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DISCURSIVE POWER IN THE CHINESE CONTEXT: A STUDY TO HOW CCP  
DISCOURSE ON RELIGION AFFECTS THE UYGHURS

MASTER THESIS

To be Submitted as Part of the Requirements of the Master Theology and Religious Studies  
*Specialization Track: Religion, Conflict and Globalization*

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S3367290

15/08/2022

Word count: 20879 (excluding the footnotes)

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## Abstract

In recent years, the Uyghurs have received attention from news outlets to governmental institutions due to the actions the governing body Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has taken towards this group. An ethnic minority with Turkic roots and Islam as its main religion, the Uyghurs are part of domestic discourse on Muslim extremism and terrorism. In the past years a considerable amount of scholarly research has been published on the interaction between the CCP and the Uyghurs in the context of this Muslim extremism and terrorism. What misses in the current ongoing debate of the CCP and the Uyghurs is the focus on what drives the CCP to engage in religious politics in the first place. Specifically, the role of discourse and power.

What the domestic debate on religion in the People's Republic China (PRC) seems to suggest is a relation between shifting positions of religion in politics and the discourse expressed with regards to religious affairs. The report of the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress lays the foundation from which these developments take place: a renewed emphasis on building a socialism with Chinese characteristics and the goal of national rejuvenation coined as the "Chinese Dream." The merge of the governmental body State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) that follows only a year after the publication of the report signals the increasing power of the CCP over religious affairs and can be interpreted as a necessary means for the CCP to secure socialism with Chinese characteristics and the Chinese dream.

To bring to the surface the underlying relations between the shifting position of religion in politics through discourse, the researcher aims to explain how the CCP's discourse on religion has affected the Uyghur in the past five years (2017-2022). Through a discursive power theory, a theory new in research that focuses on CCP discourse on religion, it will be explained how discourse is an important tool for the CCP to enhance social stability.

### Ethical statement

Although the research I conducted relies on primary and secondary sources such as media, governmental reports, policy paper, and academic publications, it nonetheless is aware of the implications it might have on the Uyghurs, whether directly or indirectly.

The sources in this thesis are selected with much consideration and offered in the most transparent way. Nothing published in this thesis is without consent. I have honored the highest ideals of intellectual inquiry, defended academic freedom, and respected the diverse approaches within scholarly work. I have strived to be clear as possible about the used methods, research questions, and key findings. Whereas the research has an impact on the studied religious group, I have strived to judiciously balance the commitment to free and rigorous inquiry, in being responsible to treat those who I studied with honesty and fairness.

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## List of Abbreviations

CCP: Chinese Communist Party, also referred to as Party

IR: International Relations

ILO: International Labour Organization

MNC: Multinational Corporation

PRC: People's Republic China

SARA: State Administration for Religious Affairs (Religious Affairs Bureau)

UFWD: United Front Work Department

XUAR: Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

## List of Illustrations

### The CCP and China's Government

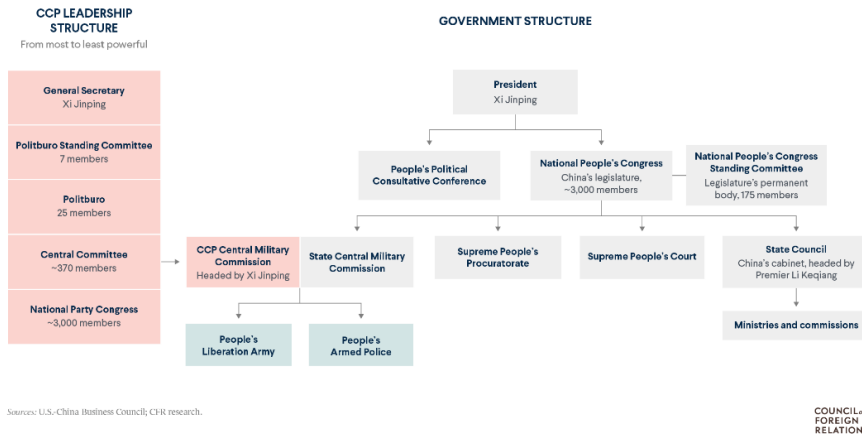


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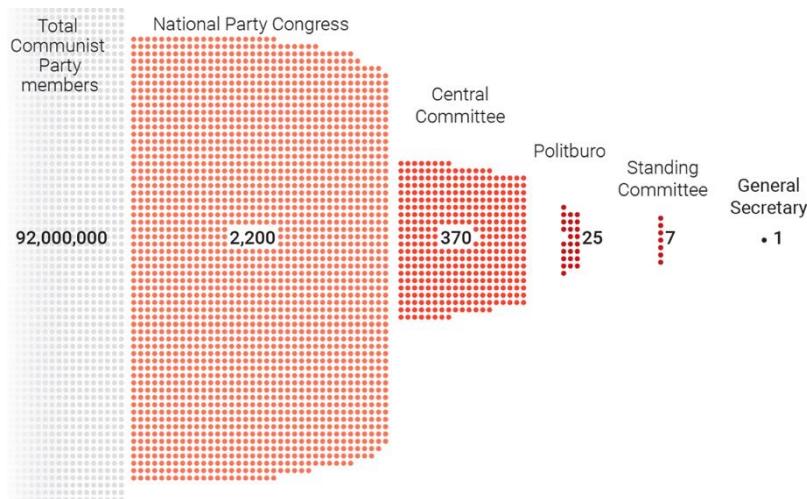


Figure 2: The Leadership Structure of the CCP, Jane Cai, "Structure of China's Communist Party: party cells, decision-making process, concentration of power," South China Morning Post, May 11, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3132921/how-chinas-communist-party-structured>.

## Introduction

“We will fully implement the Party's basic policy on religious affairs, uphold the principle that religions in China must be Chinese in orientation and provide active guidance to religions so that they can adapt themselves to socialist society.”<sup>1</sup>

In 2017 President Xi Jinping presented this view on religious affairs as part of report of the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress to the People's Republic of China. It was discussed during the meeting of the 19<sup>th</sup> National congress, which takes place every five years. With the report of 2017, President Xi re-emphasized the development goals for the PRC that have been central in his rule ever since he rose to presidency in 2012: a focus on the Chinese dream of rejuvenation of the PRC and an emphasis on the establishment of a socialism with Chinese characteristics. This ambition to further develop the PRC is not wrong in itself. As stated in the report, the focus of the PRC lies in the efforts to unite the Chinese people of all ethnic groups, to lead towards a moderately prosperous society and drive to secure the success of socialism with Chinese characteristics.<sup>2</sup> To protect the prosperous society with socialism with Chinese characteristics, religious affairs needs to be overseen to ensure they will not form an obstacle in the developmental efforts.

The practice of regulation of religion is not new to Chinese politics. For centuries, the Chinese have engaged in a process of registration and monitoring of religious activities in their lands.<sup>3</sup> This practice continued under the PRC and has been implemented in the political sphere by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), one of the two bodies the political system of the PRC is divided in. But to observe a socialist state with a communist base to engage in religious affairs, seems to be a contradiction with the communist foundation of the CCP.

A possible explanation for the observation of a secular body, like the CCP, to engage in religious affairs lies in the power they radiate: a political secularism.” As follows from the conceptualization of the anthropologist Saba Mahmood, political secularism is “the modern state's sovereign power to reorganize substantive features of religious life, stipulating what religion is or ought to be, assigning its proper content, and disseminating concomitant subjectivities, ethical frameworks, and quotidian practices.”<sup>4</sup> The report of the 19<sup>th</sup> National

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<sup>1</sup> “Full text of Xi Jinping's Report at 19th CPC National Congress,” China Daily, last modified November 4, 2021, [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2017-11/04/content\\_34115212.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2017-11/04/content_34115212.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> See Daniel H. Bays, “A Tradition of State Dominance,” in *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church-State Tensions*, eds. Jason Kindopp and Carol Lee Hamrin, (Washington: Brookings Institutions Press, 2004), 25-39, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rug/detail.action?docID=3004387>.

<sup>4</sup> Saba Mahmood, Introduction to *Religious Difference in A Secular Age: A Minority Report* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 3, <https://doi-org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/10.1515/9781400873531>.

Congress echoes this definition of political secularism through their position on the need to regulate religious affairs.

A change in politics that can support the view that the CCP practices a political secularism follows in 2018. In that year it was announced that the governmental body State Administration for Religious Affairs (Religious Affairs Bureau), responsible for the implementation of religious policies and administration of religious affairs, would merge with the CCP.<sup>5</sup> With the merge of SARA with the CCP, the CCP has gained more power over religious affairs as it can use the SARA as its pawn to reorganize religion further.

What the changes in the handling of domestic religious affairs in the PRC demonstrate, is an increased regulation of religion. A religious minority that is affected by the increased discourse of religion in the past years, are the Uyghurs. Also known as Uighur, Uygur, Uighuir, Uiguir, and Wiga, they are an ethnic Muslim minority and culturally Turkic people who live in XUAR.<sup>6</sup> Officially recognized by the PRC as Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, or Xinjiang in short, XUAR is a Chinese province located in the Northwestern part of the country.<sup>7</sup> With XUAR being the official acknowledged name of the region by the Chinese state, for nationalist Uyghurs, however, the province is referred to as Eastern Turkestan or Uyghurstan.<sup>8</sup> But with the focus on explaining CCP discourse on the Uyghurs, it is the most appropriate to refer to the region by the Chinese approved term XUAR. Because of their Turkic roots, the Uyghurs relate closely with the Turkic people in XUAR as well as the Turkic people in other countries within Central Asia, they have sought to stay connected with their roots which has contributed to the rise of new cultures among the Uyghurs that express their identity.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kuei-min Chang, "New Wine in Old Bottles: Sinicisation and State Regulation of Religion in China," *China Perspectives* (2018): 38, <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/7636>; Pitman B. Potter, "Believe in Control: Regulation of Religion in China," *The China Quarterly* (2003): 327, <https://library.fes.de/libalt/journals/swetsfulltext/17041739.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Tristan James Mabry, "Natives of the 'New Frontier': The Uyghurs of Xinjiang," in *Nationalism, Language, and Muslim Exceptionalism*, Haney Foundations Series (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 105, <https://doi-org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/10.9783/9780812291018.103>; "Home," World Uyghur Congress, accessed on August 12, 2022, <https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/>; Michael Dillon, "Ethnic Groups in Northwest China on the Eve of CCP Control and Uyghur Language and Culture in Twentieth-Century Xinjiang," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Far Northwest*, Durham East Asia Series (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 23.

<sup>7</sup> Gardner Bovingdon, Introduction to *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 10.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Dillon, "Ethnic Groups in Northwest China on the Eve of CCP Control and Uyghur Language and Culture in Twentieth-Century Xinjiang," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Far Northwest*, Durham East Asia Series (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 23.

<sup>9</sup> Adila Erkin, "Locally Modern, Globally Uyghur: Geography, Identity and Consumer Culture in Contemporary Xinjiang," *Central Asian Survey* 28, no. 4 (2009): 417-428, <https://doi-org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/10.1080/02634930903577169>.



Since 2016, Uyghurs and other Turkic ethnic-religious minorities are the target of counter-terrorism programs in which these minorities are sent to Educational Vocation and Training Camps and after “graduating” from these programs sent into to forced labor practices by the CCP as a means to eliminate the rise of and practice of terrorism or extremism among these people.<sup>10</sup> In response to the international discourse the domestic religious affairs have caused in recent years, the Chinese government published an official response to this accusations in 2019. In their white paper on extremism, the Chinese government states that the campaign of anti-terrorism/counterterrorism through de-radicalization is implemented to protect the social harmony from harm and maintain social stability that relies on obedience to the CCP.<sup>11</sup>

The global discourse that has risen on the Uyghurs situation, put Multinational Corporations under pressure to take action against what is happening in the PRC. What follows from policy papers published in 2020 is that within the supply chains of several MNC’s forced labor, as part of the de-extremization and anti-terrorism programs, has been found or is suspected of taking place.<sup>12</sup> With international laws on the prohibition of forced labor, MNC’s face a serious problem. While the CCP defends their measures taken against the Uyghurs as extremism prevention and therefore are in accordance with the law, international policy institutes state the contrary and have accused MNC’s of sustaining forced labor in the PRC. This debate between the CCP and the international sphere, caused MNC’s to publish statements on the absence of forced labor in their supply chains abroad to cleanse their name, as global fashion retailer Hennes & Mauritz (H&M) did.<sup>13</sup> The socialist Chinese were all but happy to see their countries efforts towards extremism prevention unrightfully being criticized, and started to boycott both physical and online stores of MNC’s who had made statements on forced labor in the PRC.<sup>14</sup> This example might not demonstrate the CCP’s discourse on religion directly, but

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<sup>10</sup> See Stefanie Kam and Michael Clarke, “Securitization, Surveillance and ‘De-Extremization’ in Xinjiang,” *International Affairs* 97, no. 3 (2021): 25–42, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iab038>; Joanne Smith Finley, “Why Scholars and Activists Increasingly Fear a Uyghur Genocide in Xinjiang,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 23, no. 3 (2021): 348-370, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2020.1848109>; Sean R. Roberts, Preface to *The War on Uyghurs: China’s Internal Campaign against a Muslim Minority*, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics, 76, eds. Dale F. Eickelman and Augustus R. Norton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), xii-xviii, <https://doi-org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/10.1515/9780691202211-003>; On forced labor see Vicky Xiuzhong Xu et al., “Uyghurs for Sale: ‘Re-Education’, Forced Labour and Surveillance beyond Xinjiang,” *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, no. 26 (2020): 3, <https://www-jstor-org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/stable/resrep23090>; Amy K. Lehr, “Addressing Forced Labor in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region: Toward a Shared Agenda,” CSIS, July 30, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/addressing-forced-labor-xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region-toward-shared-agenda>.

