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The Belt and Road Initiative: A Driver for Securitization in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region?

Florian Frenzel

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In recent years, the province of Xinjiang in northwest China has increasingly developed into a 'security state' in which Muslim minorities, especially the Uyghurs, are objects of State arbitrariness, discrimination and violence. Simultaneously, the region is of crucial importance for China's Belt and Road Initiative, which raises the question whether there is a linkage between the securitization of Xinjiang and the mega-project. This paper provides an analysis of the current securitization in Xinjiang and explores the relationship of the process to the Belt and Road Initiative. The author draws on the concept of the Copenhagen school for analyzing securitization and conducts a rapid literature review to collect, analyze and compare information on Chinese policies in Xinjiang. In conclusion, Xinjiang's securitization is not due to the Belt and Road Initiative, but rather reflects the efforts of the People's Republic to construct a unified (Han-)Chinese State.

1. Introduction & Background

In recent years it has become increasingly known to the public that in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), China's most northwestern province, Muslim minorities of Turkic origin, such as Uyghurs, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, have been extensively oppressed by the state. The People's Republic of China (PRC) describes the measures against Uyghurs and other minorities as part of its effort to combat terrorism and religious extremism (Wen & Auyezov 2018). Xinjiang is seen as

“[...] a key battlefield in the fight against terrorism and extremism in China. For some time Xinjiang has been plagued by terrorism and religious extremism, which pose a serious threat to the lives of the people in the region“ (PRC 2019a).

In fact, Xinjiang has seen extensive social unrest, demonstrations, riots and bombings in recent decades: between 1990 and 2000 alone, Uyghur separatists were responsible for some 200 terrorist attacks (Chung 2002: 8). In addition, there have been terrorist attacks by radical Uyghurs outside Xinjiang in the last decade (Rongxing 2015: 43ff). Consequently, China launched its 'war on terror' (Chung 2002: 8). According to Xi Jinping, China's president and chairman of China's Communist Party (CCP), stability in Xinjiang is essential for the development and stability of the whole PRC and for its unity, ethnic harmony, and national security (Clarke 2017b; Leibold 2019a). Thus, the security apparatus in the XUAR is, to some extent, a manifestation of the will to stabilize the region. Xinjiang has attracted the attention of the international public for another reason as well, namely the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

This Chinese project, which includes 65 states in Africa, Asia, Europe, Eurasia, one-third of the global GDP and two-thirds of the world population, aims for the construction and expansion of infrastructure, the conclusion of free trade agreements and the establishment of (regional) cooperation networks (Schmidt 2019: 4). As the name implies, the BRI can be split into two main segments: the belt, which is the continental link from China to Europe via Central Asia and Russia, and the road, the maritime connection between the PRC and African, South Asian and European countries (Alon et al. 2018: 2). In total, the BRI consists of six corridors, as figure 1 illustrates, connecting areas rich in resources and energy with the PRC (OECD 2018: 10). The BRI opens a different perspective on Xinjiang. With its external borders with India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Mongolia, the province has a strategically valuable position. Three of the planned corridors, the New Eurasia Land Bridge, the China-Central Asia-West Asia Corridor, and the China-Pakistan Corridor pass through Xinjiang, making the region 'an unavoidable part' of the BRI's continental section (PRC 2019b). Generally, the scope of the BRI and its importance for the PRC are immense which is emphasized by Xi's comments regarding the role of stability in Xinjiang. Social unrest, terrorist attacks and separatist aspirations are potential obstacles to the link between China and Central Asia, South Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Accordingly, "[...] stability maintenance [...] has become an even greater priority [since 2013]" (Zenz 2019a: 103).

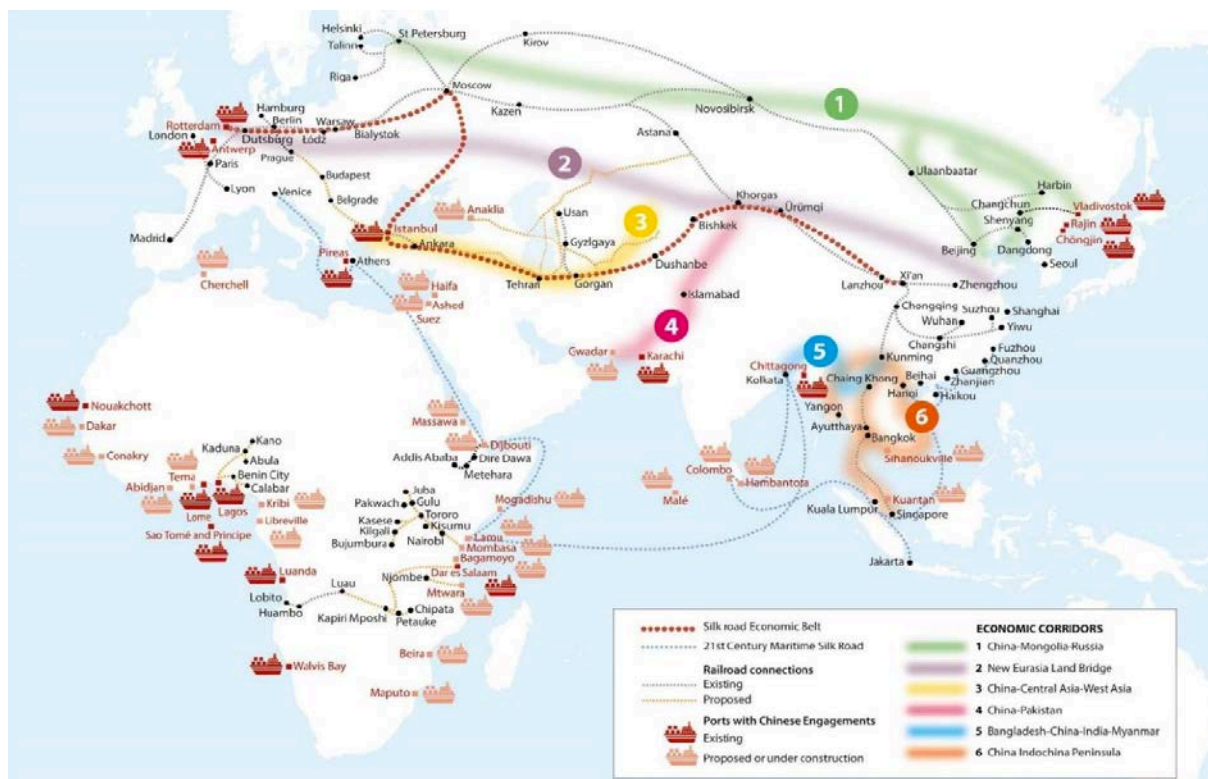


Figure 1: One (Continental) Belt One (Maritime) Road (OECD 2018: 11)

The advancing securitization of Xinjiang – the process of converting an issue into a security concern that is believed to be unsolvable in a normal political way (Buzan et al. 1998: 23ff) – and the expansion of the BRI proceed simultaneously in the XUAR and are pushed by the same political entity. This raises the question whether the BRI influences the securitization in Xinjiang? If so, in what manner? This article provides an analysis of the current securitization in Xinjiang and explores the relationship of the process to the BRI. In this regard it is important to keep in mind that the focus of this paper lies neither on the question of the oppression of the Uyghurs nor on the BRI as a project, but on the connection between the construction of the security state and the BRI. It is also noteworthy that the PRC regards Xinjiang as an area defined by state borders and thus neglects the fact that the region is also a product of relations and therefore a social construct (cf. Massey 2003). The Chinese elite's understanding of space as an 'independent entity' is clearly reflected in the Chinese policies, which disregards the cultural and social diversity of the region (cf. Belina 2003; cf. Massey 2003).

In order to address the research aim this article is structured as follows: At first, I present the theoretical concept – the securitization framework by the Copenhagen School – and the methodology – a rapid literature review – used for this project. Subsequently, the results are presented, discussed and compared. Finally, the limitations of this discussion are addressed and a conclusion is drawn. This paper is based on the assumption that the PRC is not a democracy, as it neither allows free elections nor guarantees fundamental rights or the rule of law (Lauth 2001; Yuezhi 2011: 85; Hu 2018; Zhai 2019: 251). Since the Uyghurs are by far the largest group in Xinjiang and also the most affected by governmental measures (UN 2018: 7f), the term Uyghurs is used in the remainder of this paper, meaning also the above-mentioned other minorities. Additionally, the terms PRC, the Chinese State, Beijing, CCP, etc. are used to refer to the governing Chinese elite, as there is effectively no distinction between the PRC's government and the Chinese Communist Party (Davis 2019: 99; Dooley 2019: 242).

