

Capstone Project: An awakening Giant

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*An analysis of Chinese expansion and a case study of human rights violations in
Xinjiang*

*“China is a sleeping giant. Let her sleep, for when she awakes, she will shake the
world.”*

(Source: unknown)

Abstract

This paper employs power transition theory to determine whether China has reached a status of power through which it can be called a hegemony. Using several indicators, it measures power parity as well as dissatisfaction to determine China's power and its intention to use it. China's power is further explored by delving deeper into the One Belt One Road Initiative (OBOR) and its influence on the European Union. Finally, using a case study of human rights violations, it aims to answer how influence garnered through power and the OBOR policy inhibits EU action against human rights violation. The paper recommends two modes of action for the EU to reclaim control and take against human rights abuses.

Introduction

China is rising. That cannot be denied. As some estimate that the eastern giant will soon, in 2028, become the largest economy in the world (CEBR, 2021), it deems necessary to wonder about position as well as desire to become a leader. Therefore, the first question aimed to be answer in this research question is; to what extent is China becoming a hegemony? In order to answer this, this paper employs power transition theory as a fundamental basis. The theory by Organski (1958) argues that when a nation reaches a certain power potential, it has the ability to engage in a power transition struggle for the hegemonic position. However, whether it actually does engage in a power struggle is dependent on its satisfaction with the status quo (Organski & Kugler, 2015). To determine this, several indicators, such as GDP and military expenditure, will be implemented to establish whether China is in fact in a power transition with the dominant power and whether it is satisfied or not. After establishing China's power position, a closer look will be taken on a specific China's policies. The One Belt One Road Initiative has garnered a lot of attention since it was introduced. The initiative aims to connect China to the world, especially to Europe and Africa by building a land as well as maritime road (OECD, 2018). While it could be said that its purpose is entirely economic, there are developments in Asia and Europe that tend to suggest otherwise. Cases like Montenegro, Greece and Hambantota show a different side of the OBOR initiative, as this paper will show. These cases, in part, have an influence on how Europe is able to form decisions, for instance on human rights. Lastly, on the topic of human rights, this paper employs a case study of the treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang in order to evaluate to what extent the events there are congruent with the European Union's values on human rights. It concludes that the occurrences in Xinjiang go against everything the EU stands for, which leads to the last question. Combining the findings on hegemony and Chinese policies of influence it asks; how has a rising China affected the ability of the EU to act on its values?

Literature Review

In order to understand the surrounding context of the Uyghur's relationship with the Chinese government, one has to utilize extensive literature. However, possible biases that could run throughout such literature have to be taken into account. In doing so, seeing the evidence indicating the PRC persecuting the Uyghur, any sources from People's Republic of China

(PRC) become highly doubtful as evidence suggests that the state has pretty much consolidated control over the domestic flow of information (Xu et al., 2011). One therefore has to look for other, more credible, sources.

Moving on to a core aspect of this research, the concept of hegemony as well as world order structures are crucial for placing China on the world stage. A change in hierarchies has become noticeable. China has grown into a gigantic economy, one that is ready to take center stage, at least in Xi Jinping's eyes (The New York Times, 2017). In fact, the rise of China and the simultaneous decline of US hegemony has led some to believe that the once unipolar system spearheaded by the US has now transformed into a system of multipolarity where the US shares supremacy with China (Geeraerts, 2011). Others agree with the fact that the time of US unipolarity has ended and that in a nation-to-nation struggle the US would likely succumb to the momentum that China has gained (Ikenberry, 2008).

Interestingly, there is various literature already discusses the role of China and its hegemonial potential. Some argue that China is challenging US imperialism, which can be observed in the battle with Europe and the US over control of the African continent (Campbell, 2008). Others state firmly that China will not even come remotely close to that. In fact, they argue that China will not even reach the status of a regional hegemon as it faces domestic challenges of far higher priority and is in no way able to replace the US as hegemon in the Indo-Pacific region (Roy, 2020). As seen above, scholars such as Geeraerts and Ikenberry seem to suggest otherwise. Given the various arguments that surround China and its rise in power, it deems sensible to seek out fundamental theories as forms of guidance. When consulting theories of hegemony and power, there is one particular theory of interest. Power transition theory (PTT) has become a popular choice for realists. A concept brought forward by Organski (1958), it describes the idea of periods of hegemony where a leading power is eventually challenged by another, who has grown dissatisfied with the status quo. In a struggle for supremacy, hegemon and challenger engage in a power struggle that could even lead to war. Applied to China, Kim & Gates (2015) analyze the likelihood of such an event and consider the evolution of power transition since conceived by Organski. They conclude that while war is a possibility, other scenarios are more likely, such as the implementation of "middle powers". Moreover, it might not yet be possible to fully challenge the hegemonic position of the US, but it is currently eager to consolidate itself as a regional hegemony. As illustrated by Lee (2015) the current transition in power between China and Japan is a stark reminder of what a power China has become. In fact, the author argues in line with PTT, stating that regional power transitions can very well destabilize global orders.