<sup>11</sup> “Full text: The Fight Against Terrorism and Extremism and Human Rights Protection in Xinjiang,” The State Council, last modified March 18, 2019, [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2019/03/18/content\\_281476567813306.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2019/03/18/content_281476567813306.htm).

<sup>12</sup> Xu et al., “Uyghurs for Sale,” 3; Lehr, “Forced Labor.”

<sup>13</sup> The State Council, “Full text.”; “H&M Group statement on due diligence,” H&M Group, accessed on July 12, 2021, <https://hmgroupp.com/sustainability/fair-and-equal/human-rights/h-m-group-statement-on-due-diligence/>.

<sup>14</sup> Ming Yang, “H&M Vows to Regain Customers After Backlash Over Uyghur Comments,” VOA, April 5, 2021,

it shows legitimacy and thus power the CCP has, with citizens take the initiative to protect its nation against unrightful interpretations of the domestic affairs on their own.

What the previous paragraphs indicate is that there is a series of events taking place in the PRC that are related to the CCP's discourse efforts to construct religion in the desired way. The researcher of this thesis hypothesizes that the CCP engages in a religious discourse on the Uyghurs to maintain social stability and strengthen its legitimacy to which the attempts to reach the desired rejuvenation and socialism with Chinese characteristics are dependent. By constructing the Uyghurs as extremists, the CCP has a legal base to take action towards this group and in this way ensure the Uyghurs will not jeopardize rejuvenation and socialism by bringing instability through extremist deeds.

The situation of the Uyghurs is a complicated one and not just because of the many factors involved, but also because of the lack of access to sources, whether these are academics, media or the people itself. And as the situation has taken become more serious, the perspective of scholars on the factors that influence the change has shifted a lot over time. To be more precise, where once the need of accessibility to the history of XUAR and its people was central, it has changed to a need to reassess the People's Republic of China. Studies have been performed to analysis of the social and political dynamics in XUAR in light of the new wave of violence in the years before, or the discourse between Islam and nationalism,<sup>15</sup> or the (geo)political and (socio)economic elements in the studies to the disintegration in XUAR,<sup>16</sup> or stressing that the intersection is a local and global political process.<sup>17</sup>

But scholarly work published in the past six years seem to have a shared focus on the situation, and that is on the CCP's counter-terrorism strategy. Some scholars, of Sean R. Roberts is an example, have placed this the counter-terrorism strategy within the context of the Global War on Terror, to explain the Uyghur cultural genocide and what specific actions the CCP has taken in the context the elimination of extremism and terrorism among the Uyghurs.<sup>18</sup> Thus studies to CCP discourse on Uyghur extremism have increased over time and thus make the focus in research on CCP discourse not new.

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<https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/voa-news-china/hm-vows-regain-customers-after-backlash-over-uyghur-comments>; "H&M: Fashion giant sees China sales slump after Xinjiang boycott," BBC, July 2, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-57691415>.

<sup>15</sup> Tristan James Mabry, Introduction to *Nationalism, Language, and Muslim Exceptionalism*, Haney Foundations Series (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 1-16, <https://doi-org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/10.9783/9780812291018.1>.

<sup>16</sup> Rongxing Guo, Preface to *China's Spatial (Dis)integration: Political Economy of the Interethnic Unrest in Xinjiang*, Elsevier Asian Studies Series (Oxford: Elsevier Science & Technology, 2015), xv-xvii, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rug/detail.action?docID=2095612>.

<sup>17</sup> Roberts, "Preface," xii-xviii.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

However, what seems to be completely absent in this field is the need to engage in discourse on religion and the importance of social stability. A theory which can explain the relation between discourse and social stability is discursive power. According to Kejin Zhao, “discursive power is some kind of relational power which derives from the positioning of social factors by specific, usually interactive, discourse practice.”<sup>19</sup> This theory seems to be almost absent within this field, and certainly in combination with the sources used for the analysis discussed in the thesis. To a certain extent, the debate on secularism and religion is the cause.

Within International Relations, studies to religion have been neglected for quite some time and the secularization theory has been argued to be the main cause for it. Because secularization theorists assume religion is irrational, they argue religion will be excluded from society through a process of modernization as they understand religion to be a pre-modern phenomenon.<sup>20</sup> Thus, its relevance to the analysis of contemporary politics and public life would then not be of any use.<sup>21</sup> As a response to this view, a new scholarship of critical studies of religion arose “that sought to emphasize that the very ideas of secularism and religion were social constructs that contributed to relationships of power, inclusion, and exclusion of contemporary global politics.”<sup>22</sup> This scholarship of critical studies has been of great contribution to the field, as more and more research is conducted to religion in IR in the past years.

With a renewed attention for religion in IR and thus the recognition of the importance of religion to the analysis of political activities, more scholars have considered religion in their studies. The research in this thesis aims to contribute to this academic debate by incorporating an element that has not been considered by scholars so far, or as it seems, and that is religion as discursive power. It is a gap in scholarly work that might have resulted from the debate in IR on secularism and religion, but with the research demonstrated in the thesis the researcher wishes to overcome this gap and offer a new perspective on CCP discourse on religion. It is a perspective that relies heavily on the awareness that the changes in religious affairs in the PRC are not ad-hoc but are interconnected and demonstrate the increased power the CCP wields over religious affairs. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the report of the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress first, to then explain the disappearance of SARA, the white paper publication, and the increased attention for economic actors to take action. Through a

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<sup>19</sup> Kejin Zhao, “China’s Rise and its Discursive Power Strategy,” *Chinese Political Science Review* (2016): 545, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41111-016-0037-8>.

<sup>20</sup> Erin K. Wilson, “Being Critical of/about/on Religion in International Relations,” in *Routledge Handbook of Critical International Relations*, ed. Jenny Edkins (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019), 145.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 145.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 146.

discursive power lens, this thesis will research how the Uyghurs are affected by the CCP's discourse on religion.

### *I Thesis aim*

In short, the aim of this thesis is to explain how CCP discourse on religious affects the Uyghurs. The objective is to demonstrate the underlying motives behind the increase of religious regulations, namely, to regain social stability, which follows from the selected sources on discourse. Because the Uyghurs form an obstacle, they need to be regulated to eliminate the threat they form. As the meeting of the 19<sup>th</sup> national congress is considered as the starting point of a shifting focus towards regulation of religious affairs, the thesis research will be conducted in the timeframe 2017-2022. How this will be studied is through the following research question:

*How has the CCP's discourse on religion affected the Uyghurs in the past five years?*

To formulate an answer to the research questions, the three components within the question need to become clear first: the relation between CCP and religion, the discourse that is considered to affect the Uyghurs, and the significance to study the events within the timeframe of the last five years. To study these components, specific sub-questions are formulated that will guide the research throughout the thesis:

- *What was the political economy of the CCP in the past five years?*
- *How did religion enter Chinese politics and what position does it hold in the CCP?*
- *What discourse has taken place with regards to the Uyghurs in the past years?*

Every sub-question will be discussed individually in the chapters two, three and four. The introduction of every chapter will be specific on which sub-question is central to that chapter and what steps will be taken to answer that question. What is important to mention is how the concepts religion and discourse are defined within this thesis.

From an IR perspective, discourse can be explained as “a specific series of representations and practices through which meanings are produced, identities constituted, social relations established, and political and ethical outcomes made more or less possible.”<sup>23</sup> In this

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<sup>23</sup> David Campbell and Roland Bleiker, “Poststructuralism,” in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., eds. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 208.

definition discourse is to be understood to go beyond the description of objects: it is a means used to constitute both subjects and objects.<sup>24</sup> However, in the context of the discursive power, discourse is that which “expresses power relationships and helps to build and maintain a certain social order, which is generally considered the order in keeping with the interests of those who are dominant,” a definition given by the Chinese scholar Kejin Zhao in his article on Chinese Discursive Power Strategy.<sup>25</sup> With the need to explain the role of stability to increased discourse on religion as power, the definition by Zhao would only be suitable within the research framework of this thesis.

In this research framework, religion also has a specific definition. Translated into Chinese as *zongjiao*, it consist of the words *zong* and *jiao* with *jiao* being the parallel to religion, according to scholar Zhuo Xiping, and means “to preach, to upbringing, or to instruct.”<sup>26</sup> As explained by Xiping, the full translation *zongjiao*, *although having multiple understandings*, has been emphasized to be as a social structure or as social organizations.<sup>27</sup> And in the context of social structure, religion has been given the definition as a social organization or political power interwoven with political stability, unity, and social amity due to the influence and function religion has in Chinese society.<sup>28</sup> Further discussion of why these definitions of the concepts of importance are selected for the thesis will follow from chapter one, the theory and methodology section in the thesis.

## II Thesis Lay-out

As the previous paragraph already mentions, in chapter one a detailed discussion of the research strategy will be given. Through a demonstration of the decision made with regards to selecting a suitable theory for the research and how theory itself is understood, the chapter will continue with a discussion of the methodological considerations, including a discussion of the concepts of importance the research method deemed the most fitted to study these.

Chapter two focuses on the political environment of the PRC in the past five years. As already followed from the previous paragraph, the report of the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress is an important source for the research. As will become clearer in the chapter, the report is not only

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<sup>24</sup> Campbell and Bleiker, “Poststructuralism,” 209.

<sup>25</sup> Zhao, “Discursive Power Strategy,” 545.

<sup>26</sup> Zhuo Xiping, “Religious Policy and the Concept of Religion in China,” in *Religion in China: Major Concepts and Minority Positions*, eds. Max Deeg and Bernhard Scheid, Beiträge Zur Kultur- Und Geistesgeschichte Asiens, no. 85 (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2015), 55, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1vw0pdc.9>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 55-56.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 51.

of value because of what it states about religion, but also determines the economy from which the CCP acts. With an overview of the vision for the next four years, the report offers not only the developmental goals but also how they should be achieved. And this context influences the actions of the CCP, as will become clear from chapter three.

Chapter three fits neatly in the discussion of chapter three. With chapter two offering an understanding of the political economy of the PRC and its views on the role of religion within this frame in this setting for the next four years, chapter three will research why the CCP engages in religious discourse in the first place. Through an analysis of religion's enter into Chinese politics, the chapter will shift focus to the political body SARA and what its merge suggests about the power the CCP holds over religion.

The in-practices examples of discourse on the Uyghurs will be discussed in chapter four. With an increased focus on religious control and the need to exercise this control through discourse, the CCP has published a response to their religious politics in a white paper on extremism in 2019, in which they clarify and justify the actions taken towards extremism in the PRC. From a critical analysis it will follow how the justifications are elements discussed in the 19<sup>th</sup> national congress and can be exercised in such way because of the merge with SARA. To broaden the scope, chapter five will also cover the H&M statement on forced labor and how this adds to an understanding of the reach of the CCP's discursive power. The economic significance of XUAR is a major motivator to the CCP to have this area under control to prevent social instability that threatens both the rejuvenation and Chinese dream which are essential components of the development goals for 2017-2022.

In chapter five the research findings of the previous chapters will come together through an analysis of these from a discursive power theory, to demonstrate how stability is key to the shifts in regulation of religion and thus explains the element of power, a possible answer to the research question. The research findings will be further summarized in the conclusion where it will become clear how the Uyghurs are affected by CCP discourse on religion.

## Chapter One: Research Strategy

This chapter will focus on the theory and methodology applied in this thesis. In the introduction some of the most important concepts of the thesis were already highlighted. This chapter will focus on these concepts further and place them in the theoretical and methodological frameworks to explain why the theory and method selected were deemed the most suitable for this thesis and how both are defined. Through a lengthier discussion of the theoretical framework compared to the methodology section, which is due to complexity of the theory, it will explain through what lens the case study will be analyzed and the contribution it will make to the field. After this subchapter, the steps taken in the process of selecting a research method will be discussed and why this research method is not only the most suitable but what it adds to the theory applied in the thesis, will be explained.

### 1.1 Theoretical Framework

Discourse has an important role in the CCP's attempts to control the Uyghurs, as it enables the CCP to regain social stability which is under threat by the extremist tendencies of the Uyghurs. To echo the definition provided in the introduction, discourse is the representation and practice through which elements of language are produced, and in practice expresses power relations and can function as a means to maintain social order. The latter part of the definition is of major importance in the case study of the Uyghurs, as this thesis argues, to again echo the introduction, that the underlying motive of the CCP to engage in religious discourse is:

1. to maintain social stability. This is the key factor in the realization of the nation's rejuvenation and socialism with Chinese characteristics.
2. to strengthen the CCP's legitimacy as authoritative body. Problems with legitimacy impact stability and thus also rejuvenation and the socialism with Chinese characteristics.

That discourse is used to construct the Uyghurs in a way that suits the CCP's focus on rejuvenation and socialism with Chinese characteristics, needs to be further analyzed through a theoretical framework to provide a theory-supported answer to the hypothesis. Theories that would be able to explain the research findings on religious constructions through discourse are social constructivism or social constructionism. Two theories focus on the aspect of construction.

Constructivist theory, an important theory from the field of International Relations, “maintains that the world is socially constructed by human practice and seeks to explain how this construction takes place by stressing the importance of intersubjective meanings and understandings and the interaction between agent and structure.”<sup>29</sup> A more religion related understanding of social constructivism could be found in the book *After Secularism: Rethinking Religion in Global Politics* by Erin K. Wilson. In here Wilson cites John Ruggie who explains that constructivist research argues that the way actors receive and respond to the world is constructed through ideas and assumptions such as world views, civilizational constructs (to which Ruggie mentions the West as an example), cultural factors, and states identities and the like.<sup>30</sup> What is of importance to this explanation of identity construction is that it follows from an individual’s understanding.