2. Security & Securitization

Identifying a link between BRI and the situation in Xinjiang requires an understanding of the term security and a concept for studying the securitization process in the province. Generally, there are two perspectives on the subject of security: one is rather narrow, arguing that security is always related to war and military, and focused on the state, whereas the other has a wider understanding of the meaning of 'security' as a concept, shifting the focus from the military and the state to other fields (Nye & Lynn-Jones 1988: 6f; Walt 1991: 212; Buzan et al. 1998: 1f; Theiler 2003: 250; Buzan & Hansen 2009: 187ff). However, the situation in the XUAR is

not a 'classic' conflict between states, but activities of the state against parts of its own population. A comprehensive understanding of the securitization in the province requires consideration of various aspects. As the situation in Xinjiang is neither a military one nor focused on the state per se, concepts with a narrow view on security, always in conjunction with armed forces, are not adequate in this context. Such a perspective does not allow the analysis of societal, political, or economic factors in a manner necessary for this research. Rather, a broader, multidimensional approach is needed so that non-military aspects can also be included in the analysis. For this reason, I choose the concept of 'securitization' by the Copenhagen School (CS), namely Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde. Their framework does not only concentrate on military aspects but on various sectors, enabling the analyst to take a perspective from which "[...] one particular aspect of the relationship and interaction among [entities]" (Buzan et al. 1993: 31) can be examined. The sectors are understood as 'distinctive arenas of discourse' in which the emphasis is placed on different values (Buzan et al. 1998: 196). According to the CS, security is a constructivist concept and can be defined as the speech act in which a subject tries to convince others of the necessity to take extraordinary measures, in order to safeguard an object that is perceived to be existentially threatened (Wæver 1995: 55f; Wæver 2000: 251; Kilroy Jr. 2019: 2). Yet, there is no universal definition of what constitutes such a threat, instead it always depends on the specific case. Buzan et al. (1998: 30) argue that the perception of threats is subjective and, consequently, the threshold of when something is seen as threatening – thus an objective determination of what constitutes a threat is hardly possible, as there is no objective measure of security. Security has to be understood as a self-referential practice, because a topic only becomes a security issue once it is made into one. Also, it is a 'relational phenomenon' that has to be put into context in order to analyze it. Moreover, security can be interpreted as the inability to deal with potential threats through regular political channels (Buzan 1991: 187; Buzan et al. 1998: 21ff, 29; Theiler 2003: 251). Securitization is a more extreme version of politicization taking politics beyond the established procedural rules. It describes the process of converting an issue into a security concern that is believed to be unsolvable in a normal political way. The basis for securitization can be defined as an issue recognized so threatening that everything else will be irrelevant if that particular threat cannot be averted. Consequently, an issue that is fully securitized has pushed almost all other issues aside (Buzan et al. 1998: 21ff, 29, 176).

Securitization studies, in a widened sense, aim to gain an understanding of who securitizes what issue, for whom, why, with what result, under what conditions. (Buzan et al. 1998; Balzacq 2005; McDonald 2008; Ciuta 2009; Emerson 2019;). The securitizing actor defines which

object is to be securitized, hence the concept of Buzan et al. is based on the so-called security speech act (Buzan et al. 1998: 32f). This term refers to the process in the securitizing actor strives for the securitization of something. The referent object is the one under threat but which is presumed to have a legitimate claim to survival. A wider understanding of security allows almost anything to become a referent object. Securitization can be studied directly by scrutinizing political constellations and discourse. The securitization process is initiated the moment the securitizing actor is able to “[...] break free of procedures or rules he or she would otherwise be bound by [...]“ (ibidem: 25). If the audience is convinced and engages in the discourse on existential threats and the necessity to react accordingly, a matter becomes securitized.

Many scholars believe that the securitization-concept is limited to democratic systems only, assuming that other political systems do neither require a shift from regular (democratic) processes to security politics as there are no ‘normal processes’ in the first place, nor do undemocratic leaders have to justify the use of force in order to keep their legitimacy (Vuori 2008: 68). A securitization in a totalitarian regime would therefore fall into the realm of ‘normal politics’ in the according system (ibidem: 69f). Nonetheless, Vuori (ibidem: 68) argues that all governments depend on legitimacy for their survival and must therefore justify their actions.¹ Identifying the real securitizing agent and its motivations is an especially difficult task in non-democratic systems and not always possible. Nevertheless, the securitization process can be analyzed by looking at official programs, regulations, or statements (Holm 2004: 219f; Vuori 2008: 71). Consequently, the framework by Buzan et al. can also be applied for the analysis of securitization in non-democratic societies (Vuori 2008: 93).

3. Methodology

The securitization in Xinjiang will be analyzed by applying the concept of the Copenhagen School with the aim of identifying the referent object(s). In this process, the context in which the securitization is carried out needs to be carefully examined so that one can capture the motivations of the actor(s). Buzan et al. (1998: 177) suggest discourse analysis as a method to analyze how, when, and by whom a speech act is carried out at a specific point in time. As obvious as it might be, the indispensable prerequisite for a discourse analysis is the discourse. In the PRC, the decision-making process in the security policy context involves a comprehensive discourse to maximize input and distribute responsibility (Sun 2013: 6).

¹ For a Marxist perspective on legitimacy and hegemony see Gramsci (1931-32)

However, this process is not codified, highly complex, and much information remains inaccessible to the public (Florini 2004: 21; Sun 2013: 26f; Lampton 2015: 774f; Ji 2016: 195; Wuthnow 2017: 887; Aldrich & Moran 2019: 5). Consequently, conducting a discourse analysis of the speech act is hardly possible, as it is not public and therefore not comprehensible. It is therefore necessary to deviate from the recommendation of the CS and its point-in-time approach. Instead, drawing on Vuori (2008: 71) and Holm (2004: 219f), the focus should be on official programs, regulations or statements, shifting the analysis away from looking at a particular moment to an examination of a period of time. Thereby, one has to consider that Xinjiang has been an area that is under a state of emergency and thus the normal legal order has been suspended (Agamben 2005; Minca 2017). The establishment of the security apparatus in the XUAR had started more than a decade before the BRI was announced (cf. Castets 2003: 10; cf. Millward 2007: 339f), hence the BRI cannot be the original cause for securitization in Xinjiang. Nevertheless, given the importance of the region for the success of the project, efforts to increase stability and security in the XUAR may have been intensified to minimize the potential risk to the BRI. Therefore, the hypothesis tested in this paper is that the BRI has caused an intensification of the securitization in Xinjiang. This hypothesis will be tested in a two-step analysis. First, around Xi's announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013 (cf. PRC 2013), a change in the security measures in Xinjiang must have occurred and should be identified during this step. It must then be determined whether this change can be explained as a consequence of the 'new Silk Road'. As the accessible literature that could potentially be used for this research is far too extensive to review all of it, the necessity arises to narrow the available literature. In order to do this in a systematic, transparent, and reproducible way, the author chooses a rapid literature review for the research and analysis of the literature. Throughout the process, it has to be considered that the majority of sources used for this research comes from Australia, the USA and Europe (75 %) while most other sources were published in South East Asia (22 %)². Only one source published in the PRC was included in the review.³

² Including Hong Kong

³ The distribution regarding the place where a source was published was comparable

4. Securitization in Xinjiang until 2013

For the first of the two rapid literature reviews, a number of 45 authors remain whose works were analyzed in order to identify the referent objects for the securitization in Xinjiang and the according measures taken to safeguard those objects.

4.1. Referent Objects

Generally, the objects identified by the scholars, in terms of the securitization theory, can be divided into five categories. These categories are highly interdependent and can hardly be treated individually without considering the other groups. Yet, the number of times the respective motives were mentioned throughout the different sources allows conclusions to be drawn as to what the scholars view as the main reasons for the securitization in the XUAR. Figure 2 shows the percentage of scholars that believe the according reason is the referent object for the Chinese State thus a driver for securitization.

