

THE PRICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Lisbon Treaty stipulates that the European Union's and the Member States' actions should be guided by the principles that inspired its creation. These principles are democracy, the rule of law, human rights. However, influence from outside forces can affect the European Union's unity, and leave Member States to neglect the EU's founding principles in exchange for national economic benefits. This thesis aims to research "*How has the Belt and Road Initiative affected the EU's response to the Uyghur oppression in China?*" In recent years the Uyghur oppression has become international news, however, there has been a lack of response from the European Union. Throughout this thesis, the Sino-European relations are researched, and the effect of the Belt and Road Initiative on the European Union is explored. A historic background is provided in order to allow the reader to fully understand the Uyghur oppression, as well as the nature of the Sino-European Human Rights policy. This research shows that the Xinjiang region has economic, strategic, and security benefits. These align with the Belt and Road Initiative, leading to China desiring to gain more control over the region, and try to appease the Uyghurs that have a desire to be a separate state. This has led to the detainment of nearly a million Uyghurs. The EU has expressed its concern, and urged China to allow United Nations officials into the region. However, as the EU has imposed sanctions for Human Rights violations in the past, the mere expression of its concern does not seem fitting. It is clear that the economic benefits that come from its relations with China, and the fact that China has become a world power, have had a significant impact on the willingness of the European Union to speak out against China's human rights violations. Which, in turn, negates the stipulation of the Lisbon Treaty and affects the European Union's credibility within Human Rights Diplomacy.

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INTRODUCTION

“I was so angry, I hit one of the men [in the political education camp], and they put me in solitary confinement, which is basically a well about 1.8 meters deep and maybe 80 or so centimeters wide. It’s very narrow, and you can’t move. It was cold in winter, and they poured water. My hands were chained, and I couldn’t lower them. I fainted. They took me out of there and put me in bed....” (Human Rights Watch, 2018, p. 51). This is just one of the many descriptions that the Human Rights Watch obtained during its interviews with former Uyghur detainees. In 2018, it was estimated by the United Nations that China was holding close to one million Uyghurs and other minorities in ‘re-education’ camps (Soliev, 2019, p. 17; EEAS, 2018, p. 77). Later that same year, the Chinese policies in Xinjiang started becoming international news due to the use of such detention and ‘re-education’ camps (Gallagher, 2019, p. 82). Thus far, Chinese officials have denied the existence of arbitrary detention and instead refer to it as ‘vocational education and training institutions’, which represents a broader de-extremification effort (Soliev, 2019, p. 72).

According to the EEAS (2019), the EU is committed to being at the forefront of international efforts to combat religious intolerance and to defend freedom of religion or belief (EEAS, 2019, p. 11). This is because the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief is a key priority in the EU’s external human rights policy (EEAS, 2018, p. 41). Through its human rights dialogues with partner countries, the EU regularly expresses its concern for the rights of persons belonging to minorities, in particular belonging to religious minorities (EEAS, 2018, p. 78). One of the human rights dialogue partners of the EU is China. The Sino-European relations began in 1975. However, only in 1995, with the establishment of the ‘Communication on EU-China relations’, did the EU create an outline for its relations with China (Kirchner & Christiansen, 2012). Since then, the Sino-European relations have, at times, been strained, and substantial progress has been difficult (Geeraerts, 2019, p. 287). This can be seen as the result of the different identities and conceptual differences within their norms, visions of power and governance, models of international engagement, and the emerging world order (Geeraerts, 2019, p. 289).

Concerning the Uyghur oppression in Xinjiang, the EEAS (2019) states that the EU is concerned about the existence of political re-education camps and widespread surveillance and restrictions particularly targeted at Uyghurs in Xinjiang (EEAS, 2019, p. 1). Moreover, the EEAS has urged China to allow meaningful access to Xinjiang for independent observers, including for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (EEAS, 2019, p. 1). According to Shichor (2017), the European Parliament has raised

Uyghur issues several times through parliamentary questions, motions for a resolution, and texts adopted; however, no action has been taken (Shichor, 2017, p. 131). Debata (2010) argues that the EU has been taking little interest in the Uyghur problem in Xinjiang as it does not want to curry the disfavor of China, seeing as it is a major investor in Europe with an investment of 34,8 billion US dollars (Debata, 2010, p. 56).

Besides being an important trade partner to Europe, China is also rapidly rising as a dominant force that will reshape the world order (Yongnian & Xin, 2017, p. 6). According to Hayes (2019), this increase in influence is closely tied to what the Chinese government refers to as the 'China Dream' (Hayes, 2019, p. 2). Tied to the 'China Dream' is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to connect China to Europe through Central Asia with the help of trade routes. The BRI can be seen as the most significant and far-reaching initiative ever proposed by China and is arguably one of the largest development plans in modern history (Cai, 2017, p. 2; Chang, Tang, & Zhang, 2018, p. 59).

With both economic development and the protection of human rights at the core of its foundation, the EU struggles in positioning itself towards China. Which, raises some questions with regards to which norms and values the European Union and its Member States prioritize. That is why this thesis aims to analyze the Human Rights policies within Sino-European relations, the Belt Road Initiative, and the Uyghur oppression.

RESEARCH STRUCTURE

The purpose of this research is to explore the effects of China's influence and the Belt and Road Initiative on the European Union's response to China's Human Rights violations. In order to observe this, this thesis will look at the situation in Xinjiang, China, as a case study. Therefore, the central research question of this thesis reads as follows:

- *How has the Belt and Road Initiative affected the EU's response to the Uyghur oppression in China?"*

In order to provide a concrete answer to this central research question, the research of this thesis is guided by the literature review and the following sub-questions:

1. What is the European Union's human rights policy regarding China?

2. What is the role of the European Union and its Member States within the Belt and Road Initiative?
3. What is the connection between the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and the Belt and Road Initiative?
4. How has the Belt and Road Initiative affected the European Union?

The thesis starts with a literature review, which provides a review of the existing literature and a clear description of the topics discussed in order to assure that the reader has all the necessary and basic information on the topic at hand. The literature review is followed by a methodology that gives the reader an overview of the methods used to write the literature review and to answer the sub-questions and main question. This is then followed by the findings, which are divided by the sub-questions. These findings are then analyzed in the discussion chapter and concluded in the conclusion chapter, which will provide the answer to the main question.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SINO-EUROPEAN RELATIONS

According to Saarela (2018), the EU and China are two of the biggest traders in the world, and their relationship is one of the most important in the world (Brown, 2015, p. 442). Despite this mutual importance, the EU and China pose some hard questions for one another, particularly in terms of how they conceptualize each other and find a common framework for engagement (Brown, 2015). Kirchner and Christiansen (2012) add that relations between EU and China have often encountered disagreements over human rights, religious freedom or environmental protections. These disagreements occurred due to the fact that both powers have diverging attitudes towards issues such as international law, territorial integrity and non-interference in domestic affairs (Kirchner & Christiansen, 2012, p. 2).

The European Foreign and Security Policy enables the EU to act and speak as one. This makes it possible for the Member States to handle challenges that they would not be able to solve on their own, which in turn helps with ensuring the security and prosperity of European Citizens (European Commission, 2017). Moreover, the Lisbon Treaty stipulates that “...the Union’s action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development, and enlargement and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law.” (EEAS, 2016). With the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty in 2007, it became compulsory for all new general framework agreements to include a human rights clause (Brugier, 2017, p. 204).

THE START OF THE SINO-EUROPEAN RELATIONS

The EU-China relations began in 1975; nevertheless, these took on greater significance in the mid-1990s (Kirchner & Christiansen, 2012). In 1995, the ‘Communication on EU-China relations’ was established, and it outlined the long-term goals for the EU in its bilateral relations with China. This was then followed by the ‘European Commission Communication on Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China’. This was a policy that outlined the further steps that the EU should take in order for China to remain an equal partner in the world economy, as well as to ensure the good relations between the EU and China (Kirchner & Christiansen, 2012). The new regulations established in the Lisbon Treaty regarding the

human rights clause took its toll on EU-China relations, as in 2007, it led to a stall of the renewal of the initial EU-China framework agreement from 1985 (Brugier, 2017, p. 204). However, according to Saarela (2018), EU-China relations have come a long way under their comprehensive strategic partnership established in 2003, and the 2013 'EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation', which is a top-level joint document that provides strategic guidance for the EU-China relationship and guides the comprehensive partnership between the two (Saarela, 2018, p. 7). According to the European Commission (2016), in the future, the EU aims to establish a 'Comprehensive Agreement on Investment' with China, to deepen and rebalance their relationship (European Commission, 2016). Such an agreement would open new market opportunities and allow both sides to envision broader ambitions, such as a 'Free Trade Agreement' (European Commission, 2016). Despite this, a 'Free Trade Agreement' would only be possible if China would reform towards liberalizing its economy and creating a level-playing field for business (European Commission, 2016). Therefore, the EU is pursuing a greater opening-up of the Chinese market and ensuring reciprocity and a level playing field in all aspects of its trade and investment relationship with China (Saarela, 2018, p. 9). The European Commission (2016; 2019) supports this statement, as in its report, it is stated that China has failed to reciprocate market access and maintain a level playing field while it has increasingly become a strategic competitor for the EU. Geeraerts (2019) adds to this statement as he states that a growing part of European businesses feel thwarted about China's trade barriers, currency policy, and enforcement of intellectual property rights. These businesses, therefore, call for more assertive trade policies and trade defense measures (Geeraerts, 2019, p. 285; Christiansen & Maher, 2017, p. 9). The European Commission (2019) argues that due to the magnitude of the trade and investment links between the EU and China, they must develop a more balanced and reciprocal economic relationship. That is why for their continuing prosperity, both are also mutually dependent on trade with one another and thus have a shared interest in regional and global stability facilitating economic growth (Geeraerts, 2019, p. 287).

SANCTIONS & BOTTLENECKS

Besides trade agreements and human rights clauses, sanctions have also become an increasingly central element of the EU's 'Common and Foreign Security Policy'. The purpose of these sanctions is to uphold the international security order, as well as to defend human rights and democracy standards by encouraging the targeted countries to change their behavior (Russel, 2018, p. 1). However, the effectiveness of the EU sanctions has been proved difficult to measure as these rarely achieve their aims (Russel, 2018, p. 2). In addition, inconsistencies in the imposition of sanctions have grown more

influenced by European political and economic interests, as the EU is often reluctant to adopt measures against countries that are allies or essential trading partners or are able to retaliate. Unfortunately, these inconsistencies lead to the undermining of the effectiveness of sanctions (Russel, 2018, p. 10). An example thereof is the arms embargo imposed on China in 1989 for its violent repression of the Tiananmen Square protests, which has been the only sanction ever to be imposed on China by the EU (Russel, 2018, p. 10). Wenwen Shen (2009) states that the Chinese government perceived this arms embargo as a form of political discrimination and that as long as it remained in place, it would represent a humiliation to China's dignity and international standing (Shen, 2009, p. 17). Wong (2017) states that due to the arms embargo, China found itself both in a defensive and reactive position in relation to Europe (Wong, 2017, p. 4). Moreover, according to Christiansen and Maher (2017), this arms embargo remains a sore spot in the EU-China relationship, as the arms embargo is still in place (Christiansen & Maher, 2017).

Between 1989 and 1997, the Chinese government aimed to put the Tiananmen Square protests behind it (Wong, 2017, p. 9). During this period, it utilized economic diplomacy as a means to achieve its interests and goals, while also continuing business with the European Union as usual, despite the arms embargo (Wong, 2017, p. 9; Christiansen & Maher, 2017, p. 126). Nevertheless, the EU Member States that attempted to 'embarrass' China for its appalling human rights were isolated and penalized. To isolate and penalize the EU Member States, China used its economic heft and political influence to silence, fend off, or reduce criticisms of its human rights record (Wong, 2017, p. 9). However, since then, besides the continuation of economic diplomacy, China has also learned to take on more proactive measures, such as promoting its vision of human rights to deter criticisms (Wong, 2017, p. 10). Nowadays, China is seen by the EU as an important contributor to ensuring peace and security in EU's eastern and southern neighborhoods, as well as an essential partner in meeting common goals related to disarmament, nonproliferation, counterterrorism and cybersecurity (Saarela, 2018, p. 8). However, the EU and its Member States cannot achieve their goals with China without full unity (European Commission, 2019, p. 5). Therefore, when cooperating with China, all Member States, individually but also within sub-regional cooperation frameworks, have the responsibility of ensuring consistency with EU law, rules, and policies (European Commission, 2019, p. 5). Despite the necessity to have a unified front, due to China being the EU's second-largest trading partner, it can sometimes be challenging to maintain a balance between their EU values while also safeguarding their national economic interests (Wong, 2017, p. 22; Maull, 2016, p. 16). As China is well aware of this discrepancy, it has made it an

important part of its foreign policy to lobby the EU Member States that are seen as gatekeepers (Noesselt, 2016, p. 16). This strategy allows China to diversify its connections within the EU, and persuade the Member States to vote on political issues in a way that benefits China's interests, which can be seen as a 'divide and rule' tactic (Wong, 2017, p. 1; Noesselt, 2016, p. 16).