If China were to strive for hegemony or be already in such a position, the question of how such position is improved or consolidated has to be answered. As stated previously, China wants to take centre stage. Since 2005, China has seemingly invested up to \$2 trillion in other countries all across the globe (AEI, 2020). In more recent times, a particular plan by China has gained popularity on an international level. In 2013, China announced their plans on building an international network of trade routes, by land and sea. Named One Belt One Road (OBOR), the initiative seeks to connect China to the rest of the world, Africa and Europe in particular (Xing, 2018). The announcement has provoked a mix of reactions. On the one hand, over 60 countries were eager to join the initiative immediately (OECD, 2018). On the other hand, major players like the US have heavily criticised China's plan of action, especially when it comes to funding. Rex Tillerson, former US secretary of state, described it as "predatory economics" and urged other nations like India to offer alternative funding to developing nations (CSIS, 2017). Among scholars, there have been discussions on the possible influence that such a gigantic network might have on the countries that engage with it. Some argue that the OBOR initiative is plainly economically influential and does not connote to any political means (Cai, 2017). Others have determined that China's plan incorporates larger, political goals. Particularly, Overholt (2015) argues that the initiative is reminiscent of a larger geo-political strategy of the US in post-WWII times. More intricately, Pavličević (2018) takes apart the funding attributed to the 16 +1 which is a cooperation between China and many Balkan states. He concludes that while capital influx has increased greatly through Chinese loans, China's influence is not as great as one might believe. This, paired with China's mild intentions, makes Chinese investments in the Balkan states less concerning. However, whether his assumptions are accurate should be debated, since some recipients of these loans seem to be way in over their heads. Take Montenegro for instance, the country has taken out a Chinese loan equal to 27% of its GDP (Pavličević, 2018). What happens if Montenegro, a country severely in debt (CEIC, 2021), is unable to pay back interests? Would this be one way of China gaining control beyond economic terms? All of this becomes very interesting when adding into consideration that China has been struggling to defend itself regarding accusations of human rights violations. In fact, Yeoh (2018) argues in his discussion on the long list of Chinese dissidents that the CCP is willing to go well beyond national borders to silence and persecute its targets. In establishing closer relationships with other nations, such as OBOR, the state could strengthen its ability to continue their practices while gaining support due to economic dependencies.

The Uyghur crisis is arguably a suitable example of said persecution of dissidents. Roberts (2020) argues that Xinjiang, with its abundance in natural resources, is of high value

to the party. However, Xinjiang, being a Muslim region with a distinct history is also quite different from most of China that is ordinarily atheist and ethnically Han. He concludes that by branding them as terrorists they have found an easy way to strip potential threats or targets of their rights. This has been especially successful after the events of 9/11, which paved the way for pursuing this Muslim minority with ease. Indeed, 9/11 did spark anti-Muslim sentiment, especially amongst Americans (Panagopoulos, 2006). Globally, the events of that day resulted increased islamophobia altogether (Ahsan, 2005). Such developments must have arguably decreased the likelihood of international reactions against China's counterterrorism policy, making Roberts claim all the more plausible. These policies, so the author argues, included strong means of surveilling and controlling the population which eventually self-fulfilled the prophecy of actual terrorist activity. In other words, the oppressive policies of the government birthed terrorist sentiment in the region. A bold claim, one could argue. Yet, the analogy presented by the author shows a strong narrative facilitated by the state to justify its policies. Other sources bolster this claim in stating that the post-9/11 sentiment was used to construct a threat that overshadows the reality of the situation (Pokalova, 2013). According to Roberts (2020), this more than worrisome development in Xinjiang has been observable for quite some time. However, it is only in recent years that institutions, like the European Union have reacted to this. And it is only after public outrage that some wheels have started to turn. In a Politico opinion piece, the president of the World Uyghur Congress stated his frustration with the EU, an institution that values human rights so strongly, and their inaction on this issue (Politico, 2020). It is only now, in 2021, that the EU has issued sanctions, together with the US, UK and Canada (BBC News, 2021a).

Methodology

Research Design

Given the focus and frame of this research, the analysis of empirical data, such as questionnaires and surveys were not utilized. Instead, qualitative secondary research was employed in order to best unravel the web of information that surrounds China, as a potential hegemony, and the Uyghurs. Moreover, this research was conducted in a twofold manner, beginning with an examination and analysis of scholarly articles and ending with an analysis of documentary films that report on human right violations of the Uyghur population. Secondary research, traditionally used alongside primary research, is often the starting point for any type of research that is conducted (Stewart & Kamins, 1993). A researcher might begin their journey of developing empirical research by first seeking out existing data and literature.

However, secondary information does not necessarily need to be a supplementary source of information only. According to Stewart & Kamins (1993) and Hakim (1982), secondary research can have several advantages. For one, it is more time and cost efficient as there is no necessity of collecting empirical data and common costs of empirical research are eliminated. Furthermore, secondary research can be especially appealing to (graduate students), among others, who might not have enough reach to have their questions answered or funds to conduct empirical research (Hakim, 1982). Secondary research is, of course, not without flaws as there is critique that needs to be addressed. Firstly, there are concerns about credibility and confirmability as well as dependability and transferability (Guba, 1981. Lincoln & Guba, 1985). How credible are the sources used? Can the findings be confirmed by other sources? How dependable is the research? Such worries are addressed by Largan & Morris (2019) who argue for the use of John Scott's (2014) methods of assessing documentary sources. In short, assessing several characteristics of a source can infer the quality of a source. These include authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning¹. Lastly, it is important to note, whatever data or information gathered might have been subjected to bias by the author. Furthermore, it was collected for a certain purpose, one that could likely differ from the purpose of the secondary research (Stewart & Kamins, 1993). This can make the collection of relevant findings more difficult while also making it necessary to account for biases, which make Scott's characteristics all the more important.