In terms of the securitization framework, the *Han*, in particular their *identity* based on culture, language, etc., are one referent object for the Chinese State (Clarke 2007: 326). The state idea of China which is built around the dominant Han nation⁴ has often been contested by minorities like the Uyghurs or the Tibetans (ibidem: 328). Historically, in Confucianism, non-Sinicized people were viewed as less civilized and those living outside China's Great Wall were considered to be 'barbarian nomads' threatening both the Chinese identity and the legitimacy of the Chinese emperor due to the fact that they would not acknowledge and accept Chinese rule (Rahman 2005: 27). Consequently, Chinese measures against non-Sinicized nations were regarded as justified in the past. The Uyghur identity is based on culture, language, history and religion, all of which are defining characteristics of a nation (Bhattacharya 2003: 134). Uyghurs have a particularly strong attachment for their Turk language which can be considered a major component of their identity (Clarke 2007: 333; Mackerras 2003: 131f). The predominant religion among the Uyghurs is the Islam (Clarke 2007: 325) and the Uyghur identity has been strengthened by a "[...] certain kind of international Islam [...]" at the end of the twentieth century (Mackerras 2003: 119). The Chinese State system is both communist and atheist, and any manifestation of Islam calls this system into question, as religion and communism compete

⁴ Generally, one has to differentiate between *states* and *nations* – terms often used synonymic. While a *state* is a sovereign political entity that has a specific territory, a population, and is controlled by a government a *nation* is a group of individuals who share certain characteristics and therefore believe that they are 'one people' with one identity

for influence in different areas (e. g., social, legal, ideological, political) (Millward 2007: 246; Clarke 2008: 279; Hess 2009: 78f).

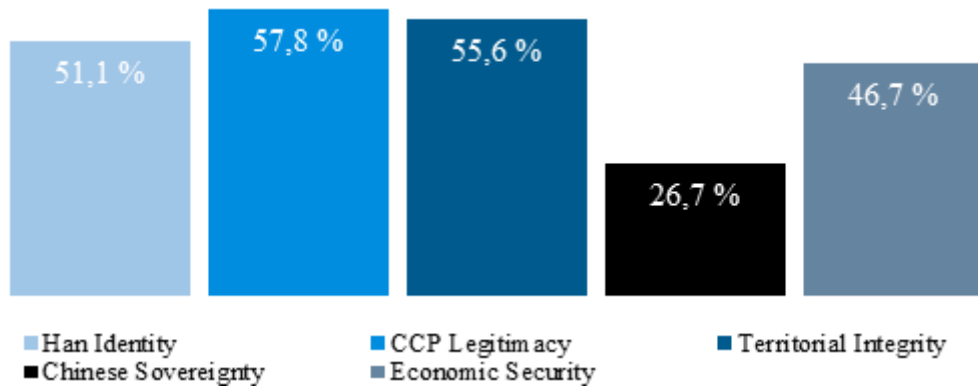


Figure 2: Referent Objects until 2013 (Own illustration based on first literature review)

Ultimately, the differences in the Han and the Uyghur culture result in a conflict between the nation-state based on the Han and the non-Sinicized Uyghur nation (Clarke 2007: 326). Such a conflict is typical for the vertical competition between nation-states and minority-nations (Buzan et al. 1998: 132) and not surprising given that the Uyghurs “[...] have never very willingly accepted the idea of sharing a common destiny with the Chinese people“ (Castets 2003: 1). Since Han ethnicity generally accounts for more than 90 % of the Chinese population, government policy is mainly made for and by Han Chinese (Mackerras 2001: 290; Mackerras 2003: 1; Clarke 2010a: 544). In Xinjiang, however, the Han share of the population is approximately 40 %, while the Uyghur proportion is about 45 % (Potter 2013: 72). This may create the impression that Han Chinese nation, a minority in the region, is particularly vulnerable and in need of protection.

Another referent object for the PRC is China's *territorial integrity*. The Chinese nation is not only based on (Han) identity but also on the concept of territorial integrity (Bhattacharya 2003: 47ff, 120). During the ‘century of humiliation’ (1839-1949), China's effective control of territory was reduced by a third due to the opium wars, foreign invasions, domestic unrest, and even civil war (Kaufman 2010: 2). This era remains one of a trauma for China and still influences the Chinese outlook on its territory today (Bhattacharya 2003: 222; Kaufman 2010). Consequently, China's aforementioned plan of building a modern nation-state also involves the retention of territories that belonged to the Qing empire (He 2012: 173). Beijing regards all territories within the Chinese borders as integral parts of the People's Republic and consequently perceives any form of separatism as a fundamental threat to the PRC (Mackerras 2001: 289; Bhattacharya 2003: 222; Dillon 2004: 166). In this respect, the XUAR is quite

outstanding, if not problematic: the region has a relatively recent history of separatism and, in the early 2000s, separatist aspirations were considered the greatest danger for Xinjiang and the most serious threat to stability and territorial integrity of the PRC (Bovingdon 2002: 42; Choudhary 2002: 70; Dillon 2004: 156; Millward 2007: 201ff).

A third motivation for the securitization of the XUAR is the *PRC's economic security*. In the Chinese context, economic security can be understood as “[...] sustaining its [the Chinese] growth rate, welfare, and economic power“ (Atli 2011: 115). China’s immense economic growth leads to an increase in welfare but is highly dependent on resources that literally fuel the economy. Accordingly, the question of supply becomes increasingly important as it is fundamental for maintaining economic growth. In order to reduce dependency from the world market and its volatile prices, the PRC needs to ensure steady supply, especially of energy in the form of oil and gas (Bovingdon 2004: 2). This makes Xinjiang particularly interesting for two reasons: on the one hand, the province is a transit region through which resources from Central Asia can be imported into the People’s Republic, and on the other, the XUAR itself is rich in resources – in 2012, Xinjiang was China’s third largest oil and largest gas producing province (Mackerras 2001: 177; Swanström 2002: 15; Bovingdon 2004: 2; Atli 2011; Cunningham 2012: 16). As a result, the XUAR has been attributed a “[...] crucial importance [...] as a major supplier for China’s ever-growing energy needs“ (Becquelin 2000: 65). This is of particular interest given that China has been a net importer of oil since 1993 and is dependent on the imports from Central Asia (Bovingdon 2010: 11). Besides oil, Xinjiang is a valuable supplier of agricultural goods for the entire Chinese State (Castets 2003: 2; Chaudhuri 2010: 13; Mukherjee 2010: 432). Consequently, a securitization is justified as control over the XUAR is of vital importance to the PRC’s economic security (Dillon 2004: 166; Bovingdon 2010: 11).

Another reason for the securitization of Xinjiang is the region’s strategic position which is of high importance for the PRC as a political entity, especially in terms of *Chinese sovereignty and foreign strategy*. The geographical location of Xinjiang can be considered ‘crucial’ in view of the number of neighboring countries and the associated opportunity to extend and increase Chinese influence abroad through the neighboring regions (Chung 2002: 10; Blank 2003: 132; Cunningham 2012: 15). Connecting the PRC to Central Asian countries in order to increase political presence and influence requires Xinjiang. Some scholars therefore understand the XUAR as an ‘unprecedented stepping stone’ (Millward 2009: 347) or a ‘useful springboard’ (Chung 2002: 10) for a projection of the Chinese influence on Central Asia. In short, the XUAR is important to maintain the PRC as a political entity and functions as a ‘buffer zone’ to shield it from threats emanating from other entities that challenge Chinese sovereignty (Blank 2003:

132; Millward 2009: 347). Consequently, a securitization of China's sovereignty and political influence justifies extraordinary measures in Xinjiang.

One fairly important motivation and referent object for China's political elite is the reputation and the *legitimacy of the Communist Party of China*. All regimes, democratic as well as dictatorial, depend on legitimacy for their survival (Vuori 2008: 68). The CCP's legitimacy and survival is based to a large extent on the party's ability to establish and maintain security and stability, in particular in terms of avoiding violence and maintaining social stability (Blank 2003: 130; Wayne 2009: 250ff; Gunaratna et al. 2010: 177). As long as the party preserves a situation in which the people's demand for stability is met, the people respect the party's rule (Wayne 2009: 253). Consequently, a failure to maintain stability would undermine the party's position and decrease its reputation. The Party would lose its legitimacy in case of instability in the XUAR or the separation of the region (Blank 2003: 130; Castets 2003: 9). Accordingly, securitization measures are seen as an instrument to avoid this.

4.2. Securitization Measures

Han Migration

One measure that safeguards all five of the identified referent objects is the settlement of Han Chinese to Xinjiang. It started in the 1950s and had initially two reasons: One was to decrease the non-Han portion of the population, thereby driving the 'Hanization' (Bovingdon 2010: 75) of Xinjiang, and the other was to increase the overall population of the province to make an annexation by other states, namely the Soviet-Union, more difficult (Seymour 2000: 172f; Millward 2007: 251ff, 306ff). The rationale behind raising the Han share of the XUAR's population is the assumption that socio-political stability correlates positively with the proportion of Han (Cliff 2012: 83). The government-sponsored immigration of people loyal to the CCP has been a 'central component' of Beijing's policy in Xinjiang and aims at achieving demographic balance between Uyghurs and Hans (Choudhary 2002: 83; Bovingdon 2010: 54). The settlement further fulfills the function of countering political pressure from minorities, in particular the Uyghurs, whose influence is weakened as their relative number shrinks (Bovingdon 2010: 54). The effect of the settlement policy is immense: the Han share in Xinjiang's population has increased from roughly seven per cent in 1949 to more than 40 % in 2013 while the Uyghur proportion decreased from approximately 75 % to 45 % (Kung 2006: 380; Clarke 2007: 334; Mackerras 2012: 497; Potter 2013: 72).