CHINA AS A WORLD POWER

With China becoming more of a world power, Yongnian and Xin (2017) state that China can contribute to the world order in three ways, which will be in favor of its international interests. First, China can contribute to the world economic order due to it being the world's second-largest economy. Second, China can reform the current order, making it more befitting to its interests. Third, China can undertake more international responsibilities due to its capacity to undertake them, which will determine and enhance its leadership in the world order (Yongnian & Xin, 2017, p. 17). The claims of China aiming to change the world order are supported within a research paper of Chih-yu and Hung-jen (2019) which states that China is utilizing multilateral and bilateral means in support of its national interests, and fostering opportunities to resist and revise the established world order (Chih-yu & Hung-jen, 2019, p. 156).

China became part of the world order after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and after it joined the United Nations (Yongnian & Xin, 2017, p. 16). According to Sceats and Breslin (2012), China can be viewed by developing countries as a potential role model (Sceats & Breslin, 2012, p. 8). Yongnian and Xin (2017) state that the incorporation of China into the international order took place in three steps, namely China's opening-up policy, which allowed the inflow of foreign capital during the 1980s; the integration with the world through revision of its institutions and adapting to the international order in the 1990s; and lastly the implementation of the 'going global' policy in the 21st century which led to conflicts between China and other powers (Yongnian & Xin, 2017). However, despite China becoming an ever more pivotal economic player and potential role model for developing countries, Western countries remain concerned about the effects of the Chinese economic growth on the international human rights regime (Geeraerts, 2016, p. 235).

HUMAN RIGHTS

The EU continues to consider China as an important global player that should be integrated into the international community. However, it grows increasingly concerned about whether China will ever accept the universal norms and values, and whether Brussels will ever be able to encourage Beijing to commit to the rule of law and human rights (Geeraerts, 2016, p. 235). The European Commission (2016) states that the EU and its Member States will continue to work with China to promote human rights, foster the rule of law, civil society, political accountability and freedom of expression, association, and religion. Saarela (2018) contributes to this remark by noting that, in supporting China's reforms, the EU strategy highlights the need to promote the rule of law, the role of civil society, and human rights, as this continues to be a core part of the EU's engagement with China. Furthermore, the European Commission (2016) states that this will require a full range of diplomatic, advocacy, and other tools both at bilateral and multilateral level (European Commission, 2016).

Sceats and Breslin (2012) state that from 1996 onward, the EU entered into bilateral human rights dialogues with China as a more 'cooperative' means of engaging on human rights issues (Sceats & Breslin, 2012, p. 12). According to Geeraerts (2019), the scope of the EU-China dialogues is wide and revolves around three pillars, namely, political, economic, and social relations (Geeraerts, 2019, p. 287). Each of the pillars is headed by a specific High-Level Dialogue, namely, High-Level Strategic Dialogue, High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue, and High-Level People-to-People Dialogue" (Geeraerts, 2019, p. 287; Christiansen & Maher, 2017, p. 123). Under each of these headings, there are distinct dialogues and a broad range of specific working groups (Geeraerts, 2019, p. 287). However, Sceats and Breslin (2012) state that the EU dialogue has been described as one that is based on the premise that a negotiation and exchange between equal partners is taking place, whereas, in reality, the EU aims to change China, however, China knows of it and does not accept it (Sceats & Breslin, 2012, p. 46). Brown (2015) confirms this by stating that the EU-China bilateral human rights dialogues have only served as an appeasement to public opinion in the EU, as political leaders from both sides can avoid an exchange on highly sensitive concerns by reassuring each other at the EU-China summits that they place a 'high value' on the EU-China human rights dialogue (Brown, 2015, p. 447). Kerry Brown also adds that the leaders are willing to accept tensions on human rights issues as long as they only play out at lower-level meetings, therefore, leaving the high-level political contacts unaffected (Brown, 2015, p. 447).

According to Brown and Beatson (2016), the EU-China relations, which had initially focused purely on trade and transactions, have now developed into a new and less straightforward dimension. Within this dimension, the EU has asserted several values and ideals which have become part of its internal and external identity (Brown & Beatson, 2016, p. 413). However, economic negotiations free of human rights considerations between the EU and China seem to belong to the past, especially with the European Trade Commissioner Malmström wishing to ensure the EU strategy is not just about interest but also about values (Brugier, 2017, p. 200). On the other hand, Brown (2015) criticizes the EU's China strategy, stating that it is based on an antiquated belief that China will liberalize its economy, improve the rule of law, and democratize its politics, all under the influence of European engagement (Brown, 2015, p. 449). Geeraerts (2016) adds to this view by stating that Europe sees itself as the model that China should aspire to follow, as Europe wishes to forge a tighter link and strengthen its influence on China through increasing economic interdependence and shared values (Geeraerts, 2016, p. 237).

BELT ROAD INITIATIVE

On the 7th of September 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping introduced one of China's most ambitious foreign policy and economic initiatives, the One Belt One Road (OBOR), also known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Cai, 2017, p. 2; Kembayev, 2018, p. 1; Makarov & Sokolova, 2016, p. 30). This announcement took place during Jinping's address to Nazarbayev University in the Kazakh capital, Astana, where he expressed China's desire to build an economic belt along the Silk Road (Clarke, 2017, p. 71; Toops, 2016, p. 4). A month later, Xi Jinping added to his initial statement in an address to Indonesia's parliament, introducing the desire to also establish a 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (Clarke, 2017, p. 71; Kembayev, 2018, p. 1). According to Clarke (2017), the BRI is motivated by Beijing's desire to resolve long-term domestic, economic, and geopolitical challenges (Clarke, 2017, p. 72). Domestically, the BRI is guided by China's ongoing state-building agenda in its traditional frontier regions, such as Xinjiang and Tibet. Economically, the BRI follows the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) aims to ensure ongoing economic growth by finding new outlets for Chinese capital and exports. Geopolitically, the BRI focuses on developing trans-Eurasian connectivity. This, in turn, speaks to Beijing's desire to construct a viable strategic and economic alternative to the current international order (Clarke, 2017, p. 72; Yilmaz & Changming, 2018, p. 255). Van der Putten, Huotari, Seaman, Ekman & Otero Iglesias (2016) add to this by stating that the core priorities of BRI are transports, energy, and telecommunication infrastructure (van der Putten, Huotari, Seaman, Ekman, & Otero-Iglesias, 2016, p. 3).

The concept of the BRI is to integrate cooperative and mutually beneficial sets of maritime and land-based corridors linking European and Asian markets. Therefore, the BRI consists of two main routes, namely the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) (*Appendix 1: Belt and Road Initiative Map* (Yongnian & Xin, 2017, p. 17; Du, 2016, p. 31). Moreover, since the announcement of the BRI in 2013, China has identified the main components of the BRI, namely the six core economic corridors that link the SREB and the MSR; the establishment of supporting financial institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund (SRF); and the publication of an official blueprint for the implementation of the BRI (Clarke, 2017, p. 71; Yilmaz & Changming, 2018, p. 254).

SILK ROAD ECONOMIC BELT, MARITIME SILK ROAD, AND POLAR SILK ROAD

The Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) has been described as a new economic development zone that combines existing infrastructure with future infrastructural development (Hayes, 2019, p. 6). The SREB has two major dimensions, namely the Road and the Belt that aim to revive the ancient trade route of the Silk Road, which links Asia and Europe, and to create an economic belt along the silk road as a kind of transcontinental association in order to forge economic ties, facilitate trade and investment, and improve the transportation networks (Kembayev, 2018, p. 1). The term 'Silk Road' was coined by geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1887 (Toops, 2016, p. 3). Richthofen used this term to describe the transcontinental trade routes across Asia, while he surveyed economic resources in China and analyzed the best rail route from China to Germany. The route went from Xi'an westward, along Xinjiang to Kashgar, and from there through what is now the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran (Toops, 2016, p. 3). Despite his focus on the Europe-China trade route, Richthofen discovered that there was not a single road but rather a myriad of trade routes (Toops, 2016, p. 4). According to Toops (2016), a cultural transition of technologies, such as printing, weaving, and glassmaking, and religions, such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, flowed along those trade routes from 200 BC through the 1800s (Toops, 2016, p. 4).

The SREB connects China with Central Asia, the Middle East, Russia, and Europa, linking together 65 countries and 4.4 billion people (

Appendix 5: Silk road Economic Belt & Maritime Silk Road Detailed (Du, 2016, p. 31). Moreover, the SREB is comprised of three main routes, namely, The Northern Route, The Middle Route, and The Southern Route (Hayes, 2019, p. 1; Yilmaz & Changming, 2018, p. 255). The Northern Route, also referred to as 'Eurasia Land Bridge', links Beijing with Russia, Germany, and Northern Europe, and covers over thirteen thousand kilometers (Hayes, 2019, p. 1; Yilmaz & Changming, 2018, p. 255). The Middle Route focuses on existing and proposed oil and gas pipelines that link Beijing to Paris, through Xi'an, Urumqi, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, and Hungary (Hayes, 2019, p. 6). The Southern Route focuses on the development of transnational highways, which link Beijing to Spain, through Southern Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Italy (Hayes, 2019, p. 6).

The Maritime Silk Road (MSR) focuses on jointly building smooth, secure, and efficient transport routes, connecting major seaports along the Belt and Road Initiative (

Appendix 5: Silk road Economic Belt & Maritime Silk Road Detailed (Du, 2016, p. 36). According to Saarela (2018), in 2017, China published 'A Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative' (Saarela, 2018, p. 44). This document indicated that the ocean cooperation would focus on building blue economic passages connecting the South China Sea to the Mediterranean, through the Indian Ocean, East Africa, and the Red Sea (Saarela, 2018, p. 44; Du, 2016, p. 31; Yongnian & Xin, 2017, p. 17). Within Europe, the MSR can be seen in a number of maritime connectivity projects such as the Piraeus port in Greece, and some new projects in countries such as Belgium, The Netherlands, Malta, and Poland (Yilmaz & Changming, 2018, p. 257).

According to Saarela (2018), on the 26th of January 2018, a new element of the BRI was introduced, namely, the 'Polar Silk Road' (

Appendix 6: Polar Silk Road (Saarela, 2018, p. 44; Yilmaz B. , 2020, p. 11). China sees itself as a 'Near-Arctic-State', and recognizes that sovereignty over the arctic area belongs to Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the USA (Saarela, 2018, p. 44). With the 'Polar Silk Road' China aims to promote its vision through the Arctic with the aid of an assertive strategy (Saarela, 2018, p. 44). Within 'A Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative', China's participation in Arctic affairs is also mentioned, and it encourages Chinese enterprises to take part in the commercial use of the Arctic route (Saarela, 2018, p. 44). Despite being rich in natural resources, the opportunities offered in the transport sector have become more prominent than mining in the Arctic region (Saarela, 2018). Both the Northern Sea Route over Russia and the Northwest Passage through the Canadian archipelago are of strategic importance for China (Saarela, 2018). However, the Northern Sea Route over Russia has become the focal point of both China and Russia's Arctic (Saarela, 2018, p. 44). Since Xi Jinping visited Russia in July 2017, the two countries have enhanced their cooperation on the 'Polar Silk Road', in the energy sector, cargo shipping and the development of a Northeast Arctic underwater fiber optic telecommunications cable (Arctic Connect) (Saarela, 2018, p. 45). There have been rules established between the two countries, such as that only Russian vessels may ship energy resources to the Northern Sea Route. Meanwhile, China has been researching environmental protection and navigation security in the Arctic (Saarela, 2018, p. 45).

ASIAN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT BANK & SILK ROAD FUND

In 2014, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund (SRF) were established (Kembayev, 2018, p. 10). The AIIB was established due to the fact that the developing countries along the BRI lack in capital and technology to meet the demands (Du, 2016, p. 38). Thus far, up to 57 countries have committed to join the AIIB, therefore making it a real international development bank, which serves the economic development of Asia (Du, 2016, p. 38). According to Yilmaz & Changming (2018), the AIIB has continued to expand since its establishment, and has 90 states as potential members, and has begun to provide funding to a number of infrastructure projects (Yilmaz & Changming, 2018, p. 258). Yilmaz & Changming (2018) also state that Europe is the largest participant region in the AIIB, with 14 EU states being founding members, and that there is no doubt that its participation has helped elevate the AIIB into a global institution (Yilmaz & Changming, 2018, p. 258). Du (2016) states that it is anticipated that the AIIB will bring the Chinese money, European expertise, and the demands of Asia's developing economies and lay down the financial foundation for the implementation of the BRI strategy (Du, 2016, p. 38). According to Clarke (2017), Beijing has backed the initiative with a considerable financial

commitment, contributing \$40 billion to the SREB; \$25 billion to the MSR; \$50 billion to the AIIB; and \$40 billion to the SRF (Clarke, 2017, p. 71). Clarke (2017) also states that the establishment of the AIIB and the SRF demonstrates China's desire to harness surplus capital to support major infrastructure projects and enhance its financial influence (Clarke, 2017, p. 75).

