A Case Study of the Uyghur Organizations in Germany and How They Influence German Policies towards China

Cross-Border Migrant Organisations - Rethinking National Policy

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(Preliminary Findings Only!)

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Abstract
This paper begins with a social network analysis of the actors that have made the Uyghurs an issue in the international arena. This allows us to see the transnational nature of the Uyghur activism to promote the rights of their kindred back in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Next, I provide a case study of Uyghur mobilization in Germany by first examining the growing (albeit still low and marginal) visibility of the Uyghur issue in German legislative discussions. In Germany, the issue concerning granting political asylum to Guantanamo Bay Uyghur detainees, for instance, has been one of the key areas where Uyghur diaspora wish to win the support from German politicians and the public. My case study exemplifies how the Uyghurs strive to bring the Guantanamo Bay issue into German parliamentary debate, but achieve no success in terms of having any bills passed in favor of such legislative move so far, let alone to make actual influences on Germany’s policies towards China.

Keywords: Uyghurs, transnational advocacy networks, diaspora politics, Guantanamo Bay issue

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1. Introduction
In this paper, I study the gradual formation of a transnational network in advancing the Uyghurs’ interests in various parts of the world, and use the example of Uyghur activism in Germany to discuss the opportunities and obstacles Uyghur diaspora face in trying to influence German policies towards their interests. My aim is mainly empirical, but I hope that the preliminary findings can serve as basis for theoretical discussions in my future research.

The Uyghurs (or Uighurs) are Turks, and most of them perceive themselves as Muslims. They are the fifth-largest minority nationality in the People’s Republic of

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1 The Uyghurs started to convert from their previous beliefs in Buddhism to Islam from the tenth to the twelfth centuries CE. See Blaine Kaltman, Under the Heel of the Dragon: Islam, Racism, Crime and the Uighur in China (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), p.1-3.
China (PRC), and the largest nationality in the northwestern region of Xinjiang (meaning “new frontier” in Chinese), where they make up nearly 50 percent of the region’s population. Various studies have shown that some (albeit not all) Uyghurs in Xinjiang have demonstrated the aspiration to preserve the Uyghur identity and even create their own state. In their own definition, their state should be “East Turkestan” or “East Turkistan”, not China. Not surprisingly, the Chinese government has considered such efforts as subversive and separatist, and has endeavored to counter any further development in this direction.

In the next section, I explore the actors that have made the Uyghurs an issue in the international arena based on hyperlink analysis of websites (i.e., URLs) that have posted Uyghur-relevant discussions. In the third section, I use the development in German legislative discussions as an example to manifest how Uyghur issues have gained more visibility (albeit still low) in German political debate. In Europe, the World Uyghur Congress (WUC) is the most well-known Uyghur umbrella organization. Founded in 2004, the WUC is headquartered in Munich, Germany, where most Uyghur migrants in Europe reside. In the fourth section, I then use the operation of the WUC as an example to show how Uyghur migrants affiliate with sympathizers, particularly with parliamentary members in Germany to seek changes. The last section summarizes my preliminary findings, and indicates what I wish to complete in future research.

2. Who are making the Uyghurs an issue internationally?

The region of Xinjiang has been in and out of the reach of the Chinese empire from the 750s to the 1750s. As various Chinese dynasties waxed and waned, so has this region’s relationship with China proper. Periods of revolt and independence have been staged in Xinjiang. Historically, China’s relationship with Xinjiang was mostly loose before the region was finally annexed as the Qing dynasty’s territory, and given provincial status in 1884 under the reign of the Qing dynasty (1644-1912). Even then, China did not have solid control of this region. The region was dominated by Chinese warlords during China’s chaotic Republican period (1912-1949). After the communist revolution of 1949, the government put an end to

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3 It is estimated that there are 500 to 600 Uyghurs in Munich, and in total around 700 Uyghurs nationwide as of 2009. This number has been reported in parliamentary documents in the Bavarian State Parliament (Bayerischer Landtag) several times. See also Entscheiderbrief, 9/2009, No. 16, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, BAMF).
Xinjiang’s provincial status. In order to “reflect the diversity of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang,” the region was named “an autonomous region” on October 1, 1995.\footnote{Wang, “Toward a Synthesis of the Theories of Peripheral Nationalism,” p.183.}