In contrast, social constructionism as explained by Alexandra Galbin, is a theory in which is assumed that social and interpersonal influences construct life as it does and therefore it concentrates “on investigating the social influences on communal and individual life.”<sup>31</sup> Or even more clearer explained by Tauhid Hossain Khan and Ellen MacEachen, social constructionism theorizes how knowledge or reality are constructed through experiences that are derived from stories, histories or narratives of the everyday lives.<sup>32</sup>

What difference these theories have when used in practice, is that social constructionism will focused on the reflection and representation of reality through the individuals’ mind, whereas social constructionism will pay attention to the individuals’ roles in this reality through for example interactions.<sup>33</sup> Thus, where the two theories differentiate in is that social constructionism focuses on how ideas are created by the group, while social constructivism focuses on the individual’s learnings in the context of their interactions within a group.<sup>34</sup> Reality is either constructed by the group or by an individual.

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<sup>29</sup> Chang Hoon Cha, “A World of Our Making: Constructivist Understanding of China’s Arms Control and Disarmament Policy,” *Pacific Focus* 21, no. 2 (2006): 153, <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.proxy-ub.rug.nl/doi/pdfdirect/10.1111/j.1976-5118.2006.tb00323.x>.

<sup>30</sup> Erin K. Wilson, Introduction to *After Secularism: Rethinking Religion in Global Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 9, <https://link-springer-com.proxy-ub.rug.nl/book/10.1057%2F9780230355316>.

<sup>31</sup> Alexandra Galbin, “An introduction to Social Constructionism,” *Social Research Reports* 26 (2014): 82, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283547838\\_AN\\_INTRODUCTION\\_TO\\_SOCIAL\\_CONSTRUCTIO](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283547838_AN_INTRODUCTION_TO_SOCIAL_CONSTRUCTIO) NISM.

<sup>32</sup> Tauhid Hossain Khan and Ellen MacEachen, “Foucauldian Discourse Analysis: Moving Beyond a Social Constructionist Analytic,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 20 (2021): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211018009>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Galbin, “Social Constructionism,” 83.



From this understanding of the two theories, social constructionism would be able to provide a theoretical answer to the research question. With the CCP acting as a group, it fits within the social constructionist understanding of the groups role in creating the ideas. However, what misses in social constructionism, or rather is not distinguished in, which is also argued by Khan and MacEachen, is the element of power.<sup>35</sup> To work from a social constructionist framework would limit the research outcomes as it does not address the power element in discourse, which is vital to understand the increase regulation as a response to social instability. Because what the CCP demonstrates through their use of discourse, is the power they gain over religion through the construction of it in a Chinese context.

A theory that could form the bridge between discourse, construction, and power is the discursive power theory. This thesis chooses to work with the explanation of this theory by Zhao who analyses the use of discursive power in the context of the PRC and how it has become an even more common practice under Xi administration, a great contribution to this thesis research. What Zhao discusses about discursive power is that it consists of three elements:

1. power facts
2. shared rules
3. social practice<sup>36</sup>

Power facts, according to Zhao, are a fundamental base of discursive power because only power that can maintain and overturn the social order, is able to obtain discursive power.<sup>37</sup> To cite Zhao, “he who controls the discourse also controls the reality created by the discourse.”<sup>38</sup> The second element, shared rules, forms the core of discursive power. Zhao explains that because language has its own rules and symbols, they are a means of discourse with the purpose to create order.<sup>39</sup> Shared rules form an important role in discourse as it drafts the rules of priority in the distribution of resources. And finally, the social practices form the connecting link between power facts and shared rules in discursive power.<sup>40</sup> Zhao explains this further by stating that social practices make discourse reality, thus the formation of a discourse cannot be separated from social practice.<sup>41</sup> This reflects the thesis’ objective to

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<sup>35</sup> Khan and MacEachen, “Foucauldian Discourse Analysis,” 2.

<sup>36</sup> Zhao, “Discursive Power Strategy,” 545.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 545.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 545.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 545.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 545.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 545.

explain the CCP's need to engage in discourse on religion as means to regain social order which according to the CCP is under threat due to the extremist tendencies of the Uyghurs. A clear example of how this is already a constructed view of the Uyghurs. Summarized by Zhao, "discursive power is some kind of relational power which derives from the positioning of social factors by specific, usually interactive, discourse practice."<sup>42</sup>

Although new in studies that focus on regulation of religion by the CCP under Xi administration, discursive power theory offers a perspective on the role of discourse as power as response to social instability that is vital to incorporate in the research of this thesis. While the theories such as social constructionism would certainly not be wrong to implement in this thesis research, it would fail to explain these observed relations between discourse and stability in the CCP's discourse. To explain how the Uyghurs are affected by the control of religion, it is necessary to understand the role of discourse in here as the language the CCP uses offer significant to how the Uyghurs are portrayed and how this constructed imaged gives the CCP the power to control them in the desired direction.

However, it should be noted that this thesis is aware of the Western roots and Eurocentrism of discursive theory and thus might fall short when used in the analysis of an Asian case study. The problem within the field of IR is the somewhat absence of a non-Western perspective on theory, as discussed by Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan.<sup>43</sup> They explain this absence of the Eastern influence on IR is caused by the Western and American dominance in theory.<sup>44</sup> To have a work of an Asian scholars such as Zhao, who offers an Asian perspective on IR by studying the theory within a Chinese context, offers helpful insights to how IR theory can make sense in a non-Western environment.

## 1.2 Methodology

With the emphasis on discourse, and thus language, the research will be conducted in a qualitative, interpretivist way. With the use of primary and secondary sources such as policy papers, official state reports, but also scholarly work and news articles, the aim is not to quantify or measure these sources to make statement about discourse, but rather to analyze the language in the discourse. In this context, qualitative research is understood as for individuals

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<sup>42</sup> Zhao, "Discursive Power Strategy," 545.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 545.

<sup>44</sup> Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, "Why is there no Non-Western International Relations Theory? Ten years on," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 17 (2017): 346, <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcx006>.

or groups ascribe a meaning to either a social or a human issue.<sup>45</sup> Interpretivist design follows from the need to explain religious discourse instead of understanding it. Although attention will be given to the why of discourse, it is not the main focus in research. What needs to be studied is what the CCP acts say about religion or aspects of religion in their discourse, and in what way and for what reason this discourse affects the Uyghurs. It is the ontological puzzle in the research that needs to be solved.

In the conceptualization of interpretivism, a more IR focused explanation of Christopher Lamont who defines it as research that “focuses on the understanding of social meanings embedded within international politics.”<sup>46</sup> Specifically the culture, norms, ideas, and identities within international politics.<sup>47</sup>

A definition that fits better with the research follows from Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter and Ajay Bailey. They explain that interpretivist research “seek to understand subjective meaningful experiences and the meaning of social actions within the context in which people live.”<sup>48</sup> Hennink, Hutter and Bailey add to this definition that the qualitative interpretivist research thus “emphasizes the importance of interpretation and observation in understanding the social world,” and therefore are an essential component of qualitative research.<sup>49</sup>

The concepts that become important in conducting a qualitative, interpretivist research are religion and discourse. With the use of discourse in the political context, a definition needs to be offered that both discussed the political element as well as the understanding of the concept from a more Chinese perspective. Because, to study the practice of discourse in the PRC, it is of importance to offer a conceptualization that could be applied to this nation in the first place. For this reason, discourse is conceptualized as representations and practices which express both power relations and a tool to maintain social order, which in the context of the research is referred to the social stability.

To have a definition of religion within the Chinese context is a challenge, as there is no uniformity on what it means. Nonetheless, efforts have been made to group the

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<sup>45</sup> John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, “The Selection of a Research Approach,” in *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., (London: Sage Publications, 2018), 41. Also see Alan Bryman, “The Nature of Qualitative Research,” in *Social Research Methods*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 380-414.

<sup>46</sup> Christopher Lamont, “Research Methods in International Relations,” in *Research Methods in International Relations* (London: Sage Publications, 2015), 19.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>48</sup> Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter and Ajay Bailey, “The Nature of Qualitative Research and our Approach,” in *Qualitative Research Methods*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage Publications: 2020), 9-25.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

understandings of religion, of which X Jinping's is an example. He categorizes the Chinese understanding of religion in terms of evaluation expressed in spiritual, cultural, and social structural sense:

- Spiritual: religion as personal or mystic experience; religion understood as private matter and human spirituality
- Cultural: religion as either a particular tradition of people or expression of human civilization, as religion is a cultural phenomenon in the history of mankind.
- Social structural: religion as social organization or political power.<sup>50</sup>

Of these understandings of religion, social structural describes a view of religion that fits with the hypothesis of the research, namely that the CCP engages in a religious discourse on the Uyghurs to maintain social stability and strengthen its legitimacy

To give an idea of what discourse the CCP has expressed with regards to religion, several primary sources such as the report of the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress and the white paper have been selected as the starting point of analysis. An issue with these sources is that they barely or have never been studied within academics so far. Unfortunately, the analysis will not have a substantial base of referencing to other scholarly works as it has not been studied before. This could make the interpretation of the sources a challenge but is not a reason to not take into account these set of sources. In the contrary, they display the shift in the regulation of religious affairs that have been taken in the five years that must be studied to offer a comprehensive study of CCP discourse on religion. Discourse analysis will enable analysis to these sources and the possibility to then place the research findings in a discursive theory framework.

An IR scholar in methodology who offers a concise conceptualization of discourse analysis is Christopher Lamont. Lamont explains that discourse analysis "focuses on the interpretation of linguistic forms of communication."<sup>51</sup> In a more detailed way and fitted for discourse analysis to religion, as discussed by Jay Johnston and Kocku von Stuckrad, "discourses are practices "that systematically organize and regulate statements about a certain theme; by doing so, discourses determine the conditions of possibility of what (in a social

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<sup>50</sup> X Jinping, "Religious Policy," 51.

<sup>51</sup> Christopher Lamont, "Qualitative Methods in International Relations," in *Research Methods in International Relations* (London: Sage Publications, 2015), 91.

group at a certain period of time) can be thought and said.”<sup>52</sup> In doing so, discourse does not focus on linguistics and textual dimension of a topic only, but also focuses on practices that carry or change knowledge of which governments, religious organizations, and media are mentioned as examples.<sup>53</sup>

This understanding of discourse analysis would fit with what needs to be studied in the discourse: how the view on the Uyghurs is shaped by the CCP. Thus, discourse analysis enables the researcher to analyze more critically who expresses discourse, in what way it is used, and how this affects the Uyghurs. What discourse analysis adds to discursive power is that it enables a researcher to put into practice the power language holds to regulate the social world as a responses to stability.

### 1.3 Conclusion

What chapter one addressed about the research strategy is as follows:

1. To formulate an answer to the question of how CCP discourse on religion affects the Uyghurs, it needs to be demonstrated how power is an important element in this discourse. This will only become clear from a discursive theory which hypnotizes about the rise of power as a response to instability.
2. Qualitative, interpretivist research is needed to understand this construction of reality through discourse.
3. And the research method that then follows is a discourse analysis, a research method which can enable a to study how the knowledge is shaped by not only the language but also the one that practices these languages, and that is the CCP.

Taking into account this approach in research, the discussions in the following chapters will not just address language solely, but also assess who expresses it to then connect their understanding to their own history. In this way it is possible to conduct research to the elements that have shaped the CCP and indirectly (or directly) have a role in how the CCP attributes meaning to society through their discourse. Thus, it needs to become clear first what elements shaped the CCP, and that will be done through a discussion of both the 19<sup>th</sup> National

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<sup>52</sup> Jay Johnston and Kocku von Stuckrad, Introduction to *Discourse Research and Religion: Disciplinary Use and Interdisciplinary Dialogues*, eds. Jay Johnston and Kocku von Stuckrad (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 3, <https://doi-org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/10.1515/9783110473438>.

<sup>53</sup> Johnston and Von Stuckrad, “Introduction,” 3.

Congress in chapter two and the rise and regulation of religion by the CCP in chapter three. Although it might seem more straightforward to discuss how religion entered CCP politics and discourse, the chain of developments with regards to religion in Chinese politics have followed in the years after the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress took place. To argue of an interrelation between the several major events that took place in the PRC, it is importance to cover these in a chronological order. The first step in the research to CCP discourse on religion is to focus on the meeting of the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress, which sets the political economy from which the CCP engages in the PRC.

## **Chapter Two: Report of the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress**

One way to explain how discourse on religion by the CCP affects the Uyghurs is through an analysis of the political economy of the CCP. With a specific focus on the timeframe 2017-2022, one document that could offer the best understanding of this political economy is the report of the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress. Every five years, the National Congress gathers for a meeting with the purpose to assess the plans of the previous five years and offer a new set of goals for the next five years. A set of goals which will be the central focus in the politics throughout the whole five years.

With this in mind, it would make it unnecessary to do a comparison study of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress meetings as the report of the 19<sup>th</sup> addresses the 18<sup>th</sup> in the beginning. Furthermore, with a specific focus on the timeframe of 2017-2022, it seems out of place to analyze the report of the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress as it was published four years prior to this timeframe. Therefore, it would not be able to provide insights to the political environment of the timeframe of importance.

Although the report of the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress is a valuable source, it needs to be approached with caution. Not only is the report used an official translated version of the Mandarin report, it was also published on the state approved website China Daily. This could mean that the translated version might have been edited for the international public and thus out of protection of the CCP to international critique, not report everything discussed during the meeting or phrase it in a different way than it is meant. Unfortunately, due to the lack of knowledge of Mandarin, it is beyond the capacities of the researcher of this thesis to confirm or reject this statement.

What aspects of the report this chapter will focus on are the origins of socialism with Chinese characteristics and how it is understood within the new era, what the thought behind the system is, the idea of socialist democracy, and lastly culture. Although the report makes no claims on the Uyghurs, it provides significant insights to the political drive behind the CCP discourse to the Uyghurs, as the report is the example of a discourse on politics itself. The selected sections of the report that will be discussed from here, each demonstrate either the political setting and ambitions or discuss in-detail the attitude towards religion and culture to set the political economy from which the CCP enacts.