VIEWS OF THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

The BRI is identified as the most significant and far-reaching initiative ever proposed by China and is arguably one of the largest development plans in modern history (Cai, 2017, p. 2; Chang, Tang, & Zhang, 2018, p. 59). Given the BRI is still unfolding, it remains difficult to fully understand or even identify the likely outcomes and certain nature of the SREB. According to Clarke (2017), there have been three major interpretations of the BRI, namely, that the BRI is driven by Beijing's geopolitical goal to break U.S. influence in the Asia-Pacific and India; that the BRI is seen as a direct outgrowth of China's economic hard work after the global financial crisis; and that the BRI is seen as Beijing's growing desire to increase its growing economic, strategic influence with a soft power narrative that would present China as an alternative leader to the global hegemony of the United States (Clarke, 2017, p. 72). Moreover, according to Cai (2017), there are also some doubts within the BRI, such as the lack of political trust between China and some important BRI countries; the fact that nearly two-thirds of BRI countries have unstable economies, which pose significant security risks to Chinese companies as well as personnel working there; and the fact that Chinese state-owned financial institutions, despite echoing the president's grand vision, are concerned about the feasibility of the BRI projects, and the risks that come with overseas loans, political instability and the economic viability of many projects (Cai, 2017, p. 15).

According to Du (2016), the BRI is an ambitious economic vision of the opening-up of and cooperation among the countries engaged in the initiative. Yongnian & Xi (2017) and van der Putten, Huotari, Seaman, Ekman & Otero Iglesias (2016) view the BRI, not as a formal policy nor strategy, but rather a broad conceptual framework for policies that contribute to greater economic integration within Asia, and between Asia, Europe, and Africa (Yongnian & Xin, 2017, p. 43; van der Putten, Huotari, Seaman, Ekman, & Otero-Iglesias, 2016, p. 3). However, Yongnian & Xi (2017) also view the BRI as an international collaboration project for China-sponsored infrastructure and connectivity links (Yongnian & Xin, 2017, p. 43). Saarela (2018) views the BRI as a trade project that is building China-sponsored interconnected infrastructure around the world, which in turn should present opportunities for regional productivity-enhancing value chains (Saarela, 2018, p. 11). In order for the BRI to be successful, Du (2016) is of the

opinion that there needs to be an improvement within the infrastructure and the creation of a secure and efficient network of land, sea and air passages, among other things, which in turn would increase connectivity (Du, 2016, p. 36). Moreover, Du (2016) is also of the opinion that the BRI's goals are not easy to be achieved, and that there would be a need for facilitating institutions and frequent diplomatic communication (Du, 2016, p. 36). According to Rana (2017), there has yet to be a collective consultation, nor an open regional discussion on the parameters of what the BRI entails (Rana, 2017, p. 9). This also has affected projects that were in place prior to the BRI, as there have been adopted into that plan without consultation with the countries involved (Rana, 2017, p. 9).

According to Chang, Tang & Zhang (2018), the BRI was unveiled as a significant element of Beijing's efforts to improve ties and stimulate growth and development along its less developed regions (Chang, Tang, & Zhang, 2018, p. 59). Yilmaz & Changming (2018) define the BRI as a connectivity and integration project which comprises of a broad area of economic political, and social interaction amongst state and non-state actors (Yilmaz & Changming, 2018, p. 254). According to Yu (2018), the proposed BRI development plan, infrastructure investments, and connectivity projects will run through more than 60 countries across Central Asia, Europe, West Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia (Yu, 2018, p. 230). Moreover, the Chinese government's vision for the BRI is for it to promote connectivity, build overland economic corridors and pillars of maritime cooperation and help enhance policy communication with other countries, as well as expand the convergence of the shared interests and explore possible areas of win-win cooperation (Yilmaz & Changming, 2018, p. 255).

According to Chang, Tang & Zhang (2018), the BRI attempts to model the four foundation principles, namely, openness and cooperation; harmony and inclusiveness; market-based operation; and mutual benefit for all the countries (Chang, Tang, & Zhang, 2018, p. 60). Moreover, according to Chang, Tang & Zhang (2018) and Du (2016) the Action Plan for the BRI consists of five major goals, namely, policy coordination, facility connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people connection (Chang, Tang, & Zhang, 2018, p. 59; Du, 2016, p. 34). The BRI will help China meet some of its economic challenges, such as encouraging regional development through better integration with neighboring economies; upgrading the Chinese industry while exporting Chinese standards; and addressing the problem of overcapacity (Cai, 2017, p. 6). Clarke (2017) adds to this by stating that the emphasis on infrastructure development within the BRI allows China to move excess production capacity out of China, in turn helping reduce the supply glut within China while helping less developed countries to build up their industrial bases (Cai, 2017, p. 13; Clarke, 2017, p. 74).

The Chinese government sees the BRI as a reflection of the country's vision of creating a new development-oriented global discourse, to ensure common prosperity and peace through infrastructure development, trade connectivity, and financial networking (Yilmaz & Changming, 2018, p. 254). The BRI has also become the template for China's foreign policy, political and economic, as well as its aid and investment programs (Rana, 2017, p. 6). Moreover, the adoption of the BRI into the Constitutions established in October 2017, cements Xi Jinping's command into Chinese society and history and adds a political edge to what was previously viewed as a solely economic initiative (Saarela, 2018, p. 21).

THE CHINA DREAM

According to Hayes (2019), the 21st-century goals of the Communist Party of China for the Chinese state are defined by the 'China Dream'. The 'China Dream' can be seen as the concept; the BRI can be seen as the blueprint; and the Two Centennials can be seen as the deadlines for achievement (Hayes, 2019, p. 1; Clarke, 2017, p. 77). These elements have respectively become part of Xi Jinping's legacy. According to Hayes (2019), the 'China Dream' refers to Xi's ideological articulation of the ongoing economic and political development of the Chinese state. In the global setting, it signals the continuation of the desire for China to reach great power status, finally becoming 'a rich and powerful country', and surpassing the United States of America (Hayes, 2019, p. 2; Yilmaz & Changming, 2018, p. 262). Moreover, in speeches and official documents, Xi has also indicated that the 'China Dream' also incorporated the 'rejuvenation of China' (Hayes, 2019, p. 2). According to Hayes (2019), Xi's China Dream concept draws on a long tradition, connecting history, development, modernization, strategy, and nationalism in a unifying and potent mix (Hayes, 2019, p. 3).

According to Clarke (2017), for Xi Jinping, crucial steps on the journey to 'great national rejuvenation' will be the achievement of the two 'centenary goals' (Clarke, 2017, p. 77). These 'centenary goals' are achieving a 'moderately prosperous society' by the hundredth anniversary of the CCP in 2021; and becoming a 'modern socialist country' that is "prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious" by the hundredth anniversary of the PRC in 2049 (Clarke, 2017, p. 77). The realization of the China Dream would benefit the world, as it is based on principles of peace, development, cooperation, and win-win relations (Clarke, 2017, p. 77).

UYGHUR MUSLIMS

XINJIANG AND THE UYGHURS

Xinjiang is China's most northern region, and it consists of about one-sixth of China's landmass (Gallagher, 2019, p. 50). It borders eight countries and is also the major Chinese passage-way to Central Asian countries (Gallagher, 2019, p. 50; Human Rights Watch, 2018, p. 25). Xinjiang has a population of around 21 million people, of which 45 percent is Uyghur, 40 percent is Han, and the leftover 10 percent are from different Turkic Muslim ethnic groups (Chung, 2018, p. 185). Xinjiang became part of China in 1949, and it was declared as an autonomous region on the 1st of October 1955. However, all major decisions are still made by the CCP, which has little Uyghur representation (Rogers & Sidhu, 2016, p. 110; Gladney, 2003, p. 457). Xinjiang is a region that is rich in natural resources such as oil and coal and is also home to 80 percent of China's gold, jade, and other precious metals. Moreover, it also has gas pipelines and vital nuclear testing sites (Gallagher, 2019, p. 51). Therefore, China has economic, strategic, and security interest in the Xinjiang region, leading it to want to maintain and strengthen its control over the region, which has left the demands of the Uyghurs on the back burner, while stability in the region has been prioritized (Gallagher, 2019, p. 50; Hyer, 2006, p. 78).

The Muslim Uyghur population of Xinjiang shares little in common with the rest of China in terms of language, culture, and even history (Hyer, 2006, p. 78). The Uyghurs speak Uyghur, and nearly all of them are Muslim (Thum, 2018, p. 1). The Chinese consider the Uyghurs to be an ethnic minority group and do recognize them as one of the 56 official nationalities of China (Thum, 2018, p. 1). Moreover, there are an estimated 500 thousand Uyghurs living outside of China (Human Rights Watch, 2018, p. 25). In general, there is no single Uyghur agenda, as certain groups want Xinjiang to be a separate state, under the name of Uyghuristan or Eastern Turkistan, other groups want to maintain cultural distinction while remaining an autonomous region, and a small group wants to integrate into the Chinese system (Davis, 2008, p. 16).

THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT AND THE UYGHURS

The relationship between the Uyghurs and China has always been a turbulent one since the day that the CCP took over the Xinjiang region. A year after China had taken over Xinjiang, they banned Islamic law and confiscated the seals of the judges (Thum, 2018, p. 9). During the 'Great Leap Forward' (1958-1961), the CCP was suspicious of Islam and the Uyghur traditions, which lead to the implementation of

repressive policies in the region with the aim of wiping out Islamic influence (Rogers & Sidhu, 2016, p. 114). During this period, there were severe food shortages in the Xinjiang region, and there were high rates of starvation. Despite these food shortages, Xinjiang was forced to export large quantities of grain to other Chinese provinces; however, the Hans population in the region was receiving shipments of food. Non-Hans were left to fend for themselves, leading to thousands of people starving to death, and around 60 thousand non-Hans to flee to the Soviet Union (Rogers & Sidhu, 2016, p. 114). These rates of migration only resulted in higher suspicion within the CCP and confirmation of their opinion of the non-Hans as disloyal and ungrateful (Rogers & Sidhu, 2016, p. 114). During the 'Cultural Revolution' (1966-1976), policies became stricter. Uyghurs were being deprived of government jobs and started facing religious and cultural prosecution. Uyghur traditions regarding dance, music, engagement, and even marriage were prohibited. In a town near Kashgar (*Appendix 4: Map of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region*, nearly all mosques were turned into pig houses by the end of the period (Rogers & Sidhu, 2016, p. 115; Thum, 2018, p. 11; Davis, 2008, p. 17).

It was only from 1978 that policies started to take political stability and economic development focus. Amongst other policies, the 'Law on Regional Autonomy for National Minorities' was established in 1984, which established a quota system for minority participation in the state's administration. Other policies also focused on affirmative action, education, and training of the Uyghurs, and they were once again allowed to wear their native costumes (Rogers & Sidhu, 2016, p. 116). These policies depict Beijing's belief that economic development could undermine Uyghur calls for independence and that most people primarily want a good economic life for themselves (Davis, 2008, p. 17). However, with the rapid economic improvements of Xinjiang, the Hans population of China started to be attracted to the region in the 1990s, leading to new tensions and dilemmas as the Uyghurs started feeling like a minority in their region (Rogers & Sidhu, 2016, p. 116). Despite these economic developments, Xinjiang still lagged behind the industrialized coastal areas (Davis, 2008, p. 17).