It is interesting to note that, during China’s tumultuous Republican period, Beijing’s ineffective and weak governance of this region invited the Uyghurs to create a state: the Eastern Turkestan Republic (ETR) was established in November 1944 under the auspices of the Soviet Union. When Chinese communists “peacefully liberated” Xinjiang in 1949, ETR leaders were either persecuted or fled to Central Asia, India and later other parts of the world. Albeit in exile, the leaders carried with them one shared possession: Uyghur nationalism that they later sought to revive overseas in various contexts, and which helped the exiled Uyghurs to make some sense of their predicament and unite under alien skies. This is a story of Uyghur nationalism, albeit small, reactivated outside their ancestral territory, growing in confined spaces and times, and forged on the waves of international cooperation.

In 1998, Keck and Sikkink have proposed a famous boomerang pattern, which depicts the occurrence of many types of transnational advocacy networks, including the campaign against tropical deforestation, human rights advocacy in Latin America and others.\footnote{Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, \textit{Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 12-3.} For the boomerang effect to emerge, access to articulate interests is usually blocked in one country, prompting political entrepreneurs to bypass domestic channels and seek international allies to push forward transformation at home. At first glance, this boomerang concept appears to depict the Uyghur case well, as is evidenced in a number of Uyghur meetings (e.g., seminars, conferences) occurring in Western Europe and North America in the past four years, during which the author has noticed a rising aspiration among Uyghur leaders and constituents in raising the salience and visibility of the Uyghur cause, in the hope that such efforts would gather direct support to advance the Uyghur cause for self-determination, and create international leverage to counter the Chinese regime’s suppression. For instance, in the online declaration of the pro-claimed “East Turkistan Government in Exile”, there is a line explaining the organization is founded in the US because the US is the “the leader of liberty, justice, and wisdom” and there is expectation that “the United States of America will recognize the just cause of freedom and independence of millions of East Turkestanis.”\footnote{“Declaration of the Formation of the Government-in-Exile of the Republic of East Turkistan”, September 14, 2004, \textit{Website of the East Turkistan Government in Exile}, http://en.eastturkistan-gov.org/government (accessed February 25, 2010).}

In the concluding section of this paper, I will critically discuss the constrains
Uyghur migrants face in terms of maximizing the boomerang effect, but for now, I will argue that the boomerang effect could be a useful conceptual backbone for the understanding of Uyghur diasporic activism.\(^7\)

Transnational strategies permit Uyghurs to show the Chinese government that the salience of the issue has reached the international arena. Signaling the message “even outside China, there are people supporting the Uyghurs” forces the Chinese government to pay attention and to cease dismissing nationalist requests as mere noise. From an alternative angle, it can be said that transnational cooperation enables Uyghurs to internationalize the issue of contention or expand the conflict to the international battlefield. This warns PRC leaders that if they do not wish to see the conflict to spill over the state’s boundaries, the leaders should consider conceding.

Of course, one can doubt that the Chinese regime would really concede to the Uyghurs’ demands simply because Uyghurs have been able to find international leverage. In this paper, I will slightly mention the counter-mobilization by the Chinese government. Chinese counter-mobilization, however, is not a main focus of this study, and awaits future to complete. My ambition centers on exploring the Uyghur networks and discovering whether the boomerang pattern has been able to create pressure on the Chinese government domestically (e.g., pressure from “below”) and internationally (e.g., pressure from “above”).

The use of “information” politics, a strategy commonly used by TAN,\(^8\) plays a vital role in raising the salience of the Uyghurs’ issue. In fact, as Petersen has observed, until the late 1970s, Uyghur diaspora was not effective in spreading their cause to the international community at all largely due to the “limited media” Uyghur leaders were able to use.\(^9\) The arrival of the Internet in a way gives like-minded activists easier and cheaper means of interacting, and has further reinforced some shared rhetoric and images needed for the continuation of the Uyghur national self-determination struggles.\(^10\)

By observing Uyghur websites, such as that of the Uyghur American Association (UAA) during the past three years, one can see that their websites have become more and more sophisticated. The websites do not contain just press releases and statements of positions. One can also link websites to other online forums where

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\(^7\) In my comprehensive survey of 57 ethnic groups in Europe, I find out the boomerang patterns do not depict the emergence of transnational networks of various ethnic groups well. However, I believe the transnational mobilization of the Uyghurs could be an exception, where the boomerang effect does take place. For more debates on the boomerang effect and ethnic mobilization, please see Yu-Wen Chen, *Transnational Cooperation of Ethnopolitical Mobilization: A Survey Analysis of European Ethnopolitical Groups* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009).