Collection of Information

When conducting a qualitative secondary research there are a variety of streams of information that can be drawn from. These can vary from scholarly articles and theory to videos and social media, and many more (Largan & Morris, 2019).

First and foremost, the sources collected were gathered through the search engines Google, Google Scholar and SmartCat/WorldCat. One stream of information included fundamental literature on hegemony, which was collected and applied to the case of China. Examples of such theory include Organski's PTT as well as Wallerstein's world systems theory. Such sources are vital in the answering of the research questions as they elucidate on what constitutes hegemonies, how they maintain power and give insight into the implications of hegemonial

¹ Largan & Morris (2019, Chapter 8):

1. Authenticity: Is the evidence genuine?
2. Credibility: Is the evidence accurate?
3. Representativeness: Is the evidence typical or untypical of its kind?
4. Meaning: Is it clear and comprehensible?

changes. Furthermore, to explore and identify the actual ways through which China is expanding and solidifying its power, journal as well as news articles were collected that either analysed or described Chinese policies, both domestic and foreign. The One Belt One Road Initiative (OBOR) is one example that has been thoroughly documented and scrutinized for possible implications on affected nations. Such information served also the purpose of answering the question on implications of Chinese hegemonization for the European Union. Moreover, a culmination of scholarly and news sources was utilized to firstly examine the context of the Uyghur crisis. The collection of on-site documentaries as was key in providing evidence for the ongoing human rights violations in Xinjiang. Such documentaries were investigative reports by news agencies such as the BBC, Channel 4 and others. Such reports are a vital source of first-hand information as they provide evidence of how the situation looks like on the ground. In fact, organizations like Human Rights Watch (HRW) as well as newspapers, such as the Sydney Morning Herald, used the reports by the BBC as primary sources to inform the public (HRW, 2021; Sydney Morning Herald, 2021). Footage such as produced by the BBC immense value due to the visual confirmations that it can achieve as well as the witnesses it includes. Thus, it offers an alternative to written reports who may overlook certain intricacies, such as the number of surveillance cameras provided by street recordings

Analysis

Analyzing China's status in the world stage with the use of fundamental theory, such as PTT and world system theory required the use of indicators. Previous PTT scholars have utilized and justified national capabilities (as measured by Correlates of War) as well as GDP (Houweling & Siccama, 1988; De Soysa et al. 1997), which were employed when framing China growth in a power transition setting. The composite index of national capabilities (CINC) refers to a list of indicators that measure state power, such as demographic, economic and military strength² (Heckmann, 2009). However, CINC offers a perspective from the industrial times, such as an indicator on iron and steel production. While its data is still quite valid, times have changed which is why the indicators of GDP and CINC must be extended with further data. Technological development has become an important feature and must therefore be taken into account. Which is why this analysis included Research and

² CINC indicators:

military expenditure, military personnel, energy consumption, iron and steel production, urban population, and total population (Correlates of War, 2012)

Development funding as a technological indicator. The data was drawn from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (n.d.), which has developed a global monitoring process for exactly this type of data, ranging from 1996 to 2019. This data is useful for evaluating China's ambitions and funding in terms of expenditure in technological innovations as it determines how much spending is funneled into R&D in businesses, higher education, governmental institutions and others. The analysis of human rights violations in Xinjiang underwent a different approach. Instead of literature, documentary films, or rather investigative reports, of the treatment of Uyghurs served as the basis of analysis. However, it was pertinent to beforehand define what is meant by human rights and to what extent they are valued in Europe. This deemed as crucial given the fact that the goal was to examine to what extent European values stand in contradiction with the events in Xinjiang. Having clarified the frame of human rights, the reports were analyzed with a human rights lens. Meaning, the UN declaration of human rights, the most widely accepted framework, was used as a guideline on what rights the Uyghur people have. Lastly, for the sake of conciseness as well as readability, human rights were categorized under four columns. These four columns were derived from the structure of the High Commissioners office of the United Nations Human Rights department (n.d.). The first encompasses the rights of the individual as well as the recognition of dignity and rights. The second includes rights of the individual in society. The third, spiritual, political and public rights. And the fourth, cultural, social and economic rights.

China as a Contender for Hegemony? An Analysis

If we are to consider the possibility of China being/becoming a hegemony, PTT is arguably well-suited as a popular choice of theory when it comes to discussion China's advances. If, the possibility in question is to be tested as a reality, PTT requires several characteristics to be in place. The basic prerequisite being, the existence of a declining dominant power, and an ascending challenger. There is no debate on who ought to play the part of the declining dominant power, the United States (Geerearts, 2011; Ikenberry, 2008). However, exploring the level of US decline and China's growth requires more a more thorough analysis. If we are to talk about an occurring power transition, PTT requires the ascending challenger to reach a certain power parity that is necessary to be able to possibly (not necessarily) overtake the dominant power. Such transition can occur peacefully, if the challenger is satisfied with the status quo or, in case of dissatisfaction, it can turn into conflict (Organski & Kugler, 2015). To now apply PTT to the case of China, it has to be established whether a certain level of power parity has been achieved.