The softening of the policies was short-lived, as from the 1990s on policies started becoming more restrictive once again. Beijing put a birth control policy in place to control the Uyghur population. With this policy, Uyghurs would have to ask authorities for permission in order to have a child and would have to be approved or planned in for a different period of time due to quotas being put in place. Uyghurs in rural areas were allowed to have up to three children, whereas Uyghurs in urban areas were allowed to have up to two children. However, the authorities aimed to lower these rates by offering monetary compensation to couples who decided to have fewer children (Chung, 2018, p. 189). If a woman were

to become pregnant without permission, she would be forced to have an abortion, despite this being against Islam. Moreover, resistance to these measures would lead to a denial of medical and health benefits and salary cuts (Rogers & Sidhu, 2016, p. 116). Whereas the Uyghurs were being limited in the number of children they were allowed to have, the Han were able to escape the 'One Child' policy by migrating to Xinjiang. Policies, such as this one, were part of Beijing's plan to accelerate the integration of Xinjiang into China (Human Rights Watch, 2018, p. 21). Due to the policies becoming stricter, during the 1990s, the open resistance of Uyghurs increased (Thum, 2018, p. 14). However, by 1992, Uyghurs, who criticized the government or embraced their cultural identity, would face prosecution. Policies with the aim of increasing Han migration to Xinjiang continued being established, as the CCP believed that if Han people occupied important positions in Xinjiang, the situation would improve. Besides policies targeted at Han migration, the CPP continued to show apprehension about granting Uyghurs various social and cultural rights (Rogers & Sidhu, 2016, p. 119).

In April 2001, China established the 'Strike Hard' campaign to target violent terrorism and religious extremism. This campaign has never formally been brought to a close (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 9). The 'Strike Hard' campaign has had major impacts on the Uyghur diaspora, due to the Chinese government banning Turkic Muslims from contacting people abroad (Human Rights Watch, 2018, p. 83; Davis, 2008, p. 21). In 2001 China also managed to align its security campaign in Xinjiang with the 'War on Terror' movement that started after the 11th of September 2001 attack in the United States of America (Thum, 2018, p. 14). This allowed the Chinese government to obtain a 'carte blanche' from the international community while dealing with its terrorist threat (Gallagher, 2019, p. 44). Alongside with the 'Strike Hard' campaign, the Chinese government started using the 'separatism, extremism, and terrorism' slogan, which implies a distinct link between the three concepts (Davis, 2008, p. 18). However, these concepts are not precisely defined in China's laws and are open for interpretation by the authorities (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 9). Due to the blurred line between terrorism and separatism, China could increase its counterterrorism efforts (Gallagher, 2019, p. 44). According to Gallagher (2019), the counterterrorism law of China describes terrorism as any activity that, by any means of violence, sabotage or threat, generates social panic, undermines public security, infringes upon personal and property rights, or menaces state authorities and international organization, with the aim to realize political, ideological or other purposes (Gallagher, 2019, p. 57).

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Gallagher (2019) also states that the counterterrorism law states that counterterrorism work is to be conducted in accordance with the law by respecting and upholding human rights and protecting the lawful rights and interests of the Chinese citizens and organizations. Counterterrorism should respect citizen's freedom of religious belief and ethnic customs, and any discriminatory actions based on region, ethnic group, and religion are prohibited (Gallagher, 2019, p. 58). Upholding freedom of religious belief is also established in Article 11 of the 'Law on Regional National Autonomy'. However, in January 2015, the Chinese government implemented the 'Religious Affairs Regulations Amendment' in Xinjiang. With this amendment, the Chinese government was able to control online communication and diminish the role of religion in marriages, funerals, etc. (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 12). These laws did not stop there, as in March 2017, the XUAR authorities adopted a 'De-extremification Regulation', prohibiting a wide range of behaviors that are labeled as extremist. Behaviors on this list are things such as wearing burkas, having 'abnormally' long beard, and having a name of Islamic origin (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 12).

On the 5th of July 2009, approximately a thousand Uyghurs protested for an investigation on the death of two Uyghur men at a factory. These two men were killed on the 25th of June 2009 as a result of rumors being spread about a Han woman having been raped by six Uyghur men. There was no evidence to support this rumor, leaving the Uyghur population feeling like their government had failed them in prosecuting the Han men that were involved in the murder. These protests turned into riots and led to 197 deaths and nearly two thousand injuries, according to the Chinese government. However, rights organizations claim that the death toll was higher. Besides deaths during the riot, another 26 individuals were also sentenced to the death penalty (Gallagher, 2019, pp. 52-53). After the Urumqi riots, the Han residents of Urumqi also decided to start their protests, this time demanding that the government crackdown on Uyghurs, to which the government obliged and started accelerating the creation of new restrictions (Thum, 2018, p. 14).

In 2015 the Chinese government made it easier for Xinjiang residents to obtain passports. However, in 2016 the authorities in the region started to recall these passports as a way to prevent Turkic Muslims from leaving China (Human Rights Watch, 2018, p. 14+61). In order to apply for a passport, Xinjiang citizens had to provide various samples of biometric data, such as DNA samples, fingerprints, iris scans, voice samples, and their blood types (Human Rights Watch, 2018, p. 18). Since the implementation of

the 'Strike Hard' campaign, Xinjiang has become one of the most tightly monitored regions in the world. Besides the requirement of permission to travel outside of the country, Uyghurs were also required to equip their cars with GPS tracking devices, and install government spyware on their phones (Thum, 2018, p. 15). Turkic Muslims are also required to attend a variety of political indoctrination gatherings, such as flag-raising ceremonies, which are often followed by political meetings during which participants are expected to denounce their families or to praise the Communist Party (Gallagher, 2019, p. 83; Human Rights Watch, 2018, pp. 65-66). Things such as facial hair and clothing that can be interpreted as extremist have been banned, together with pilgrimages to Mecca, popular Islamic names, and religion in education (Human Rights Watch, 2018, p. 19). Uyghurs have been incentivized to marry Han people. Such a marriage goes paired with an array of benefits such as coverage of medical bills and free education for their children (Chung, 2018, p. 189). However, Uyghurs in China are not the only ones affected by these policies, as China has applied pressure on certain countries to return Uyghur people to China (Sceats & Breslin, 2012, p. 51).

INTERNMENT CAMPS

In 2018 and 2019, China's policies in Xinjiang started becoming international new due to their use of detention centers and re-education camps (Gallagher, 2019, p. 82). Re-education camps are not a new phenomenon in China, as they have been used by the CCP since 1949. The main goal of these camps is to de-extremize elements of society (Gallagher, 2019, p. 82). These are not presented as court-sanctioned criminal punishment, but rather the free medical treatment of a dangerous addiction to religious ideologies. China has long considered those who think differently from the government as 'mentally ill' or 'suffering from ideological defects' and forcing them to undergo political indoctrination (Gallagher, 2019, p. 84). Authorities in Xinjiang conduct risk assessments of the residents to determine whether they should be detained. Being Uyghur automatically deducts ten percent of one's score, and the same goes for praying daily. Other factors that play a role are age, other religious practices, whether people have foreign contacts, and whether they have been abroad (Gallagher, 2019, p. 83). However, due to authorities having to achieve certain detention quotas, often, basic rights are neglected, and innocent people are detained (Human Rights Watch, 2018, p. 12). These quotas are also imposed on Xinjiang residents as they are encouraged to spy on each other and report any suspicious behavior to the authorities (Human Rights Watch, 2018, p. 75). Once taken into custody, detainee's basic due process protections are not regarded, as they are not provided an arrest warrant nor access to legal counsel (Human Rights Watch, 2018, p. 28).

In August 2018, the United Nations estimated that China was holding close to one million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in these camps (Soliev, 2019, p. 71). Chinese officials have since denied the existence of arbitrary detention and instead refer to it as 'vocational education and training institutions' which represents a broader de-extremification effort. They claim that this vocational training includes making clothing and shoes, food processing, assembling electronic products, and e-commerce (Soliev, 2019, p. 72). In interviews with former detainees, Human Rights Watch (2018) obtained information on how life was in the internment camps. They described torture and ill-treatment, such as beatings and being hung from the ceiling. The camps were overcrowded, and there was a lack of fresh air. Detainees are being forced to praise President Xi and the Party before every meal, and are also being forced to learn to read and write thousands of Chinese characters and speak Mandarin (Human Rights Watch, 2018, pp. 33-38). Detainees come from various educational backgrounds, as some are illiterate, whereas others have obtained PhDs. The age of the detainees also varies between teenage years and people in their eighties. There are also pregnant and breastfeeding women detained in the camps (Human Rights Watch, 2018, p. 53). Any disabilities that one might have are not taken into account, which can leave people being detained for indefinite amounts of time (Human Rights Watch, 2018, p. 41). As detainees are denied contact with their loved ones, family members of detainees often do not know where their loved ones are being held (Zenz, 2018, p. 10).

ASKING FOR HELP

According to Shichor (2017), the Uyghur diaspora failed to enlist the support of other governments and non-governmental organizations. However, this was not necessarily due to lack of effort, but rather due to China's isolation and immunity. The lack of interest from the international community, and the lack of coordination within the Uyghur diaspora, paired with the limited communications technologies in the initial year of Uyghur repression also played a role in this failure (Shichor, 2017, p. 126). Unfortunately, despite the technological developments and the efforts of the Uyghur diaspora to inform people about the oppression of the Uyghurs, the most recent attempts to call for help have continued to fail. This time due to China's ascendance as a world economic power and the overall reluctance of governments to promote separatism or to upset China (Shichor, 2017, p. 130).

METHODOLOGY

According to McCombes (2020), the methodology allows for the explanation of the type of research that was done and how the data was collected (McCombes, 2020). Therefore, this chapter aims to provide a clear account of how the research for this thesis has been conducted, and why specific methods have been chosen, a methodology chapter.

RESEARCH METHODS

Greetham (2014) states that research methods are not exclusive and tend to overlap within the research. Within this thesis, four main research methods can be identified, namely, historical, descriptive, comparative, and evaluative. The historical research method aims to explore the history of a topic. It can often be used for case studies, and to highlight certain circumstances of a topic. Within this thesis, the historical method can be identified throughout the literature review, which provides a historical account of the Sino-European relations, the establishment of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and the oppression of the Uyghur population in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region (XUAR). The historical method has been chosen as it provides an overview of how these three topics have developed over the years. Following the historical method, the descriptive method can be identified in the sub-questions, as well as some portion of the literature review. The descriptive research method aims to show what things are like. Within this research, this method is applicable when the current Sino-European relations, the detainment of the Uyghur population, and the influence that China has had in Europe are explained. These two methods together allow for the Comparative research method to be explored in the discussion portion of this thesis. The Comparative method aims to identify the differences and similarities between certain topics. Within this thesis, the difference between the past and the current situation can be seen. With the historical and descriptive accounts, one can identify the changes and compare them in the discussion. Moreover, the Evaluative research method also allows one to assess whether the current situation could worsen in the future. This can be seen both in the discussion as well as the conclusion portions of this thesis. There the future of Sino-European Relations and the impact that China is having on EU unity and upholding of their values are evaluated.

RESEARCH TYPES, APPROACH, AND TYPES OF SOURCES

Research can be divided into two types, namely, quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research aims to base conclusions on statistical findings and other measurable empirical data, whereas

qualitative research aims to base its research on data that cannot be converted into numerical form (Greetham, 2014). Research can use either one of the research methods separately or a combination of both. Within this thesis, the type of research that has been utilized is qualitative research. The qualitative research has been done through the analysis of multiple academic articles. This goes paired with the theoretical approach to research, which Greetham (2014) states that it is where a search and review of background literature takes place. As previously mentioned, the search and review of background literature takes place mainly within the literature review, but can certainly also be identified within the sub-questions. This approach was utilized with the aims of providing the reader with a clear and thorough understanding of the topics at hand, as otherwise, the conclusion could seem far-fetched.

Besides research types, one can also identify types of sources. Within research, primary and secondary sources can be used. A primary source is anything that has been collected by the researcher through questionnaires, tests, observations, interviews, and so on. A secondary source is anything that has been 'recycled,' this means any source that has taken primary sources and has analyzed this material, reinterpreted it, and so on (Greetham, 2014). Moreover, Greetham (2014) argues that these sources can be paired together within research, much like the research methods. Within this thesis, as it has a qualitative focus, nearly all sources are secondary sources. There was an aim to conduct interviews of experts on the fields of Human Rights, Belt and Road Initiative, the Uyghur oppression, and Sino-European Relations. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, this was not able to take place.

The secondary sources that have been utilized come from different academic journals, government documents, reports by non-governmental organizations, and some from newspaper articles. This thesis utilized Uyghur oppression as a case study to analyze the EU's response to Human Rights violations in China. The impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on the EU's 'ability' to raise its voice about the violations is also explored. Within the literature review, Sino-European relations were researched with the aid of academic articles, as well as government documents published by the European Union institutions. Unfortunately, due to the language barrier, as well as the secrecy of the Chinese government, the researcher was unable to find documents from the Chinese government to analyze their view of the relations. Instead, academic articles explaining what has occurred in the past have been utilized. In order to research the establishment of the Belt and Road Initiative, academic articles were consulted. These were able to provide a thorough description of the establishment, the surrounding institutions, the goals for the project, as well as some views on the project. The Uyghur oppression literature review was established with the aid of academic articles and non-governmental reports, some of which had

interviews that allowed the reader to gain knowledge of how life is within the detainment camps. An analysis of the past events was provided with the aid of academic articles. The sub-questions were mainly based on academic journal findings. Concerning Sino-European relations, some EU documents have been utilized. With regard to the effects of China on the European Union, some non-academic articles have been utilized.