\(^8\) Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders*, p. 12-3.


\(^10\) Ibid.
like-minded supporters share the Uyghurs’ views. The impact is both technological and psychological, and more importantly, the scope is beyond national borders. As evidence of the impact of the Internet, the Chinese government has been reported to have tightened its measures to block the Internet access of inhabitants in Xinjiang for fear that they might obtain or disseminate unfavorable messages against the regime.\(^{11}\)

Uyghur activists’ messages usually center on the discrimination against and oppression of Uyghurs in China as well as on the need for a homeland. The Uyghur diaspora has aimed to frame this issue in terms of human rights violations and self-determination, as opposed to in terms of terrorism, which the Chinese government has otherwise strived to propagate.

To understand how the information about the Uyghurs has been disseminated and thus helps raise the salience of the Uyghur cause, I examine URLs that have posted Uyghur relevant information. I shall note that although online networks cannot be totally equated with offline networks, an examination of online networks that are making the Uyghurs an issue still gives us some interesting clues to the current operation of the Uyghur diaspora and its affiliates.\(^{12}\) I will compare online and offline Uyghur networks in the following paragraphs.

The technique I employ to study Uyghur-relevant URLs is called hyperlink analysis, which is part of the general social network analysis (SNA) (See Appendix 1 for the methodology). As Figure 1 shows, the actors that are contributing to the dissemination of Uyghur discussions online are quite heterogeneous. We can categorize these actors into at least five types.

The first type includes organizations whose advocacy focus is solely on the Uyghurs’ self-determination cause. Although from the websites of the World Uyghur Congress (WUC) I have seen more than 20 organizations that are involved in the Uyghur issues “offline,” it appears that in the virtual space, not all are active; the Uyghur American Association (UAA) is an exceptional case that has been vital in offering Uyghur news and information to other types of actors in the network, such as major Western news agencies (e.g., the BBC) and international non-governmental human rights organizations (INGOs, e.g., Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International), as well as popular social networking platforms (e.g., Twitter and Facebook).

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Figure 1: Online Uyghur Issue Networks

Source: Map generated by www.issuemapper.net.
The second type of actors includes INGOs with a more general human rights focus, such as various national branches of Amnesty International. From the direction of the arrows, we can see that Amnesty International organizations in New Zealand and in the U.S. have received information from the first category of actors, namely the UAA, and then further spread its information to other press and media.

The third type of actors is widespread in the online Uyghur issue networks. These actors are news agencies and news providers mostly based in North America and Western Europe, such as the New York Times and the BBC. The role of the press and media cannot be underestimated because, as Figure 1 shows, they have been playing prominent roles in making the Uyghur issues a network.

The fourth type includes newly developed social networking websites (e.g., Facebook) and information-sharing websites (e.g., YouTube). Although these kinds of channels are not formal institutions that conventional social movement scholars are accustomed to analyzing, the informality and accessibility of these channels are what have attracted interested individuals to use these websites.

As the directions of the arrows in Figure 1 demonstrate, most of these websites are receivers of information in the Uyghur issue network. That implies that Uyghur activists and supporters have found these websites to be attractive channels to convey Uyghur positions and concerns.

The last type includes “gov” URLs, such as that of the White House (see lower right corner of Figure 1), which are not prominent in the Uyghur online issue network at all. They are in a relatively marginal location of the entire Uyghur issue network, and they tend to be receivers, rather than providers of information. This implies that advocating the Uyghur cause remains the business of non-state actors. In a way, being at the margin of the network and being pure receivers of information also indirectly suggest the significant role of government actors: other actors have sought to influence these actors (meaning they must be important), but they remain only receivers/observers rather than active issues-generators.