Economic Development

The strategy of the Chinese government is to use economic development as a means of assimilating Xinjiang and its people. This is based on the assumption that poverty leads to political unrest and instability, therefore the most effective remedy would be poverty reduction respectively an increase of living standard and material wealth (Gunaratna et al. 2010: 154; Cunningham 2012: 16f). This approach, as a logical extension, is intended to destroy favorable conditions for the emergence of separatism or terrorism (ibidem). Besides, material wealth is believed to reduce or even solve ethnic tensions (Gunaratna et al. 2010: 154). Furthermore, according to the belief of the CCP, a higher living standard would demonstrate the advantages of the Chinese socialism and support the Party's legitimacy and national unity (Millward 2007: 295f).

The growth rates of Xinjiang's GDP demonstrate that the measures have been quite effective: the GDP in 2008 was 19.6 times higher compared to 1978, averaging an annual growth rate of 10,4 % (PRC 2009). Household income increased by roughly 30 times and officials claim that poverty and basic subsistence problems of all ethnic groups have been eliminated (ibidem). However, many scholars note that the beneficiaries from the economic development are mostly Han Chinese, whereas the Uyghurs face economic discrimination and barely participate from economic growth (Concepcion 2000: 20; Bovington 2004: 39; Kerr & Swinton 2008: 123; Hastings 2011: 895; Mackerras 2012: 500).

Campaigns against Terrorism, Extremism and Separatism

The probably most serious threat to the five identified referent objects would be a separation of Xinjiang from the PRC. From Beijing's perspective, separatist aspirations and all forms of extremism and terrorism directed against the Chinese State in order to achieve independence require action and need to be combated effectively. The Chinese government justifies its (repressive) policies in Xinjiang with its fight against the so called 'three evils' of separatism, extremism, and terrorism (Clarke 2013: 128). In this context, it makes sense to link the three together, because militant Muslims in Central Asia often display all three characteristics (Chung 2004: 990f). Gunaratna et al. (2010: 2) argue that attacks in the past have demonstrated "[...] that China faces a real threat of extremism and terrorism". They believe that the three evils have been threatening stability and security in China (ibidem: 137). The increasing future threat of terrorism to the People's Republic is also stressed (Potter 2013: 85). The PRC's terrorist problem is mostly isolated to Xinjiang where most terrorist attacks, bombings or demonstrations occur (Chung 2002: 8; Clarke 2010a: 543). Beijing blames 'East Turkestan terrorists' for these events (Gunaratna et al. 2010: 137). More precisely, Beijing claims the Uyghur separatist group called East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) to be the terrorist

group responsible for many attacks in the XUAR (Shahadah 2011: 153). According to the government, the ETIM had close ties to al-Qaeda, the Taliban and other Central Asian Islamist groups, aiming at the establishment of a theocratic Islam State in Xinjiang through launching a 'holy war' (Clarke 2007: 337; Clarke 2008: 292f). However, only few scholars believe that the terrorism in Xinjiang poses a serious challenge to the PRC whereas most argue that it is not as problematic as presented by the state. While neither neglecting the terrorist attacks and violent incidents in Xinjiang, nor the Chinese authorities' and (Han) citizens' genuine fear of the (Uyghur) separatists' violence (Millward 2004: 2), they suggest that this violence does not pose an actual threat to the PRC. China's campaign against the Eastern Turkistan Independence Movement, which is presented as the main terrorist threat to China, seems somewhat arbitrary, as this movement was hardly known before, even among those campaigning for an independent Turkistan (Zambelis 2010: 17f; Cunningham 2012: 13; Pokalova 2011: 184; Shahadah 2011: 153). Yet, after the 9/11 attacks in 2001 in the USA the Chinese government seized the opportunity to join the USA in their war on terror and imposed domestic anti-terrorism measures that would otherwise have been massively criticized by the international community (Dillon 2004: 157; Clarke 2010a: 543; Kanat 2012: 510; Potter 2013: 72, 77). In this regard, linking Uyghur separatists to international terrorism was merely a logical step to justify actions against them (Shahadah 2011: 153). Nonetheless, the picture of an escalating terrorist threat since 1990 is exaggerated and (Uyghur) separatists lack the capabilities to actively pose a serious threat to the PRC (Chung 2002: 9; Gladney 2002: 269; Millward 2004: 2, 30; Vicziany 2003: 259; Clarke 2008: 295; Cunningham 2012: 38). It is further not taken into account that most of Xinjiang's Uyghurs are not attracted to the idea of a Muslim State (Kuo 2012: 334f).

The Public Portrayal of Uyghurs

Closely linked to the campaign against terrorism, separatism, and extremism is the manner in which the PRC displays Uyghurs in the public discourse, which has altered drastically: while the situation in Xinjiang had been presented as essentially positive in spite of various terrorist attacks before the 9/11 attacks in the USA, the perspective and rhetoric of the Chinese government regarding the Uyghurs shifted (Chung 2002: 8; Millward 2007: 339f; Smith Finley 2013: 12). In early September 2001, Xinjiang's party secretary Wang Lequan stated that "[...] the situation in Xinjiang was 'better than ever in history' [...]" emphasizing that "[...] society is stable and people are living and working in peace and contentment" (Millward 2007: 339). This picture of a harmonious cooperation between Hans and Uyghurs shifted completely immediately after the attacks (Clarke 2010b: 224f; Kuo 2012: 530). Chinese propaganda departments began producing reports, documentaries and movies that presented Uyghur groups as terrorist organizations (Kanat 2012: 510). Kanat (2012: 522) suggests that the Chinese State

is using the Uyghurs as a scapegoat which can be blamed for domestic problems (e. g., continuous dissent and protests in the XUAR that apparently cannot be solved by the state). This presentation of the minority as a terrorist threat, hence an enemy, potentially unifies the Han majority and mobilizes them against the ‘other’, the Uyghurs (Clarke 2007: 339; Kanat 2012: 510, 522).

Management and Control of Islam, Language and Culture

Every element of Uyghur identity has either been under surveillance, control, or manipulation to ensure the Sinicization of Xinjiang, thus subduing separatist aspirations (Smith 2008: 60). Given the role Beijing ascribed to Islam and the fear of a strong Islamic influence in Xinjiang, restrictions of religious practice are merely a logical consequence (Bosely 2006: 310). Through the *China Islamic Association*, the party gradually took control of religious institutions in Xinjiang, but also confiscated mosque land and replaced religious courts with regular, state-run courts (Shahadah 2011: 149). The state closed mosques, strictly regulated religious education, tested the Imams’ patriotism and loyalty to the PRC, and obliged religious leaders to patriotic re-education (Kurlantzick 2003: 432; Clarke 2007: 332; Bovingdon 2010: 66). People accused of illegally practicing Islam would even be arrested or detained (Clarke 2007: 332). Yet, it was not until after 9/11 that the control of religion escalated drastically (ibidem). In order to monitor and control the activities of the Muslim community, the Chinese government infiltrated mosques with spies, whilst keeping spiritual and knowledgeable people away from them to impede the religious leaders’ access to knowledge about their religion (Bosely 2006: 309). Apart from religion, other aspects of the Uyghur culture have been extensively monitored as well. Language, for example, is a fundamental aspect for the Uyghur’s identity (Hess 2009: 76f) and authorities have identified it “[...] as a key area of ‘struggle’ in the fight against ‘separatist’ tendencies“ (Clarke 2007: 333). Consequently, the use of Uyghur language in public media, cultural circles, or education is being limited and Uyghur literature, especially if dealing with political or cultural history, is censored increasingly while Uyghur intellectuals have been object to systemic punishments (Bosely 2006: 292; Clarke 2007: 333; Rogers 2011: 147). The censorship even included the public burning of ‘illegal’ books and writings (Kurlantzick 2004: 265; Shahadah 2011: 150f). In the educational system, the trend towards a monolingual education in Mandarin started in the 1980s and appeared at all levels of instruction (Dwyer 2005: 37; Hasmath 2011: 123; Imtiyaz 2012: 25) as schools are “[...] widely recognized as the greatest integrating force [...]“ (Dwyer 2005: 38). Generally, Uyghur publications have been under strict control and censorship since the early 1990s (Bovingdon 2004: 31f). This concerns not only literature, but also recorded poems and music which were labelled as having “[...] unhealthy social effects“ (ibidem: 31). Fearing the emergence of nationalist sentiment, the

Chinese government has systematically withheld information about Uyghur history and repressed information on their culture (Bhattacharya 2003: 151; Clarke 2010a: 220).

