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HIST 480W

Senior Seminar in International Studies

April 10, 2021

INTRODUCTION

The Xinjiang Autonomous Region is located in Northwestern China and it is home to the ethnic population of Uyghur Muslims. This location has also been center to possibly one of the most discussed human rights issues in the past decade. Following accusations of genocide and new-era concentration camps, the Chinese government has been under fire facing harsh international criticism. The main issue from which the current Uyghur unrest stems from is the forced Sinicization imposed by China's Communist party. Scholars Jennifer Ang and Maria Soloshcheva compellingly discussed the evolution of the treatment of minorities in China.

BACKGROUND

In order to understand the evolution of Uyghur struggles over the years and charting the course of their unrest, it is important to refer to imperial China, traveling all the way back to the Han dynasty. Indeed, it is during the very Han dynasty that the concept of , meaning Chinese people, was introduced. It was not a racial notion but a cultural concept. As

terms of geographical and religious factors. This idea was introduced by Chiang Kai-Shek³, leader of the Kuomintang Nationalist party.

While Chiang Kai-Shek seemed to at least incorporate minority rights into the conversation, the 1950s under Chairman Mao's rule can be considered the most ambiguous time for the Uyghur population. On one hand, the Chinese government manipulated the idea of , publicly preaching the need for a nation built on multiculturalism but covertly engaging in Han-centric behavior. On more than one occasion, Mao's administration claimed genealogical ties with the minority peoples and laid historical claims to their lands. On the other hand, the Chinese government tended to group together ethnicities that did

case, the outside world also comprehends the rest of mainland China as most Chinese citizens are unaware of the real situation in Xinjiang. Indeed, as Soloshcheva explained, the Chinese media is very focused on respecting the principle of non-interference when it comes to coverage on the Chinese Communist Party's internal affairs.¹⁸ Over the years, the Chinese Communist Party has increasingly tightened regulations on internet use, banning all Google services and other mass media outlets that concern sensitive topics.¹⁹ Soloshcheva highlighted that the forced oppression exercised by the Chinese government has indeed left the Uyghur problem unsolved and more intricate than ever before. The forced assimilation and the Chinese Communist Party's perception of nation is indubitably unacceptable for the Uyghur population, as is the Uyghur's resistance and worship to the Chinese government.²⁰

ANALYSIS

sources. In particular, this paper will analyze two _____ and two _____ articles about the recent Xinjiang cotton boycott. Because of the multiplicity of different issues tied to the Xinjiang area, it is easier to focus on one specific issue, a very current one for the matter. The recent Xinjiang cotton boycott has been catching the attention of many global media outlets for its involvement of large name-brand companies like Nike, Gap, and H&M. Interestingly, depending on where you are in the world, you get a different version of the story, different secondary accounts on what is happening in Xinjiang and who is at fault. Therefore, the real question to ask is: “who is telling the truth?”

When talking about the link between the global supply chain and forced labor in Xinjiang, a situation similar to that outlined by Kumar occurs. Journalists have been trying to find out more on this issue. However, there is extremely restricted access to the region. As in the case of China falsely adopting the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, it seems that China has been keeping its own citizens in the dark about Xinjiang. Referring to Soloshcheva's emphasis on China's extremely controlled mass media outlets, the Chinese Communist party has been holding up its act by twisting the information reaching the outside world. In her

article, "People in China Left Wondering, 'What Happened in Xinjiang?'" , Yaqiu Wang explained that, "For the past several years, the word 'Xinjiang' and the human rights abuses documented across the region had been taboo on the Chinese internet."²⁴ Indeed, a minor slip-up and leak of information opened up China's citizens to the truth about Xinjiang's cotton. However, Wang pointed out that, "Most netizens focused on expressing outrage at Western brands, [while only] some are asking questions about Xinjiang and criticizing the government's policies there."²⁵

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Mississippi cotton plantation²⁷ dating back to the American colonial slave-practice in the 1700s and 1800s. This was a very clever way to flip the conversation on its back, reminding everyone that China has not been the only country to abuse ethnic minorities. Furthermore, judging by the very name of the article, referring to the youth group as “China’s Outrage Machine”, it is easy to deduct that the American counterparts did not take the comment very well.

Another crucial point of Zhong and Mozur’s article was the assumption that the country’s considerable consumer market has been the only reason for peaceful cooperation between China and global big-name corporations,²⁸ alluding at the fact that economic gains are valued more than human lives. However, the very actor who denounces China’s, and other governments’, thirst for money is the country who also chooses to use economic threats to resolve the issue. As Peter Goodman, Vivian Wang, and Elizabeth Paton emphasized in their article, the United States announced that failure to remove Xinjiang cotton from global supply chains could result in an American ban on Chinese imports.²⁹ With this claim, the American administration dissociated itself from the Chinese consumers’ view of the U.S. boycott on Xinjiang cotton as “a Western plot to sabotage China’s development.”³⁰

Looking at China’s counter-argument, Xinyu Tan wrote in her article for the

“The attack on Xinjiang cotton staged by the anti-China forces on the basis of ‘forced

²⁷ Raymond Zhong, and Paul Mozur, “How China’s Outrage Machine Kicked Up a Storm Over H&M,” , March 29, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/29/business/china-xinjiang-cotton-hm.html>.

²⁸ Raymond Zhong, and Paul Mozur, “How China’s Outrage Machine Kicked Up a Storm Over H&M.”

²⁹ Peter S. Goodman, Vivian Wang, and Elizabeth Paton, “Global Brands Find It Hard to Untangle Themselves From Xinjiang Cotton” The New York Times, April 6, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/06/business/xinjiang-china-cotton-brands.html>.

³⁰ Ibid.

When analyzing all four of the articles, two from the U.S. and two from China, an almost absurd finger-pointing is legible through the lines. Starting from the very provocative headlines like “Xinjiang Cotton Boycott US-led Burlesque” and “China’s Outrage Machine”, both sides make it clear that they wish to come out of the debate triumphant. In all four articles there were references to economic policies and trade ban threats. It seemed like either side was more involved in ruining the reputation of the other than safeguarding Uyghur’s rights. While the American-based source was more subtle in its accusations, the [redacted] articles were very direct in calling out the U.S. and other global powers who opposed China’s sale of the alleged forced labor cotton. Mei and Tan both attacked the morality of the U.S. administration in calling out the crimes in Xinjiang. They referred to such statements as a product of Western speculation and fake news. On the other side, the [redacted] articles were much more toned down and faint. Nonetheless, they worked on insinuation, emphasizing China’s missteps and valorizing the United States’ efforts in fighting the valiant war against human rights abuses in Xinjiang.

In both Eastern and Western media coverage, there was a heavy focus on personal gains as opposed to the well-being of people. By maneuvering information to force the other into economic retaliation, the [redacted]

supposedly having more freedom in expressing their opinions, were regurgitating the U.S. government's capitalist focus on the economy as the only problem-solving system, the go-to solution. It is also important to point out that the neutral source, an NGO designed in its very nature to side with the vulnerable party was closer to the American view of the issue. Whether it be for its subtlety or its counterpart's uncoverable violations, the

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