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY TOWARDS CHINA

EUROPEAN UNION & HUMAN RIGHTS

According to the OHCHR (2008), "[h]uman rights are universal values and legal guarantees that protect individuals and groups against actions and omissions primarily by State agents that interfere with fundamental freedoms, entitlements, and human dignity." (OHCHR, 2008, p. 3). As the European Union was created upon principles of democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for the principles of the UN Charter and international law, it also rules with these principles in mind, including within its external affairs (EEAS, 2016, p. 2). For the European Union, the promotion of human rights in third countries only became an explicit objective on the agenda of the European Political Cooperation (EPC) in 1986 (Shen, 2009, p. 20). Nowadays, the EU has the 'EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy'. This policy "... sets the level of ambition and defines the priorities of the EU and its Member States in this field in relation to all third countries (EEAS, 2018, p. 1; European Commission, 2020, p. 2). This policy is also based on the EU's belief that only societies that are open to the free flow of trade, investment, people, and ideas, are able to better understand and protect human rights (Geeraerts, 2016, p. 237). Moreover, all EU cooperation with third countries nowadays is required to contain a clause that stipulates that human rights are an essential element in the relations between the parties (EEAS, 2018, p. 1). However, some countries view this promotion of human rights as being triggered by strategic and self-interested thinking or as being incoherent and guilty of double standards (Shen, 2009, p. 2).

SINO-EUROPEAN RELATIONS & HUMAN RIGHTS

In the field of human rights, the two main frameworks that allow for Sino-European interaction are the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue and the UN's Human Rights Council (UNHRC) (Geeraerts, 2016, p. 242). The EU-China Dialogue on Human Rights was established in 1995 and takes place twice a year (EEAS, 2016, p. 2; Shen, 2009, p. 14). The dialogues take place on three different levels, namely, diplomatic dialogue between officials from both countries, legal seminars, and bilateral and multilateral cooperation projects (Na, 2016, p. 165; Brugier, 2017, p. 203). According to Shen (2012), this dialogue approach was adopted by the EU out of necessity for seeking a partnership with China; however, they have since become an integral part of EU-China relations (Na, 2016, p. 165; Shen, 2012, p. 12). This is due to the fact that the dialogue allows for both sides to voice their opinions and concerns, and that China is more receptive of the discrete non-confrontational approach (EEAS, 2016, p. 2; Shen, 2009, p.

14; Shen, 2012, p. 10). However, despite this approach, human rights monitoring remains a sensitive and highly visible component of the Sino-European political dialogue (Wong, 2017, p. 2). According to Chang and Pieke (2018), China views these dialogues as a completely optional, non-binding form of friendly cultural exchange (Chang & Pieke, 2018, p. 321).

These dialogues can also be seen as a way for the Chinese government to channel the criticisms of their human rights record to a private forum, as the Chinese government only participates in these dialogues under the condition that the EU Member States shall not support any resolutions at the UN against China (Shen, 2009, p. 15; Sceats & Breslin, 2012, p. 15; Brugier, 2017, p. 203). This led the General Affairs Council (GAC) to issue a conclusion in 1998 with a decision to abstain from sponsoring resolutions at the UNCHR against China (Shen, 2009, p. 21). Moreover, the EU also is affected by these dialogues, as it suffers from conflicting interests and coordination problems between the GAC, the Member States, the European Commission, and the European Parliament (Shen, 2009, p. 2; Wong, 2017, p. 7; Geeraerts, 2016, p. 243). This, in turn, affects the EU's credibility in its bilateral human rights diplomacy, as well as undermines the EU's standing and messages in multilateral human rights discussions (Geeraerts, 2016, p. 243; EEAS, 2017, p. 2). According to Geeraerts (2016), another weakness of these dialogues is that they lack any concrete and publicly articulated benchmarks, which in turn makes it hard to gauge whether the dialogues have an impact on China's human rights situation, as data on the outcomes and content of these dialogues is limited. (Geeraerts, 2016, p. 243).

CHINA'S MANIPULATION & HUMAN RIGHTS

In the 1990s, China accepted the universality of human rights; however, it continues to undermine the basic principle of protecting these rights (Na, 2016, p. 162). In general, China does not seem to have objections towards the United Nations expressing concern over consistent and large-scale human rights violations, however, when it comes to interference in the pretext of defending human rights, that is where China draws the line (Sceats & Breslin, 2012, p. 11). This is in line with Chinese human rights diplomacy that the Chinese government developed in 1997 to counter Western attempts to highlight and embarrass the Chinese human rights record (Wong, 2017, p. 3). The initial aim of this diplomacy was to break the EU-US cooperation in the UNCHR, which led to Western states co-sponsoring resolutions that condemned China's human rights record (Wong, 2017, p. 12). In this diplomacy China stipulates its beliefs for human rights, as it prioritizes socio-economic rights; puts collective rights above individualistic rights; is of the opinion that a country's commitment to human rights should be based on their level of

development; and that public order goes above any human rights (Na, 2016, p. 161; Sceats & Breslin, 2012, p. 14). Moreover, China often invokes the principle of non-interference or -intervention on the grounds that it is part of China's internal affairs (Sceats & Breslin, 2012, p. 52).

In the three decades that China has participated in the international human rights system, it has learned to dissuade countries from tabling resolutions against it (Sceats & Breslin, 2012, p. 19; Primiano, 2018, p. 187). China has achieved this by adopting several counter-attack strategies in response to any country that criticizes its human rights record (Rogers & Sidhu, 2016, p. 129). These strategies range from the rejection of human rights interference to selective use of hardline tactics and tactical concessions (Wong, 2017, p. 2; Rogers & Sidhu, 2016, p. 129). China also often uses a double standards strategy to undermine comments that criticize its human rights record (Rogers & Sidhu, 2016, p. 129). An example of this is China's reply to when the EU responded to China's crackdown on Uyghur protesters in July 2009 by emphasizing the importance of freedom of expression. China responded to this by expressing its 'great concern' for the discrimination against the Roma and other ethnic minorities and migrants in the EU Member States and the incitement of religious hatred in the fight against terrorism (Sceats & Breslin, 2012, p. 19). This has led to the Chinese human rights record receiving little attention, despite the strong evidence of serious human rights violations (Sceats & Breslin, 2012, p. 11). According to Saarela (2018), the human rights situation in China has deteriorated under the rule of President Xi Jinping, as human rights defenders are increasingly targeted, and the internet and media are heavily monitored and censored (Saarela, 2018, p. 24). When it comes to the EU, China has also managed to gain a hold on Member States' actions. It achieved this by focusing on appealing to the European's commercial interests in order to downplay their human rights values, which can also be seen as China cultivating an internal lobby against trade and human rights actions against itself (Geeraerts, 2016, p. 238; Wong, 2017, p. 13). All of these strategies by the Chinese government have led to European countries being gradually more hesitant to deploy any hardline protectionist measures towards China as they fear retaliatory measures (Wong, 2017, p. 27). Moreover, the lack of resolutions against China could lead to the increase of China's power globally on issues related to human rights (Sceats & Breslin, 2012, p. 19; Primiano, 2018, p. 187).

THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE MEMBER STATES WITHIN THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

The EU remains the world's largest single market, leading to China wanting to upgrade and modernize its land and maritime trade routes in order to further expand trade opportunities with Europe and the other countries along the Silk Road. This means that the BRI would connect China to the EU, and in turn, would create a vast economic space (Christiansen & Maher, 2017, p. 123). According to Makocki (2016), China's approach towards the EU and the BRI can be categorized into two developments, namely, the search for tangible projects for cooperation; and the slow acceptance of the EU's role in shaping the rules for China's engagement with individual EU member states (Makocki, 2016, p. 68). Yu (2018) supports this by stating that it is very clear what China aims to achieve with the BRI in terms of the EU (Yu, 2018, p. 233). Namely, China wants free access to the EU Single Market; it also wants a secure home for its investments and a willing partner for China's fast-growing acquisition of overseas assets; and lastly, China also wants a meaningful diplomatic alternative to its relationship with the United States of America (Yu, 2018, p. 233). In 2015, the EU and China agreed to incorporate the EU's Investment Plan for Europe and BRI as part of the EU-China strategic agenda (Yilmaz & Changming, 2018, p. 259). By partaking in the BRI, EU Member States anticipate positive economic and political outcomes such as new investment opportunities in energy, trade, and infrastructure (Yilmaz & Changming, 2018, p. 259). The amplitude of the BRI, and its developments, are something that the EU and Europe itself have never experienced before. According to Kerikmäe & Zuokui (2017), the EU-China cooperation will be requiring compromises in different areas, as well as legislation adjustments, in the process of implementing the BRI (Kerikmäe & Zuokui, 2017, p. 3).

According to Makarov & Sokolova (2016), in November 2014, President Xi Jinping announced that China would provide \$40 billion to the Silk Road Fund in order to finance the construction and modernization of roads, railroads, and pipelines with the goals of increasing the volume of trade with Europe (Makarov & Sokolova, 2016, p. 30). The BRI is being set up as a non-securitized platform, which rests on consensual rules and norms (Yilmaz & Changming, 2018, p. 264). The Chinese government has stated that the BRI is an international effort that is non-exclusive (van der Putten, Huotari, Seaman, Ekman, & Otero-Iglesias, 2016, p. 5). According to Yilmaz & Changming (2018), this makes it relatively easy to take part in the initiative, as the BRI focuses on de-emphasizing coercive policy instruments in favor of an exclusive focus on cooperative development. (Yilmaz & Changming, 2018, p. 264). Beijing's lack of a clearly defined set of guidelines for the BRI development suits the Chinese pragmatic approach, which allows the Party to

simply shift plans during the implementation process whenever new opportunities arise (Yu, 2018, p. 234). According to Yilmaz & Changming (2018), in this new Eurasian discourse, Beijing places enormous emphasis on prioritizing economic diplomacy in place of a strategy that prioritizes security over economic development (Yilmaz & Changming, 2018, p. 266).

"The ongoing combination of the BRI and the EU's Juncker plan for strategic investments within the EU-China Connectivity Platform offer real opportunities to build infrastructure sustainably, share development experiences, standards, and expertise." (Geeraerts, 2016, p. 288). According to Saarela (2018), the BRI should present opportunities for regional productivity-enhancing value chains (Saarela, 2018, p. 11). Moreover, the success of projects such as the BRI depends on their mutual benefit not only for China and Europe but also for third countries involved (Saarela, 2018, p. 11). However, Saarela (2018) also states that the BRI needs to be an open, transparent, all-inclusive initiative, which adheres to international and multilateral market rules, requirements and standards in order to be successful (Saarela, 2018, p. 11).

CHINA'S INTENTIONS

In general, China has focused on targeting the CEE and Mediterranean European regions, mainly because China perceives EU Member States differently than the EU itself (Makocki, 2016, p. 68; van der Putten, Huotari, Seaman, Ekman, & Otero-Iglesias, 2016, p. 6). Nonetheless, other parts of the EU have not been completely neglected, and the list of EU countries forming a part of the BRI is evolving (van der Putten, Huotari, Seaman, Ekman, & Otero-Iglesias, 2016, p. 6). However, the EU and its institutions are still perceived as potential threats to the BRI (Makocki, 2016, p. 68). China has signaled to some EU Member States that they are welcome to propose joint activities; however, this inclusive approach does not mean that it regards all EU Member States as equally relevant for the BRI (van der Putten, Huotari, Seaman, Ekman, & Otero-Iglesias, 2016, p. 6). According to Kerikmäe & Zuokui (2017), the BRI is indirectly linked to other China-originated ideals and collaborations such as the China Dream and the 17+1 cooperation, in which the Chinese state cooperates with seventeen Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries (Kerikmäe & Zuokui, 2017, p. 1). According to van der Putten et al. (2016), the BRI is slowly gaining ground across Europe, with the help of clear economic effects, shaping bilateral political relations and strategic implications (van der Putten, Huotari, Seaman, Ekman, & Otero-Iglesias, 2016, p. 9). This can be seen in the fact that by the 14th of May 2017, China had launched over 20 rail links with Europe, and that there currently are more than 50 freight train routes operational between 27 cities in

China and 28 cities in Europe. Moreover, the frequency of their usage has also increased rapidly (Yilmaz & Changming, 2018, p. 256; van der Putten, Huotari, Seaman, Ekman, & Otero-Iglesias, 2016, p. 10).