4.3. Problems with the Policies

The situation in Xinjiang is a dilemma for the Chinese State: the policies implemented with the intent to tie Xinjiang (and its population) closer to the PRC cause the Uyghur population to fear the loss of its identity and therefore oppose the measures. If a society, in this case the Uyghurs, feels threatened, it is likely to strengthen its cultural identity as a defense; defending culture with culture (Clarke 2007: 330). From the perspective of the Uyghurs, the PRC's policy of oppression and forced assimilation was at the very least harmful and ultimately provoked anti-Chinese sentiments and violent reactions in Xinjiang (Bosely 2006: 317; Gunaratna et al. 2010: 172; Pokalova 2013: 284). Those in turn have been perceived as a threat to the state's security which led to an intensification or an increase of measures (Clarke 2007: 324ff). It is therefore evident that the very policies and measures in place to safeguard stability in Xinjiang are one main factor contributing to instability and social unrest, possibly even facilitating the emergence of a secessionist movement (Bovingdon 2002: 3; 2004: 1; Chung 2002: 12; Kung 2006: 388). Assuming that Mackerras (2001: 301) is correct stating that an independent Uyghur State could only become reality either in case of a collapse of the PRC or if Xinjiang was to receive strong military support from other countries, the question remains why China has been repressing Uyghurs with such harsh measures. Most scholars agree that the majority of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang do not aspire to independence at all, but only want to express and live their culture (cf. Mackerras 2001, Choudary 2002; Bovingdon 2004; Clarke 2007, 2010). It appears that Beijing is unable to comprehend the Uyghur's attachment to their identity and thus their resistance to the Chinese policies caused by this attachment. Instead, it remains "[...] riddled with the threat of instability and secession" (Choudhary 2002: 86).

5. Securitization in Xinjiang from 2014

This section consolidates the results from the literature review of the 50 remaining sources that were published from 2014 onwards. As in previous chapter, the authors' statements regarding China's referent objects and securitization measures were extracted, collected, and classified. The motivations for the securitization were divided into the five categories that have already been established and the BRI was added as a sixth category, since a number of scholars explicitly suggested the BRI as one reason for the state policies in Xinjiang. Figure 2b displays

what the literature after 2013 proposes to be the motivation for the security measures in China's northwestern province. In the following, some of the categories already discussed above are briefly supplemented by some aspects. The territorial integrity of the PRC, its economic security and Chinese sovereignty are not discussed again, as not much has changed in these areas. Nevertheless, all five detected referent objects will be discussed in the section on the BRI

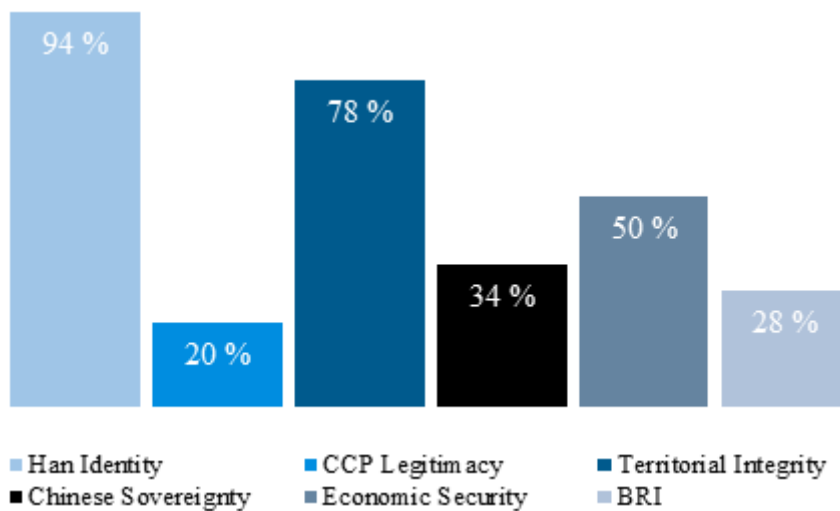


Figure 3: Referent Objects from 2014 (Own illustration based on first literature review)

5.1. Referent Objects

The most prominent referent object according to the second rapid review is the *Han identity*, which is closely linked to national unity and social stability. The establishment and maintenance of stability in Xinjiang as a means to protect Han identity and PRC unity has been given greater emphasis and prominence in the second set of literature. As before, Xinjiang is publicly displayed as a site of existential threat that is vulnerable to security challenges and potentially dangerous for the desired Chinese nation state and its stability (Clarke 2016b: 14; Clarke 2016c: 241; Anand 2019: 129f). Thereby Xinjiang as a heterotopia fulfills the function of the 'constitutive outside', from which one can distance oneself, which in turn leads to the construction of identity (Johnson 2006; Germes & Glasze 2010).

The intensity with which the CCP drives its agenda of national unification has increased in recent years and the CCP claims ethnic stability to be its 'primary objective' for Xinjiang which should be prioritized (Leibold 2019b: 49; Chestnut Greitens et al. 2020: 16). The unification of China has gained importance under the leadership of Xi Jinping who became general party secretary of the CCP in 2012 and president of the PRC in 2013 and has since been advertising the 'great national rejuvenation', also called the 'Chinese renaissance' or simply the 'Chinese Dream', which aims at 'finally' bringing China back on the world stage after the 'century of

humiliation' (Mackerras 2015: 27; Hayes 2016: 2). The 'rejuvenation of the nation' is to a large extent based on the (artificial) concept of Han identity, which is being utilized by the CCP in order to gain support for its political agenda of nation-building and unification through creating the feeling of pride among those who are said to share Han cultural values (Gladney 2018: 1015, 1022). Although this approach is not openly intended to discriminate, discrimination against ethnic groups other than the Han is an inherent consequence of Han centrism (Ang 2016: 403; Gladney 2018: 1015). As the Chinese Dream is reflecting Xi's vision of building a strong Chinese nation, the recent focus on the Han identity and its growing importance can be explained with the close connection to Xi Jinping himself (He 2019: 182; Leibold 2019c: 4). With regard to the *regime's legitimacy*, the statements made in the first rapid literature review remain valid. However, as indicated in the previous section, the appointment of Xi Jinping and the attachment of his person to the Chinese Dream has added another aspect that further increases the need to legitimize the regime. Part of this dream is Xi's "[...] grand strategy for achieving 'social stability and enduring peace' [...]" (Leibold 2019b: 46) in Xinjiang, thereby linking both aspects directly to Xi's legitimacy and reputation. Maintaining social stability is particularly important given that the party's reputation has suffered from growing social challenges (Li 2019: 365). Beside the Chinese Dream, the BRI is an opportunity for Xi to consolidate his power and can be considered a 'flagship project' on which both his, as well as the CCP's future legitimacy are resting (Klimeš 2018: 433; Harris 2019: 276; He 2019: 183; Smith Finley 2020). The 'great rejuvenation of the nation' and the BRI have "[...] attained the status of party and state dogma" (He 2019: 183) and are directly linked to Xi's legacy, making their success all the more important for the regime (Chung 2019: 120; Hayes 2019a: 44). A prerequisite for the success of the BRI and the Chinese Dream – and thereby for legitimacy of the Chinese regime – is stability in Xinjiang, making it an imperative for Chinese policies in the province (Arduino 2018: 14; Godbole 2019: 229; Leibold 2019b: 46ff).

The motivations for the BRI are multifold, combining economic, political, military, and social respectively cultural aspects, whereby the project has both domestic and geopolitical implications (García-Herrero & Xu 2016: 2f; Alon et al. 2018; Clarke 2018; OECD 2018; Schortgen 2018: 26f; Duarte 2019: 143). Smith (2018: 4) notes that "[...] it may be more prudent to ask which Chinese interests are *not* served by the BRI". Simultaneously, he points out that there is no clear definition of what the BRI is, making it difficult to determine precisely what the actual components of and reasons for the project are (Smith 2018: 3). The literature suggests that the BRI is a means for serving a variety of purposes, making the project "[...] the instrument par excellence [for] Beijing to achieve [its] goals [...]" (Duarte 2019: 143).