Starting with GDP at current prices, we see China (16.64) still lacking behind the United States (22.68). However, this gap is predicted to narrow drastically in the coming years (International Monetary Fund, 2021). According to the IMF, if we look at the growth patterns of both countries, China is experiencing more growth momentum with a percentage growth of 8% percent in 2021, while the US stands at around 6%. Future predictions see both countries becoming more satiated, with an estimated growth in 2026 of 4.9% and 1.6% respectively. This is a twofold difference between the countries and, with respect to their economy, will calculate into billions of dollars in difference. And while these are future estimates, the difference in Purchasing-Power-Parity (PPP) already speaks for itself. IMF (2021) data shows that China has already surpassed the US in 2017 and is continuing to grow drastically. Moving on, CINC data (Correlates of War, 2012) with its indicators on military expenses/personnel, energy consumption, iron and steel production as well as urban/total population, ranks China as the most powerful nation already in 2012 (among the G20). This might be out of proportion given China's relative power to the US at that time. But given China's landmass and size of population, it makes sense that these indicators rank it so high. However, this still lacks the factor of technology, one that is so very important. Current R&D expenditure shows the US in a leading position with a spending of 476\$ billion (in PPP) which is 2.7% of their GDP. China on the other spends only 2% of their GDP, which translates into 346\$ billion (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.). Even though China is by far the second most spender on R&D, the US is willing to spend considerably more. Coming back to the previous question, has power parity been reached? As Lemke (1996) defines it, parity is referred as a "range of roughly equal power values" (p.246) and that contenders can be both named as dominant powers when about 80% of parity is achieved. Looking at China's track record across the board, one could argue that China has encroached power parity and is on the verge of reaching the threshold. In terms of GDP and R&D it is still lacking, but its PPP and the sheer size of the country will allow China to aim higher. Yes, it is outgrowing the US. It will inevitably become the world's largest economy; it is just a question of when. Some estimate that, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it will do so by 2028 (CEBR, 2021). If time is nigh, it is all the more necessary to discuss how China might behave. In PTT predictions about dominant power behavior are made through establishing whether the power is satisfied with the status quo or not. The status quo in this case refers to rules that the dominant power enforces on others which consolidate military, economic and political structures and benefit the one on top (Lemke & Tammen, 2010). Unfortunately, dissatisfaction as a form of measurement has seen little use in the past. There is

however one, who has even applied the concept to China. Lim (2015) uses established PTT indicators of dissatisfaction and draws an overview of China attitude towards the status quo.

Starting with military expenditure, Lim uses older data which nonetheless indicates strong dissatisfaction. China has seen a double-digit annual growth in the years 1994 and 2012 and has rapidly decreased the, you could say canyon, between them and the US. Especially in East-Asia, China has shown its intent to not only be part of an arising region, but to be its dominant player (Lim, 2015). As some time has passed since the collection of this data, the question arises as to how China's military expenditure looks like today. Official data puts China's annual military expenditure at around 2% of their GDP. Moreover, the official defense budget in the last ten years has seen a tenfold increase (SIPRI, 2021a). However, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has reason to believe that it is in actuality way higher. It estimates the actual budget at \$240 billion, 40 per cent higher than it officially is. SIPRI believes that China is not fully transparent about its spending. With regard to satisfaction, these new numbers give reason to believe that China has only grown more dissatisfied of the status quo. Lim (2015) argues that the next indicator, congruence with the domestic regime, exemplifies China's dissatisfaction. Similarity in institutions breeds satisfaction, is the argument within PTT (Lemke & Werner, 1996). Thus, China's autocratic model seems as incongruent as possible, with democratic models of both the dominant power and the international institutions it has created. For many decades, China had been classified as one of the strongest forms of autocracy (Systemic Peace, 2012). While scholars were hoping for a transition into democracy, this did not occur (Lim, 2015). In fact, Lim argues that China has gone further than just simply resisting transition. The China model, a mixture of economic growth and party control over economic and political decision-making, has garnered the attention of other ASEAN nations (Lim, 2015). Fast forward to today and little to nothing has changed. China is still a strong autocracy (Polity IV Scale, 2016) with no political rights. And Lim is correct in arguing for China's original intent of strategic partnership with ASEAN members. However, what used to be a China that was keen on participating in the ASEAN conversation has become an assertive China that is eager to "divide and rule"³ in order to further its agenda (Mahdi, 2020). Chinese dissatisfaction is also observable through the way in which it approaches the agreed upon rules of ASEAN and to what end they operate the way they do. Lim (2015) argues that China's military operations in the South China Sea violate ASEAN agreements is possible due to its great power difference to other members, who are eager to

³ Methods such as divide and rule will be discussed further in the following section

further economic collaborations and therefore in a bad position to enforce agreements. Furthermore, China has been pushing to exclude influences from states like the US which goes against ASEAN's open-door policy when it comes to cooperation with others (Malik, 2006). Overall, China's attitude towards the status quo is clear. It is one of dissatisfaction. It has increased its military expenditure, stayed on its autocratic course and immersed itself in regional institutions. Not with the intention to simply join discourses on economic growth and security, maybe at the beginning, but to dominate and disregard its rules. To encapsulate the findings above, China has encroached the line of parity as it has amassed a sizeable amount of economic and military power. Yes, it is still lacking behind in many terms, GDP, military and R&D but its growth is nonetheless impressive. In fact, the US and China are isolated contenders in a hegemonial struggle (International Monetary Fund, 2021; SIPRI, 2021b; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.). With a power incomparable to other nations, one could truly argue that a rough parity has *been* achieved, one that very well may consolidate and grow closer in the coming years. This makes China's dissatisfaction with the status quo all the more interesting. However, it cannot be classified as a hegemon on a world scale. Although, on a regional level, one might argue otherwise. If China is already reaching power parity with the US, how is it viewed on its home turf, East Asia? In a survey among ASEAN member states, 73% believed China to be having the greatest economic influence, with many believing that it had more political and economic influence than the US (Reuters, 2019). More shockingly, around 30% had no or little confidence in the US as a partner and keeper of regional security. And indeed, ASEAN sentiment seems to have come across something interesting here. As previously stated, China's handling with ASEAN members shows increased confidence in its abilities. The following section outlines some of China's policies, which may give more insight into their power on a regional as well as global scale.