### 2.1 Foreword

The foreword offers a great starting point to the analysis of the report as it discusses the central focus of the CCP on the establishment of socialism with Chinese characteristics. From

the foreword it follows that the theme central in the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress is socialism with Chinese characteristics:

Remain true to our original aspiration and keep our mission firmly in mind, hold high the banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics, secure a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, strive for the great success of socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era, and work tirelessly to realize the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation.<sup>54</sup>

This idea of socialism with Chinese characteristics was first introduced to Chinese politics by Deng Xiaoping in 1982, and from then on has become the banner of the CCP.<sup>55</sup> Thus the engaging efforts to uphold socialism with Chinese characteristics in the goals set for the PRC, is not new under the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress, but an echo of a decade's long focus. What the excerpt of the foreword states about the practices of socialism with Chinese characteristic in current times is as follows.

With the focus to remain true to the “original aspiration” and “mission,” it refers to the Chinese Communist quest for rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (Chinese dream). In here the nation-shared interest to achieve what by President Xi is now termed the “Chinese dream” it is necessary that this dream is shared by all people of China, as the benefits of the rejuvenation are for all. This becomes clear further on in the foreword where the report mentions that the mission to rejuvenate the Chinese nations applies to the “Chinese people of all ethnic groups” and therefore they are ought to build together a moderately prosperous society and secure the success of socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era.<sup>56</sup> As they claim that the socialism with Chinese characteristics together with the Chinese dream are already embraced by all the people in China, powerfully stating that the resistance of groups such as the Uyghurs towards the CCP is in fact not taking place, the socialist values and traditional Chinese culture are in the hearts of the people.<sup>57</sup> Thus, as the idea is already embraced by the Chinese people of all ethnic groups, it is of importance to remain focused on the efforts to unite the people to eventually fulfill the Chinese dream.

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<sup>54</sup> China Daily, “National Congress.”

<sup>55</sup> Zhao, “Discursive Power Strategy,” 549.

<sup>56</sup> China Daily, “National Congress.”

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



The next part of the excerpt that is of interest to discuss more in-depth is what this so-called new era is and what significance socialism with Chinese characteristics has for this era specifically. As already noticed, the socialism with Chinese characteristics is a view on the PRC has existed among the Chinese politicians for several decades now. This begs the question, what is envisioned precisely when President Xi speaks of a socialism with Chinese characteristics in the report of 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress?

In section I *The Past Five Years: Our Work and Historic Change*, the first sections that follows after the foreword but is worth to mention to understand the statements made in the foreword, the report demonstrates what is meant with socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era. This section of the report mentions that after the Chinese nation underwent a tremendous transformation to become a rich and strong country that embraced the prospects of rejuvenation with the “banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics (...) flying high and proud,” it has now entered a new era of growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>58</sup>

What characterizes this new era is that, although a new stage in development is entered, what eventually will enhance the success of socialism with Chinese characteristics is to build further from the foundation laid by the past success together with the continuation in a new historical context.<sup>59</sup> The efforts of the past have not been in vain as they only add to the continued building of the socialism with Chinese characteristics.

To eventually fulfill the dream of having a great modern socialist country, the idea introduced by President Xi in the current CCP politics, Chinese people of all ethnic groups are ought to work together, so not forced as the people already have embraced socialism with Chinese characteristics and the Chinese dream, to in this way create a better life individually and common prosperity for all can. Again, it echoes the idea of shared togetherness that seems vital to the achievements that are the focus point in the goals set for the next five years.

This sense of togetherness that follows from the excerpt is what this thesis understands to be one of the drivers in the CCP discourse on the Uyghurs. Because of their seeming opposition assimilation efforts, they manifest themselves as a threat for the goals set for Chinese society.<sup>60</sup> If they do not forsake their own culture and adopt the Chinese culture as their own, they will not share the ideologies central to this culture. Common prosperity, to which the Chinese dream of rejuvenation depends on, is dependent of the ability of the society

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<sup>58</sup> China Daily, “National Congress.”

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Gardner Bovington, “Heteronomy and Its Discontents: “Minzu Regional Autonomy” in Xinjiang,” in *Governing China's Multiethnic Frontiers*, ed. Morris Rossabi, Studies on Ethnic Groups in China (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004) 122, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvbtzm7t.8>.

to work together. In this view, it is than problematic to have an ethnic group like the Uyghurs who threaten the social stability that follows from the unison among the Chinese people in the focus on the achievement of the Chinese dream and socialism with Chinese characteristics, integration in Chinese society.

Thus, the specific discourse on the Uyghurs by the CCP is not meaningless: there is a national interest at stake, an interest that plays a vital role to reach the vision for the new era. And as the steps set for the next five years are important for the years that follow after this timeframe has ended, they cannot stay still in their development because of resistance to the ideals among certain ethnic groups such as the Uyghurs, it is not without reason the report specifically works with the language “must lead and unite the Chinese people of all ethnic groups in fulfilling the central task of economic development,” because this would address anyone who resides in the PRC and thus side-step any considerations of groups who do not identify as “Chinese”, to which assimilation plays a role.<sup>61</sup>

The underlying principle within the seeming need to ensure the achievement of better lives for Chinese of all ethnic group, is that it is part of the central task of economic development, as follows from the ending paragraph of section I of the report. As briefly touched upon in the introduction of this thesis, economic development is the main driver of the PRC. To ensure rejuvenation economic development is key. But for economic development social stability is necessary, as an economy with social instabilities is at risk to becomes instable itself. With the decades long tension among the Uyghurs of Xinjiang and the CCP in Beijing, an undesirable situation of instability lies at bay. Considering the import need of stability to economic development, the CCP seems to have no other option than to act upon this observed instability to protect the greater goal of rejuvenation.

## 2.2 The Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and the Basic Policy

Whereas in the previous subchapter the origins of socialism with Chinese characteristics and its meaning within the new era were discussed, this subchapter focuses on the thought behind the system. Mentioned in the third section of the report, *The Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and the Basic Policy*, the role of the thought on socialism and Chinese characteristics is to build on and further enrich the system through

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<sup>61</sup> China Daily, “National Congress.”

“Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents, and the Scientific Outlook on Development.”<sup>62</sup>

These systems of theory were central practice of the CCP since its establishment and provides and insight to the development their vision has for the PRC undergone. Thus, the history of previous systems and theories is not forgotten. On the contrary, they are (through the thought) a representation of their latest achievement to adapt Marxism to the Chinese contexts and expresses the experience and wisdom of both the Party and the people.<sup>63</sup> In addition, the thought is not only an important component of the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics, but also the guiding principle for both the Party members and all the Chinese people in the ambitious task of national rejuvenation, again echoing the emphasis on the importance of togetherness.

That the guiding principle is for all Chinese people, is an important statement of the CCP with regards to non-Han ethnic groups. It seems to suggest that all the ethnic minorities located in the PRC, such as the Uyghurs, are considered as Chinese and therefore they are ought to comply to the CCP’s goals for the PRC as they apply to the Chinese people. Although the CCP denies it vividly, the re-education of the Uyghurs then seems to be a necessary step of the CCP to reconstruct their identity as terrorists and use the several visible acts of resistance as an argument.<sup>64</sup>

To execute the thought, section three mentions 14 work practices in which the thought needs to be applied to grasp the essence and rich implications of the Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. Because not every work practices is of relevance, it would not make any contributions to the thesis. But one working practice that needs further attention is “Upholding Core Socialist Values.” Mentioned as the seventh point of the work practices, the Party calls upon its members to uphold Marxism, the ideal of communism, together with the socialism with Chinese characteristics, and the core socialist values.<sup>65</sup> These need to be uphold as being part of the traditional Chinese culture, they are of importance to the cultural confidence which in turn has power over the sustainment of the development of the country or nation. The Chinese spirit, Chinese values and Chinese strength, the CCP adds,

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<sup>62</sup> China Daily, “National Congress.”

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Sean R. Roberts, “Cultural Genocide, 2017-2020,” in *The War on Uyghurs: China’s Internal Campaign against a Muslim Minority*, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics, 76 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 201, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvsvf1qdd.12>. For attacks see, Rongxing Guo, “Uyghur Unrest and Xinjiang,” in *China’s Spatial (Dis)integration: Political Economy of the Interethnic Unrest in Xinjiang*, Elsevier Asian Studies Series (Oxford: Elsevier Science & Technology, 2015), 43-65. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rug/detail.action?docID=2095612>.

<sup>65</sup> China Daily, “National Congress.”

need to be fostered more as they act as sources of cultural and moral guidance for the people.<sup>66</sup> The discussion of culture introduces the theme that follows from the next subchapter: the place of ethnic groups and religious affairs in the new era.

*2.3 Improving the System of Institutions Through Which the People run the Country and Developing Socialist Democracy/ Building Stronger Cultural Confidence and Helping Socialist Culture to Flourish*

Section VI of the report, *Improving the System of Institutions Through Which the People run the Country and Developing Socialist Democracy*, is the first section of the report which specifically addresses its approach towards ethnic groups and religious affairs and thus of major importance to grasp how the CCP can affect the Uyghurs in their discourse. Described in point six, “Consolidating and Developing the Patriotic United Front,” the report states that the National Congress of the CCP

(...)will fully implement the Party's policies concerning ethnic groups, heighten public awareness of ethnic unity and progress, and create a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation. We will encourage more exchanges and interactions among different ethnic groups, helping them remain closely united like the seeds of a pomegranate that stick together, and work jointly for common prosperity and development.<sup>67</sup>

The report then continues with: “we will fully implement the Party's basic policy on religious affairs, uphold the principle that religions in China must be Chinese in orientation and provide active guidance to religions so that they can adapt themselves to socialist society.”<sup>68</sup>

What follows from both excerpts is that to develop socialism with Chinese characteristics, cooperation of all is needed, which refers to the earlier observations of the emphasis on all Chinese people. As follows from the previous two subchapters, to unite in the cause to establish a socialism with Chinese characteristics and rejuvenize the nation is what conditions the success of both. To economic development stability is a condition, a stability the CCP aims to preserve through the unification efforts of ethnic minorities and religions on more national level. As the excerpt on ethnic minorities suggest, although the nature of the policies for ethnic groups is not mentioned and thus cannot be argued whether the intentions

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<sup>66</sup> China Daily, “National Congress.”

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

are a positive development or not, it does demonstrate the active discourse on the CCP and ethnic minorities (and religion). It is a strategic step to build good relations to prevent uprisings against socialism with Chinese characteristics and thus national rejuvenation.

In their discourse with religion, the report demonstrates it needs to be in line with socialism with Chinese characteristics. This means the CCP is not interested in eradicating religious life among their people, but to guide it within the focus of the new era to ensure it will not become an obstacle to the success of socialism and the rejuvenation. This somewhat positive approach to religion within the PRC sets the CCP under Xi administration apart from previous administrations, as the communist foundation of the CCP opposed religion and its believers to the extent of extinguishing. The excerpt forms an important source of language to the study of this thesis and will be further addressed in the theoretical chapter of this thesis.

To guide the society in the right direction, cultural confidence is a necessary tool as follows from the earlier discussed section III. It is not without reason section VII, *Building Stronger Cultural Confidence and Helping Socialist Culture to Flourish*, covers the CCP's ambition to generate a socialist culture with Chinese characteristics. The report states that in order to thrive economically, culture needs to thrive as well because a nation will only be strong if its culture, which is the nation's soul, is strong as well.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, culture confidence with a rich and prosperous culture must be present as without or not fully, rejuvenation of the PRC is not possible.<sup>70</sup>

To prevent a scenario as such, the report stresses the need to develop a socialist culture with Chinese characteristics for the nation. This culture is envisioned as “a culture that is sound and people-oriented, that embraces modernization, the world, and the future, and that both promotes socialist material wellbeing and raises socialist cultural-ethical standards.”<sup>71</sup> To develop a socialist culture, Marxism, Chinese fine traditional culture, the realities of the contemporary PRC and conditions of the current era need to be combined.<sup>72</sup> The guidelines in this development are:

1. Holding firmly the leading position in ideological work
2. Cultivating and observing core socialist values
3. Raising intellectual and moral standards

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<sup>69</sup> China Daily, “National Congress.”

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

4. Seeing socialist literature and art thrive
5. Promoting the development of cultural programs and industries<sup>73</sup>

While the first three guidelines are repetition of the subjects addressed so far, no further discussion of these is needed. In addition, point four has no significance for the research in this thesis, and also for this point no further discussion will follow. However, point five does offer new and relevant discourse on culture in the context of socialism with Chinese characteristics. What needs to be improved according to the report is the public culture service system and the systems for cultural industries and markets, the economic policy on culture, and international communication.<sup>74</sup> From section VIII *Growing Better at Ensuring and Improving People's Wellbeing and Strengthening and Developing New Approaches to Social Governance*, it follows that with the improvement of the systems, the report refers to the vocational education and training programs and the improvement of education.

In addition to the improvement of the systems, policy, and communication, the report mentions the need to strengthen “people-to-people and cultural exchanges with other countries, giving prominence to Chinese culture while also drawing on other cultures.”<sup>75</sup> A stark contrast with the CCP’s goal to enhance the PRC’s cultural soft power.<sup>76</sup> Cultural soft power is not a tool of friendly exchanges, but a power gain that follows through cultural elements of the PRC and not vice versa.

Thus, to unite the people further in socialism with Chinese characteristics, cultural confidence is required. In effect, this means that the PRC needs a strong culture that is their own. The fine traditional China has had for over 5000 years and, has outgrown “the revolutionary and advanced socialist culture that developed over the course of the Chinese people's revolution, construction, and reform under the Party's leadership,” is the foundation for the development of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics.<sup>77</sup> To guide the establishment of a socialism with Chinese characteristics, five point are discussed which needs to followed in the next years to work towards the achievement of the said culture.

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<sup>73</sup> China Daily, “National Congress.”