Although not directly, the BRI is intended to strengthen national unity and territorial integrity, especially in Xinjiang. The underlying rationale is that delivering economic development, modernization, and an increase of living standards will eventually gain the people's loyalty, especially of ethnic groups like the Uyghurs (Clarke 2016a: 304; Mehta 2018: 12; Clarke 2019: 15; Davis 2019: 103). Basically, the BRI is an extension of the PRC's approach to integrate the XUAR through economic development (Smith 2018: 4ff; Clarke 2019: 10ff). Hao (2016: 210f) even argues that "[d]evelopment is still the key to solving all the problems in China [which includes] solving nationality issues [and] effectively safeguarding national unity [...]". Economic prosperity and a greater economic connectivity between Xinjiang and Eurasia is believed to reduce security challenges and instability in the XUAR (Hoh 2018: 71; Mehta 2018: 2; Duarte 2019: 148). In this respect, the BRI is – through economic stimulation – a means to achieve stability and a method of state-building in Xinjiang (Clarke 2017a: 72; Godbole 2019: 238f). In terms of economic security, the BRI enhances China's physical connectivity to Central Asian and Eurasian states, thereby gaining better access to more markets on which Chinese producers can trade their excess capacities (Dillon 2016: 81; García-Herrero & Xu 2016: 2f; OECD 2018: 30; Smith 2018: 4ff; Chung 2019: 120). In this regard, the BRI functions as a spatial fix as it relocates the problem with overcapacities to other countries (cf. Harvey 2001; Lin 2018: 181). However, more important for China's economic security is the access to oil and gas from Central Asia which is facilitated through the BRI (Arduino 2018: 76; Fathil 2019: 367; Berlie 2020: 51f). Consequently, the BRI can be seen as a means to support the PRC's economic security (Duarte 2019: 145ff). With regard to China's sovereignty and its foreign strategy, the BRI helps China to strengthen its position in Central Asia and increase its influence and power in the region (Smith 2018: 4ff; Chung 2019: 120; Godbole 2019: 239; Berlie 2020: 49). Through the BRI, the PRC is able to expand its reach, thereby potentially reducing the (already declining) US American and Russian influence in Central Asia, and possibly even establishing an alternative to the existing international order (Mackerras 2015: 27; Clarke 2016a: 297; Clarke 2017a: 72; Clarke 2018: 96). Furthermore, the BRI is intended to revive China's 'former greatness' through an expansion of Chinese influence by connecting the PRC closer to its neighboring states, which in turn would enhance the regime's reputation, especially Xi's reputation (Mackerras 2015: 27; Chung 2019: 120; Harris 2019: 276; He 2019: 183; Smith Finley 2020). Obviously, Xinjiang, being a major hub of the BRI, is of high relevance for the success of the project (Arduino 2018: 140; Sohrab & Ali 2018: 65; Chung 2019: 120; Smith 2019: 584; Zenz 2019a: 103; Bellér-Hann 2020: 378f). Given the region's history with separatism and (violent) social unrest, the establishment and maintenance of stability and

security in Xinjiang has become a 'strategic imperative' and all the more important since the announcement of the BRI (Zenz & Leibold 2017a: 19; Arduino 2018: 14, 93; Mehta 2018: 4; Chung 2019: 120; Zenz 2019a: 103; Berlie 2020: 52). Accordingly, under Xi, the regime has abandoned its purely economic perspective and instead emphasizes the stability and security implications of the situation in Xinjiang (Klimeš 2018: 433). Regarding Xinjiang's Uyghur population, Bellér-Hann (2020: 378f) and Zenz (2019b: 124) express the view that Beijing is using the increasing importance of Xinjiang as an opportunity to seek a 'definitive solution' to the 'Uyghur problem'. A comparison of the BRI with the other five referent objects indicates that the motivations for the BRI are de facto rooted, as illustrated above, in the realms of these other referent objects (cf. Clarke 2017a). This raises the question whether the BRI is in fact an independent referent object, which will be discussed below.

5.2. Securitization Measures from 2014

In order to securitize the identified referent objects, the PRC had already implemented the measures presented above before 2013. Most of them were continued after 2013 and will be supplemented briefly, while the focus here is on additional measures that have been introduced. Officially, just like before 2014, the measures are justified with the battle against separatism, extremism, and terrorism (Roberts 2018: 246). By linking Muslims and all forms of Islam to extremism the regime justifies and legitimizes oppressive security policies against the Uyghurs (Dillon 2015: 263; Roberts 2018: 246; Gonul & Rogenhofer 2019: 53). In the last five years, Xinjiang's security apparatus has been stepped up turning the XUAR into what Harris (2019: 276) calls a 'militarized high-security zone' (Bellér-Hann 2020: 378; Chestnut Greitens et al. 2020: 21). Alone between 2007 and 2017, Xinjiang's security budget rose tenfold, with expenses reaching a peak in 2017 (Godbole 2019: 233; Zenz 2019a: 117f). Chestnut Greitens et al. (2020: 21) argue that the shift in the quality and intensity of repressive policies in Xinjiang took place in the same year by shifting the focus from selected individuals to the entire Muslim population of Xinjiang and thus from selective to collective repression. Additionally, over the last decade, the CCP has revised its approach to ethnic unrest and concluded that the cause of ethnic unrest is rooted in the mindset of minorities and argued that increased assimilation and re-education of minorities is the solution to this (Chestnut Greitens et al. 2020: 24ff). It appears that the PRC is no longer merely striving to secure its referent objects by adopting protective policies; rather, the regime seems determined to secure the objects by simply eliminating all perceived threats and forms of opposition in Xinjiang (Smith Finley 2019: 10f; Zenz 2019a: 124; Bellér-Hann 2020: 378). The narrative of Uyghurs being uncivilized terrorists has been

reinforced by Beijing, which blames separatism, terrorism, and religious extremism for (social) instability in Xinjiang, but at the same time persistently frames Uyghurs as ‘radical terrorists’ and a ‘biological threat’ to society (Mackerras 2014: 248; Trédaniel & Lee 2017: 191; Zenz 2019a: 103).

When analyzing the securitization in the XUAR from 2014 onwards, one has to consider two factors that led to a change of circumstances in the province: one being the rising interethnic violence (in the province) since 2013 (Chestnut Greitens et al. 2020: 10, 22ff; Hasmath 2018: 46; Roberts 2018: 244f). During the last few years, Uyghur resistance has shifted in its quality towards more violent and radical activities (Clarke 2015: 133f) and, as Shoemaker (2014: 85) points out, “[...] for the first time, China has had an objective problem with terrorism“. The second factor is Chen Quanguo, who became Xinjiang’s CCP secretary in 2016 after holding the same position in Tibet for the previous five years (Zenz & Leibold 2017a: 16; Roberts 2018: 245; Chestnut Greitens et al. 2020: 27). Already in Tibet, Chen had gained a ‘good’ reputation and Xi Jinping’s confidence by securing stability and suppressing separatist tendencies through innovative ethnic policies that ensure CCP rule over minorities (Zenz & Leibold 2017a: 16ff; Gonul & Rogenhofer 2019: 49; Smith 2019: 584). The strategy previously used in Tibet is now being applied again in Xinjiang – with considerably more drastic measures than in Tibet (Gonul & Rogenhofer 2019: 49; Zenz 2019a: 115; Chestnut Greitens et al. 2020: 28). Since Chen’s appointment, the security apparatus in Xinjiang has been stepped up and security measures (against Uyghurs) in Xinjiang have increased (Roberts 2018: 245; Bellér-Hann 2020: 378; Zenz & Leibold 2020: 334).