China's most Influential Policy

With China reaching an astonishing amount of power while at the same time showing dissatisfaction with the status quo, a closer look at its actions is well deserving. The country's ambitions of expanding as a power can be well understood when viewing its policies. China is engaging in several strategies to extend its grasp of influence. Coming back to Xi Jinping's speech on bringing his country to center stage as a great power (The New York Times, 2017), how is China translating this wish into action? Perhaps the most obvious example is the One Belt One Road Initiative. Its main objectives lie in connecting China to other nations, thereby

gaining access to natural resources, new trade opportunities, and, quite interestingly, deepening cultural exchanges (OECD, 2018). The whole idea of connecting China with the world is executed in two ways, by constructing a land and maritime belt. When broken down further, the planned infrastructure for this endeavor is divided into six economic corridors (OECD, 2018).

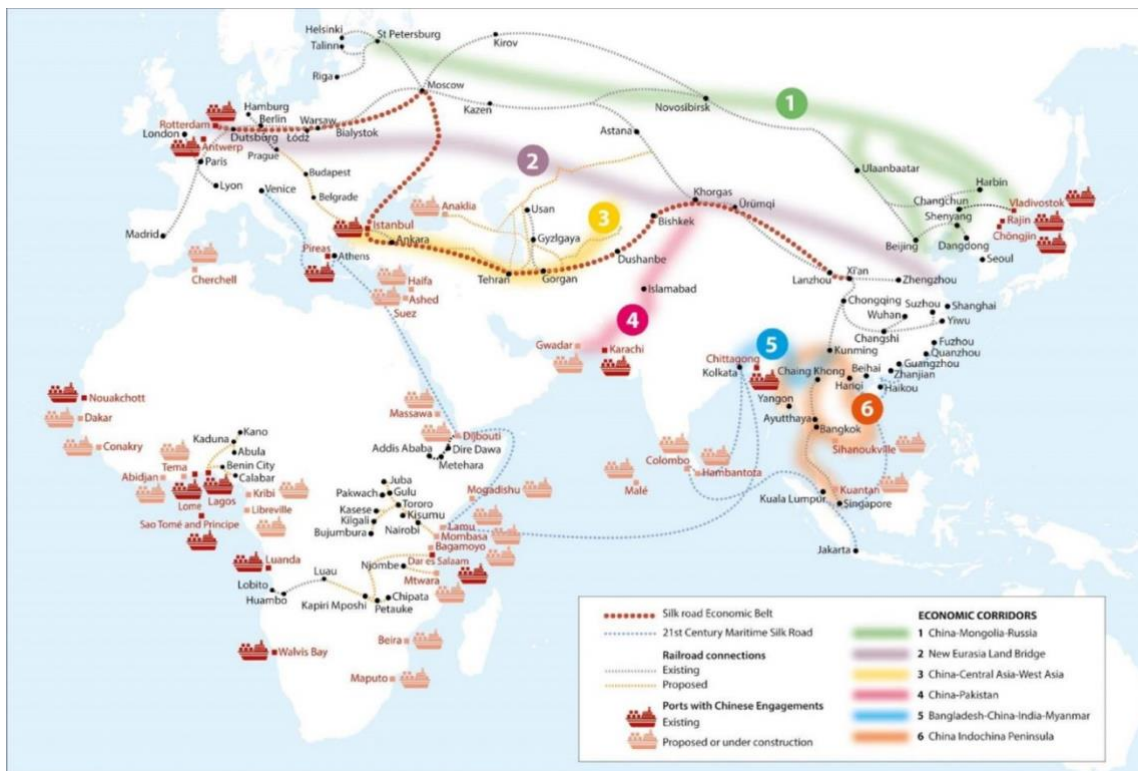


Figure 1: One Belt One Road, an overview by OECD (2018)

Together, they connect China to 65% of the world’s population and around one-third of the world’s GDP (Xing, 2018). Establishing such a web of connections requires large sums of capital, as well as the cooperation with nations that China seeks to connect to. Regarding funding, exact amounts are hard to determine, but the cost of the entire project is estimated to lie between one and eight trillion US dollar (CSIS, 2018). Furthermore, since the unveiling of the initiative in 2013, over a hundred nations have, in some way or another, agreed to joining the initiative (OECD, 2018). The benefits for China are clear. Economically, it enables them to expand their market reach, diversify their export routes and get closer to desired natural resources while at the same time provide employment for workers (Silin et al. 2017). In establishing such close trade relationships China also gains compliance with engaging states. Thus, it is also building a more intricate political relationship. China’s way of funding massive project in countries that not necessarily can afford it has seen one-sided reactions. A survey of ASEAN member states shows skepticism of China’s intentions. Many view that a deal between