Although hyperlink analysis of the URLs that are spreading Uyghur news gives us a preliminary understanding of online Uyghur networks, one might expect a gap between online and offline networks, since not all Uyghur organizations have established a virtual presence. Thus, it is interesting to ask what kinds of organizations could have been missed in this online network. The best way to find out is probably to have another dataset of organizations that are spreading Uyghur news, as manifested in their participation in relevant offline events. The researchers can then study the network they form through offline events. Unfortunately, I do not have this type of data at present. Hence, I identify potential missing organizations or networks based on the current literature. And, if possible, I also conjecture why
these organizations or networks are not shown in Figure 1.

First of all, Central Asia and Turkey harbor quite a number of Uyghur diaspora communities. The existing literature has indicated their importance in sustaining the Uyghur cause beyond China. The seeds in Central Asia and in Turkey, however, are not shown in Figure 1 at all. It could be that these organizations do not rely too much on information technology, such as the Internet, to spread their cause. Petersen has also indicated a conscious attempt of Central Asian states, in cooperation with China, to block and prohibit websites that discuss the Uyghur issues.  

There could also be a hypothetical link between ethnic mobilization and modernization. That is, even modernization (e.g., the development of the telephone and the Internet) has to a certain extent stimulated cross-border exchanges modernization has unequal impacts on different countries. Organizations from more affluent and well-advanced countries (e.g., the U.S.) appear to have a higher degree of activism because their countries are more integrated into the global economic and political system. Benefiting from such benign conditions, these organizations therefore have easier and better access to the world, and can use modern technologies to advance the groups’ causes. Conversely, even in the offline reality, for the Uyghur organizations in central Asian states, the lesser developed political and social conditions (e.g., limited nation-wide Internet infrastructures) could have reduced these organizations’ employment of online tools to foster the Uyghur cause. This is only a hypothesis, though. It deserves further empirical test to confirm.

Second, Uyghurs have also exchanged views and resources with the Tibetan and Taiwanese independence movements, as well as overseas Chinese dissident networks, although each of these movements has different historical connections with China, and each pines for different political objectives. The URLs of these organizations are nevertheless not shown in Figure 1. A potential reason is that, even though activists in these movements have exchanged views and information in offline settings, these activists do not or have not established any shared discourses (with the Uyghurs) that would draw these activists into one single-issue network. The Uyghur issue network is itself a distinct network.

Third, it must be pointed out that the story of the Uyghurs’ international presence is not just about an allegedly oppressed minority’s struggle for lebensraum. The majority of Uyghurs today perceive themselves as Sunni Muslims. Finley

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14 Gladney, Cyber-separatism.
documents how the Uyghurs are involved in global Islamic solidarity networks both symbolically and materially, based on the belief that they and their Muslim brethren are suffering from the oppression of “foreign” powers. For Middle Eastern Muslims, the threats appear to be linked to Western “imperialist” powers, while for Uyghurs, the threats are perceived to be from the domination of the Chinese state controlled by the Han majority. The fact that such Islamic linkage is not shown in Figure 1 indicates a gap between the online and offline networks. It is likely that Uyghurs would become a part of another online (broader) network that focuses on the Islamic cause, but this has to be further investigated in future research. As far as “making the Uyghurs a distinct issue of debate in the international arena” is concerned, it appears that their Muslim linkages do not contribute to this effort.

Fourth, although some human rights organizations have attempted to de-link Uyghurs’ Muslim connections from the infamous term “terrorism,” the American and Chinese governments have identified some terrorist elements, such as the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), in Uyghur communities. This adds further dynamics to the international networks of Uyghurs that I seek to illustrate, and complicates China’s reactions to the Uyghur separatist movement. This potential linkage to terrorist groups, not surprisingly, is also not shown in Figure 1. This is likely related to fact that these potential terrorists elements have not (greatly) considered using the Internet to spread their causes. Even if they do, the Uyghurs would be more likely to be a small part of the issues networks rather than the other way around. This might explain why we do not see these violent wings constituting a part of the Uyghur online network.

3. Rising Visibility in German Debates?
As an example of how the visibility of the Uyghur issues has been raised beyond China, I examine legislative discussions in Germany. The reason for looking at the German legislative debates is that Germany has one of the hugest Uyghur communities in Europe.