Surveillance

Since the beginning of 2017, Xinjiang’s administration has established an advanced system of ‘total surveillance’ (Cliff 2019: 181; Bellér-Hann 2020: 378;), calling for the establishment of “[...] ’nets spread from the earth to the sky’, meaning ground as well as digital surveillance in [Xinjiang]“ (Godbole 2019: 232). The state assigned more than one million so-called ‘big brothers and sisters’ to stay with Uyghur families in rural areas and assess their behaviors for multiple weeks (Klimeš 2018: 431f; Roberts 2018: 248; Byler 2019b; Leibold 2019b: 53). The XUAR’s authorities are also motivating the citizens to monitor each other and report suspicious or illegal behavior, which includes things like giving up smoking, refusing to drink alcohol or refusing to watch Chinese television (Roberts 2018: 248; Hayes 2019b; Bellér-Hann 2020: 388). In addition to the direct monitoring of people’s behavior, the police presence in the XUAR, especially in Uyghur neighborhoods, has been increased through police patrols and so-called ‘convenience police stations’ (Clarke 2018: 92; Chestnut Greitens et al. 2020: 16). To ensure comprehensive supervision of Xinjiang, surveillance cameras are located virtually

everywhere in Xinjiang (Zenz & Leibold 2017a: 17; Byler 2018: 179; Chung 2018: 192; Clarke 2018: 92). Aiming at the automation of surveillance, profiles of Xinjiang residents are created⁵, for which biometric data such as pictures of a person's face and iris, recordings of voice, fingerprints, etc. is being collected (Byler 2019a; Byler 2019b; Cheng 2018: 339; Clarke 2018: 92; Mehta 2018: 13). Additionally, citizens, Uyghurs in particular, are required to install a government developed application named 'Cleannet Bodyguard' on their smartphones which constantly scans the devices for suspicious content and keeps track of the user's communication and all other activities conducted with the phone (Roberts 2018: 245f; Byler 2019b; Godbole 2019: 232; Leibold 2019b: 52). The scale of the surveillance network in the region is unprecedented, turning the XUAR into a 'twenty-first century police state' and possibly the most heavily guarded and surveilled place in the world (Zenz & Leibold 2017b: 22; Dooley 2019: 245; Chestnut Greitens et al. 2020: 16). Obviously, the rationale behind the surveillance system is to serve the protection of the referent objects by detecting potential opposition, civil unrest or violent acts of extremism respectively terrorism before they occur (Roberts 2018: 245).

Re-Educational Detention

In spring 2017, Xinjiang's authorities under the leadership of Chen Quanguo launched a campaign aiming at the 'transformation through education' of people whose ideology or behavior is considered suspicious for the PRC – Uyghurs and other minorities (Gonul & Rogenhofer 2019: 49; Leibold 2019b: 57; Zenz 2019a: 103; Chestnut Greitens et al. 2020: 17). To this end, the administration of XUAR has built facilities for mass internment and established a system of extrajudicial detention and internment (Leibold 2019b: 57; Chestnut Greitens et al. 2020: 17). Scholars assume – based on leaked documents, satellite imagery and internment rates – that approximately one million Uyghurs, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz are subject to forced re-education and political indoctrination (Zhang 2018; Zhao 2018; Davis 2019: 115; Smith Finley 2019: 3; Zenz 2019a: 122f; Zhang 2019; Chestnut Greitens et al. 2020: 10). The exact number of detention camps is unknown to the public with estimates ranging from a few dozens to several hundred, although the majority of sources' estimates remain under one hundred (Byler 2019b; Hayes 2019b; Smith Finley 2019: 22; Zenz 2019a: 118; Zhang 2019; Chestnut Greitens et al. 2020: 10). Due to the political sensitivity of the facilities, there is almost no official information on them and the Chinese State does not permit (objective) investigations (Roberts 2018: 250; Smith Finley 2019: 17; Kelemen & Turcsányi 2020: 226). Public tenders in connection with the construction of the camps indicate that the camps have a high similarity to

⁵ Even of (foreign) visitors to the province as well

prisons – including the installation of security fences, police stations, watchtowers, barbed wire, etc. (Zenz 2019a: 106ff) The threshold for detention is very low and people are interned on the basis of criteria that are so broad that practically everyone is qualified for detention: possessing a passport or a compass, having relatives abroad, practicing religion, having a beard, or simply being related to someone who meets the mentioned criteria justifies a detention (Byler 2018: 53; Davis 2019: 102; Smith Finley 2019: 4f). During detention, detainees have to confess their ‘crimes’ and denounce their own cultural and/or religious practices (Cheng 2018: 339; Dooley 2019: 249). They are forced to embrace Han culture, learn Mandarin, sing pro-communist songs and express their patriotism, as well as their gratitude and admiration for the CCP and Xi Jinping (Cheng 2018: 339; Dooley 2019: 249; Smith Finley 2019: 7; Zenz 2019a: 113f). Furthermore, detainees are subjected to physical and mental torture (Mukherjee 2015: 196; Byler 2019b; Cliff 2019: 182; Davis 2019: 102; Rakhima & Satyawati 2019: 12; Smith Finley 2019: 7). Generally, there is little information on how long the detention lasts, however, reports indicate a duration of several years (Byler 2018: 53; Zenz 2019a: 123). As a result of the ‘re-education campaign’, more than 10 % of Xinjiang’s Muslim population is assumed to be imprisoned (Cliff 2019: 182; Davis 2019: 100; Zenz 2019a: 122), with detention rates as high as 30 % in some parts of the southern XUAR (Chestnut Greitens et al. 2020: 17). While officials state that this has led to the region being safe from violent incidents (Soliev 2019: 72) scholars argue that it created “[...] the most abject sense of fear and trauma [...] among its Uighur communities“ (Smith Finley 2018) and has left many people with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, including depression and anxiety (Harris 2019: 279). Under Article I(b) of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, activities that cause serious physical or mental harm to members of an ethnic, racial or religious group qualify as genocide (UN 1948). Following this definition, the re-education system in Xinjiang could possibly be characterized as genocide, but this is yet to be determined.

Control of Population Shares

As discussed above, state measures aimed at decreasing the non-Han portion of Xinjiang’s population through a significant influx of Han Chinese to the region. Additionally, in recent years the state began to actively prevent Uyghur pregnancies. The authorities promote the placement of IUDs among minority women, even if they have only one child and are thus below the official child quota (Zenz 2020: 13ff). In addition, married Uyghur women of childbearing age are blackmailed with detention in order to be sterilized, with scheduled sterilization rates above 30 % in some areas of Xinjiang (ibidem: 15ff). Uyghur women in Xinjiang are offered free medical treatment, including health checks, contraceptives, sterilizations, and abortions, to regulate birth and population growth rates (ibidem). Uyghurs who voluntarily limit their family

size receive cash rewards (Leibold 2019b: 57). Another way of reducing the future Uyghur population and to promote assimilation is interethnic marriage which is actively encouraged by offering Han men financial incentives for marrying Uyghur women (Harris 2019: 278; Leibold 2019b: 57; Zenz 2020: 20f). The prevention of births within an ethnic, racial, or religious group also falls under the definition of genocide according Article II(d) of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (UN 1948a). In this respect it is worth discussing whether the described Chinese policy in Xinjiang can be classified as genocide (Zenz 2020: 21).

5.3. Problems with the Measures

Most scholars agree that the extremist and terrorist threat, although not deniable, is exaggerated by the PRC, and that the government's response is a drastic overreaction with a repressive character (Mackerras 2014: 248; Dooley 2019: 244; Li 2019: 315; Chestnut Greitens et al. 2020: 29). In the discourse on Xinjiang, the regime strives to evoke a sense of preventive urgency, and in practice every interethnic conflict is handled with oppressive force (Leibold 2016: 236; Trédaniel & Lee 2017: 192; Chestnut Greitens et al. 2020: 42;). This leads Zenz & Leibold (2020: 345) to the conclusion that the PRC is using securitization and the security apparatus as a means to 'solve' every problem in Xinjiang – regardless of its scale or cause. However, this approach, together with the other policies enacted to integrate or assimilate the XUAR, is widely believed to be the cause of the ethnic tensions and extremism (Castets 2015: 244; Clarke 2015: 129f; Jahn 2015: 263; Dillon 2016: 78; Kanat 2016: 212; Sohrab & Ali 2018: 61; Cliff 2019: 183). Instead of integrating the Uyghurs into the Chinese system, they are excluded and separated from the Han society, thereby fueling tensions between the Han Chinese and the Uyghurs (Clarke 2016c: 242; Roberts 2018: 246). For the former group, membership of the Han ethnic group is gradually becoming the most important criterion for being Chinese, which automatically defines all non-Han as non-Chinese, thus as 'others' (Rice 2018: 59). For some Uyghurs, extremism in the form of radical Islam has become an appealing means of counteracting the repression and discrimination they experience (Clarke 2015: 142; Rice 2018: 60). In this respect, China's 'draconian policies' of preventing terrorism – primarily targeting the Uyghurs – actually causes the radicalization of some of them (Clarke & Kan 2017: 7; Trédaniel & Lee 2017: 192; Smith Finley 2018b: 88ff;). Generally, the PRC regards Uyghurs and their culture as an obstacle to the promotion of Han Chinese nationalism and 'total control' in Xinjiang (Fallon 2019: 83; Li 2019: 326). Accordingly, policies aimed at the sinicization of Uyghurs are understood to support the Han identity, reduce ethnic-instability in the XUAR and

thereby strengthen China's territorial integrity and geopolitical position, while also increasing the PRC's economic security and the regime's legitimacy. Consequently, a greater push towards sinicization, assimilation, and even elimination of the culture has occurred within the last years (Irgengioro 2018: 331; Rice 2018: 59; Dooley 2019: 235; Fallon 2019: 83). Because of the repressive nature of the measures, some scholars describe the regime's approach to Uyghur culture as 'cultural genocide' based on the concept of Raphaël Lemkin (Lemkin 1944: 79ff; Moses 2010; Irvin-Erickson 2017: 160, 182ff; Dooley 2019: 245; Fallon 2019: 83; Zenz 2019b: 4).