THE MEMBER STATES

There is hardly an EU Member States where the BRI has not stirred a debate in policy-making circles about China's motivations, the feasibility of the BRI, and the opportunities that come along with it (van der Putten, Huotari, Seaman, Ekman, & Otero-Iglesias, 2016, p. 9). According to Makocki (2016), due to China realizing the potential threat that the EU and its institutions could prove to be, due to its role in shaping the rules for China's engagement with the individual Member States (Makocki, 2016, p. 69). Therefore, China has since actively avoided the EU level, and instead focused on, where possible, reaching their goals at the Member State level (Makocki, 2016, p. 69). Yang et al. (2019) add to this by stating that in order to secure the momentum of the BRI, China needs to continue strengthening the 17+1 cooperation, as well as needing to achieve progressive China-EU cooperation and in turn transitioning the BRI from the Member State level to the EU-level cooperation model (Yang, et al., 2019, p. 2). China's increased significance has boosted its capacity to influence choices of EU Member States and has therefore complicated EU diplomacy and has threatened EU's standard power setting (van der Putten, Huotari, Seaman, Ekman, & Otero-Iglesias, 2016, p. 10).

According to van der Putten et al. (2016) no European country, nor the EU, has so far developed a comprehensive strategic approach in responding to the impact of the BRI (van der Putten, Huotari, Seaman, Ekman, & Otero-Iglesias, 2016, p. 10). However, some developments can be seen. Germany has adopted a cautious approach towards the BRI, but nowadays, there are also freight rail routes connecting Chongqing to Duisburg (Yilmaz & Changming, 2018, p. 256; Gaspers & Lang, 2016, p. 24). The Netherlands is not perceived as a priority to China; nonetheless, its role as Europe's largest port enables it to become an obvious connecting point between the Maritime Silk Road and the Silk Road Economic Belt (Putten, 2016, p. 41). Another country that China perceives as an important piece of the BRI implementation is Italy, as it is located at the end-point of the Maritime Silk Road (Casarini, 2016, p. 38). Two countries that have seemed extremely interested in the BRI are Poland and Greece. Poland, despite having no specific BRI projects as of yet, aims to become a Silk Road hub for Central Europe (Szcudlik, 2016, p. 45). Whereas Greece hosts one of the few large-scale projects in Europe that can be seen as part of the BRI, namely 'The Piraeus' port, which can also be seen as a key driver of Sino-Greek relations (Tonchev, 2016, p. 30).

EUROPEAN UNION'S OPINION

According to Saarela (2018), there is no unified EU policy position in regards to the BRI (Saarela, 2018, p. 10). Makocki (2016) states that both the European Commission and the EEAS quickly understood that the BRI had strong political support in China and that it would be implemented regardless of the EU's position (Makocki, 2016, p. 69). The BRI has caused a great deal of confusion for the EU Member States and Brussels, this because, beyond the trade statistics and new rail connections, its role is not entirely clear for Europe. However, this has not stopped several EU Member States from pledging their support for the initiative (Yu, 2018, p. 232).

The EU views China almost exclusively in economic terms as an opportunity for European service-oriented economies and as a threat to jobs in European manufacturing sectors (Yu, 2018, p. 231). Yu (2018) states that China has devised several tactics to attain its economic diplomacy goals (Yu, 2018, p. 232). One of these tactics has been the 'divide and rule' approach that has left the EU with some concerns (Saarela, 2018, p. 10). However, Rana (2017) elaborates on this by stating that the EU's reserve towards the BRI is unlikely to prevent the EU MS from lobbying for projects and infrastructure that would improve their economic position (Rana, 2017, p. 17).

According to Saarela (2018), in April 2018, a report was issued in the EU that depicted the concerns with regards to the BRI, as this initiative counters the EU agenda for liberalizing trade, and pushed in favor of subsidized Chinese companies (2018, p. 10). Makocki (2016) states that the EU was forced to adopt a more proactive approach to seek engagement and to try to influence decisions. The EU did this by recognizing that for China, the BRI is meant to further their domestic economic reform and that engaging on the connectivity aspects of the SRI would allow the EU to monitor political and strategic aspects of the BRI. Moreover, it was also understood by the EU that the BRI was not solely established to create opportunities for cooperation, but also to create opportunities for competition (Makocki, 2016, p. 69).

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN XINJIANG AND THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE?

Xinjiang is rich in natural resources such as petroleum, natural gas, coal, uranium, and platinum (Hägele & Kramer, 2017, p. 47). However, this is not the sole benefit that Xinjiang has for the Chinese government. Xinjiang has become particularly important for the Chinese government in recent years due to the fact that the region borders countries such as Kazakhstan, Russia, Pakistan, India, and so on (Appendix 2: Map of China (Hayes, 2019, p. 7; Toops, 2016, p. 4). Xinjiang's position as the westernmost region in China means that any overland trade towards Central Asia and Europe must go through Xinjiang (Toops, 2016, p. 4). This means that China's Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to revive the ancient Silk Road by linking Central Asia and Eurasian economies into a China-centered trading network, passes through Xinjiang, in turn, making the region a hub for the initiative (Chung, 2018, p. 186; Toops, 2016, p. 4). According to Hayes (2019), due to Xinjiang's importance within the BRI, the region has also become increasingly interwoven with other factors of the Xi Jinping's legacy, such as the China Dream and the Two Centennials (Hayes, 2019, p. 1).

Nonetheless, these developments come with some degree of concern from the Chinese government. According to Davis (2008), Beijing fears that Xinjiang being directly connected to Central Asia will directly expose it to Islamic militants from these countries and beyond (Davis, 2008, p. 17). However, these fears are not newfound, as the CCP has been regarding Xinjiang's separatist movement as terrorism and an existential threat to the party-state since the 1990s (Hayes, 2019, p. 10; Cai, 2017, p. 7). According to Hägele & Kramer (2017), China has attempted to appease any potential conflict by introducing economic incentives in XUAR, which were supposed to benefit local ethnic minorities (Hägele & Kramer, 2017, p. 47; Hayes, 2019, p. 7). An example of this tactic in Xinjiang is the CCP's decision to make Kashgar a special economic zone in May 2010. This decision resulted in the almost complete destruction of the Old City of Kashgar (Appendix 4: Map of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, which was the home to the city's Uyghur population. This was regarded by the Uyghurs as an attempt by the Chinese government to break up their communities and reduce their influence in the city (Hayes, 2019, p. 9).

According to Hayes (2019), the BRI and the increased transportation infrastructure into Xinjiang are aimed to increase the overall economic development in the region (Hayes, 2019, p. 1). China is hoping to increase revenues from tourism to the region by marketing it as an important link to the ancient Silk Road and the BRI (Gladney, 2003, p. 459). However, it is clear that Uyghur separatism will have important consequences for China's economic development of the region in terms of tourism, as tourists and

businessmen tend to avoid areas with ethnic strife and 'terrorist activities' (Gladney, 2003, p. 459). According to Chen (2019), one of the key determinants of a successful BRI would be how Beijing addresses the inter-ethnic challenges in Xinjiang, as the Uyghurs are skeptical about the BRI and its economic benefits (Hägele & Kramer, 2017, p. 47; Chen, 2019, p. 2).

HOW HAS THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE AFFECTED THE EUROPEAN UNION?

The BRI was announced on the 7th of September 2013 by Chinese President Xi Jinping (Cai, 2017, p. 2). As previously mentioned in the literature review, the EU has been skeptical of this initiative. It was only on the 14th of May 2017, during the first 'Belt and Road Forum', that an official message was delivered confirming the EU's support of the BRI (Amighini, 2018, p. 263). In terms of Member States, support for the BRI has clearly been shown by Germany, France, Czech Republic, Italy, and Hungary (EuropeNow, 2018). According to Yilmaz & Changming (2018), by partaking in the BRI, the EU Member States anticipate positive economic and political outcomes such as new investment opportunities in energy, trade, and infrastructure (Yilmaz & Changming, 2018, p. 259). However, the question remains of how the BRI has affected the European Union since its announcement in 2013.

According to Verhoeven (2020), China has opted to invest directly in European infrastructures and provide loans to finance infrastructure projects in order to realize the European part of the BRI (Verhoeven, 2020, p. 287). This is befitting as the EU is the main destination for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the world (Yilmaz B. , 2020, p. 7). Over the past ten years, the total Chinese investment in Europe has come to amount to 348 billion USD, and China has acquired more than 350 European companies over that same period (Yilmaz B. , 2020, p. 7). Pencea (2018) adds to this by stating that Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOE) are willing to pay a high price for some company takeovers, which suggests that their motivations besides being economic, are also strategic (Pencea, 2018, p. 205). These takeovers are a legal way for Chinese companies to access European technology and expand their control of key European port assets (Pencea, 2018, p. 206; Corre, 2019). According to Yilmaz (2020), Chinese investors target Europe's strategic assets and research and development networks with the largest and wealthiest European countries attracting the greatest investments (Yilmaz B. , 2020, p. 10). However, in 2018, the FDI from China towards Europe saw a decline (Corre, 2019). Moreover, Corre (2019) mentions that despite the decline in FDI, China has diversified its investment pool to smaller EU Member States such as Spain, Hungary, and Croatia (Amighini, 2018, p. 265; Corre, 2019). According to Corre (2019) and Amighini (2018), the FDI in firms, banks, ports, and utilities, are aimed at fostering economic alliances and partnerships. However, they have also resulted in 'investment influence' that can expand into the political realm (Amighini, 2018, p. 265; Corre, 2019). This is notably the case among smaller Member States and struggling economies as it is easier for China to have an impact on peripheral states and separate them from the big nations (Yilmaz B. , 2020, p. 15; Corre, 2019).

China has been known to use the 'divide and rule' tactic within Europe (Mendes & Gagliano, 2020, p. 248). According to Corre (2019), Beijing's strategy to sow divisions is an intentional one. It treats EU members differently and creates circles of friends with regular contacts (Corre, 2019). These 'circles of friends' from China's point of view are divided into Northern European countries, Southern European Countries, and Central and Eastern European Countries that are mostly encompassed in the 17+1 group (Corre, 2019). According to Kavalski & Mayer (2019), China is buying its way into Europe through the BRI and, in turn dividing the continent and undermining core European values such as human rights, democracy, and the rule of law (Kavalski & Mayer, 2019). The rising weight of China in many countries' economic and trade relations has increased their dependence on the former and, therefore, also its geo-strategic influence (Amighini, 2018, p. 264). This increased dependence allows China to influence member states. According to Amighini (2018), this influence paired with a timely diplomatic push from Beijing has boosted its capacity to influence the choices of European states and has complicated EU diplomacy (Amighini, 2018, p. 267).

According to Corre (2019), there are examples of this political influence that is attached to China's economic presence (Corre, 2019). "Ever since China's COSCO company acquired the controlling share of the port of Piraeus in 2009, Greece has been suspected of pandering to Chinese interests" (Kavalski & Mayer, 2019). Amongst Greece, Hungary and Croatia also seem to have been influenced by the benefits of the BRI. As in 2016, Greece, Hungary, and Croatia refused to sign onto a joint declaration on the EU's support for freedom of navigation. This statement was aimed at showing support for the final ruling of the Philippines and China's case over the South China Sea (Corre, 2019). In 2017, Greece also blocked an EU statement at the UNHRC, which condemned China's human rights violations. This was the first time that the EU failed to speak with one voice at the UNHRC. Furthermore, Hungary similarly refused to sign an EU joint letter that denounced the reported torture of lawyers detained by Chinese authorities (Corre, 2019; Chang & Pieke, 2018, p. 326). Lastly, in September 2018, the European Commission proposed new legislation to establish a Common European Framework for screening FDI in the receiving countries. This proposed legislation came at the request of Germany, France, and Italy (Yilmaz B. , 2020, p. 10). This proposal was met with reluctance from one EU country, in particular, namely Portugal. This reluctance was due to the fact that Portugal is a major recipient of Chinese FDI in many sectors of its economy (Corre, 2019).

Besides affecting the unity of the EU, the BRI could also prove to have significant consequences for the Member States with struggling economies. This can be seen in the recent case of the Port of Hambantota

in Sri Lanka, which, after being modernized by Chinese firms, was not commercially viable. This meant that the port could not earn sufficient returns to repay the outstanding debt, and was therefore handed over to the Chinese investor company for 99 years. Although EU countries cannot grant sovereign guarantees if they happen to be in a similar situation, it could mean that they are at risk of enlarging their national debt to unacceptable levels (Pencea, 2018, p. 123). Therefore, the EU has to grapple with Chinese ownership or control of physical infrastructure and the security and economic risks that arise from it (Corre, 2019). According to Jing (2018), the EU is afraid that Beijing's strengthened cooperation with the peripheral Member States may indeed continue to have an impact in the EU relations and these Member States' positions towards collective actions and decisions (Jing, 2018, p. 98). Brattberg & Corre state that as Chinese pressure on EU member states continues and perhaps intensifies in 2020, the European Union's unity and collective willingness to push back against Beijing will be tested (Brattberg & Corre, 2020, p. 7). Yilmaz (2020) and Amighini (2018) add to this by stating that the increasing Chinese influence might call for a strengthening of EU internal cohesion policies (Amighini, 2018, p. 265; Yilmaz B. , 2020, p. 15). Therefore, if the EU wants to minimize the impact of China within the Member States, it needs to present a unified front both politically and economically (Amighini, 2018, p. 265).