First, I look at legislative discussions in the Bavarian State Parliament (Bayerischer Landtag) because its regional capitol, Munich harbors the hugest Uyghur community in Europe, and the Uyghur umbrella organization, the WUC, is

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located there. Table 1 looks into parliamentary proposals and requests in the Bavarian State Parliament and asks how many of them have mentioned “Uyghur(s)” or “Xinjianq” in the text. Parliamentary requests (Anfrage) are questions posed by parliamentarians asking the government to answer specific questions, while parliamentary proposals (Antrag) are suggestions to be passed for further implementation.

The search period is from the 11th legislative session to the current 16th session, which spans from 1986 to 2010. As the result indicates, there are only non-binding parliamentary requests, proposals and minutes of parliamentary debates regarding the Uyghurs or Xinjiang. This implies that the “Uyghurs” is becoming a minor focus of debate in the Bavarian State Parliament, but they have not been able to be integrated into any formal binding legislation. In addition, one can immediately notice that from the 11th to the 14th legislative sessions, there were already some debates over human rights in China, but Uyghurs were not an issue of debates at all. The Uyghur issue only starts to be “seen” from 2003 on. This could be the result of conscious lobbying efforts of the WUC since it was founded in 2004. Before 2004, there was no organized Uyghur advocacy in Germany. This conjecture, however, needs to be confirmed with interviews, which I will conduct in the near future.

In Bavaria, parliamentary proposals in support of the Uyghurs are mostly initiated by parliamentarians from the multicultural-minded Green party (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) and the center-left Social Democrats (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, SPD). From 2003 on, it is clear that the question over whether the Bavarian and German government should grant political asylum to Uyghur inmates at the Guantanamo Bay has been raised by parliamentarians from the Green party and the SPD. The U.S. president, Barack Obama has promised to close this detention camp in Cuba, and the U.S. federal courts have also ruled that the 16 or so Uyghur detainees posed no threat to the U.S. The task for the U.S. administration now is to find countries willing to offer asylum to these Uyghur inmates.

There is no easy solution. The Chinese government has insisted that these Uyghurs are terrorists linked to separatist acts in Xinjiang, and should be sent back to China to face trials. The PRC has also warned that any country giving Uyghur

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19 Part of the WUC’s operation has been supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) based in Washington, D.C., USA. The NED is a NGO aiming to strengthen democratic institutions around the world. The NED receives financial support from the U.S. Congress and further distributes resources to various NGOs around the world, including organizations that promote Uyghur rights.

20 There has been no evidence that Uyghurs in Germany are related to any extremist or separatist activities back in Xinjiang, China. See Entscheiderbrief, 9/2009, No. 16, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration and Flüchtlinge, BAMF).
inmates political asylum would be harboring terrorists. For the Obama administration, therefore, how it tackles the Uyghur issue could have an impact on its relationship with China. Various Western European countries, such as Germany, Switzerland, Canada and Sweden also face similar dilemma. While hailing Obama’s determination to close the camp, these countries worry that their acceptance of Uyghur inmates could jeopardize their respective ties with China. I will examine more of this Guantanamo Bay issue in the next section.

Table 1. Parliamentary Documents in Bavaria (Non-Binding)

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<tr>
<th>Legislative Sessions/Documents</th>
<th>Parliamentary requests in which “Uyghur(s)” and/or “Xinjiang” were mentioned</th>
<th>Parliamentary proposals in which “Uyghur(s)” and/or “Xinjiang” were mentioned</th>
<th>Parliamentary requests in which (more general) human rights issues concerning China were mentioned</th>
<th>Parliamentary proposals in which (more general) human rights issues concerning China were mentioned</th>
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22 These documents were obtained from the website of the Bavarian State Parliament (http://www.bayern.landtag.de). The 16th period is supposed to last until 2013. But we only have documents until this time (February, 2010) when we write this paper.

23 There are more requests (Anfrage) that concerns “China” in general, such as safety of products from China. In this column, I do not take these documents into account, but focus on documents that mention general human rights in China.
Similarly, I examine the development in the German federal parliament (Bundestag). I search keyword “China” from the first of January, 1989 to the first of January, 2010. Like the situation in the Bavarian State Parliament, issues concerning Uyghurs and/or Xinjiang have been debated, but fail to become any binding statements. I will explain why they failed in the fourth section of this paper.