China and their country must be negotiated with caution, while only less than 10% saw China as a benevolent power (Reuters, 2019). Such opinions should come as little surprises when considering some of the drawbacks that resulted from the OBOR initiative. The Hambantota port in Sri Lanka serves as a fitting example. Under its former president, Mahinda Rajapaksa, Sri Lanka took out large loans from China, who was the only one willing to fund what was regarded an economically unviable project. Sri Lanka, a country already deeply in debt, was soon unable to even back pack interests when China proposed to relieve \$1 billion of its debt. In turn, Sri Lanka handed over a 99-year lease of the Hambantota port, which is now a planned project under the OBOR initiative (The New York Times, 2018). While fault can be placed with the Sri Lankan government, it is argued by some that China is purposely engaging in such trades and is coercing government with the prospect of defaulting on their debt (The Diplomat, 2016). However, whether this a case of soft-power loans gone wrong or targeted coercion cannot be clearly said. The bottom line is, China ended up with basically gaining ownership of a key harbor for the maritime belt of the OBOR initiative. While the general idea of the OBOR initiative characterizes more as a policy of attraction, China is not afraid to take more drastic measures of convincing. Especially within its realm of a regional hegemony it has made use of “divide and rule” in order to intimidate ASEAN member states and diffuse power between them. A clear case of that is the South China Sea and the historical claim that China has made. Under UN nautical law territorial waters extend 200 nautical miles from the nation’s coast (United Nations, 1982). However, China has laid a claim to most of the South China Sea, going well beyond their territorial waters, by laying out what has been called the nine-dash line (The Economist, 2012). The nine-dash line encompasses international waters as well as territory of several ASEAN member states. In the past, China has been sowing seeds of conflict between members by highlighting territorial conflicts (Asia Times, 2020). At the same time, it has engaged in more confrontational methods by establishing naval blockades around islands like Ayungin Shoal (The Philippines), thereby cutting of supply and trying to contestants out (Baruah, 2017). On top of that, it has been building islands with military capacity to further consolidate their position (BBC News, 2015). All that is in obvious disregard of the supposed alliance with ASEAN member states. It showcases the power of a regional hegemony expanding its own backyard. One that is dissatisfied with how the rules have been laid out before it had the power to have a say in it.

Chinese expansion does not stop in Asia or Africa. It is within the goals of the OBOR initiative to reach Europe as well. Interestingly the OBOR Initiative has been compared to an aid plan that increased US trade opportunities and tied them closer to Europe. According to Shen & Chan (2018), the OBOR initiative is much like the Marshall Plan when it comes to their purpose. The purpose being to boost exports, export their currencies, counter rivals, strategically divide camps and draw diplomatic support away from their rival. The economic purposes aside, the aspect of countering a rival and drawing away support seem most interesting when looking at Europe especially. As the Marshall plan targeted Eastern European states (among many) to sway them from the Soviet persuasion, so does now the OBOR initiative engage, successfully, with these former Soviet states (Shen & Chan, 2018).

As part of the OBOR expansion towards Europe, China has deeply invested the 16 + 1 agreement. The 16 members are comprised of 11 EU members and 5 Balkan states. From 2009 up until 2015, they have received around \$1.9 billion in investments which amounted to a 381% growth in 6 years (Pavličević, 2018). Looking closer, Montenegro serves as a prime example of debt trap diplomacy almost gone right. The country took out a \$1 billion investment loan from China and is now facing the consequences. Unable to repay the debt, it turned to the EU to help in solving the problem (Reuters, 2021). The EU now stands before a dilemma. It either lets Montenegro default on its debt, which could lead to another Sri Lanka scenario or, it could lend out a credit and help the distraught country pay its debt. Either scenario is less than beneficial as it involves either letting China enter Europe's backyard or spend resources on saving Montenegro. However, once that is settled, there are another 15 Central Eastern European countries who have taken out investment loans. The good news is, many of them should be able to carry the weight on their own. However, in some cases, Chinese investments went further in form of acquisition or funding of coal power plants in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Romania (Pavličević, 2018). By heavily investing in fossil fuel energy, they are arguably going against coal phase-out plans of the EU. EU climate goals for 2030 (EU Commission, 2020) imply a necessary phase-out of coal, which is not the direction that Chinese investments are going. While this already speaks of some influence that China has within the EU, recent developments in Greece are all the more drastic. China has invested in several sectors, transport infrastructure, energy, telecommunications, real estate and tourism (Tonchev & Davarinou, 2017). What strikes the eye immediately is the fact that it has acquired a 51% majority stake in the Greek port Piraeus (Reuters, 2019b). With that, China has acquired one of the major European ports which will play an integral role in connecting Europe to the maritime belt of the OBOR initiative, bringing China's sphere of influence closer and closer.

That it already has some influence within Greek’s decision-making is showcased by Greek’s decision to block a EU statement on China’s violations on human rights (Reuters, 2017). This is probably the most crystal-clear example of how China has already begun to undermine European values.

Human Rights Violations in Xinjiang, a Case Study

As it is part of the aim of this paper to explore to what extent European values stand in contradiction to the events in Xinjiang, this section will first elucidate on what is meant by European values before going into the matter of human rights violations. After a cataclysmic second world war, Europe laid in shambles. With the US standing as victor, it saw the responsibility to build Europe up in a way that would prevent new atrocities from happening. An important idealist point of guidance was earlier introduced by Wilson, the League of Nations and articles 22 and 23 (who were more concrete articulations of human rights) (Douglas, 2000). However, while the League of Nations failed, it brought the idea of universalized human rights forward, something that was incorporated into the UN charter of 1945 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (United Nations, n.d.). What started out with the wish to never again see the horrors of war resulted in a universal framework which has since been signed and ratified by many. Among them is the EU, whose founding values included the promotion and protection of human rights (European Parliament, n.d.). These values seem to have permeated European culture as today a clear majority, 48% of EU citizens, see protecting human rights worldwide, along with freedom of speech, as the main fundamental values that need to be upheld (Eurobarometer, 2019).