DISCUSSION

Xinjiang has been a Chinese region since 1949, and it became an autonomous region in 1955. Since Xinjiang became a part of China, the Uyghur population has been oppressed. However, this oppression only became international news in 2018, once the United Nations estimated the detainment of nearly a million Uyghurs in detention camps. Within the first year of having been taken over by China, Islamic law in the region was banned. This was then followed by an increasing number of repressive measures. Between 1958 and 1961, there were high rates of starvation, and China implemented policies with the aim of wiping out Islamic influence. Then between 1966 and 1976, the Uyghurs started to be deprived of government jobs; they started to be culturally and religiously persecuted, their traditions were prohibited, and their mosques were turned into pig houses. Since 2001, China has put the 'Strike Hard' campaign in place, in order to target 'violent terrorism' and 'religious extremism'. China managed to align this campaign with the 'War on Terror' movement after the 11th of September 2001 attacks in the United States of America. This gave China a 'Carte Blanche' from the international community for fighting its internal 'terrorist issue'. The Uyghur oppression only continued to get worse from that point on, to the point that nowadays, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) is one of the most tightly monitored regions in the world. Together with the 'Strike Hard' campaign came the 'slogan' 'Separatism, Extremism, and Terrorism'. Under this campaign, a 'Birth Control Policy' was instituted in Xinjiang, where women had to ask for permission from the authorities to have a child. Uyghurs were also banned from contacting people from abroad. However, it was not bad for everyone. The 'Birth Control Policy' actually benefited the Han Chinese who migrated to Xinjiang to avoid the 'One Child Policy'. Uyghurs that wanted to marry Han Chinese people also benefited, as they were offered coverage of medical bills and free education for their future children as compensation for marrying outside of their culture.

HUMAN RIGHTS

The reason for this long-standing oppression is not the fact that the Uyghurs have not reached out for help. In fact, the Uyghurs have tried to get international attention for their oppression, however, what at first did not succeed due to lack of communication tools, is now failing due to China's position in the world. As China ascended to a world economic power, governments grew reluctant to promote separatism and to upset China. Throughout its ascendance into a world power, China also managed to establish its position in the international human rights system. As China has a different view of human

rights compared to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it has made sure to make this known to other states. China believes in the principle of non-interference or -intervention and considers Human Rights as a part of a country's internal affairs. It has also made clear that socio-economic and collective rights are more important than individualistic ones, and that public order goes above any human rights. China has also expressed that it believes that a country's level of commitment to Human Rights should be dependent on the level of development of such a country. Throughout the years, China has managed to dissuade criticisms of its Human Rights violations through counter-attack strategies such as naming the reasons why the criticism is a double standard, or simply playing the 'non-interference' card.

With regard to the EU in specific, after the imposition of the arms embargo as a reaction to the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989, China utilized economic diplomacy to achieve its interests and goals. Member States that criticized China were isolated or penalized through economic heft and political influence in order to silence or fend off criticisms of its human rights record. Therefore, Member States are more hesitant to deploy hardline protectionist measures towards China in fear of retaliation. That is why in 1996, the European Union decided to enter into bilateral human rights dialogues with China. It did so as it was perceived to be a more 'cooperative' means of engaging with China on such issues. This due to the fact that China is more receptive to discrete, non-confrontational approaches. These dialogues have since become an integral part of Sino-European relations, as it allows for both sides to voice their opinions and concerns. However, China views this dialogue as a strictly optional, non-binding form of friendly cultural exchange. This leads critics of the dialogues to believe that they are solely a way for the Chinese government to channel the criticisms to a private forum. Others view the dialogues as something to appease the public opinion of the EU. The lack of concrete and publicly articulated benchmarks for the dialogue also does not help its position. It is hard to assess whether the dialogues are having an impact on China's human rights situations. Moreover, the conflicting interests and coordination problems between some of the EU's institutions lead the EU to have a lack of unity during the dialogues, which affects its credibility within Human Rights Diplomacy.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

As previously mentioned, in 2018, China's policies in Xinjiang started to become international news due to the United Nations estimation of nearly 1 million Uyghur detainees in detention centers and re-education camps. Chinese officials have since denied the existence of arbitrary detention, and in turn, choose to call them 'vocational education and training institutions'. They claim that this represents a

broader de-extremification effort. These institutions are presented as free medical treatment of a dangerous addiction to religious ideologies. China claims that this vocational training includes making clothing, assembling electronic products, and e-commerce. However, former detainees interviewed by the Human Rights Watch have a different narrative. When the detainees are taken into custody, their basic due process protections are not upheld as they do not receive an arrest warrant nor access to legal counsel. Detainees describe the detention camps as being overcrowded, where people get tortured through beatings, and some even report being hung from ceilings and being kept in very small rooms. There is no regard for age, education level, nor disabilities. Detainees are forced to praise president Xi Jinping and the CCP before every meal. They are also forced to learn to write thousands of Chinese characters and speak Mandarin. Due to the lack of regard for disabilities, illiterate people and people with other disabilities often have more prolonged sentences due to not meeting the requirements from the authorities. The detainees are also denied contact with their loved ones, meaning that their families do not know where they are being detained. The European External Action Service (EEAS) claims that the EU is concerned about the existence of political re-education camps and the widespread surveillance and restrictions targeted at the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. The EU was created upon principles of democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for the principles of the Un Charter and international law. The Lisbon Treaty also stipulates that the EU's actions on the international scene shall be guided by these principles. So, it can be expected for the EU to announce its concern. However, some people believe that the EU has been taking little interest in the Uyghur problem in Xinjiang. This due to the fact that the EU might not want to be on China's bad side, seeing as it is a major investor in Europe.

REASONS FOR OPPRESSION

Besides being a 'thorn in China's side', Xinjiang also has economic, strategic, and security benefits. XUAR amounts to a total of one-sixth of China's landmass, it is rich in natural resources such as oil and coal, and it is also the home to 80% of China's gold, jade, and other precious metals. Additionally, Xinjiang, being China's most northern region and bordering a total of eight countries, is the main point of passage for any overland trade towards Central Asia and Europe. This makes XUAR a hub for China's Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), which is a part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Announced in 2013, the BRI is the most significant and far-reaching initiative ever proposed by China. It can also be argued that it is even one of the largest development plans in modern history. The main aim of the BRI is to integrate

cooperative and mutually beneficial sets of maritime and land-based corridors linking the Eurasian continent.

Therefore, China has wanted to maintain and even strengthen its control over the region. With regard to the Uyghurs, they do not have a unified agenda. A small group wants to integrate into the Chinese system, whereas others want to maintain their cultural distinction while remaining autonomous, and some even go as far as wanting to be a separate state. This separatist movement is seen as an existential threat to the CCP and is often even labeled as terrorism. As China considers those who think differently from the government as 'mentally ill' or 'suffering from ideological defects', it is no surprise that it forces people with differing beliefs to undergo political indoctrinations. Within Chinese counterterrorism law is stated that counterterrorism activities are supposed to uphold human rights and protect the lawful rights and interests of Chinese citizens and organizations. It also states that discrimination based on region, ethnic group, and religion are prohibited. However, China managed to instate its own loopholes by making sure to implement the 2015 'Religious Affairs Regulations Amendment' and the 2017 'De-extremification Regulation' in Xinjiang. These two policies allowed the government to control online communications, diminish the role of religion in ceremonies, but also to prohibit a range of behaviors such as having 'abnormally' long beards or having a name of Islamic origin. Other measures imposed by the government were the ability to obtain passports easier in 2015, only to have them be confiscated in 2016. In order to get those passports, Uyghurs had to provide an array of biometric data samples. Uyghurs also had to start requesting permission to leave the country. They had to equip their cars with GPS and install government spyware on their phones. In terms of forcing the population to align with Chinese beliefs, they were also required to attend a variety of political indoctrination gatherings such as flag-raising ceremonies, political meetings where they were required to denounce their families or praise the CCP. However, China has taken measures to try and appease the separatist movement. China believes that if it were economically appealing to remain a part of China, Uyghur separatists would no longer want to be a separate country. Therefore, China introduced economic incentives in order to try and appease the Uyghurs. Unfortunately, the rapid economic improvements in the region ended up attracting more Han Chinese to the region. This, in turn, led to the Uyghurs to feel even more like a minority in their own region.

CHINA'S INFLUENCE IN EUROPE

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the Belt and Road Initiative aims to connect China to Europe through Central Asia. Whereas some EU Member States received this initiative positively and anticipated positive economic and political outcomes from it, it was only in 2017, at the first Belt and Road Forum, that the European Union's support for the initiative was confirmed. Next to the BRI, China also established the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The AIIB is aimed at aiding the development of the BRI. Europe is, in fact, the largest participant region in the AIIB, with a total of fourteen EU Member States being founding members, which helped the AIIB to be elevated into a global institution. It can be assumed that the participation of these states in the AIIB also depicts their support for the BRI. The BRI has slowly been gaining ground across Europe with the help of clear economic effects, shaping political relations, and strategic implications. However, China has been known to try and use the 'divide and rule' approach when it comes to the European Union. It does so by engaging with the Member States rather than the European Union. It has especially been focusing on targeting Central and Eastern European Member States, as well as the Member States on the Mediterranean. This strategy is an intentional one, and this can be seen through the fact that China treats the Member States differently depending on the 'circle' they belong to. Over the years, China has been able to gain a hold on Member States' actions by appealing to their commercial interests while downplaying their Human Rights values. Nowadays, China is buying its way into the EU through the Belt and Road Initiative. Simultaneously, China is dividing the continent and undermining EU values such as Human Rights, Democracy, and Rule of Law. An example of this is Greece, which, since the acquisition of the Piraeus Port in 2009, has been suspected of pandering to Chinese interests. The increased presence of China has led to some Member States becoming dependent on China, and this, in turn, has increased China's geo-strategic influence. This dependence also allows China to influence the Member States, as paired with a timely diplomatic push from Beijing, Member State's decisions can be influenced in such a way that it complicates EU diplomacy. Three major examples of this influence are the blocking, by Greece, of an EU statement at the UNHRC condemning China's Human Rights violations in 2017. This was the first time that the EU failed to speak with one voice at the UNHRC. Hungary similarly refused to sign a joint letter denouncing the torture of lawyers in China. Furthermore, Portugal was reluctant to support the Common Framework for FDI screening proposed by Germany, France, and Italy. This due to the fact that it is a major recipient of Chinese FDI. China is one of the major FDI investors in the European Union, with over 348 billion USD invested and over 350 European companies acquired. From 2018 on, China started to diversify its FDI

portfolio towards smaller Member States and the Member States with struggling economies. China also shifted towards takeovers of European companies, as it is a legal way to access European technology and expand its control of key European port assets. In terms of the largest and wealthiest European Member States, these were attracting the greatest investments. This framework was proposed as these investments could lead to investment influence that could, in turn, extend into the political realm. These investments have also been utilized to further realize the European part of the BRI. However, this comes at a cost. If BRI projects that China invests in are not economically viable, Member States risk enlarging their national debt to unacceptable levels. This is because unlike other countries, Member States are not able to grant sovereign guarantees, and therefore transfer ownership of the projects for 99 years, to China. The prospect of the enlarged national debt is not a pleasant one, as it can affect the European Union as a whole. Prior to Chinese influence, it was already difficult to maintain a balance between Member States and European Union values, as well as Member States' need to safeguard their national economic interests. If Chinese pressure on the EU Member States continues and perhaps intensifies in 2020, the EU's unity will be put to the test. That is why the increase in Chinese influence calls for strengthening of EU internal cohesion policies. This due to the fact that the EU cannot achieve its goals without full unity. Member States must not forget their responsibility of ensuring consistency with EU laws, rules, and policies.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis is to analyze if China's Belt and Road Initiative has influenced the European Union's Human Rights actions. The main human rights actions that are researched in this thesis are the European Union's responses towards the oppression of the Uyghurs in China.

