, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/briefingroom/statements-releases/2023/09/21/c51-leaders-joint-statement/> (access: 05/ 2024).

Central Asia with South Asia. Infrastructure investments are to be examined in order to accelerate the economic development, energy security and connectivity of the TITR. Observers believe that the USA is particularly interested in the logistics sector of the TITR.⁵⁵ For the US, “building diverse, resilient and secure supply chains for critical minerals” is particularly important.

Europe and Central Asia

Compared to the USA, relations between Europe and Central Asia have become broader and more diverse, but this does not say much about the quality of relations and their actual results. The European Union concluded a *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement* with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan back in 1999 and with Tajikistan in 2009. Turkmenistan agreed to such an agreement with the EU back in 1998, but its parliament refused to ratify it. The situation was similar with NATO: in the early 1990s, all five Central Asian states joined the North Atlantic Co-operation Council. They later joined the “Partnership for Peace”, which was offered to interested countries outside NATO following the establishment of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997.

With its Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia project, the EU made its first attempt in 1998 as part of its TACIS programme to create a transport corridor into Central Asia. On 8 September 1998, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan signed the *Basic Multilateral Agreement on International Transport for Development of*

⁵⁵ “Под взглядом орлана США хотят контролировать логистику в Центральной Азии” (The USA wants to control logistics in Central Asia with an eagle's eye), <http://iz.ru/1676598/kseniia-loginova/pod-vzgliadom-orlana-ssha-khotiat-kontrolirovat-logistiku-v-centralnoi-azii> (access: 06/2024).

the Europe-the Caucasus-Asia Corridor in Baku.⁵⁶ The participating countries agreed to “develop economic relations, trade and transport links in the regions of Europe, the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea and Asia”.⁵⁷ Transport was to take place via motorways, railways, waterways, airways, containers and pipelines. It developed quickly and doubled in the period from 1999 to 2002 to around 8.5 million tonnes of freight.

However, cooperation with Central Asia itself was limited. The euphoria of the post-reunification period had long since faded in the Central Asian states, and the ruling family clans there were always concerned that they would not fall victim to a remote-controlled “transfer of democracy”. They therefore decided to maintain their close relations with Russia and seek proximity to China. Among other reasons, this was an important motivation for them to sign *the declaration on the founding of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation* together with the presidents of Russia and China in Shanghai on 15 June 2001.

A few weeks later, on 11 September 2001, the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York took place. Central Asia was re-evaluated by the powers that be almost overnight. However, developments in the region were contradictory: on the one hand, the five Central Asian states stood alongside the West as partners in the “war on terror”, while on the other hand, the unstable situation in the Central Asian countries, which was characterised by mass protests, power struggles and crises, prevented a dynamic development of relations with the EU. However, it should not be overlooked that there was always a contradiction between the external appearance of EU relations with Central Asia and the individual countries in the region and the regional and bilateral relations of an EU member state such as Germany. This may have been a deliberate lack of transparency.

⁵⁶ Cf. www.traceca-org.org/fileadmin/fm-dam/pdfs/til_mla/1/MLA_English_with_amm_endments.pdf (access: 05/2024).

⁵⁷ Ibid.

During the German Council Presidency in June 2007, the EU adopted something like a Central Asia strategy for the first time under the title *The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership*. In it, it recognised Central Asia as “a strategically important interface between the two continents” of Europe and Asia and formulated its interest in “peace, democracy and economic prosperity prevailing in Central Asia”.⁵⁸ The EU emphasised that it wanted to share its experience and expertise in “good governance, the rule of law, human rights, democracy and education and training” with the countries of Central Asia. The actual prospects for cooperation were cited as “the EU’s dependence on external energy sources” on the one hand and “the need for a policy of diversified energy supply” on the other, whereby the geographical relationship with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran must also be taken into account. According to the document, EU enlargement, the inclusion of the South Caucasus in the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Black Sea Synergy Initiative would bring Central Asia and the EU closer together. Within this framework, the EU wants to embed its relations with Central Asia in its energy co-operation with the countries bordering the Black and Caspian Seas.

This cooperation focused on the exploration of oil, gas and water resources, the modernisation of energy infrastructure, the construction of pipelines and energy transport networks and the development of a Caspian Sea-Black Sea-EU energy transport corridor, with the aim of achieving a convergence of energy markets based on the principles of the EU internal market. In this context, the EU recognised the function of Central Asia as an “important trade corridor between South and East Asia and Europe”. Among other things, the EU intended to establish a regular political dialogue at the foreign minister level as well as dialogue forums on the rule of law, human rights and energy issues. The actual pillar of cooperation, however, was the implementation of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) with the countries of

⁵⁸ All quotes in this section are taken from “The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership”, www.data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10113-2007/en/pdf (access: 05/2024).

the region, in which they had to enter into a variety of commitments. Other areas of cooperation were environmental protection, border protection, migration, measures against corruption, and the fight against drug, human and arms trafficking to and from Afghanistan, as well as against organised crime and international terrorism. In practice, these areas of cooperation involved intensive collaboration with the relevant security, defence and civil protection bodies in the countries concerned.

The response to the adoption of the Central Asia Strategy among the countries in the region can be considered cautious and reserved for the reasons already mentioned. Kazakhstan led the way, concluding an *Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA)* with the EU in 2015, which entered into force on 1 March 2020 following ratification by all EU member states. Kyrgyzstan and the EU concluded their EPCA negotiations on 6 July 2019, but a legal dispute delayed the signing. Uzbekistan and the EU concluded their negotiations on the agreement on 6 July 2022, and Tajikistan did not start them until early 2023. Turkmenistan signed a partnership and cooperation agreement in 1998, but never ratified it. Its relations with the EU are now governed by an interim agreement on trade and trade-related issues.

The EU had already launched the Black Sea Synergy Initiative⁵⁹ in 2007. In doing so, it continued the process it had steered itself. The initiative “complements the European Neighbourhood Policy, the enlargement policy for Turkey and the strategic partnership with the Russian Federation”, according to an EU report written a year later. The initiative provided for the accession of interested states to the Treaty, establishing an energy community in the electricity and gas sectors, and examined the construction of a gas corridor between the Caspian and Black Seas and the expansion of trans-European transport networks.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ See “The Diplomatic Service of the European Union”, http://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/black-sea-synergy_en (access: 05/2024).

⁶⁰ See Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: “Report on the first Year of Implementation of the Black Sea Synergy”, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/> (access: 05/2024).

On 13 May 2019, a meeting of EU foreign ministers and their counterparts from the six countries of the EU's Eastern Partnership (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) took place. The EU focussed on strengthening the political association and economic integration of the partner countries in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia were later granted the status of EU candidate countries.

In June 2019, the EU adopted the updated version of its Central Asia Strategy, which was now entitled *The EU and Central Asia: New opportunities for a stronger partnership*. The EU continued to focus on “the strategic geographical location of Central Asia at the crossroads of Europe and Asia”, but has now also placed energy exports to Europe, the market potential of 70 million inhabitants and security in the Central Asia region in the crosshairs of its interests. The EU considered it to be in its “great interest” that “Central Asia does not develop into a competing or rival region, but into a region with which rules-based cooperation and networking is possible”.⁶¹ The EU strategy now focuses on “three interlinked and mutually reinforcing priorities”: [1] partnership for resilience (promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law, implementing the Paris climate commitments, migration, border management, mobility, tackling common security challenges such as terrorism and extremism, etc.), [2] partnership for prosperity (development of a competitive private sector, removal of structural barriers to trade and investment, WTO accession, etc.), and [3] partnership with the EU in the region and better cooperation (intensification of political dialogue, creation of spaces for civil society participation, etc.).