It is worth noting that the documents I found at the federal level include parliamentary requests, minutes of discussions, long reports about general human rights conditions in China, opinion-pieces in the parliamentary journal “Das Parlament”, and others. This diversity makes it hard to categorize these documents as I have done with the Bavarian documents shown in Table 1.

Interestingly, the aforementioned Guantanamo Bay issue was more indirectly mentioned in parliamentary documents at the federal level than at the Bavarian state level. This means that parliamentarians at the federal level tend to discuss the more general human rights issues of China, and link the Uyghur concern to it. There is no direct proposal at the federal level expressing the support for Uyghur Guantanamo inmates to be taken into Germany. This is different from proposals at the Bavarian state level, which as noted previously, directly calls for the acceptance of Uyghur inmates.

Because the documents at the federal level are more diverse, indirect and hard to categorize, I will not present an overview as in Table 1, but rather use the materials obtained from Bavarian State Parliament (main source) and the Bundestag (secondary source) to help construct a case study in the following section.

4. Uyghur Mobilization in Germany: The Guantanamo Bay Debate

In the previous section, I have presented evidences of a growing (albeit still low and marginal) visibility of the Uyghur issue in German political debate. It is more

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24 I did search keywords such as “Uyghur” and “Xinjiang” in the Bundestag online archive, but these keywords did not generate any result at all, so I decided to search “China” instead. This is the website of the German Parliament, http://www.bundestag.de.
obvious that these debates were raised by parliamentarians. German politicians could pick up the Uyghur cause because they were personally sympathetic to the Uyghur’s plight or because they entertain certain ideology believing in the empowerment of minorities around the world. The task of this section is to specify who are raising the salience of the Uyghur issues in Germany, or in other words, who are advocating for the Uyghurs in Germany. I examine the cooperation between sympathetic German politicians and Uyghur diaspora residing in Germany and in other parts of the world. The case I choose is the recent debate over whether Germany should accept Uyghur detainees at the Guantanamo Bay or not.

The source of our analysis comes from secondary literature, such as governmental documents, parliamentary documents, campaign statements, and newspapers. Delia A. Pop has conducted some interviews with German officials, and we will continue to arrange more interviews in the near future. But what we presented in this paper is mostly based on secondary literature.

According to the German law, two different paths of legal procedures could be taken for Uyghur Guantanamo inmates to be accepted in Germany. First, the inmates could be treated as asylum seekers. The usual legal procedure for granting asylum would be conducted by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für Migration and Flüchtlinge*, BAMF) implementing the bills which had been adopted by the German Parliament (*Bundestag*). Second, parliamentarians could also call for the acceptance of Uyghurs from the Guantanamo Bay prison. If enough votes are collected and the proposal passes,25 inmates could be received in Germany, provided that there is at least one German region which is willing to accept the inmates.26

Recently, an agreement at the European Union (EU) level has also been reached, which could become the third potential path for the Uyghur Guantanamo inmates to be accepted in EU member states. This agreement essentially states that refugees who have been chosen by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) shall be accepted by EU member states.

It has not been decided yet which procedure shall be applied to determine whether to give Guantanamo detainees political asylum in Germany or not. Until thus far, no parliamentary bills concerning this issue has been passed, neither in the federal Parliament nor in the Bavarian State Parliament. It has also not been decided if the Guantanamo detainees would be integrated into the usual formal asylum-procedure.

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25 Proposals can be introduced by a party or a fraction, and if they obtain enough votes to pass (often the majority vote, meaning that 2/3 are necessary), the proposal then goes through the Parliament and it must be implemented. It is the same procedure at the regional and the federal level.

At the regional level of Bavaria, as previously mentioned, the key actors advocating to accept Uyghur inmates are some parliamentarians from the Green Party and the SPD. The Green party, for instance, is known to advocate multiculturalism and it has also openly demonstrated an ambition to support neglected minorities around the world, such as the Uyghur in China and the Roma in Europe, according to the Green Party’s report “Addicted to Freedom”.27 Alone or together with the SPD, they have submitted very direct proposals, explicitly calling for the reception of Uyghur inmates.