Before delving into the evidence provided by the investigative reports on human rights violations, it is necessary to outline what is defined as a human right. Here, the UN declaration of human rights serves as the fundamental basis. Under the declaration, the UN outlines multiple themes of laws. For the purpose of this paper and better oversight, they have been organized into four columns. They are the following:

Columns	Articles
1: Rights of the individual	3-11
2: Rights of the individual in society	12-17
3: Political, public and spiritual rights	18-21

Starting with the rights on the individual, there are various observations that can be made. An ex-detainee from a camp in Xinjiang speaks out on the treatment in prison (DW, 2021). She states that she suffered electric shocks to the head as a punishment for failing to repeat Chinese words. Furthermore, she speaks of forced injections that have led to many women ceasing to have a period, which hints at forced sterilization. Another detainee, a male, states that he was cuffed to a desk, legs and arms, for two days, unable to move at all. The BBC (2019a, 1.38) interviewed a woman who also stated that she received electric shocks to the head. Afterwards, she had to thank her abuser; “thank you teacher, we will not be late next time”. Furthermore, she stated that private bathrooms were equipped with cameras. A previous report by DW (2020) revealed documents that explained some of the arrests of people in Xinjiang. According to the document, people were detained for wearing a beard, having a face cover, having too many children, being born after 1990 and having relatives abroad. These events stand in clear violation of the rights of the individual. Especially, article 3 (the right to life, liberty and security of person), article 5 (torture) and article 9 (arbitrary arrest) can be seen as violated as the witnesses’ claims and the leaked documents show.

The rights described in articles 12 to 17 state an individual’s right in civil and political society. Regarding article 12, which incorporates the right to privacy, a documentary by the CBC (2019) shows massive violations. In an undercover meeting with Leon, a government mandated company responsible for building surveillance tech in Xinjiang, the extent of surveillance is revealed. The employee reveals, not knowing he is talking to a journalist, that there are cameras in every single street. Not only do these cameras record you, they also have facial recognition application and scan your behavior or body language. According to a whistleblower and expert, who remains anonymous, this technology is explicitly used on Uyghurs who can be distinguished due to their different facial structure. The surveillance system scans Uyghurs, classifies them as normal, of concern or dangerous and feeds the information back into a gigantic system. Thus, what we see here is a massive violation of privacy. Another instance of privacy violation cameras in private bathrooms, as mentioned by the detainee in the report by the BBC (2019a). Regarding other rights within the column, no other violations or allegations could be clearly determined. However, this does not mean that such rights were upheld. Just that evidence is not substantial enough. For instance, footage by DW (2021, 9:33) shows abandoned villages where houses have been sealed by the authorities.

This could hint at a violation of article 17, the right to property. However, current evidence is not sufficient in making such a claim. Third, the investigative reports also gave insight into rights violations of spiritual freedom. When roaming the city of Kashgar, the BBC (2019b) encountered proclamations that are plastered to the doors of a mosque. The proclamations state certain rules in the context of religion. It explicitly forbids the wearing of beards which are of importance in the Islamic faith. Moreover, the footage shows the transformation of mosques and holy sites into public toilets and businesses. In other districts, mosques are not transformed but simply demolished. Wiped of the face of the earth. Clearly, the Uyghurs freedom to practice their faith is being inhibited. Lastly, cultural rights also seem to be violated. An investigative report of the Uyghur districts shows a worrisome development (Wall Street Journal, 2019). The footage shows that whole traditional districts have been demolished. Out of the rubble now come high towers, resembling nothing like Uyghur architecture. Gulchehra Hoja, a Uyghur activist comments on the development of her home saying; they're destroying my family, my home, even my memories" (3:35). Article 27 frames the right to participate in the cultural life of the community. In the case of the Uyghurs, there is no cultural life to participate in as its people are detained, its religion is disappearing and its cultural heritage is being demolished.

Reflecting back on the purpose of this case study, it can be clearly stated that several human rights, across all four columns, have been violated. Adding to the severity of the situation is the use of sterilization and birth controls (DW, 2021), which fall under the category of Genocide (United Nations, 1948b). The above-mentioned violations showcase just a fraction of the abuse. A report by the Newlines Institute (2021), written by experts on Genocide, came to the conclusion that China is clearly engaging in the systematic destruction of a people, the killing and harming of Uyghurs and inhibiting of reproductive abilities, and is therefore engaging in Genocide. The events in Xinjiang are clearly incongruent with what is valued in the European Union, whether it's the EU Charter or the wishes of its citizens to protect human rights world-wide. Thus, what is the EU doing on this matter? Is it in line with its values of human rights? So far, all that the EU has done is issue sanctions against four Chinese officials and one government entity. In a tit for tat, Beijing has retaliated with sanctions themselves (European Parliament, 2021). How effective is this really? Can the EU do more?