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

## 2.4 Conclusion

Through a discussion of the report of the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress, the chapter explained the political economy of the CCP. Although the report of the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress does not specifically engage with a religion or with the Uyghurs in general, it sets the stage of the idea of what the PRC needs to be. This is an important idea to uncover, as it shapes the context from which the CCP expresses its discourse. As follows from the research strategy chapter, the background on a actor influence the social meanings it attributes to reality.

Throughout the discussion of the selected parts of the report, two points seem to recur throughout the whole report:

- The need and guidelines to uphold socialism with Chinese characteristics and the national rejuvenation
- To have a successful result in these efforts, all the people in the PRC need to unite and work towards the goals together.

The recurring emphasis of these two points demonstrate the political economy of the CCP and thus also the background that shapes the discourse of the CCP. With the hypothesis of the thesis in mind, CCP engages in a religious discourse on the Uyghurs a to maintain social stability and strengthen its legitimacy. The guideline for the social stability rises from the discussion of the report through the recurrent theme of togetherness or unity. The discussion of culture and cultural confidence cannot succeed without legitimacy, as a nation's economic growth is dependent of the cultural confidence. But if the culture is not share, a weak cultural confidence arises which challenges legitimacy is culture is used as tool to acquire this in the first place.

But in order to answer the research questions, it is necessary to know what then the role of region is in these related effects. This will be discussed in the next chapter on CCP and religion.

### Chapter Three: CCP and the Regulation of Religion

Whereas the political economy was the central discussion in chapter two, chapter three focuses on the events that followed the meeting was held and the report was published to the people. Central in this chapter is the need to understand what steps have followed in the adaptation of religion in Chinese politics, which form a necessary background in the explanation of what role it has in current CCP politics and how it indicates an increase in regulations of religion in the past five years.

Since the establishment of the People Republic China in 1949, religion has been a practice subdued to state regulation by the CCP. With economic development as the central focus in Chinese politics since the establishment, (social) stability within the nation is a crucial factor as the ability to grow a strong economy is dependent of it.<sup>78</sup>

The practice of religion regulation in the PRC seems to build further on earlier practices of state-controlled religion in the early times. Historically religion has been registered and monitored ever since the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and after this Dynasty came to its end it resulted in the Board of Rites and its successor Religious Affairs Bureau, which was active until a few years ago.<sup>79</sup> Thus state control of religion in the PRC is not a modern invention. Yet, what is of interest to observe is that the level of state control and its related effects to expression of religion vary under each leader of the PRC.

After Xi got elected as president and started his administration since 2012, regulations of religion seem to have become a central component of politics. As briefly covered in the introduction already, since 2016, the Uyghurs and other Turkic ethnic-religious minorities have become the target of count-terrorism programs in which these minorities are sent to Educational Vocation and Training Camps by the CCP as a means to eliminate the rise and practice of terrorism and extremism among these people.<sup>80</sup>

This chapter will not cover these actions taken by the CCP, as the focus lies on the necessity to understand till what degree the CCP can control religion in the first. To lead this discussion, a brief analysis of the CCP governing structure and its place within Chinese politics should be given first. It is an important discussion needed to assess how much power the CCP has in Chinese politics and thus how far its grip on religion can reach. There are

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<sup>78</sup> See Duncan Freeman, "Stability and Change: The EU, China and Perceptions of Stability," in *Conceptual Gaps in China-EU Relations*, ed. by Pan Zhongqi (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 141-155, <https://link-springer-com.proxy-ub.rug.nl/book/10.1057/9781137027443>.

<sup>79</sup> Bays, "State Dominance," 26-27.

<sup>80</sup> Kam and Clarke, "Securitization, Surveillance," 625-642.



several political bodies that have had their share of or still have their share in the way religion is incorporated in the Chinese politics. To avoid confusion on which political body belongs to the Chinese government and which to the CCP, it is unavoidable to discuss the role of the CCP in the political mechanism first.

When the origins and position of the CCP in current Chinese politics is elucidated, religion in the CCP's politics can be observed and interpreted. With the selection of several documents or laws on religion that the Chinese politics have adopted over the years, it will follow how religion is approached and has had its own share in the shaping of Chinese politics. Where the connection lies with the research question, is the discussion of SARA.

Although established by the Chinese government to oversee religious affairs for them, it has come under CCP rule a few years ago. With SARA having responsibility to the CCP now, it can be interpreted as a step within CCP rule to increase its control over religious affairs in the PRC for its own gains. Through SARA, the CCP can shape the narrative of the Uyghurs as extremist further, which confirms the hypothesis that CCP engages in a religious discourse maintain stability and legitimacy. To shape the Uyghurs as extremists in discourse, the CCP has a legal base to take action towards them to ensure they will not jeopardize rejuvenation and socialism to which CCP legitimacy is dependent of. Thus, a more politic oriented focus will be offered in this thesis to lay bare the developments that have taken place in religion politics that ultimately impact the level of power of CCP's discourse.

### 3.1 The Role of the CCP in Chinese Politics

While socialism with Chinese characteristics is the leading principle of the CCP, its origin lies in a very different principle: Marxism-Leninism. Founded in 1921, the Chinese Communist Party, also known as the Communist Party China, the CCP was originally founded as a response resistance of the Chinese people to feudal rule and foreign aggression.<sup>81</sup> As the backbone for the Chinese people, the CCP managed to change the resistance into cooperation towards building a stronger and more prosperous country.<sup>82</sup> Through numerous developments in the PRC, the CCP eventually adopted a focus on socialism with Chinese characteristics and has been actively engaging from this system until today.

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<sup>81</sup> China Daily, "National Congress."

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

Figure 1 offers a clear overview of how Chinese politics are conducted nowadays: through the CCP and the Governmental system of the PRC.

The CCP and China's Government

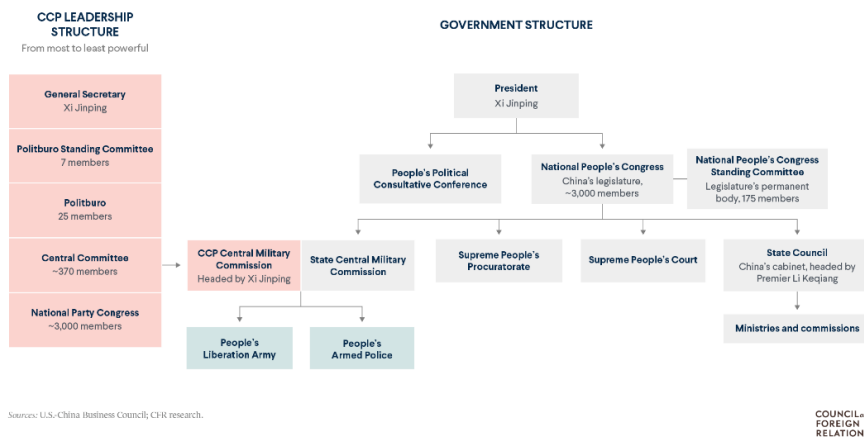


Figure 1: The CCP and China's Governmental Structure.

What is of interest to note in figure 1 is that President Xi is active in both systems. But what might seem unexpected, that although Xi fulfills a position as President, his other appointment as the General-Secretary of the CCP's gives him the highest status in politics.<sup>83</sup> Within the CCP, President Xi has the power convene meetings with “the seven-member Politburo Standing Committee and the 25-strong Politburo,” as is stated in the Constitution of the CCP.<sup>84</sup> It is a power President Xi does not have as President in the Chinese government.

Figure 2 offers a further close-up of the political layers within the CCP.

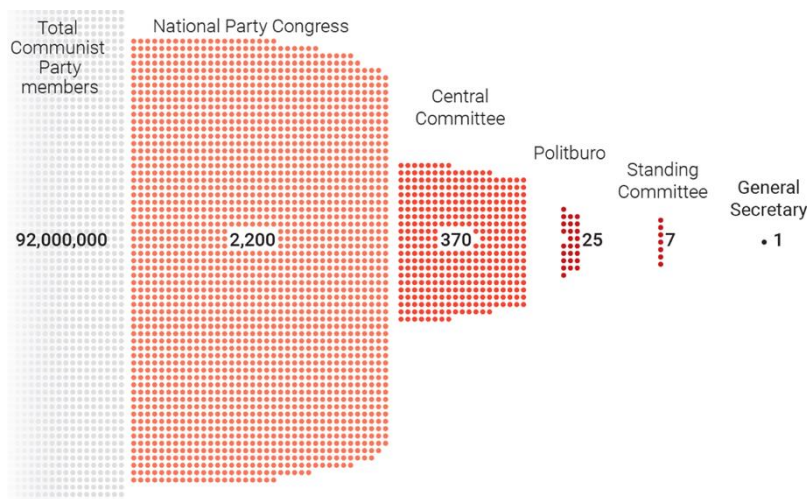


Figure 2: The Leadership Structure of the CCP.

<sup>83</sup> Jun Mai, “Leadership in China’s Communist Party: how general secretary became the country’s top job,” South China Morning Post, May 8, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3132631/chinas-communist-party-how-general-secretary-became-countrys>.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

At the bottom of the CCP structure, which can be considered as a pyramid of power, stands the National Party Congress. The National Party Congress is comprised of 2200 members who are elected from Communist Party members and convenes every five years for the reselection of members and the publication of the new five-year plan of the PRC, during the National Party Congress.<sup>85</sup> The main function the National Party Congress fulfills is to elect the members for the Central Committee, which comprises 200 full members and 170 lower-ranking members.<sup>86</sup>

The central role the Central Committee fulfills is to elect the members of the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee, with the latter functioning as the core of Chinese leadership.<sup>87</sup> Eventual decisions are made through a democratic voting system in which the majority rules.<sup>88</sup> That President Xi as General-Secretary has no full authority over the decision made by the CCP, has a reason. To prevent a violent administration as Mao's, who had full power as chairman of the CCP, to rule the PRC again, a voting system was installed.<sup>89</sup> For this reason, it would have been unjust if the research focused on how President Xi affects the Uyghurs, because eventually policies are accepted through a voting process within the Party. This small group of people has the power to shape the Chinese society through their decisions.

### 3.2 Religion in CCP Politics

The positive consideration of the implementation of religion in Chinese politics is a recent development. Under the rule of Mao the policies on religion were repressive as a result of his communist, atheist view, but eventually became replaced with a more relaxed attitude by his successors in the decades that followed.<sup>90</sup> Mao's successors, such as Xiaoping and Xi recognized that coercion to eliminate the existence of religious belief was unfeasible as religion was not expected to decline among the people anytime soon, and therefore did not fight religion.<sup>91</sup> Instead they adopted their view of a privileged atheism, to still uphold the

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<sup>85</sup> Jun Mai, "Communist Party."

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Jun Mai, "Communist Party," "China's 2017 Communist Party Leadership Structure & Transition," The US-China Business Council, June, 2017, [https://www.uschina.org/sites/default/files/chinas\\_2017\\_communist\\_party\\_leadership\\_structure\\_transition\\_updated.pdf](https://www.uschina.org/sites/default/files/chinas_2017_communist_party_leadership_structure_transition_updated.pdf).

<sup>88</sup> Cai, "Communist Party."

<sup>89</sup> Jun Mai, "Communist Party."

<sup>90</sup> Potter, "Believe in Control," 319.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 319.

political secularism which relies on, what became clear from the discussion of the 19<sup>th</sup>, a thought shaped by Marxism-Leninism, communist and so forth.<sup>92</sup>

Physical proof of the shifting focus of the CCP from the elimination of religion to a consideration of religion, follows from the is the issuance of document 19 in 1982. In this document the Party not only expressed its official recognition of only Catholicism, Protestantism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Islam and supported atheism, but also laid a political foundation for the prohibition of feudal privileges to religious organizations and of Party members to adhere to a religion.<sup>93</sup>

However, the religious relaxation in the 80's, was soon met with religious turbulence caused by social unrest in Tibet and Xinjiang. In effect, a more regulative and strict approach to religion returned to politics with the issuance of Document no. 6 in 1991. What Document no. 6 stresses is that "implementing administration of religious affairs is aimed at bringing religious activities within the bounds of law, regulation, and policy, but not to interfere with normal religious activities or the internal affairs of religious organizations."<sup>94</sup>

Thus, the legislative base for the CCP to regulate religious affairs to avoid social instability cannot be abandoned as religion caused turbulence has proven to resurface any time still.<sup>95</sup> The idea that religion should remain within the frame of "law, regulation and policy," has been further developed in Chinese politics. Expressed in The State Council's 1997 "White Paper on Freedom of Religious Belief in China," the Council argued that "religion should be adapted to the society where it is prevalent," which is more specified as that "religions must conduct their activities within the sphere prescribed by law and adapt to social and cultural progress."<sup>96</sup>

With the previous discussions of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the need of cultural confidence for economic development, the latter part of the citation is likely to refer to this context in which religion should be practiced. That would mean that the statement on religious affairs mentioned in the report 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress echoes the State Council.

The rising emphasis in Chinese politics to protect the social stability from religious uprisals, can be further supported by provisions of article 36 of the 1982 Constitution in the 80's and late 90's:

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<sup>92</sup> Potter, "Believe in Control," 319.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 320.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 320.

<sup>95</sup> Potter, "Believe in Control," 320; Chang, "New Wine," 38-39.

<sup>96</sup> Potter, "Believe in Control," 322.

Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief.

No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion: nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in any religion.

The state protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state.

Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.<sup>97</sup>

To have a constitution revised because of the shifting position of religion because of the challenge it poses to social stability, why Chinese politics adopt a stricter approach towards religion again and how the observation of an increase regulation of religion in the last five years echoes the past. An event in Chinese history that demonstrates the shifting position on religion due to stability even more, is the 2001 National Work Conference on Religious Affairs signifies it even more. Then President Jiang Zemin called upon the Party to guide religion within the socialist needs, a clear echo of the documents discussed, and also:

- instructed officials to adhere to the policies on religious freedom,
- called upon them to refrain from the use of administrative force to eliminate religion
- addressed that religion, although initially contested by the communist predecessor, will be part of Chinese society for a long time and has psychological, cultural, and moral functions.<sup>98</sup>

In addition to the call for guidance, Jiang also emphasizes the need to present religion to interfere with the socialist system, the interests of the state and the requirements of the social progress, a view adopted by President Xi.<sup>99</sup> Thus the state control of religion is certainly not a new invention under Xi administration, as a matter of fact he echoes viewpoints of past administrations. To explore how under Xi administration political control of religion intensified, the next subchapter will discuss how discourse on SARA implies an increased growth in the CCP hold over religion.

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<sup>97</sup> Potter, "Believe in Control," 325.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 323.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. 324.

### 3.3 SARA

In the administration's that prevailed current president Xi's, the regulation of religion used to be prescribed by the CCP and enacted through law and administrative regulation.<sup>100</sup> To manage religion, the CCP relied on three institutional bodies: the United Front Work Department of the CCP Central Committee (UFWDC), the patriotic associations of the five state-sanctioned religions, and the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA), which is also known as the Religious Affairs Bureau.<sup>101</sup>

Of these bodies, SARA is responsible for the implementation of religious policies and administration of religious affairs.<sup>102</sup> This means that in order to understand how CCP control affects the Uyghurs, it needs to be considered how SARA contributes to this practice.

In its original form, SARA fell under State Council supervision and its major responsibilities under the Council were:

- To protect the freedom of religious belief of Chinese citizens as required by law, safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of religious groups and the venues of their activities, ensure the religious leaders can conduct regular religious activities - and ensure citizens who wish to do so can take part in regular religious activities;
- To monitor issues related to religion at home and abroad, and to investigate various religious beliefs;
- To draft laws, rules and regulations relating to religion, research and draft departmental rules and regulations, as well as specific policies relating to religion;
- To supervise the implementation of laws, rules and regulations relating to religion, offer guidance to religious groups concerning the law and the country's policies - and prevent and curb illegal, irregular and illegitimate activities under the guise of religion;
- To organize and guide promotional activities related to the country's policy on religion and issues concerning legality;
- To support initiatives to promote patriotism, socialism, reunification of the motherland, and solidarity among individuals belonging to religious groups; and unite and motivate citizens with religious beliefs to assist the country's process of reform and opening up, as well as economic construction;

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<sup>100</sup> Potter, "Believe in Control," 318.

<sup>101</sup> Chang, "New Wine," 38.

<sup>102</sup> Chang, "New Wine," 38; Potter, "Believe in Control," 327.

To assist religious groups in educating religious leaders, managing religious schools, and promoting self-reliance development, help religious groups handle issues supported or coordinated by the government;

To direct the work of religious affairs departments under local people's governments, and assist local people's governments to promptly resolve key issues relating to religion;

To support and help religious groups with their international communications, as well as communications with the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), Macao SAR and Taiwan;

To undertake any other tasks designated by the State Council.”<sup>103</sup>

This list of responsibilities SARA fulfills, or technically used to fulfill, demonstrates how much influence the body has on religious life in the PRC. For example, to assert control over religion, SARA has the means to shape religious education and international communication between religious groups, but also influence them through its power to draft and supervise the implementation of the laws, rules, and regulations.

Although the SARA was under direct supervision of the Chinese government, SARA could not be used by the CCP as a tool to spread the ideas of religion and enable action towards religion that would benefit the CCP. However, this limited influence of the CCP on SARA changed under President Xi. As a response to religious extremism, the CCP increased religious reforms which resulted in the revised Regulations on Religious Affairs<sup>104</sup> These regulations were implemented to prevent religious activity from harming the national security.<sup>105</sup>

When the revised Regulations of Religious Affairs were passed in 2017 and implemented in 2018, SARA was decided to be merged together with the UFWD as an extension of the reform the during third plenary session of the 19th Communist Party's Central Committee of 2018.<sup>106</sup> As a result of the new reforms, religious affairs became part of the Central Committee in 2018 and managed by the UFWD, which already has been explained to be part of the Central Committee. This step caused the religious regulations to

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<sup>103</sup> “State Administration for Religious Affairs,” The State Council, last updated September 15, 2014, [http://english.www.gov.cn/state\\_council/2014/10/01/content\\_281474991091034.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/state_council/2014/10/01/content_281474991091034.htm).

<sup>104</sup> “International Religious Freedom Report 2018,” United States Department of State, accessed on August 12, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/CHINA-INCLUSIVE-2018-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

become directly under Party responsibility.<sup>107</sup> And in the light of increased regulation of religion by the CCP, the merge of SARA with the CCP is just one of many steps the CCP is taken to have full authority over religious affairs to protect the stability and legitimacy of the PRC and CCP.

### 3.4 Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter aimed to display what steps have followed in the adaptation of religion in Chinese politics. By first explaining the CCP's role in the Chinese politics, several changes in the approach to religion in the political environment have been discussed. What followed from the discussion is how religion needs to be in line with the cultural and social visions for the PRC and will face severe measure when it threatens the society. After Mao, religion has not been perceived as something that should be eliminated from society, but rather as an actor that needs to be considered in politics. Social turbulence caused by the Uyghurs have fueled this approach towards religion and added to the construction of how religious affairs should be dealt with by the CCP.

From here the discussion shifted to SARA. As the political body responsible to oversee religious affairs, its merge with the CCP displays the increase of power the CCP has over religious affairs directly. Within a broader context, it enables the CCP to increase its regulation of religion through SARA. Backed by its own constitution and additional legal documents on how religious affairs should be approached, the CCP has every potential to regulate religion without breaking any laws. Consequently, this means that when the CCP needs to eliminate instability caused by dissatisfaction of a religious group, they can turn towards discourse to shape them into a danger to the society and then have every legal right to take actions towards them. This is what the discussion of both the white paper on extremism as well as the discussion of the H&M statement will demonstrate in the next chapter.

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<sup>107</sup> United States Department of State, "Freedom Report."



## Chapter Four: CCP Discourse on Religion

So far, the previous chapters have explained the developments that have taken place in the political economy of the CCP, the shifting approach in legislative measures towards religion, and how the merge of SARA indicates an increased growth of CCP power over religion. As the last shackle in the research to how CCP discourse of religion and how it affects the Uyghurs, this chapter will focus on discourse through an analysis of two documents: the white paper on extremism and the H&M statement on forced labor.

Whereas the previous chapter addressed the implications of CCP regulations of religion within the domestic sphere, this chapter will bring to attention the implications this control has within the international discourse. With an increased attention for the situation of the Uyghurs, international interference in the domestic affairs of the PRC has risen in the past years. Two sources which demonstrate this change in relations and therefore important to study in this chapter are an official statement of the multinational corporation H&M to the labor controversies within the PRC and an official declaration on the battle of extremism within the PRC directed to the UN. What both sources highlight is not only the way Uyghur extremism is constructed through the CCP discourse, but also suggest the reach discourse on the domestic issues of the PRC has on the international sphere.

In the subchapters that follow, each source will be individually analyzed on the level of discourse. What are they responding to and for what reason? And more specific, what language do they use? In other words, what significance does the source hold to a study focused on the effects of state-controlled religion.

While the H&M Group statement on the first hand does not seem to be related to a study that focuses on how CCP discourse on religion affects the Uyghurs, it in fact addresses the result of the CCP's efforts to shape the Uyghurs into a certain direction and how conflicting interpretations of the Uyghurs bring MNC's into tight positions. With the objective to demonstrate the chain of events in religious regulations that have taken place since the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress took place, the chapter will first discuss the 2019 white paper on extremism to then continue with the H&M statement of 2020.

### 4.1 The White Paper on Extremism

In 2019, the State Council Information Office of the PRC published a white paper on "The Fight Against Terrorism and Extremism and Human Rights Protection in Xinjiang." The white paper is divided into eight parts. The publication follows only a year after the religious reforms when the State Council lost its supervision over SARA. That not the CCP but the

State Council published a statement on extremism and states in the foreword that the “Chinese government” stands against extremism and terrorism is of importance already. However, as the state council bears responsibility for the “principles and policies of the Party and the laws and statutes adopted by the NPC, and administering China's internal, diplomatic, national defense, financial, economic, cultural and educational affairs,” the statements made in the white paper are certainly the CCP’s.<sup>108</sup> Thus it can be cited as a source that offers CCP discourse on religion.

In their foreword the white paper expresses that the PRC respects human rights in accordance with its Constitution.<sup>109</sup> It is a direct response to international critique on human rights violations in the PRC.<sup>110</sup> In the first chapter of the paper the State Council states that XUAR has been part of the territory for a long time and witnessed social and economic change under the PRC, which the State Council describes as the best period of prosperity and development for XUAR.<sup>111</sup> This is then followed with specific statements on the history and identity of the Uyghurs:

- Uyghurs came habitants of the PRC through migration and ethnic integration
- They are no descendent of the Turks (chapter 3.3 of this thesis states otherwise)
- Uyghur means to maintain unity among the people
- And states that today a large number of people from XUAR does not believe in or are Muslim.<sup>112</sup>

Part II of the statement addresses the origin of terrorism and extremism in XUAR. The most relevant section of that part is that:

Since the 1990s, especially after the September 11 attacks in the US, the “East Turkistan” forces inside and outside China have stepped up their collaboration as

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<sup>108</sup> “State Council,” Embassy of The People’s Republic China in Nepal, accessed on August 12, 2022, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cenp/eng/ChinaABC/zz/t167478.htm>.

<sup>109</sup> “PRC State Council, The Fight Against Terrorism And Extremism And Human Rights Protection In Xinjiang,” University of Southern California, March 19, 2019,

<https://china.usc.edu/prc-state-council-fight-against-terrorism-and-extremism-and-human-rights-protection-xinjiang-march>.

<sup>110</sup> U.S. Mission China, “China 2018 Human Right Report,” U.S. Embassy and Consulates in China, April 17, 2019, <https://china.usembassy-china.org.cn/china-2018-human-rights-report/>. Although published after the white paper, the source states the human rights issues that have been observed in 2018 and that the CCP now defends in their white paper.

<sup>111</sup> University of Southern California, “State Council.”

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

terrorism and extremism spread around the globe, trying desperately to establish “East Turkistan” through “Jihad” (holy war).<sup>113</sup>

Part III adds that thousands of terrorists’ attacks have been conducted in XUAR by separatist, extremist, and terrorist forces.<sup>114</sup> However, this claim is based on incomplete statistics as the State Council admits, and therefore it is to be taken with much caution how valid this statement is. In their strike towards extremism and terrorism, as described in part IV, the local governments of the PRC combat violence that violates “human rights, endanger public security, undermine ethnic unity, and split the country,” through counterterrorism and de-radicalization programs which are in accordance with the law.<sup>115</sup> These programs are enacted by the special anti-terrorism law, which is composed of:

- Constitution of the People’s Republic of China,
- Criminal Law of the People’s Republic of China,
- Criminal Procedure Law of the People’s Republic of China,
- National Security Law of the People’s Republic of China,
- Counterterrorism Law of the People’s Republic of China,
- Regulations on Religious Affairs,
- Opinions on Certain Issues Concerning the Application of Law in Handling Criminal Cases Involving Terrorism and Extremism jointly issued by the Supreme People’s Court, the Supreme People’s Procuratorate, the Ministry of Public Security, and the Ministry of Justice.<sup>116</sup>

What the State Council reports is that their law-based de-radicalization focused on religious related activities is used only to combat the rise and spread of religious extremism in XUAR to maintain social harmony and stability. This focus on social harmony and stability is so treasured that even XUAR fights extremism and terrorism, according to part V. XUAR started to set up projects that benefit the public in multiple ways such as their establishment of education and training centers to educate and rehabilitate people who have committed

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<sup>113</sup> University of Southern California, “State Council.”

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

crimes/broke the law, to eradicate the influence of terrorism and future desires to turn to terrorism and extremism again.<sup>117</sup>

The white paper states that the trainees have realized that to adapt to the society is more desirable than to oppose it, and in order to find work the Chinese language is necessary and therefore should be practiced.<sup>118</sup> Through the training, the paper states, the trainees have realized that extremism is not only against their religious doctrines and but also causes ethnic separatism and terrorism which bring instability.<sup>119</sup>

Experience has proven, as follows from part VI, that the measures were effective and did not violate human rights:

- XUAR paid special attention to the protection of human rights in their combat of extremism.
- The counterterrorism program is effective because it does not target any specific region, ethnicity or religion. On the contrary, its function is to prevent use of religion or religious activities as a tool to cause disorder or commit crimes.
- The government handles in the best interest as it wants to maintain stability which is beneficial for human development and thus demonstrates the government's humanitarian stance.<sup>120</sup>
- The de-radicalization efforts of the PRC even maintained international and regional security.

In the concluding section of the white paper,<sup>121</sup> two final statements are made that are of importance to this thesis:

There is no doubt that Xinjiang's fight against terrorism and extremism is an important component of the global struggle, and has made an important contribution to the latter. (...) Focusing on social stability and lasting peace, Xinjiang will continue to fight terrorism in accordance with the law, ensure human rights, develop the economy,

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<sup>117</sup> University of Southern California, "State Council."

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Part VII is not discussed on purpose as it largely repeats part VI.

improve people's lives, and build a united, harmonious, prosperous, and culturally advanced socialist society where people live and work in peace and contentment.<sup>122</sup>

In broad lines, what the white paper demonstrates is that the Chinese governments campaign of anti-terrorism/counterterrorism through de-radicalization is justified as a tool to maintain social harmony and stability. By no means is the white paper a means of oppression or discrimination, as it only aims to eliminate the current and future rise of extremism and terrorism among the people in the PRC. In the light of the recent merge of SARA with the CCP, it is to be questioned if the anti-terrorism/counterterrorism is not used as an additional tool to compel alliance to the socialist cause of the CCP.