The already concluded *Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreements* (EPCA) remain the “cornerstones of EU engagement” in bilateral cooperation. In the “Partnership for Prosperity”, the EU intends to support intra-regional trade and investment activities and facilitate market

⁶¹ All quotes in this section were taken from the “Gemeinsame Mitteilung an das Europäische Parlament und den Rat. Die EU und Zentralasien”, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/DE/TXT/> (accessed 05/2024). Wording contained in the text of the section is close to the original text.

access. A central point of this partnership is the “promotion of sustainable connectivity”, which is part of the EU strategy to promote connectivity between Europe and Asia. According to the EU, the expansion of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) to the EU's neighbouring countries and the Chinese New Silk Road initiative offer great opportunities for cooperation in Central Asia. The intention is to link the TEN-T system with Central Asian (including via the South Caucasus) and other regional networks. The actual aim is to create “balanced, sustainable East-West and North-South land connections”, which are to be made possible by “modern integrated border management” and “compatible customs transit systems”. The EU is also prepared to work together with countries participating in the ASEM process⁶² to promote connectivity between Europe and Asia.

The main institutional structure of the interregional dialogue consists of the annual meetings of foreign ministers and the annual political and security dialogue at the level of deputy ministers. The final EPCA conclusion also entails regular dialogues on human rights.⁶³ The conclusions of the European Council on the new strategy for Central Asia also emphasised

*that the scope of EU relations depends on the willingness of individual Central Asian states to undertake reforms and to strengthen democracy, human rights, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, as well as to modernise and diversify their economies.*⁶⁴

⁶² The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) policy platform aims to strengthen EU-Asia relations through informal policy dialogues at all levels and in all areas.

⁶³ All quotations in this section are taken from the “Gemeinsame Mitteilung an das Europäische Parlament und den Rat. Die EU und Zentralasien”, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/DE/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52019JC> (access: 05/2024). Wording contained in the text of the section is close to the original text.

⁶⁴ See <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/3978/st10221-en19.pdf> (access: 05/2024).

The USA also adopted a Central Asia strategy in 2019, which, in view of the Trump administration's foreign policy and foreign trade policy, almost automatically made conflicts of interest between the EU and the USA appear likely.

When Ursula von der Leyen took over the presidency of the European Commission in 2019, a qualitative change took place within the EU. When she took office, von der Leyen announced that she wanted to become the chair of a "geopolitical commission". She demanded that "Europe must learn to use the language of power".⁶⁵ Implementation of the Central Asia strategy has been slow for the time being. The COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020, the West's hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan from 30 Aug. 2021 – a shock for the Central Asian states – and Russia's attack on Ukraine, which began on 24 Feb. 2022, slowed down international political processes considerably. For a time, each side and level was almost exclusively preoccupied with itself.

On 27 Oct. 2022, the first summit of the Presidents of the Council of Europe and the Presidents of Central Asia was held in Astana, Kazakhstan. The summit summarised the progress of relations to date. The participants emphasised the institutionalisation of relations through "the work of the existing platforms". Positive assessments were given of cooperation in border management and security in the broadest sense. The Central Asian heads of state welcomed the dialogue on the rule of law, human rights and gender equality, but did not say a word about the dialogue on democracy. Otherwise, the summit was characterised by statements, declarations of willingness and expressions of interest. As a result of the summit, a series of high-level conferences were organised on environmental/water resources, connectivity, civil society, etc. The Second EU-Central Asia Economic Forum in Almaty in May 2023 was particularly well received. The EU had commissioned various studies on sustainable connectivity between Europe and Asia in advance, which left no doubt about the geographical focus of connectivity.

⁶⁵ "Außenpolitik der neuen EU-Kommission", [http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/ au-
Benpolitik-der-neuen-eu-kommission-von-der-leyen-will-100.html](http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/ au-
Benpolitik-der-neuen-eu-kommission-von-der-leyen-will-100.html) (access:
05/2024).

Central Asia as a continental bridge or Thucydides' trap?

The second summit took place on 2 June 2023 in Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan. The participants agreed to adopt the roadmap for EU-Central Asia cooperation at the next ministerial meeting. The summit declaration made it clear that the EU was increasingly asserting its views on “universal values”, democracy and good governance, especially as it also defined these factors as prerequisites for cooperation. In connection with the expansion of trade and investment, a dialogue on the EU’s sanctions regulations was called for. This summit was also not characterised by the adoption of concrete measures. A few days after the summit, the 10th round of dialogue on politics and security took place at the level of deputy foreign ministers in Astana on 13 June 2023. The participants noted the impact of the Ukraine conflict and the negative developments in Afghanistan. It was agreed to intensify dialogue and cooperation on security issues. These issues should be prioritised at the next meeting of foreign ministers.

On 29 Sep. 2023, the German Chancellor received the heads of state of Central Asia in Berlin for a summit meeting. The participants emphasised “the importance of bilateral trade and investment cooperation” and the importance of a favourable economic environment in which the rule of law, human rights, property rights and an independent judiciary are of particular importance. They spoke in favour of the further development of the “Middle Corridor” (TITR) and “the development of financing sources for infrastructure projects within the framework of the Global Gateway Initiative”. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development had prepared a report for the Heads of State “on sustainable transport routes between Europe and Central Asia, in which the Central Trans-Caspian Network was identified as a sustainable transport network”. The participants welcomed this report.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ “Gemeinsame Erklärung der Staatschefs Zentralasiens und des Bundeskanzlers der BRD”, <http://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/975226/2226662/63a570a73d143bdf5f781a7685fe2173/2023-09-29-z5-erklaerung-data.pdf> (access: 05/2024).

The *Joint Communiqué* of the 19th EU-Central Asia Foreign Ministers' Meeting, which took place in Luxembourg on 23 Oct. 2023, emphasised the joint commitment to the continuation of the strategic partnership based on "shared values and mutual interests". The foreign ministers reaffirmed "the relevance of the EU Strategy for Central Asia" and endorsed the "Joint Roadmap for deepening EU-Central Asia relations". The foreign ministers emphasised the geostrategic role of trade and investment and stated that "the promotion of democratisation, human rights and the rule of law has a direct positive impact on confidence in the trade and investment climate in the region".⁶⁷ They agreed to strengthen sustainable supply chains and expand cooperation on investment and critical raw materials. Cooperation on sustainable connectivity in trade, transport, energy and digital technology, etc. is to be intensified, and the interconnectivity of the regional power grid and energy efficiency improved.⁶⁸ – Meanwhile, the EU carried out an initial assessment of the impact of the EU strategy for Central Asia. In addition to Russia's "illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban and China's increasingly aggressive foreign policy", it noted growing instability in the Central Asian region, specifically in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border. As Central Asia was considered to be of strategic interest to the EU, the importance of security, connectivity, energy and resource diversification in the region grew significantly. The EU recognised the need to define trade routes through Central Asia, bypassing Russia. The report emphasised the need for a "more active presence of the democratic EU in the region as an alternative to established autocratic actors".⁶⁹ It also emphasised the importance of transatlantic cooperation in Central Asia and called on "the EU to take the initiative to