Firstly, the Uyghur oppression in Xinjiang has been occurring since 1949. Throughout the years, the measures got worse. When China introduced the 'Strike Hard' campaign and managed to align it to the 'War on Terror' after the 11th of September attacks in the USA, it was able to instate a tighter control over the region. China had gotten a 'Carte Blanche' from the international community to fight its national 'terrorist threat' of separatism. This allowed it to keep oppressing the minority without being scrutinized. As a consequence of Xinjiang's beneficial location and natural resources, China has wanted to keep a stronghold on the region. After the introduction of the Belt and Road Initiative, the measures got worse, and China started to detain Uyghurs in detention camps. The Uyghurs have attempted to get the attention of other government and non-governmental institutions. However, due to the lack of communication opportunities, as well as China's current position in the world, these attempts have gone in vain.

Secondly, the European Union has expressed its concern for the Uyghur detention. However, it can be argued that the EU, due to its economic relations with China, has only voiced its concerns to appease the public opinions in the EU. The EU and China only speak of human rights issues within their Human Rights Dialogues. These dialogues have no concrete or publicly articulated benchmarks, and this makes it hard to assess the impact that they are having on the Chinese Human Rights violations. Moreover, China also sees these dialogues as a non-binding form of friendly exchange. With China becoming a world (economic) power, countries have become more reluctant to speak up against Human Rights violations in China. With China being a major Foreign Direct Investment provider for the European Union and its Member States, it would not come as a surprise if they would try to appease the Chinese in order not to be retaliated against.

Thirdly, another thing that plays into the European Union's Member States' actions is the influence that China has managed to gain. Over the years, China has managed to appeal to Member States' commercial interests, and with the introduction of the Belt and Road Initiative, its influence only increased. The best example that can be given is Greece, as after the acquisition of the Piraeus Port in 2009, has been

pandering to Chinese interests. This, among other Member States' actions, has had an impact on the EU's unity, and its position within Human Rights Diplomacy.

In conclusion, the European Union's unity is being tested by the presence of China. Not only within the EU's borders but also on the international stage. What the EU was built upon, and should have its actions guided by, have fallen to the back burner as the Member States chose for their national economic benefits. While participating in the Belt and Road Initiative, which could be seen as a reason for the detainment of the Uyghur population, the Member States are neglecting their values in exchange for the promise of economic prosperity.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE MAP



Figure 1 - Belt and Road Initiative Map (Future Directions, 2019)

APPENDIX 2: MAP OF CHINA



Figure 2 - Map of China (On The World Map, n.d.)

APPENDIX 3: XINJIANG DETENTION CAMP MAP

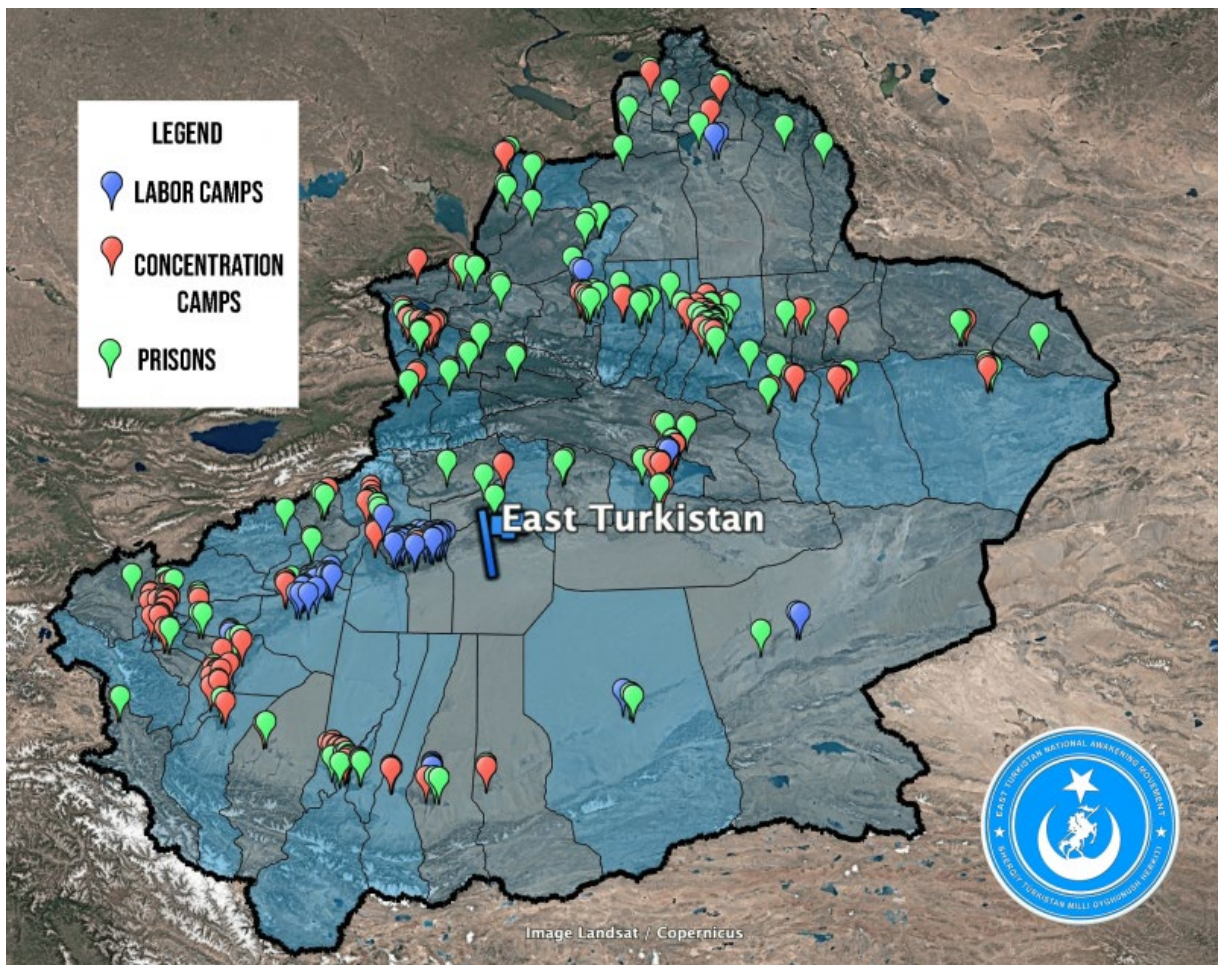


Figure 3 - Xinjiang Detention Camp Map (Ma, 2019)

APPENDIX 4: MAP OF XINJIANG UYGHUR AUTONOMOUS REGION



Figure 4 - Map of Xinjiang (China Highlights, n.d.)

APPENDIX 5: SILK ROAD ECONOMIC BELT & MARITIME SILK ROAD DETAILED



Figure 5 - Detailed Map of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road (Azam, 2016)

APPENDIX 6: POLAR SILK ROAD

China's polar extension to Silk Road

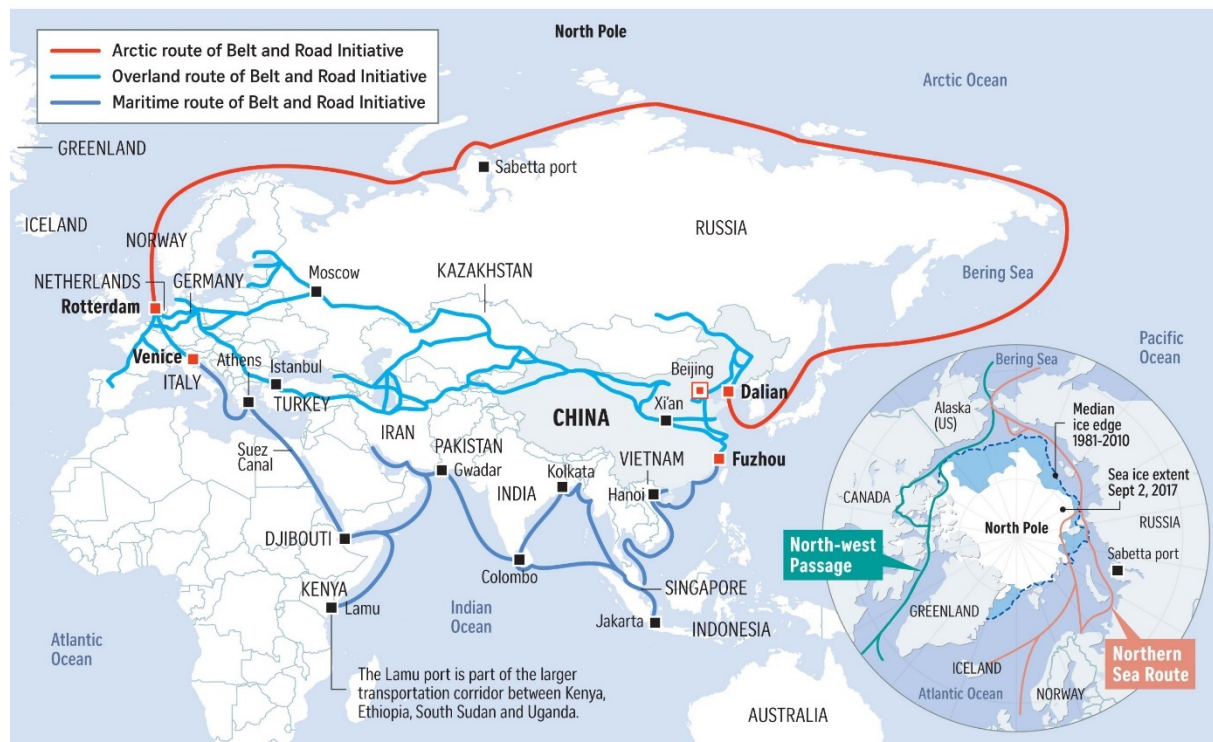


Figure 6 - Map of the Polar Silk Road (Ehret, 2019)

APPENDIX 7: ETHICS FORM



European Studies Student Ethics Form

Your name: Isaura Cardoso

Supervisor: Mr. van Munster

Instructions:

Before completing this form you should read the APA Ethics Code (<http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx>). If you are planning research with human subjects, you should also look at the sample consent form available in the Final Project and Dissertation Guide.

- a. Read section 2 that your supervisor will have to sign. Make sure that you cover all these issues in section 1.
- b. Complete section 1 and, if you are using human subjects, section 2, of this form, and sign it.
- c. Ask your project supervisor to read these sections (and the draft consent form if you have one) and ask him/her to sign the form.
- d. Always append this signed form as an appendix to your dissertation. This is a knock-out criterium; if not included the Final Project/Dissertation is awarded an NVD.

Section 1. Project Outline (to be completed by student)

(i) Title of Project: The Price of Human Rights

(ii) Aims of project:

The aim of the project is to access whether the European Union and its member states promote it's Human Rights values as states in their Foreign Policy documents. This project focuses on the relations between the EU, its Member States and China. It looks into the effects of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the current oppression of the Uyghur community in Xinjiang, China. This region is important for the Belt and Road Initiative. The EU and its Member States benefits from being involved in the BRI, but does that go at the cost of promoting the protection of Human Rights?

(iii) Will you involve other people in your project – e.g. via formal or informal interviews, group discussions, questionnaires, internet surveys etc. (Note: if you are using data that has already been collected by another researcher – e.g. recordings or transcripts of conversations given to you by your supervisor, you should answer 'NO' to this question.)

No

If yes: you should complete the section 2 of this form.

If no: you should now sign the statement below and return the form to your supervisor. You have completed this form.

This project is not designed to include research with human subjects . I understand that I do not have ethical clearance to interview people (formally or informally) about the topic of my research, to carry out internet research (e.g. on chat rooms or discussion boards) or in any other way to use people as subjects in my research.

Student's signature Isaura Cardoso Date 18-05-2020

Section 2 Complete this section only if you answered YES to question (iii) above.

(i) What will the participants have to do? (v. brief outline of procedure):

(ii) What sort of people will the participants be and how will they be recruited?

(iii) What sort of stimuli or materials will your participants be exposed to? Tick the appropriate boxes and then state what they are in the space below

- ☐ Questionnaires
- ☐ Pictures
- ☐ Sounds
- ☐ Words
- ☐ Other

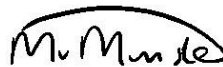
(iv) Consent: Informed consent must be obtained for all participants before they take part in your project. By means of an informed consent form you should state what participants will be doing, drawing attention to anything they could conceivably object to subsequently. You should also state how they can withdraw from the study at any time and the measures you are taking to ensure the confidentiality of data. A standard informed consent form is available in the Dissertation Manual. Appendix the Informed Consent Form to your Final Project/Dissertation as well.

(vi) What procedures will you follow in order to guarantee the confidentiality of participants' data?

Student's signature:

Date

Supervisor's signature:



Date 18-5-2020

(if satisfied with the proposed procedures)