Discussion

In drawing from the knowledge of power transition theory, one can argue that the power that China has amassed over the years puts her closer and closer to the power position of the US. Reaching what can be argued as a phase of power parity, China has not only become

increasingly powerful. It has grown dissatisfied with the status quo. The current disruptive policies in the South China Sea, as well as the blatant autocratic character of China have shown that the nation is incongruent with the sets of values and rules established under American hegemony. While it is not yet powerful enough to challenge these on a global level, China has become a problem for the East Asian region. Even more so as the Obama administration struggled deeply with accommodating the issues of the region while simultaneously balancing geopolitical issues in the Middle-East and the Crimea (Saha, 2020). And while Trump may have reset the focus on China, it has still managed to engage in a major project that can and has protected Chinese interests, both economic and political. The OBOR initiative has to be taken seriously. The examples in this paper show that the OBOR policies can have effects that exceed the original deals made with the respective countries. With regard to the EU, the examples of Montenegro and Greece show the implications that the OBOR policies have on Europe already. What makes these developments even more worrisome is the fact that this is only the beginning of Chinese expansion into Europe. Italy has signed a memorandum with the intention to join the initiative. Next to Greece it would become the second major European country but also the one of the most indebted countries in the eurozone and also the first G7 country to join OBOR (Bindi, 2019). The targeting of vulnerable economies in Europe opens larger realms of influence for China. Thus, this paper recommends that the EU develops a counter alternative to Chinese investments in Europe. However, this could be increasingly difficult to accomplish. The EU's funding is limited and subject to more regulation than China's. Also, the EU cannot just give handouts to projects that are clearly not feasible, such as the Montenegro highway. It is a complex situation that the EU should not aim to solve alone. Given the interest of the US to maintain its hegemonial position in the world, it should be more than willing to assist the EU in consolidating power in European hands. In fact, the recent G7 summit introduced a plan to deal with China's investment strategy by offering an alternative, the Build Back Better World (B3W) plan. However, it has been criticized for burdening nations with debt (BBC, 2021b). This issue of debt has to be addressed by the G7 if it aims to truly strengthen the countries it invests in. Otherwise, they just become political pawns in a ploy for diplomatic leverage against China, which is exactly what China is currently achieving. The difference is, China is purposely engaging in debt diplomacy.

The issue of the Uyghur needs a different approach entirely. While a strong B3W plan could help the EU regain legitimacy when demanding human rights protection, it cannot just simply maintain the path that it is currently on. Sanctions can be a useful tool when the recipient is unable to deal with the consequences, whether its frozen assets or travel bans. However, a

few sanctions against Chinese officials will not do much, except provoke. This was the case with the recent sanctions by the EU, as mentioned above. It also distracts from the true issue, the Uyghur Genocide. The EU office for China relations has been sanctioned and now demands that they be lifted so that the official can return to their normal work. Thus, we see why sanctions will not work. A much more concrete approach needs to be taken. On the side of business. At least 83 brands, e.g., Nike, are working with suppliers that utilize forced labor camps in Xinjiang to collect cotton (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2020). The EU should start to consider, to urge companies to boycott the industry and seek an alternative. When ignored, it could also go to the extent of sanctioning the businesses if they choose to continue with sourcing their cotton from Xinjiang. All in all, the role of the Uyghurs is a complex one as the genocidal treatment occurs in a timeline in which China is has become increasingly strong and therefore difficult to handle. This is worsened by its dissatisfaction with the status quo. Furthermore, the strong autocratic sentiment makes a solution for the Uyghur crisis through the democratization of China impossible. While it is in itself of the highest priority to save the Uyghurs, it is the moral responsibility of the EU to take action.

Conclusion

This research paper covered a variety of issues. To elucidate on China's position of power, Organski's (1958) power transition theory was used. Using various findings by scholars on how to classify an ongoing power transition, the concepts of power parity was implemented to determine whether China has reached a position of power that sizeable enough to enter a transition and level of dissatisfaction was used to determine whether China is in fact willing to enter a transition. Looking at various indicators of power, this paper came to the conclusion that China has in fact roughly encroached power parity, especially on a regional level in East Asia. Given China's GDP growth, it is still developing further upwards, which will make a determination on power parity in the future more concrete. With regard to dissatisfaction however, it can be safely said that China is not satisfied with the status quo and the rules of the hegemonial power. Furthermore, its incongruence to the democratic model and its strong autocratic footing makes a transition to a democracy that is satisfied with the status quo unlikely. This paper also covered China's policy of the One Belt One Road initiative. It outlined the size and purpose of the initiative before delving deeper into the influence that the initiative has created in some regions so far. China has made some strong moves in East Asia, engaging in what some argue to be debt trap diplomacy. In Europe, China has arguably increased its

influence by making large investments, especially in countries that tend to struggle economically. This had an influence on the EU. Cases like Montenegro force the EU to commit funds that could otherwise develop member states more efficiently. Greece however, is a whole new issue altogether. The country's decision to stand in the way of condemning China on human rights violations compromises the EU's integrity and limits its ability to act on its values. This answers the culminating question posed in the beginning. Greece aside, it is this paper's opinion that the EU is in need of more affirmative action against China, regarding both the OBOR initiative and Xinjiang. On the former, the B3W plan is a good start, but must be executed without risking increased debt. On the latter, companies, that profit from the systemic genocide and incarceration of the Uyghur ought to be persuaded to change their production streams or face sanctions. While this might be a drastic and unlikely approach, it could hurt Xinjiang severely if such large streams of revenue suddenly fall away.

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