⁶⁷ "Joint Communiqué of the 19th European Union-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting", <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/de/press/press-releases/2023/10/23/jointcommunique-of-the-19th-european-union-central-asia-ministerial-meeting-23-october-2023-luxembourg/> (access: 05/2024).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Committee on Foreign Affairs: "Report on the EU strategy on Central Asia", <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2023-0407.html> (Ref.: 05/ 2024).

develop a joint strategy for Central Asia with the United States, which should include cooperation in the areas of democracy promotion, investment and trade, economics and regional security.⁷⁰

Concluding remarks

When Russia and the United Kingdom fought for supremacy in Central Asia in the “Great Game” during the 19th and 20th centuries, the balance of power was still quite clear. Basically, there were only two players. In the “New Great Game”, which is being fought out in Central Asia today, it is sometimes difficult to precisely determine the interplay between the players and their specific goals. Constructive forces wrestle with destructive forces. The “superpower” and all the major powers are represented, including the European Union, which is a major player but has no sovereignty of its own. Some states, such as Turkey, also act as individual actors, despite their involvement in certain alliances, etc. Almost all powers and forces use intensive diplomacy and all kinds of hybrid methods to achieve their goals. There are no proxy wars yet (this is perhaps only a matter of time), but there are various proxy games, for example, in the entire South Caucasus. What role could the Taliban’s Afghanistan play in the near future in a region where Islamization tendencies cannot be overlooked anyway? When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, it fell into a trap devised by Brzezinski, which some people should remember today when reshuffling their cards. The rules of the political game have become both harsher and more sophisticated since the Russian attack on Ukraine, especially in the Central Asian region, where Russia’s “distraction” had created a vacuum that needed to be filled quickly. The escalating conflict in the Middle East also appears to be having an initial impact on the region. Some are considering restructuring their logistics chains in the Middle East and are focussing on Central Asia.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

In this complicated situation, the Central Asian states are in the process of opening up room for manoeuvre that goes beyond the effects of their previous multi-vectoral foreign policy. The convening of the Consultative Summit of Central Asian Heads of State, which has now become a regular format for cooperation in the region, laid the foundation for the Central Asian states to focus more strongly on national interests. The five heads of state concluded a *Treaty on Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation for the Development of Central Asia in the 21st Century* on 21 July 2022 in Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan, in which they described their consultative summits as a fundamental platform for interaction between the contracting parties. In July 2022, Kazakhstan's President K.-J. Tokaev proposed to the geographical neighbours Russia and China to participate in the consultative meetings as invited guests on a permanent basis. The treaty itself gives top priority to national security. The contracting states assure each other of "full support and mutual assistance in the defence against threats to their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity".⁷¹ Article 6 states:

*The Parties reaffirm their firm commitment to refrain from the use of force or the threat of force in their relations between States; they undertake not to join military alliances, blocs or other associations of States directed against the Parties, nor to participate in actions directed against any of the Parties. [...] The Parties undertake not to authorise the use of their territory, communications systems and other infrastructure by third States to the detriment of the state sovereignty, security, stability, constitutional order and territorial integrity of any of the other Parties.*⁷²

The states agreed to work together for peace and security in Central Asia and "on issues of common interest" in the military and military-technical field. They will represent jointly agreed positions to the outside world on issues of peace and security in Central Asia. They will deepen their "co-operation in combating new challenges and threats to security, including terrorism, extremism and separatism".⁷³ Promoting

⁷¹ <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P2200000507#13> (access: 05/2024).

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

the further development of the region's transit and transport potential plays an important role in economic cooperation. This includes 1. the comprehensive use of existing and the creation of new rail, road, air and waterways and the simplification of administrative procedures in cross-border transport, 2. the establishment of a network of industrial, logistics and wholesale distribution centres, etc. The treaty clearly shows that Central Asia has understood that state and regional security and the function as a transport corridor of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route form a unity, because without security there is no Trans-Caspian Transport Route. – The first outlines of the results of the agreement can now be seen. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan laid the foundations for their military cooperation at the beginning of 2024. There is now talk of the allies deploying troops in the event of danger, such as the invasion of large groups of military forces from Afghanistan. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in particular are now in the process of developing transport logistics in the South Caucasus on their own initiative.

New partners offer Central Asia previously unthinkable prospects. In 2022, the strategic dialogue “Central Asia-Gulf Cooperation Council” was launched, followed by a summit in Jeddah in 2023. The next round of the dialogue forum took place in April 2024 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Qatar and Uzbekistan agreed to establish relations at the level of a strategic partnership. The first investor forum between the Gulf Cooperation Council and Central Asia will take place in May next year. As an increasingly agile regional power, Turkey has also intensified all of its activities in Central Asia. As the driving force behind the Organisation of Turkish States, which was founded in 2011, its vision of a “Turkish world” – a counter-concept to the “Russian world”? – has met with considerable resonance among the Turkic states of Central Asia. Central Asian elites see Turkey's model of Islam as moderate and acceptable. Some in Central Asia sympathise with the idea that a Turkic cultural area with strong interaction in transport and logistics could emerge. The influence of Turkey and the Organisation of Turkish States will largely depend on Erdogan's successor and his policies.

The continental route of China's New Silk Road runs along the Trans-Caspian Transport Route. As the German and Chinese economies are closely intertwined and the two markets are interdependent, both China and Germany have a great interest in a stable, secure Central Asia. The transit region of Central Asia can contribute significantly to the resilience of both states, but also of Central Asia. During Chancellor Olaf Scholz's visit to China on 16 April 2024, both sides committed to a multilateral rules-based order in the World Trade Organisation. President Xi Jinping said during the visit:

*There have been a number of major changes in the global situation over the past decade. But the bilateral relationship has always remained stable. (...) The risks facing humanity as a whole are increasing. In order to resolve these issues, it is essential that co-operation between the major powers gains the upper hand. [...] A good stable development of bilateral relations between the two of us goes far beyond the bilateral dimension. They will have a great influence not only on the entire Eurasian continent, but on the whole world.*⁷⁴

President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang mentioned "Eurasia" several times in their statements. Which brings us back to Brzezinski and geopolitics.

⁷⁴ "Pressestatements von Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz and President Xi Jinping am 16.04.2024", <http://www.bundeskanzler.de/bk-de/aktuelles/pressestatements-von-bundeskanzler-olaf-scholz-und-staatspraesident-xi-jinping-am-16-april-2024-271328> (access: 05/2024).

Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer

The Tarim Basin – China’s Achilles heel in the geopolitical context

Climate and settlement history

The Tarim Basin, a territory on the edge of the Chinese world for over two thousand years and closely linked to it, has always been characterised by a variety of cultures in its oases on the northern and southern edges of the Taklamakan Desert.¹ With its network of oasis cities, it forms the central section of the historic Silk Road and thus the crossroads of migration and encounters between the peoples of Eurasia. Since the formation of the empire under the first emperor of China around 200 BC, it has been the most important corridor for China’s exchange with the West.² These places, often flourishing cities, have received new attention in historical research since the world moved

¹ The fact that oases are expanding worldwide is due to Xinjiang, where 95 per cent of people live in oases. In recent years, it has been possible to make ever larger areas of desert fertile, for example by irrigating them with groundwater. This has led to an unprecedented expansion of the oasis cities. However, even Chinese scientists, such as Dongwei Gui from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, question whether this development is sustainable. The danger of further desertification remains topical; see Eichhorn 2024 and a wealth of entries on the internet on the keywords “oasification”, “desertification” and “oasis protection system”. – This contribution is dedicated to the memory of my friend from my student days in Munich, Holm Sundhaußen 1942-2015. His work focused on the history of Southeast Europe (with an emphasis on the 19th and 20th centuries), in particular nation-building and nationalism, ethnic conflicts, economic and social history, social change and cultures of remembrance. In *Yugoslavia and its Successor States 1943-2011*, published in 2012, Holm Sundhaußen endeavoured to write a history beyond national narratives. This was particularly true with regard to the causes of the collapse of the Yugoslav state and the mass violence in the 1990s. Drawing on international research on violence, the author argued that hatred and violence have no nationality, that they are anything but a “Balkan” phenomenon, but can occur anywhere where influential actors override the rules that prevent violence.