#### 4.2 H&M Statement on Forced Labor

In recent years, especially since 2020, numerous policy reports, briefings and media articles have been published on the situation of the Uyghurs of XUAR.<sup>123</sup> Where some are published to raise awareness of what is happening inside XUAR, others specially address the role the economic sector has in the continuation of oppression of the Uyghurs. An example of a for this thesis important policy report that addresses the overlooked impact CCP's discourse on the Uyghurs has on the economic sector, is "Uyghurs for Sale: Re-education, Forced Labour and Surveillance Beyond Xinjiang." In this policy report published by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, both the circumstances of the Uyghurs are addressed in the light of forced labor as well as how multinational corporations play a role in here, whether of these practices being present in their supply chain or not. In another briefing published in 2020, "Addressing Forced Labor in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region: Toward a Shared Agenda," special attention is given to the understanding of relevant supply chains of the XUAR-linked forced labor and includes a deeper dive into forced labor risk in cotton production and supply chains in the XUAR."<sup>124</sup>

In this exact setting of increased awareness of the role of supply chains in XUAR-linked forced labor practices H&M Group's statement falls. This begs the questions, why did H&M Group respond, what did they respond, and how is their response of significance for this thesis research? To answer these, some facts about H&M Group need to be introduced

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<sup>122</sup> University of Southern California, "State Council."

<sup>123</sup> Xu et al., "Uyghurs for Sale," 3; Lehr, "Forced Labor."

<sup>124</sup> Lehr, "Forced Labor."

first. H&M Group is a family of business and brands such as H&M, COS and Monki.<sup>125</sup> Active in 74 markets with 1,700 manufacturing factories around the world employing 1,6 million people and reliant of a global supply chain, it is not without reason H&M aims to uphold responsible partnerships with all their suppliers and to contribute to the growth and development in the communities where they operate.”<sup>126</sup>

That H&M Group is strongly committed to these business practices follows from their 2020 statement on due diligence, a statement that demonstrates the economic element involved in the Uyghurs-CCP relations that this thesis wishes to highlight. This statement was soon followed with a mass-boycott by the Chinese consumer directed at H&M Group branches in the PRC in 2021. In response to the boycott, Chinese e-commerce removed H&M products from their online platforms, going as far as making the physical stores disappear from the online maps.<sup>127</sup> Of interest is that H&M Group was not the only target of discontent within the PRC. Just like H&M Group, global fashion retailer Nike faced accusations of forced labor practices of Uyghurs within their supply chain. In a company statement that followed, which unfortunately is no longer available on the website of Nike, Nike clarified to not have anything to do with the accusation as they did not rely on supply chains in XUAR in the first place.<sup>128</sup> While both official statements placed the companies from one hot fire into another, it offers a valuable insight of the international discourse on the PRC’s domestic affairs.

What H&M Group precisely addressed in their statement, and thus of value to this thesis research, is as follows. The H&M Group statement on due diligence is a one-page statement that addresses their relationship with forced labor practices within the PRC. What the exact motives are behind the publication of the statement do not follow from the statement. However, in the earlier mentioned policy report of the Australian Policy institute, H&M is listed as one the 83 corporations with a potentially abusive labor transfer program outside Xinjiang.<sup>129</sup> In the report the 83 corporations are asked to act, which could offer a possible explanation for H&M Group’s decision to feel international pressure to take responsibility. The statement is divided in three sections: a general statement, a section on due

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<sup>125</sup> “Brands,” H&M Group, accessed on April 6, 2022, <https://hmgroup.com/brands/>.

<sup>126</sup> “H&M Group at a Glance,” H&M Group, accessed on April 6, 2022, <https://hmgroup.com/about-us/h-m-group-at-a-glance/>; H&M Group, “due diligence.”

<sup>127</sup> VOA, “H&M Vows to Regain Customers After Backlash Over Uyghur Comments,” accessed on August 15, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/voa-news-china/hm-vows-regain-customers-after-backlash-over-uyghur-comments>.

<sup>128</sup> “Statement on Xinjiang,” Nike, accessed on August 13, 2021, <https://purpose.nike.com/statement-on-xinjiang>.

<sup>129</sup> Xu, et al., “Uyghurs for sale,” 27.

diligence, and a section which specifically addresses XUAR. While the statement does not address the Uyghurs specifically in any of the sections, it is of great value to understand the impact state control of the discourse on the Uyghurs has on the economic sector:

H&M Group is deeply concerned by reports from civil society organisations and media that include accusations of forced labour and discrimination of ethnoreligious minorities in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). We strictly prohibit any type of forced labour in our supply chain, regardless of the country or region. If we discover and verify a case of forced labour at a supplier we work with, we will take immediate action and, as an ultimate consequence, look to terminate the business relationship. All our direct suppliers sign our Sustainability Commitment that clearly states our expectations with regards to forced labour and discrimination linked to religion or ethnicity, for their own operations as well as their supply chains. (...) our work to ensure the respect and compliance with international labour standards is continuous. We are committed to respecting human rights and our approach is guided by the UN Guiding Principle on Business and Human Rights and OECD Guidelines for responsible business conduct.<sup>130</sup>

How brief in length this central part of the statement may be, it addresses a few critical points for this thesis. Numerous times H&M Group speaks of “forced labor,” a term that needs to be defined to clarify its significance for this thesis. The definition of forced labor is established by the International Labour Organization (ILO) during the 29<sup>th</sup> Forced Labor Convention of the ILO in 1930. According to Article 2 of the Forced Labour Convention forced labor, or compulsory labor, is “*all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.*”<sup>131</sup>

What according to Article 2 are not considered as practices of “forced labor” are compulsory military service, normal civic obligations, prison labor (under certain conditions), work in emergency situations (such as war, calamity or threatened calamity e.g. fire, flood,

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<sup>130</sup> H&M Group, “due diligence.”

<sup>131</sup> “C029 - Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29),” International Labour Organization, accessed on January 10, 2022, [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID,P12100\\_HISTORICAL:312174,Y](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID,P12100_HISTORICAL:312174,Y).

famine, earthquake) and minor communal services (within the community)”.<sup>132</sup> However, to these specific prohibitions on the use of forced labor are added. As agreed upon during the Abolition of Forced Labor Convention of 1957, forced labor is considered as prohibited when it is implemented in the following way:

- as punishment for the expression of political views,
- for the purposes of economic development,
- as a means of labour discipline,
- as a punishment for participation in strikes,
- as a means of racial, religious or other discrimination.<sup>133</sup>

What significance the conceptualization of forced labor holds within the context of the H&M Group statement, is that H&M Group demonstrates how the international discourses presses on MNC’s to take a stance towards the labor practices in their supply chains, and thus engage in the discourse. Because the CCP might defend their actions as extremism prevention and state to act in accordance with their constitution, this view is not shared by the international sphere who interpret the actions taken towards the Uyghurs, such as forced action, not to be justified because the argument is wrong.

In the second section of the statement, H&M groups echoes its earlier mention of the transparency in their supply chains, which is an important aspect of the Sustainability Commitment H&M Group works with. Through the importance of transparency in their supply chains, H&M Group claims not to be involved in forced labor activities, which they discuss in the last section on their statement. Again, while H&M Group does not state the purpose of their statement, they take responsibility for the management of business within the PRC anyway.

In specific, H&M Group states to not have any manufacturing factories within XUAR nor sources products from XUAR. And with regards to the Chinese manufacturing factories, they work together with, H&M Group states that they must uphold their Sustainability Commitment, which prohibits forced labor practices. Thus, within their production chain located in the PRC, H&M Group states not to be guilty of using forced labor practices. To this

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<sup>132</sup> International Labour Organization, “Forced Labour Convention;” “What Is Forced Labour, Modern Slavery And Human Trafficking,” International Labour Organization, accessed on January 10, 2022, <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/definition/lang--en/index.htm>.

<sup>133</sup> International Labour Organization, “Forced Labour.”



they add that the cotton used in their production chain, which is the part of global value chain where forced labor is detected by international organizations and policy institutes, comes directly from suppliers who use cotton licensed by the Better Cotton Initiative.<sup>134</sup>

This means that if the BCI decides to temporarily halt licensing of cotton farms in XUAR, this ultimately impacts all the partners of BCI, from the cotton farms to the textile retailer. In the statement of H&M Group, H&M mentions BCI has made the decision to temporarily halt licensing of cotton from XUAR because of due diligence, this automatically means the suppliers H&M is contracted cannot even supply cotton from this region which means H&M also beyond their own supply chain, cannot be brought in connection with XUAR forced labor practices.

One important element that can be observed in the third section of H&M Group's statement is the impact of the cotton production on global relations. XUAR produces over 20 percent of the cotton in the world and is therefore an important province for the PRC's economy.<sup>135</sup> What this means is that if forced labor is inserted as a means to harvest cotton, a significant impact is made on both the PRC's economy as well as the global production chain. The PRC's denial of any such practices taking place in their country could therefore be motivated not only from a political perspective, namely the PRC's strong commitment to sovereignty, but also as an economic damage control. At the same time this again shows how the Uyghurs are affected by this attitude: to protect the economic growth, the Uyghurs have to be regulated in a stricter way to prevent them from causing instability which impacts economic growth negatively.

Overall, while the H&M Group statement does not specify why H&M Group chooses to respond to reports on XUAR, it demonstrates the dilemma the multinational corporations face due to global value chains. As determined by the ILO, forced labor is prohibited to be used for several motives, which the PRC seems to be guilty to according to policy institutes, media, and global companies. It is an example of how the CCP manages its control of the Uyghurs and of how this impacts Uyghur relations with the international sphere as major economic players pull out of XUAR to avoid any risks in disobeying the international law on labor, which ultimately impacts the Uyghur independent survival and makes them even more reliant of CCP help to survive economically. It is a visual cycle the Uyghurs seem to be stuck in

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<sup>134</sup> "Find Members." Better Cotton Initiative, accessed on January 10, 2022, [https://bettercotton.org/membership/find-members/?\\_sf\\_s=hennes](https://bettercotton.org/membership/find-members/?_sf_s=hennes).

<sup>135</sup> Lehr, "Forced Labor."

### 4.3 Conclusion

Whereas the previous chapter offered backgrounds to important developments that have taken place in the context of CCP discourse on religion, this chapter offered the discourse itself and have made brief reference to how the Uyghurs are affected by this discourse. The discussion of the white paper shows how language is used to justify the measure taken against extremism, and thus the Uyghurs. The discussion of H&M teaches how other the economic sector is affected by the CCP regulation of religion through discourse. As the CCP constructs the Uyghurs as extremists, because they do not assimilate well into the CCP's socialism with Chinese characteristics, measures have been taken against them. Although the CCP defends the Uyghur workers as anything but forced the international sphere has determined them as forced laborers and put pressure on MNC's to take action.

To then formulate an answer to the research question, the research findings of this chapter together with the chapter that preceded will be analyze from a theoretical perspective to offer insights towards how CCP discourse on religion affects the Uyghurs on the precondition of power in the next chapter.

## Chapter Five: Analysis of the Research Findings

Each of the previous chapters has addresses a component of the research question that needed to be clarified first before the step could be taken towards the interpretation of the research findings. Although brief interpretations have been offered throughout the subchapters, to answer the research questions theory is needed. From both the introduction and the subchapter on the theoretical framework followed that discursive power theory is needed to explain the research findings.

To summarize what has been stated about the theory so far in the previous chapters, “discursive power is some kind of relational power which derives from the positioning of social factors by specific, usually interactive, discourse practice.”<sup>136</sup> Discursive power consists of three elements power facts, shared rules, and social practice.<sup>137</sup> In here the power facts are what maintain and overturn the social order, the shared rules are what creates order, and the social practice draft the priority in the distribution of resources.<sup>138</sup> The three elements form a theoretical base to the thesis’ objective to explain the CCP’s need to engage in discourse on religion as means to regain social order which according to the CCP is under threat due to the extremist tendencies of the Uyghurs. Because as Zhao puts it, “he who controls the discourse also controls the reality created by the discourse.”<sup>139</sup>

Considering the research findings of the thesis, what does discursive power adds in the process to find an answer to the research question?

As discussed in chapter 2.1, to build a great modern socialist country Chinese people of all ethnic groups need to work together so a better life individually and common prosperity for all can be created. As argued in the sentences that followed, the emphasis on togetherness for the greater good is what this thesis argues to the drive to control the Uyghurs on religious level. The Chinese dream of rejuvenation can only become a success if the necessary economic development has taken place. This economic is dependent of culture confidence (see 2.2. and 2.3) thus the PRC needs to have a socialist culture. This socialist culture needs to become the central component in the lives of the Chinese people and thus assimilation is needed.

And this is where the Uyghurs form an obstacle. Remaining true to their Turkic and Muslim roots, they defy the integration into the Chinese (socialist) culture and cause or could

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<sup>136</sup> Zhao, “Discursive Power Strategy,” 545.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 545.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 545.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 545.

cause segregation, cultural clashes and endanger the PRC's connection with Eurasia due to XUAR's function as a gateway to Eurasia.<sup>140</sup> That the CCP in response does everything in their power to ensure integration, is visible from the white paper's statement that the Uyghurs have become part of the PRC through migration and ethnic integration, are not descendants of the Turks, are not so religious, and even are given a name that expressed unity among the people.<sup>141</sup>

Only these few words of the white paper already demonstrate how actively the CCP constructs the Uyghurs in their discourse on religion. And the facts that the white paper is also published in an English version, only adds to the CCP efforts to maintain the social order within its own country by positioning themselves as a confident front towards the international sphere. It radiates the power facts of the discursive power theory.