6. Comparison of Results and Discussion

To test the hypothesis that the BRI has caused an intensification of securitization, I outlined the course of securitization in Xinjiang. This test comprises the following two steps: first, a change in security measures in Xinjiang must have taken place and be identified. Secondly, this change would have to be caused by the BRI. As demonstrated above, there has been a change in scale and quality of the securitization taking place in the XUAR since 2014, with an extreme increase of securitization measures from 2017. The originally predominant goal of integrating Xinjiang and its population into the rest of the PRC has shifted towards assimilating the region and the Uyghurs; even towards the eradication of the people's culture and identity. Therefore, Xinjiang's security apparatus has been stepped up significantly and the suppression of minorities, Uyghurs in particular, has reached an unprecedented level. Thus, the first condition for verifying the hypothesis is fulfilled. The second step, establishing a causal link, is more difficult. At first impression it seems quite plausible that the BRI can be regarded as the cause of the increasing securitization. The project has considerable relevance for the People's Republic of China and its leaders, some of whom have even linked their personal reputation to it. Besides, the BRI-corridors running through Xinjiang and BRI-investments made to the province depend on stability in order to function or maintain their value respectively. The securitization in Xinjiang was also intensified after the project had been announced in 2013. However, the essential question is: what is being securitized in Xinjiang? In order to determine whether the BRI is the cause for the increasing securitization, one has to look at the referent objects identified in the second set of literature. The evaluation of the literature shows that most scholars regard the Han identity, also seen as the Chinese identity, as the main reason for the securitization, especially after 2014. Another major factor contributing to the securitization of Xinjiang is the territorial integrity of the PRC. Both objects can be considered part of China's nation-building process and thus as important aspects of the Chinese self-understanding (Bhattacharya 2003: 47ff, 120;

Clarke 2007: 328). Correspondingly, a shift within the reviewed literature regarding the motivations for the securitization occurred: while the referent objects were distributed quite evenly until 2013, the two mentioned objects, Han identity and territorial integrity, stand out significantly in the second data set. This reflects the urge to restore China's power and influence after the 'century of humiliation' through the 'great national rejuvenation' brought to the fore by Xi Jinping (Mackerras 2015: 27; Hayes 2016: 2; Rice 2018: 60). The BRI on the other side is only seen as a referent object – and thereby as one reason for the securitization in Xinjiang – by a comparably small number of sources. Most of these sources claim that stability in Xinjiang has become a strategic imperative to ensure the viability of the BRI, neglecting to some extent that stability was already perceived as essential before 2013. While in theory, it is possible to argue that the BRI might be a further reason for a securitization of the XUAR the results of the literature review suggest that, in practice, the BRI is not a relevant reason for securitization. Rather, the goals the project aims to achieve are also the very motivations for the securitization, namely the referent objects that have been identified in the literature review (cf. Clarke 2017a). This implies that the BRI and the identified objects are, in a metaphorical sense, two sides of the same coin, with the BRI essentially being an instrument to support and strengthen the Han Chinese identity, the country's territorial integrity, its economic security, China's geopolitical position, and the regime's legitimacy. Ultimately, the intensification of the securitization in Xinjiang cannot be explained by the BRI. This is further supported by the fact that there are many similarities in the securitizations of Xinjiang and Tibet, despite the regions' differences in their strategic or economic value for the PRC (Mukherjee 2010: 431; Narramore 2012; Zenz 2019a; Chestnut Greitens et al. 2020: 28). It is therefore unlikely that Xinjiang is being securitized because of the BRI but rather due to general characteristics shared with Tibet (e.g., social unrest, relatively small Han population, frontier region, etc.). The process in Xinjiang appears to be rooted primarily in the PRC's attempts to create *one* country united under the Han culture and identity. The achievement of this goal is being driven forward by Xi Jinping, who, since his election as president of the PRC in 2013, has been promoting the realization of the Chinese dream (Xi 2014: Address to the First Session of the 12th National People's Congress; Lampton 2015: 772; Leibold 2019c: 4). Since the Chinese Dream is based on reinforcing the Han identity, other identities, in this context the Uyghur identity, are perceived as threats. The PRC's approach appears to be a form of depopulation, albeit not physically, but through the eradication of the population's identity (Buzan et al. 1998: 121).

7. Conclusion

Both, the BRI and the extreme oppression of minorities in Xinjiang, are relatively recent and many questions about the details are still unanswered. Although there is a growing body of literature on these topics, the actual motives for both projects remain uncertain respectively the decisive factors behind them are blurred. This paper explores the background of the securitization in Xinjiang and thus tries to provide a better understanding of the current situation. This background – China's motives for securitization – is also interesting in other contexts, as it can offer an impression of the mentality and self-perception of China's elite, which is particularly important considering China's emerging status as a global power.

As demonstrated above, the BRI is not the driver for an intensified securitization in Xinjiang. Instead, it serves to further reinforce the referent objects identified in the rapid literature review. This result has to be considered in the light of the methodology used and its limitations. Generally, a rapid literature review has proven to be quite functional, as it enabled the author to identify relevant sources and to collect information in a relatively short amount of time and in a reproducible manner. However, the origin of the sources from primarily western sources could be problematic because researchers from the predominant regions may have an unfavorable view of China and thus be (subconsciously) biased (cf. Weber 1949; Watzlawick 2005; Buzan & Hansen 2009: 143; Uemura 2013: 98ff; Silver et al. 2019: 27f). It is possible that this bias could have been reduced if the review would have included more languages, particularly Mandarin. A very fundamental problem, concerning all sources, is the lack of conclusive data on Uyghurs in Xinjiang, as the PRC is concealing this sensitive information where possible (Hastings 2011: 896f; Roberts 2018: 250; Smith Finley 2019: 17; Kelemen & Turcsányi 2020: 226). Conducting field research in Xinjiang and collecting data is almost impossible (Smith Finley 2019: 17), thus the research is based, for example, on what can be taken from public sources, witnesses' reports, or satellite images.

As the Xinjiang conflict is still ongoing and measures have intensified in recent years, it is not foreseeable that the situation in Xinjiang will ease anytime soon. The international community is divided over China's approach to Xinjiang' minorities, with some states being concerned because fundamental values such as human rights are at stake and due to the high probability of China committing a genocide in Xinjiang, whereas other (less democratic) states possibly see the activities as imitable (UN 1948a; UN 1948b; Brost & Schieritz 2019; UK 2019; Westcott & Roth 2019). At a time when China is ignoring an arbitral ruling on its activities in the South China Sea (cf. Mohr 2017), while tightening its control over Hong Kong and thereby potentially further violating international law (cf. Chan 2020), the situation in Xinjiang seems

all the more important as it demonstrates the CCP's willingness and determination to secure its control over the Chinese territory and the corresponding population. According to Buzan et al. (1998: 208) excessive securitization will eventually create an intrusive and coercive state which stifles civil society and harms the economy. They argue that the solution lies in desecuritization, that is, in the process of shifting issues from the emergency mode back into the realm of normal politics (ibidem: 4, 210). Generally, a desecuritization in Xinjiang would be possible since the 'existential threat' – Uyghur terrorism – is in fact exaggerated by the authorities and the continued existence of the discussed referent objects is not dependent on the securitization. However, there are at least two aspects that contradict the desecuritization in the XUAR. First, the state as the securitization agent is actively maintaining an urgent sense of threat in Xinjiang (Chestnut Greitens et al. 2020: 42; Trédaniel & Lee 2017: 192) which facilitates the realization of policies deemed useful for the regime. Second, a desecuritization could be understood as an acknowledgement of the regime's failure to pacify and assimilate Xinjiang and thereby undermine the CCP's legitimacy (Clarke 2007; Clarke 2015: 130; Kanat 2016: 214; Li 2019: 330). Consequently, it is unlikely that the situation in Xinjiang will change in the foreseeable future.

8. Bibliography

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