² Linguistic historical name research has also found a broad field here; see, for example, Dragoni 2023. Dunhuang research has recently been intensified by the International Dunhuang Project IDP, based in the British Library: <http://idp.bl.uk>

closer together, especially since the Central Asian expeditions from Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In terms of geological history, the Tarim Basin is a consequence of the tectonic forces released by the collision of the Indian and Eurasian plates, which led to the formation of the Taklamakan Desert and, at the same time, to the oases surrounding the Tarim Basin, which live off the meltwater from the surrounding snow-covered high mountains that frame this basin to the north and south in a west-easterly direction. The trade routes that formed along these oasis chains led to the coining of the term ‘Silk Road’ or ‘Silk Roads’ in the course of renewed globalisation in the 19th century and its use for the exchange of goods of all kinds that had been taking place for thousands of years. In fact, the Tarim Basin is, to a certain extent, the centrepiece of the continental Silk Roads. The Turkologist and specialist in the history and culture of the Altaic peoples, Peter Zieme, writes about the settlement³, although the relationship between the Uyghurs of that time and the Uyghurs of today has not been clearly established:

*Among the ancient Turkic peoples of Central Asia, it was the Uyghurs who were the first to switch completely to a sedentary way of life when they occupied new settlement areas in the Turfan Oasis and the Gansu Corridor after the destruction of their mighty steppe empire on the territory of Mongolia by the Kyrgyz from the year 840 onwards.*⁴

Zieme characterises the early settlement history as follows:

Here and in the other oases of the Tarim Basin, smaller states had existed since centuries before the Common Era, inhabited mainly by Indo-European peoples such as the Tocharians, the Saka or the Sogdians. Wherever states emerged in the Tarim region, they were centred around the oases, where the population generally practised agriculture and horticulture, for which the construction and maintenance of irrigation systems were the most essential prerequisite for existence. Any neglect of the systems inevitably led to the drying out and destruction of the cultivated land. In addi-

³ Zieme 1992.

⁴ Here Zieme refers to works by Annemarie von Gabain.

tion to Turkisation, which can certainly only be traced back to the middle of the 6th century AD, the last stage of which was the mass advance of the Uyghur tribes, the development of the Tarim states was often determined to a decisive extent by the degree of Chinese power in these areas, which the Chinese regarded as “western lands”.⁵

Baymirza Hayit’s characterisation of the region sounds similar, declaring Turkestan to be a “cornerstone of Europe and Asia” in 1962, which, as “one of the oldest cultural countries on earth”, has been “at the centre of world politics for centuries”.⁶ In fact, the oases on the edges of the Tarim Basin in particular are of central importance in terms of cultural history, partly because the arid climate there has preserved numerous written records, including those relating to Manichaeism.⁷ Understandably, the Tarim Basin became the object of domination interests from many sides. Religious and cultural attributions and aspects played an early role in this, particularly in propaganda.⁸

China’s external borders and the Turkestan discourse

Gradually integrated into the territory of the newly proclaimed People’s Republic of China since 1949 and constituted in 1955 as the “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region” (新疆維吾爾自治區/新疆维吾尔自治区, *Xīnjiāng Wéiwú’ěr zì-zhìqū*, Engl.: *Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region*) with the Tarim Basin at its centre, this region was long before and is

⁵ Zieme 1992, 9f.

⁶ Hayit 1962, 205.

⁷ On Manichaeism, see Schmidt-Glintzer 1987 and 1987a.

⁸ Since the spread of Islam, its compatibility with secular rule has become an issue, but only in a dramatised way since the formation of the modern nation state. Leslie 1986 provides an overview of Islam in China. Anthropological studies, such as those by Dru C. Gladney, and legal-systematic considerations, such as those by Janne Mende, are important for the debate in general. See Gladney 1991 and 2004 and, more generally, on the question of the relationship between culture and human rights, Mende 2015. There have long been attempts to assert a fundamental incompatibility between Islam and Chinese statehood; see Israeli 1980 and the review by Schmidt-Glintzer 1981 as well as Drewes 2016.

still a disputed area. The historian may take some distance from this. It helps to speak of this area, which was formerly also called Chinese Turkestan or East Turkestan, as the Tarim Basin. With the comparatively late establishment and consolidation of the People's Republic within its current borders, including Taiwan, many questions remain unresolved. Both Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong and their respective parties agreed on the course of the border, and China's external borders seemed to have been determined by consensus, apart from disputed islands in the South and East China Seas and the specific course of the border with India and Russia on the Amur. In the meantime, however, this certainty of recognised external borders seems to be dissolving again. Alongside Taiwan, the Tarim Basin plays a prominent role in public debates.

This is helped by the fact that the global upheavals and irritations of recent years, including the Covid-19 pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops and the Palestinian conflict that has flared up again since 7 October 2023, mean that much more far-reaching shifts in the geopolitical balance of power now seem more likely again. The world has become more fragile, and the whole of Asia is bracing itself for extreme weather events associated with, among other things, a change in the monsoon, migration, the formation of megacities, food crises and new state failures.⁹ Old tensions are being reawakened, including on the fringes of China, and new horizons in the political and cultural transformation processes are becoming conceivable, with memories of past experiences of domination developing new explosive power. The successful defeat of smallpox in Xinjiang in 1958, to name just one example, was preceded by a long history of measures such as forced vaccinations, which have left scars to the present day.¹⁰

⁹ See the impressive speech by Pasuk Phongpaichit 2024.

¹⁰ See Kind 2024. Eric Schluessel 2020 addresses the difficult coexistence of Chinese and Uyghurs at the end of the imperial era and the ongoing attempts at assimilation. On surveillance practices, Schluessel writes: "It shows how the complex genealogy of modern government in Xinjiang owes a great deal to the regimes of surveillance and discipline that have emerged in the 'liberal' West." (Schluessel 2020, 221). He refers to Roberts 2018.

A look at the new formation of China after the empire must take such scars into account, but the distance to the events in China alone does not seem to be enough, because there are also separate options in the eyes of the beholder, not least in Europe, where empire, state and nation building and associated secularisation processes of very different kinds have taken place, from Charlemagne, who is still revered today, to the nation building at the end of the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy. The view of these pasts is therefore very different in the individual parts of Europe, but also in different academic disciplines.¹¹

The European debates on Central Asia also shifted perspectives after the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, as can be seen from the fact that in the book published in 1956 by Baymirza Hayit, *Turkestan in the XXth Century*, the “General map of Turkestan before the Russian conquest” does not include the Tarim Basin in the east.¹² A few years later, after Baymirza Hayit had identified Russia as the political force that continued to dominate Xinjiang, he also included East Turkestan with the description:

*The country is nominally part of the Chinese Empire. In practice, however, the Soviet Russians rule here through their local confidants. [...] More communist functionaries for East Turkestan are trained in the Soviet Union and in Tashkent than in China.*¹³

And it ends with an appeal:

*As long as Russia and China remain the rulers of this country, the Orient can never live in safety and the Occident is also under threat.*¹⁴

This rhetoric has been echoed time and again by Foreign Minister Gerhard Schröder, who declared in the Bundestag on 16 June 1965 that the German government “demands and seeks to realise the right to freedom, self-determination and national independence not only for the

¹¹ Still worth reading: Albahari 2006.