That within the PRC, CCP has the tools to regulate the Uyghurs through discourse without breaking their own laws has to with the following. According to the Article 33 of the PRC Constitution,

Every citizen enjoys the rights and at the same time must perform the duties prescribed by the Constitution and the law (...) these duties included upholding the Four Basic Principles, which impose a duty to uphold the socialist road, the dictatorship of the proletariat, leadership of the Party, and Marxism, Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought.<sup>142</sup>

Thus, if the duties are not upheld, then the law and or constitution will be broken and then the government or CCP can take legal action against its citizens. This trend of reasoning seems to be implemented in the fight against terrorism and extremism.

In a section of the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress that has not been discussed yet, the National Congress address the safeguarding of the national security. In that section it is stated that "national security is the cornerstone of peace and stability of our country, and safeguarding it is in the fundamental interests of the Chinese people of all ethnic groups."<sup>143</sup> Besides calling for improvement of the national security strategy, policy, and system, it also emphasizes that the National Congress,

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<sup>140</sup> Erkin, "Consumer Culture," 417-428.

<sup>141</sup> University of Southern California, "PRC State Council."

<sup>142</sup> Potter, "Believe in Control," 325.

<sup>143</sup> China Daily, "National Congress."

(...) must rigorously protect against and take resolute measures to combat all acts of infiltration, subversion, and sabotage, as well as violent and terrorist activities, ethnic separatist activities, and religious extremist activities. We will strengthen efforts to raise awareness of national security among all Party members and all the people, and create a strong synergy of the whole society to safeguard national security.<sup>144</sup>

With the implementation of the counterterrorism law (2016) to strengthen national security against terrorism and extremism that has spread around the globe and caused within the PRC the desperate attempt to establish a “East Turkistan.”<sup>145</sup> With the counterterrorism law, the PRC has a legal ground to justify their next steps in their regulation of the Uyghurs to eliminate the obstacle they form in the building of a socialism with Chinese characteristics and the Chinese dream of rejuvenation.<sup>146</sup> With mass surveillance of Muslims through for example biometric data collecting, and the vocational training schools, the a new era is set in motion.<sup>147</sup> It is this new era that has taken its shape under Xi administration, that made the researcher of this thesis decide to analyze how CCP discourse on religion affects the Uyghurs in 2017-2022.

Discursive strategy in this context only confirms how discourse can be used a way to gain and express power. The CCP need economic growth to rejuvenate the country and the willingness of all people to work together towards the socialism with Chinese characteristics. As has been argued, social stability is the key component to make this happen. Thus, when threats to stability are observed, the CCP exerts its power to ensure no damage will be done to its plans for the PRC.<sup>148</sup> But with the Uyghurs, the CCP seems to attach instability towards this group on the basis of the Muslim tendencies to turn towards extremism or terrorism. To make a case for themselves and thus have a legal base to regulate this group, they construct the Uyghurs are possible terrorists. And this is what discursive power is all about, “he who controls the discourse also controls the reality created by the discourse.”<sup>149</sup> To protect social stability, the CCP needs to regulate the Uyghurs and does that through discourse on religion. With the new goals for the next five years published by President Xi during the meeting of the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress, the CCP must work hard to reach these goals and cannot have

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<sup>144</sup> China Daily, “National Congress.”

<sup>145</sup> Roberts, “Cultural Genocide,” 201, University of Southern California, “State Council.”

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 202.

<sup>147</sup> Jonathan Brasnett, “Controlling Beliefs and Global Perceptions: Religion in Chinese Foreign Policy,” *International Studies* 58, no. 1 (2021): 50, DOI:10.1177/0020881720981513.

<sup>148</sup> Zhao, “Discursive Power Strategy,” 545.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 545.

problems with social stability and legitimacy. To then observe a sudden increase of regulations of religion, suddenly falls in place.

The attempts to create a certain reality through discourse follows from a part of white paper of the State Council that also has not been discussed yet but supports the argumentation: that the vocational education and training do not violate human rights. As said in white paper, the trainees at the centers can be categorized in three ways:

- “1. People who were incited, coerced or induced into participating in terrorist or extremist activities, or people who participated in terrorist or extremist activities in circumstances that were not serious enough to constitute a crime;*
- 2. People who were incited, coerced or induced into participating in terrorist or extremist activities, or people who participated in terrorist or extremist activities that posed a real danger but did not cause actual harm, whose subjective culpability was not deep, who made confessions of their crimes and were contrite about their past actions and thus can be exempted from punishment in accordance with the law, and who have demonstrated the willingness to receive training;*
- 3. People who were convicted and received prison sentence for terrorist or extremist crimes and after serving their sentences, have been assessed as still posing potential threats to society, and who have been ordered by people’s courts to receive education at the centers in accordance with the law.”<sup>150</sup>*

Of these three categories only trainees from category one and three will be placed at the centers for support and education, as stated in Articles 29 and 30 of the Counterterrorism Law of the People’s Republic of China.<sup>151</sup> Although refuted by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute in their 2020 publication,<sup>152</sup> the State Council claims that the centers:

The centers fully respect and protect the customs and habits of trainees of different ethnic groups, care for their mental health, offer psychological counseling services, and help them solve real-life problems. In accordance with the law, the centers adopt a

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<sup>150</sup> University of Southern California, “PRC State Council.”

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Xu et al., “Uyghurs for Sale.”

policy of separating education and religion. Trainees may not organize and participate in religious activities at the centers.<sup>153</sup>

Islam in XUAR is interpreted by the CCP as a tool to oppose the CCP and its socialist system and endangers Chinese nationalism, which are both prohibited by law as followed a explained a few paragraphs back.<sup>154</sup> Incorporating the global discourse on the War on Terror the CCP further justifies their campaign against the Muslim community in XUAR.<sup>155</sup> What hides behind the CCP's control of religion, is social stability which has come under threat due to turbulence cause by ethnic minorities such as the Uyghurs.<sup>156</sup> The CCP needs compliance of religions to government policies on religion as social stability is needed for the CCP to establish socialism with Chinese characteristics and impacts their economy which needs to increase in order to achieve rejuvenation.<sup>157</sup> Thus the regulation of religion is therefore not only a means to control religion but also to set the boundaries for tolerance for compliance.<sup>158</sup>

This is an important argument to consider within the research to the control of the Uyghurs. The regulation of religion follows from the agenda of ensuring socialism for the era but is also paired together with a need for compliance to this agenda to. To regulate the Uyghurs through several counterterrorism programs they can eliminate the threat the form for stability through Muslin extremism and terrorism, ensure Islam complies to socialism and thus the ideal that to be united and working together guarantees a better life and prosperity to the nation.

Thus, what all these interpretations of the research findings demonstrate is that the developments on religion in Chinese politics together with the CCP's discourse on religion are not ad-hoc and demonstrate the several aspects of discursive power. For decades, religion has been subdued to Chinese state control, varying from very strict to more relaxed ways. From the moment religion has been somewhat accepted to be practiced in the PRC, strict laws and measures have been implemented to ensure it would not oppose socialism in anyway. It took a few decades for the CCP to understand that how hard they tried, religion will be part of the Chinese society for some time. Thus, the only way to then ensure it would not be a problem, is to guide it in the right direction.

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<sup>153</sup> University of Southern California, "PRC State Council."

<sup>154</sup> Potter, "Believe in Control," 329.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 329.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 335.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 335.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 335.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

In this thesis an attempt has been made to study how the CCP's discourse on religion affects the Uyghurs in the past five years. In the recent years the PRC has received quite some attention with regards to their controversial practices on the regulation of religion. With the CCP's focus on socialism with Chinese characteristics and the rejuvenation of the country, this focus has shaped the way the CCP exerts its power. And ultimately has impacted the CCP's discourse, as through a discursive power lens, power is theorized to be derived "from the positioning of social factors by specific, usually interactive, discourse practice."<sup>159</sup> To reinsert the hypothesis mentioned in the introduction, current events related to the PRC seem to suggest that the CCP engages in a religious discourse on the Uyghurs to maintain social stability and strengthen its legitimacy to which the attempts to reach the desired rejuvenation and socialism with Chinese characteristics are dependent. By constructing the Uyghurs as extremists, the CCP has a legal base to take action towards this group and in this way ensure the Uyghurs will not jeopardize rejuvenation and socialism.

To test the hypothesis, three components of the research question needed to be discussed first to then from theory confirm or reject the hypotheses based on the research findings of the previous chapters. As argues in the introduction the three components that needed to be discussed were the relation between CCP and religion, the discourse that is considered to affect the Uyghurs, and the significance to study the events within the timeframe of the last five years.

Throughout the research one thing became clear: there is need to explain the relations between stability and the increased use of CCP's discourse on religion as an example of power. Although the campaign against the Uyghurs is justified to be a counter terrorism measure, chapters two, three and four have demonstrated that the underlying motivation behind this CCP discourse on religion, is to ensure the Muslim Uyghurs would not form threats for the social stability through their disintegration efforts. With the social stability necessary to succeed in the socialism with Chinese characteristics and bring the society closer to the desired rejuvenation, the regulation of the Uyghurs is than necessary.

In chapter one it was explained why discursive theory instead of other identity constructed related theories such as social constructionism and social constructivism was selected as the most suitable to conduct analyze how CCP discourse on religion affects the Uyghurs. In addition, it was explained how the theory was understood, with special reference

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<sup>159</sup> Zhao, "Discursive Power Strategy," 545.



to the challenge of applying a “Western” theory to an “Asian” environment. The chapter then continued with a discussion of the methodological considerations. Besides justifying the qualitative and interpretive nature of the research, special attention was also given to the definition of religion used in this thesis and how this also relates to the discussion of the applicability of a Western theory to a non-Western example. As a final component of the chapter, it was explained, on the basis of the primary sources, that discourse analysis would be the best research method to implement.

What follows from the discussion in chapter two on the report of the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress is that the Uyghurs are affected by CCP discourse through the political economy of socialism with Chinese characteristics and rejuvenation. Current PRC policies, drive solely on the principle of socialism with Chinese characteristics which is needed for the Chinese dream of rejuvenation of China, a principle that can only be achieved through economic growth. As part of the socialism with Chinese characteristics, the CCP goes to great lengths to spread a culture with Chinese characteristics. As the Uyghur identity relies in Turkic and Muslim heritage, religion has become target of CCP policies to ensure the Uyghurs do not endanger the China dream. In fact, they ensure the Uyghurs even share the same positivity towards united China through a Chinese culture, a part of the central practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

The precise role of religion in the Chinese politics and how religion is used in discourse to justify the regulations of religious affairs, followed from chapter three. Where chapter two offered an understanding of the political setting in the PRC through the discussion of its political economy, chapter three takes this political setting to another level by discussing how the setting shapes the discourse of the CCP in the past years. What first needed to be discussed in this chapter is the CCP. In specific the foundational background of the CCP, how the Party is positioned in politics in comparison with the Chinese government and, and what the governing structure with related power of the CCP is. The latter important to understand the power the CCP can even gain with discourse.

From here the discussion switched to SARA, the political body that oversees religious affairs within the PRC. That SARA has suddenly merged with the CCP so soon after the new political economy for the CCP was set in the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress meeting, suggests the increased growth of power the CCP wields within the Chinese politics and ultimately impacts the Uyghurs.

Where the in-practices examples of discourse on the Uyghurs are discussed, is in chapter four. With the discussion of the white paper on extremism, the CCP tried to justify

their measures taken against extremism. This justification demonstrates the interactive engagement of the CCP in religious discourse and provides insights to the language that construct the Uyghurs. To broaden the scope, chapter four also discussed how the efforts to reshape the Uyghur indirectly affect the economic sector as well. Because the Uyghurs are active in the cotton industry, MNC's who harvest the cotton from Uyghur farms or have companies in their supply chain that use this cotton, the MNC's face an issue. Forced labor is forbidden and if a MNC directly or indirectly makes use of forced labor, they can suffer serious consequences. If one party than claims the Uyghurs are not working under forced conditions, while the other claims they do, the MNC faces a dilemma, as was the case with H&M.

In chapter five the research findings of the previous chapters came together interpretation of them through a discursive power lens. What the situation of the Uyghurs demonstrates is how deeply the CCP engages in discourse on religion to protect their socialism with Chinese characteristics. Their discourse is not fueled by a certain hatred towards religion, which under Mao Zedong used to be the case. Rather, the stress of success of the Chinese society in building a socialism with Chinese characteristics and reach rejuvenation of the state, cannot tolerate social instabilities caused by minorities who do not share the CCP's vision.

As follows from chapter four and five, because of their seeming opposition to integrate in Chinese society, the Uyghurs manifest themselves as a threat for the goals set for Chinese society. As common prosperity to which togetherness is key, and common prosperity is dependent of the ability of the society to work together, the CCP cannot have people form an obstacle in this chain. Thus, as chapters five and four state, the strict regulation by the CCP is not ad hoc, but follows from a national interest that is at stake. This could be devastating towards achieving the Chinese dream. Thus, actions need to be taken towards these groups, which seems to force the CCP to take action in the forms of extreme control of identity expression. What it demonstrates is the interactive engagement of the CCP in discourse on religion to construct a reality that would offer them the means to justify actions taken towards region. This observation falls in line with the CCP as a discursive power as the CCP derives power from their interactive discourse on the social factor of stability.

To answer how the Uyghurs are affected by CCP discourse on religion is by being positioned as extremists and terrorist due to their practice of Islam and their Turkic heritage that they have attempted to preserve against the CCP's integration efforts. Due to the emphasis of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the CCP lays focus on creating a stable

society which is united through a socialist culture. As the Uyghurs have been not very open to receiving this message, they are now forced to cooperate. Although this might not seem as an issue at first, to refuse integration the Uyghurs challenge the social stability to which economic development is dependent. As XUAR is necessary for the CCP to increase economic development, due to its importance to the cotton industry, the CCP cannot effort instability in this province and therefore implements a strict protocol of regulations of their religion to regain power over stability. Time will tell if the CCP's discourse on religion will remain to affect the Uyghurs.

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