¹² Hayit 1956.

¹³ Hayit 1962, 204.

¹⁴ Loc. cit., 206.

German people, but also for all peoples of the world”¹⁵, a maxim that some German politicians in those years also wanted to apply to South Tyrol – but which Gerhard Schröder probably did not refer to the Uyghur Autonomous Province of Xinjiang at the time.

The declaration by the German Federal Minister of Defence Peter Struck on the military mission in Afghanistan on 20 December 2002 heralded a new era. He said:

Our considerations are based on the assumption that the focus of the Bundeswehr’s tasks will be on multinational operations and beyond our borders for the foreseeable future. Fortunately, defence on our country’s borders has become an unlikely option.

Driven by the conviction that “the stabilisation of the country, the consolidation of a multi-ethnic government of national reconciliation and the creation of framework conditions for economic development and social democratisation (are) of central importance for success in the fight against international terrorism”, he explained:

*Our outstanding role in the future of Afghanistan is based on the trust of the Afghan people and the Afghan government. Anyone who visits Kabul to get an idea of the situation can feel this.*¹⁶

This is followed by the remark “that our security is defended in the Hindu Kush”. Modern defence includes “the prevention of conflicts and crises”, and, at the same time, “also post-crisis rehabilitation and participation in reconstruction and nation building. Modern security policy means multilateral security provision within the framework of the United Nations, NATO, the European Union and the OSCE”.¹⁷

It is quite obvious that “international terrorism” is a phenomenon that is occasionally relabelled as heroism in a chameleon-like manner. Scholars must take this into account. The heroes of some are regarded by others as terrorists or war criminals, while a scientific point of view keeps its distance due to its multi-perspectivity.

¹⁵ Cited in Hayit 1966, 38.

¹⁶ Struck 2002.

¹⁷ Ibid.

There is another aspect to this. Since the concept of asymmetric conflicts has become commonplace and since wars are no longer fought on the field but from a distance and from the air, new challenges of assessment have arisen. After all, the geopolitical system has shifted. On the part of the USA, the “pivot to Asia” has been added, and one almost seems to expect that the existence of an independent Turkestan will soon be declared the *raison d’être* of the German state again. Positioning in the past makes such changes seem possible, so it is helpful to look further back.

Russia’s expansion on China’s borders and the dream of a global unification of mankind

The Tarim Basin and its longer prehistory are covered elsewhere in this volume.¹⁸ Here we will only take a look at the more recent history, and the history of the endeavours to establish an autonomous state at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century will only be touched upon. The Manchu Empire had expanded in the 18th century.¹⁹ In the middle of the 19th century, it lost territories on its northern borders – as in other areas – partly due to the strong influence of the Russian Tsarist Empire. After the suppression of the Nian Rebellion (1851-1868), an uprising of predominantly impoverished peasants in the area north of the Huai River (part of Shandong, Henan, Jiangsu and Anhui), General Zuo Zongtang continued his campaigns to the northwest and reconquered Xinjiang. Already in the debate of 1872, when the question arose as to whether China should limit itself to its 18 provinces or also regard the peripheral zones, namely the Tarim Basin, as part of the empire, the majority took the view that these peripheral zones should be part of China in order to preserve China proper, i.e. the “18 provinces”.

¹⁸ See the contribution by Hans van Ess in this volume.

¹⁹ Perdue 2005.

After the settlement of the so-called Ili crisis in 1881²⁰, in which German diplomacy also played a role, the Tarim Basin nevertheless remained a contested zone in the geopolitical power game, even though it had had the status of a province since 1884 and was therefore part of China's statehood. This idea of a China with a peaceful environment also corresponded to the ideas of the reformers of 1898, who dreamed of a global unification of mankind, as could be found in many places at that time and also in revolutionary movements under the influence of Marxism-Leninism.

In the 17th century, China finally put a stop to Russia's expansionist drive towards Central and East Asia and regained the Amur region in the Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689) and incorporated large parts of Inner Asia into the Manchu Empire in the 18th century, including the Tarim Basin in 1759. However, in the 19th century, Russia, together with the European powers, was able to exploit China's weakness and, in the Treaty of Aigun (1858) and the Peace of Peking (1860), force the cession of not only the territories north of the Amur, but also those south of it, as well as a coastal strip up to the border with Korea. Russia's eastward expansion was only halted by the rising new Asian superpower, Japan. The latter had challenged Tsarist Russia by attacking its Pacific fleet off Port Arthur, a conflict that was ended in 1905 after Japan's victory over Russia with the Peace of Portsmouth. This was the first time in modern times that a European empire had been put in its place by an Asian power. Despite some settlements of border issues, such as

²⁰ On the prehistory of the Ili crisis, see Chu 1966, among others. Still fundamental: Hsü 1965. On the prehistory of China's expansion under the Manchu dynasty, see the important contribution by Mittag (2005). He emphasises that "in the Qianlong era, i.e. in the second half of the 18th century, China's expansion took on a completely new dimension with the conquest of the vast Central Asian territories" (Mittag 2005, 94). He quotes the poet Ji Yun's preface to his poems from Ürümqi, stating that the poems were intended to help show "that the majestic virtue of the Holy Emperor was so overflowing that Longsha [i.e. the northwestern border areas] and Congxue [i.e. Pamir and Tianshan Mountains] were opened up on the outermost border." Mittag quotes Ebner von Eschenbach 1992, 367. On the concept of expansion and the controversial concept of "Sinicisation" as well as Laura Hostetler's thesis of the Qing as a colonial late-comer, see Hostetler 2001, 73ff.

the Treaty of St Petersburg in 1881, which slightly revised the Treaty of Livadia of 1879 and through which China regained the aforementioned Ili territory occupied by Russia in 1871, China increasingly found itself on the defensive against the external powers. The “Open Door Policy” propagated by the USA finally ensured that every power in every part of China had a free hand to seek its own advantage on an equal footing with other powers. In China itself, the young intellectuals, reformers and innovators cultivated progressive ideas centred around a universalist concept of humanity. The young Mao Zedong was still formulating it:

*Our feelings should be universal; we can't just love this place and not love others. That is one level. At the same time, our efforts should not be limited to China. Of course, some must also work in China, but it is more important to work in the whole world. So we should help Russia complete its social revolution, help Korea gain independence, help countries in South-east Asia gain independence, help Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet and Qinghai become autonomous and enjoy self-determination.*²¹

The European Tsarist Empire and later the Bolsheviks in Moscow, on the other hand, always pursued their own interests, especially with regard to the neighbouring areas of China. As early as the 1930s, Stalin made pacts with Sheng Shicai (1897-1970) in Xinjiang, but was dissatisfied because he was a “provocateur or hopeless ‘leftist’“, as he informed the Consul General Garegin Apresov (1890-1941) in Ürümqi on 27 July 1934.²² Stalin also negotiated directly with Sheng Shicai about his plans to introduce communism in Xinjiang, which Stalin vehemently rejected on the grounds of Xinjiang’s economic backwardness.²³ Sheng Shicai, who came from Manchuria, ruled Xinjiang from 1933 to 1944 with Soviet support. Moscow stationed a contingent of troops in Hami. Sheng Shicai became a member of the CPSU in 1938. In order to secure Xinjiang, the nationalist government under Chiang Kaishek appointed Sheng Shicai as governor of Xinjiang in 1941. In the meantime,

²¹ Schram 1992-2005, vol. I, 7.

²² Stalin 1934.

²³ WCA/121894.

however, he had signed a contract with the Soviet Union to exploit the tin deposits, dated 24 Nov. 1940. A few years later, in 1943, he joined the Guomindang and took part in the hunt for communists. It was he who ordered the execution of Mao's brother Mao Zemin on 27 Sep. 1943. He left Xinjiang on 11 Sep. 1944 and lived in Moscow from then on.

When the communist movement, which was unsuccessful in the heartland at the time, retreated to the northern border regions with its legendary Long March, Mao even considered going to Xinjiang in order to obtain Russian support there more easily. On the Long March, however, Zhang Guotao was given supreme command of the Red Army because Zhou En-lai had fallen seriously ill. The initial intention was to reach the border area between Sichuan, Gansu and Shaanxi, where a Soviet territory was to be established, with the aim of including Xinjiang after conquering the three provinces.²⁴ However, this turn to the west was not realised, perhaps also because of Sheng Shicai's position, which meant that this area was not a safe haven, but above all because Mao wanted to move north against the Japanese invasion in the summer of 1935, thus expressly setting himself apart from his rival Zhang Guotao, who had moved to Sichuan. However, the Tarim Basin remained in his sights. Last but not least, the Republic of China and, after 1949, the People's Republic was a key partner for the neighbouring countries, as can be seen from the efforts of England and subsequently Pakistan to establish a road link between Pakistan and the Tarim Basin. England's goal was still in 1943,

*that Sinkiang remains in name and as far as possible in substance a part of China, in order thus to prevent or at least to delay the establishment of complete Russian control over it.*²⁵

²⁴ Schram 1992-2005, vol. V, 16f.

²⁵ Cited in Kreutzmann 2022, 13.

Accordingly, the Beijing government continues to treat this region sensitively to this day, as a study on the official *Xinjiang White Paper* from the period between 2003 and 2020 shows, which concludes with the sentence:

*The frequency of ‘Xinjiang white papers’ further illuminates the region’s importance for the Chinese government under Xi Jinping. Moreover, their usage as a response to international criticisms tells us that Beijing remains sensitive regarding ‘losing its face’ and does not simply ignore them – at least not yet.*²⁶

The minority issue

While respect for the minorities had been propagated during the Long March and extensive freedoms had been granted to them, the Soviet chief negotiator Mikoyan explained Moscow’s position in one of the almost daily Sino-Russian talks at the end of January and beginning of February 1949 on 4 February that it was not necessary to grant the minorities independence and thus give up territorial claims. At best, the status of autonomy was justifiable. Mikoyan was unwilling to accept Mao’s proposal to unite Inner and Outer Mongolia and make them part of the new China.²⁷ Two days later, on 6 Feb. 1949, this point was once again put on the agenda in connection with the question of nationalities. There was, of course, a slight threat in Mikoyan’s words, who pointed out that the leadership of Outer Mongolia was striving for the unification of all Mongolian territories with Outer Mongolia – and that the Soviet Union was not in favour of this, although it would not suffer any disadvantages of its own in such a solution.²⁸ In the minority issue, Moscow once again had the upper hand. To this day, Russia plays a key role in the security of China’s long border to the northwest and north.

²⁶ Lavička 2022, 307.

²⁷ WCA/113318.

²⁸ WCA/113352.

Against the backdrop of Moscow's announcement that "at best, the status of autonomy" was justifiable, Russia and China's representatives were surprisingly quick to agree on the issue of the Tarim Basin that it was an integral part of China, even if they recognised that even an autonomous status would not silence voices calling for independence. Moscow was aware of the potential for unrest among the Uyghur population and knew how to use this as leverage against Beijing a few years later. Mao seemed to be primarily interested in whether oil deposits were suspected there. And indeed, on 18 June 1949, Stalin drew his attention to the fact that Xinjiang had to be occupied quickly in order to initiate the production of oil there: "Without your own oil, you will get into trouble".²⁹ There was also a danger, Stalin explained to a delegation led by Liu Shaoqi, that England would activate Muslim resistance forces in the region.³⁰

On 15 Nov. 1949, according to a report by the Russian ambassador, which he passed on to Stalin on 1 Dec. 1949 under the highest level of secrecy, it was said that after the liberation of Sichuan Province and Xinjiang, China would attack Tibet. In March of the following year, an invasion of Hainan Island was planned, the island that Sun Yatsen had been prepared to sell, but which in the meantime had become strategically important. In the spring of 1950, a landing on Formosa was being prepared for the summer of 1950. However, they were well aware of the sacrifices that such operations could entail and would take this into account.³¹

The question of Taiwan's affiliation to the People's Republic of China, long undisputed, as well as the thematisation of the cultural autonomy of minorities in the territory of the People's Republic of China, has recently received increased media attention.³² The fact that, in the course of the modernisation process, questions of cultural identity in

²⁹ WCA/113379.

³⁰ WCA/113380.

³¹ WCA/117887.

³² For media attention in general, see Alpermann 2023. On the Chinese side, a peaceful picture is painted, which some foreign visitors confirm,: see Flounders 2023.

various regions, and not only in the Tarim Basin, are being raised anew and addressed from different perspectives has played a significant role in this. The tensions and difficulties of integrating this region into China’s general modernisation process, in particular logistical development³³, have been described in many ways. In particular, the settlement of Han Chinese and their role in the development process has led some to speak of “Han economic imperialism in Xinjiang”, which, however, must also be understood as an expression of security interests, especially as Xinjiang has now become so central to China that it must do everything in its power to secure unrestricted control over this region.³⁴ In the 1950s, the Soviet Union – always a European empire in China’s eyes – still had special rights in Xinjiang that were guaranteed by treaty and restricted China’s sovereignty. The European powers’ claims to influence and co-determination in China thus extend to the present day.

On the other hand, the Tarim Basin, like other marginalised areas of China, must of course be seen as part of the PRC’s minority policy, with its successes and failures.³⁵ This policy, like the treatment of the marginalised areas, is the subject of much debate in China and has also attracted attention in international research. The Chinese state-building and modernisation process in these regions is under particular scrutiny, with general human rights discourses and different views of cultural human rights being intertwined and legal positions and geopolitical interests often being difficult to distinguish from one another.³⁶

Even though Xinjiang is indisputably an integral part of the People’s Republic of China, active and internationally networked Islamist and

³³ See e.g. Joniak-Lüthi 2016.

³⁴ Bachmann 2004, 156f. There it says: “The PRC has invested so much in, and so much depends on, Xinjiang that the regime will do what it must to retain undisputed control over this vast region”; see also Bovingdon 2004.

³⁵ The history of minority politics, which is also addressed in other contributions to this volume, can only be mentioned here, but not developed. See in particular the contribution by Thomas Heberer in this volume.

³⁶ Assessment criteria in questions of autonomy and cultural self-determination are unclear worldwide. Different standards are argued internationally. – The debate has only just begun; see Mende 2015.

Pan-Turkic movements in the surrounding area pose a constant challenge, if only because of its peripheral location. For a long time, the attention of internationally organised interested groups was mainly focused on Tibet, but with the rapid economic rise and growing international influence of the People's Republic of China, attention has now turned to other border regions of China, including Taiwan, Hong Kong and now, in particular, Xinjiang, combined with the desire to question the legitimacy of the PRC's policies as a whole.³⁷ Just how effective such discourses are is shown by the fact that in the case of Taiwan the long-undisputed one-China principle is being called into question. Xinjiang has thus become the PRC's new Achilles heel in a special way.

A New Great Game: New Concepts of Order and China's Interests

The chequered history of this important contact zone for China and Central Asia, but also for East and South Asia, has become the object of the West in recent centuries as a result of European intentions to dominate the world and the resulting greed to subjugate the world and its parts. This greed and quest for control, which emanated from Tsarist and then Bolshevik Russia as well as from England, and in which Japan and others such as Germany soon also sought their share, extends to the present day. Knowing the role of the Tarim Basin region since the late 19th and 20th centuries in the rival power struggle between England, Russia, Japan and China – long represented by the Nanjing government under Chiang Kaishek – in which Turkey also played a role, makes it easier to understand China's current sensitivity on the Xinjiang issue. Such an understanding enables an enlightened attitude and allows us to think about peaceful modernisation without neglecting the distortions and traumatising of the past. Although this conflict seemed comparatively remote from a German perspective in the 20th century, for a long

³⁷ The beginnings of continuous monitoring of publications on Xinjiang date back some time; see Hoppe 1987.

time only the European perspective of Sven Hedin was known³⁸; at least Walther Heissig provided some analyses during the Second World War and suggested that the “Yellow Apron” should be taken into account in defence policy considerations.³⁹ In the meantime, such considerations have been taken up again and are combined with the “weaponisation of human rights” and sanction measures with recourse to laws demanding extraterritoriality.

Firstly, it should be noted that the Tarim Basin, which was also part of the historical conflict between Great Britain and Russia, the so-called “Great Game”, until the British withdrawal from India in 1947, is now once again being labelled by interested parties as an illegitimate territory of Chinese communist rule. Today’s geostrategic conflicts between Russia, the USA, China and India are therefore occasionally referred to as the “New Great Game”, in the context of which the struggle for China’s peripheral territories should be seen – a struggle in which China is now also actively involved in terms of propaganda.⁴⁰ Initially fuelled by Russia in the 1970s and then by exiled Uyghurs, who are still very successfully present in Western media today⁴¹, this propaganda war dominates reporting on China to a large extent.⁴² Claims to validity are derived from the diversity of cultural and settlement history, which have been increasingly articulated since the 19th century, most recently in the context of geostrategic tensions between the USA and China. In particular, the digital control and surveillance technologies that have developed particularly rapidly in China’s catch-up modernisation are

³⁸ Among the numerous travelogues, I will only mention the report from 1905 by Gustav John Ramstedt in 1978.

³⁹ On Walther Heissig and Central Asian studies in Germany, see also Walravens 2012 – Historical scholarship increasingly turned to this side in the 1970s. With regard to Xinjiang, the following contributions in the *Cambridge History of China* are relevant: Fletcher 1978 and Fletcher 1978a and Liu/ Smith 1980.

⁴⁰ Alpermann 2023.

⁴¹ Haiyuer Kuerban appeared at the Annual General Meeting of Volkswagen AG on 10 May 2023 as a representative of the World Uyghur Congress. See Kuerban 2023.

⁴² See the article by Hauke Neddermann in this volume.

interpreted as part of a repressive regime, while the Chinese side sees them as a reaction to the inter-ethnic conflicts that have broken out since July 2009.

This new positioning towards the PRC, which has been fuelled not least by the USA, can only be understood if longer-term political concepts and the pursuit of political interests are taken into account. In a departure from the political concepts of the 19th century, the USA has committed itself to a new understanding of America's role in the world since the end of the 1920,⁴³ in which a special role ("American Exceptionalism")⁴⁴ is attributed to the United States in connection with an "American Dream".⁴⁵ The recently intensifying geopolitical debate is increasingly determining the perception of individual areas of discourse. The EU's characterisation of China as a systemic rival reflects the increasing assertion of US claims to authority and the defence of Chinese claims to co-determination at the international level in the face of Europe's continuing helplessness⁴⁶ and is forcing a continuation of the "Great Game" in Central Asia, especially as the geopolitical framework has changed dramatically in the last three decades⁴⁷ and the disintegration of the empires of Russia and China, which are regarded as empires, is expected in the West. The industrialisation of the Tarim Basin as part of the modernisation strategy that has been pursued for several years and the integration into global value and supply chains that has been initiated in this way have recently been counteracted by the application of the *Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act*.⁴⁸ This means that any involvement of international companies in China can be

⁴³ A turning point was the article of 1 July 1928 by Franklin D. Roosevelt.

⁴⁴ See Depkat 2021.

⁴⁵ Hauhart/Sardoč 2022-2023 in this regard.

⁴⁶ Lohmann 2019; on extraterritoriality, see also Kurkin 2021.

⁴⁷ Therefore, even descriptions such as Schmidt-Glintzer 1997 are only historical today, even if reading analyses from that time provides a foil for understanding the present. Haghayeghi 1995 should be emphasised here. The history of dealing with diversity in China is still a topic of research in China itself, which also reflects the sensitivity to this topic; see e.g. Liu 2022.

⁴⁸ See the *Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act*, 117th Congress v. 22 Dec. 2022.

effectively sanctioned by the USA, as the examples of VW and BASF at the beginning of 2024 show. Depending on the opportunity, the claim of emerging countries, as in the case of China, can be perhorresised⁴⁹, and a world order under the continued leadership of the West can be promoted. The means are the focus on multi-ethnicity, as addressed by German Defence Minister Peter Struck, and the potential of new identity discourses for separation efforts.⁵⁰

The history of the phenomenon of multiethnicity is therefore of particular importance for current political processes in which identitarian positions are booming. In relation to China, knowledge of migration, multiculturalism and multiethnicity is therefore of central importance. This includes the fact that without Chinese reports and sources, we would know much less about the oasis areas on the edges of the Tarim Basin that are being discussed today and that without Chinese cultural tradition – for example in the case of the Tibetan Buddhist canon or the *Secret History of the Mongols* – we would no longer have any knowledge of many of the written traditions of individual peoples. It is therefore important to remember the different narratives about the history of this region and its interweaving with Chinese culture, as well as the humiliations that China has experienced since the 19th century at the hands of European powers, not least Russia, which had their own history in the Tarim Basin, where Russia and England fought for power and influence at China’s expense.⁵¹ At the same time, of course, China’s chequered history with its border countries should be remembered.⁵²

As the situation in the Tarim Basin continues to shift, new approaches can also be noted in the current debate, including a pragmatic course (“back to normal”) towards a promising development path declared when Ma Xingrui 馬興瑞 (born 1959) took office as the new Party Secretary for the Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang in December

⁴⁹ Other empires, however, such as India, which has been fragmented for a long time, remain exempt from this verdict for the time being as useful allies.

⁵⁰ Still worth considering: Rösen 2004.

⁵¹ Jackson 1962; cf. also Hsü 1965, 4ff.

⁵² See the references given in the previous notes.

2021. The aim is to replace past surveillance and repression measures, particularly in response to separatist and terrorist activities, with civilian development support. During discussions on the ground, which are conducted by academics as well as other interested actors, it is important to remain aware of the insight formulated by Peter Drucker almost fifty years ago, taking into account the personal interests of informants: “The most important thing in a conversation is to hear what has not been said!”⁵³ The group of academics I was a member of in May 2023 was guided by this principle. It is an attitude that Hannah Arendt formulated in her 1959 Hamburg Lessing speech and which in many ways recalls the ideals that revolutionaries such as Mao Zedong harboured in their youth, that the conversation

*applies to the common world, which remains inhuman in a very precise sense if it is not constantly discussed by people. For the world is not human simply because it is produced by people [...], but only when it has become the subject of conversation. [...] Only by talking about it do we humanise what is in the world [...] and in this talking we learn to be human.*⁵⁴

Of course, occasionally some things can be left unsaid, such as the comment by the Beijing German scholar Huang Liaoyu 黄燎宇, who wrote in the *Berlin Tagesspiegel* about the change of course in US-China policy just as our group of academics had arrived in Ürümqi from Kashgar for the first night:

Anyone who has heard or read what Barack Obama said about China in a speech in Australia in 2010 will realise that it was not differences in values that led to this change of course: ‘Our planet would not tolerate over a billion Chinese living like Australians and Americans.’⁵⁵

This was not discussed. And yet, in the background was the realisation that without the willingness to share this world with all people, perhaps even with all living beings, any talk of human rights and shared values would come to nothing.

⁵³ Peter F. Drucker 1975, *The Practice of Management*. Mumbai: Allied Publishers.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Stölzl 2018, 39ff.

⁵⁵ Huang 2023.

Concluding remarks

Anyone who gets involved with the Tarim Basin today – and thus the area of present-day Xinjiang in north-west China – will quickly realise that this part of the world has a long and diverse history of relationships and can only be understood from this perspective. Even though Xinjiang is part of China, the Tarim Basin remains a corridor to Central Asia, especially to the neighbouring countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan, due to its location between Dunhuang (Latitude: N 40/ Longitude: E 94), which is already far to the west in Chinese eyes, and Kashgar 喀什 (Latitude: N 40/ Longitude: E 76), which lies in the “Far West”. It is therefore considered the centrepiece of the Silk Roads⁵⁶ of the past and forms an important part of the “Belt & Road” initiative propagated by Xi Jinping in 2013. All the oases along the Southern and Northern Silk Roads, including Aksu, Kucha, Turfan and Hami, form a network that has been an important corridor of trade and change in human history. These settlement areas, located between the Kunlun Mountains and the Tibetan highlands in the south and the Tianshan, which rises up to almost 8000 metres north of the Tarim Basin, and further to the northeast the Altai Mountains, where the Scythians once made their mark and where today, as in earlier millennia, every climate change has formative consequences⁵⁷, was the focus of the exploratory journey from which this and the other contributions in this volume take their starting point. This is where Europe and Asia have joined hands for thousands of years. It was through this corridor that Buddhism found its way into the world via Gandhara.⁵⁸ It was here that the first Chinese pilgrims, interested in the teachings and wisdom from the West, made their way – around the year 400 AD. The monk Faxian travelled the 260 km to Taxkorgan via Kashgar and then, entering what is now Pakistani territory, a further 390 km to Gilgit on the

⁵⁶ See the car map Silk Roads 2000.

⁵⁷ On climate change in the Altai, see Reckel/Schatz 2022, 63. The results of Johannes Reckel's field research could contribute to a little more respect and humility towards this region; see Reckel 2024.

⁵⁸ See Werning 2009.

upper reaches of the Indus, from where he travelled the 661 km to Peshawar and finally headed south-east again via Taxila near Rawalpindi and Islamabad to India and the Buddha's places of activity on the lower reaches of the Ganges.⁵⁹

In order to arrive at as undistorted an assessment as possible of the situation in this westernmost province of China, it is important to take all these historical facets into account, as well as the dynamics of modernisation in the present – also because in Europe, especially in the leading media, people are increasingly taking sides in this *New Great Game*. Despite Europe's audible commitment to getting rid of the colonial era, we are constantly seeing new attempts at domination. As Europeans, we feel vindicated when Sören Urbansky reports from Siberia in the Russian Federation that “integration of the North-East Asia region is a long way off”⁶⁰, also because there is no peace treaty between Russia and Japan. According to Urbansky, many of the people he met there felt like “Europeans in the middle of Asia” and regarded the term “Far East” as “a kind of orientalisation”.⁶¹ He goes on to write: “The people on both banks of the Amur and beyond did not choose their neighbours”.⁶² This actually trivial statement, because it applies to almost every place in the world, can be read as an impetus for very different options for action. And an understanding of this is essential.

However, especially against the backdrop of past experiences with unequal treaties and in view of global Islamist and other fundamentalist movements, there is a danger of new arbitrariness and the rejection of regulations and agreements that are considered valid. With such a new perspective, each of China's peripheral areas becomes a possible object

⁵⁹ See Falk 2021 – A northern route south of the Ysyk-kol via Bishkek and Samarkand and then via Kabul and Peshawar was taken by Xuanzang (600-664 CE), as documented by the Indologist and linguist Ji Xianlin (1911-2009), who had studied under Ernst Waldschmidt in Göttingen from 1935 to 1945 and received his doctorate there in 1941; see Ji 1985.

⁶⁰ See Urbansky 2021, 351.

⁶¹ Ibid. 350.

⁶² Ibid, 352.

of an attempt at cultural reclassification, which is why some in China reject the concept of “Greater China” as a term to relativise the question of what the real China is, for example, with the words “China is great but not greater”.⁶³ It is easy to overlook the fact that a lively debate on the question of China’s borders is underway in China itself.⁶⁴ Instead, an external and, in some cases, actively separatist movement has led to reactions in China itself, in Xinjiang, at least, since such reclassification efforts have gained considerable momentum, reinforced by the “World Uyghur Congress” (WUC), an exile organisation classified as separatist by both Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China, which has succeeded in attracting attention in the West. Some old European references are understandably used as arguments in favour of the uniqueness of Xinjiang’s cultures. The grave finds on the edge of the Tarim Basin with “European mummies”⁶⁵ have now become part of a new power struggle. Obviously, old dreams of reorganising western China, as formulated by Walther Heissig or Wolf Schenke in the 1940s, have not been forgotten or even revived by some. Regardless of this, it must be possible to talk about the Tarim Basin, which is a part of China and which contributes to China’s special character as a multi-ethnic state, as in principle about all parts of the world, if only because all parts of the world are part of a common history in the sense of Immanuel Kant⁶⁶ and because the future of humanity cannot be conceived independently of the development of individual areas of the earth. It is in this context that my observations and insights, gained from many years of study and now also from a trip to the Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, should be understood. Finally, it should be emphasised that there is also a long-running discussion about political options in China itself. It is a discourse in which any serious academic study of the modernisation processes in China must be interested in participating.

⁶³ Metzger/Myers 1996, 104.

⁶⁴ See Ge 2023, for example.

⁶⁵ See the Wikipedia entry “Tarim mummies”.

⁶⁶ Immanuel Kant, *On Perpetual Peace. A Philosophical Outline of 1795*, Second Section. Third definitive article.

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For several years now, Xinjiang has been the subject of a global debate focusing on ethnicity and human rights issues. Accusations of genocide have been made. This volume aims to broaden the view of Xinjiang from an academic perspective. It includes historical and geopolitical background information as well as recent findings. In doing so, the entire Xinjiang discourse in the Western media cannot be viewed in isolation from general China policy and the new 'system rivalry' between 'the West' and 'the autocracies'.

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