The Green party holds the same supportive position at the federal level, while the SPD, due to its role as a key coalition of the ruling government at the federal level, it refrained from supporting the Uyghurs, thus creating a division between the SPD at the Bavarian level and at the federal level. This phenomenon is quite normal in the federal system of Germany. We will discuss more about its implications later.

Both legislative discussions occurring at the federal and regional level reveal some “issue linkages” made by deputies and fractions. The concept of “issue linkage” was in fact proposed by Keck and Sikkink in their interpretation of the work of transnational advocacy networks (TAN). They argue that issues involving “bodily harm to vulnerable individuals” resonate with the basic ideas of “human dignity” common to most cultures, thus making them more likely to win supports in campaigns.28 Gross breaches of human rights, for instance, run afoul of the diverse conceptions of human dignity and “lend themselves to dramatic portrayal and personal testimony” that are the core of TANs’ tactics.29

Another concept relating to issue linkage is the concept of “framing”. Benford and Snow describe movement actors as “signifying agents” who are constantly engaged in the interpretation, construction and maintenance of opportunities and challenges.30 Regarding the Uyghur issue, I think one can first identify a “master frame” which has been used by sympathetic parliamentarians at the Bavarian state level and at the federal level. This master frame centers on the dire human rights records in China. For instance, at the federal level, mainly the Green Party but also

28 Keck and Sikkink use the term “human dignity” rather than “human rights” on the ground that not all cultures have the same beliefs in human rights, but most uphold human dignity. See Keck and Sikkink, Activists beyond Borders, p. 204-5.
29 Keck and Sikkink note that a short and clear causal chain between the cause and effect of an issue must be established in order to persuade the target audience. For instance, environmental campaigns have often emphasized the link between safeguarding the environment and protecting the vulnerable people residing therein. See Keck and Sikkink, Activists beyond Borders, p. 27.
the other parties have tried to link the Chinese human rights records to the ongoing oppression of minorities, such as the Uyghurs and Tibetans within China. In cooperation with the Liberals (Freie Demokratische Partei, FDP) and with the votes from the Liberals, the Greens have urged the German government to support the protection of minority rights in China, with special focus on the Uyghurs and Tibetans (cf. report on the request from the committee for human rights and humanitarian aid, February 13, 2009, N° 16/11980).

Apart from the master frame, there are also special frames that link the human rights issue to the Chinese treatment of people in labor camps (laogai) where allegedly minorities and dissidents are detained and oppressed.

These issue linkages server to enforce the urgency of the aforementioned Uyghur matter, underlining the necessity of giving help to the Guantanamo inmates with Chinese origins. Most deputies in favor for granting asylum to the Uyghurs are pointing to the human rights situation in China, especially the human rights violations regarding minorities, as a reason to prevent the Uyghurs held in Guantanamo from returning to China where they might be exposed to torture or even execution. In a way, the Guantanamo debate could be conceived of as a special frame, too.

One could argue that German legislative discussions on general human rights situation in China predate the introduction of the Uyghur elements into legislative debates. Thus, it is hard to see a clear and strategic issue linkage between general human rights issues and the Uyghur issue since the former was already there before the latter drew German politicians’ attention. I would argue, however, activists would still profit from the relatively established debates over China’s human rights records when they introduced the Uyghur elements.

Another notable example of issue linkage and special framing effort was using a symbolic event, such as the Beijing Olympic, to raise the salience of the Uyghurs’ agenda. Beijing’s successful bid to host the 2008 Olympics in 2001 gave Uyghur activists new momentum and an opportunity to advance their interests and sound their voices. In 2001, the International Olympic Committee’s (IOC’s) decision to let China stage the Olympics was set and it was fairly unlikely to change. My point is, hence, not too much on how Uyghur actors could actually boycott the Beijing Olympics (the Beijing Olympic successfully took place in 2008!), but rather about how these actors perceive and capitalize on such a symbolic event to advance their respective political interests.

While the Olympic Movement promotes the universal Olympic spirits of friendship, solidarity and fair play, those in the anti-camp, such as Uyghur activists and their sympathizers from the German Green party, expose the Chinese regime’s
failure to live up to such spirits when it repeatedly violates human rights. By exposing the discrepancy between China’s promises to the Olympic spirit (and to ameliorate human rights’ practices) and its actual performance, Uyghur activists seek to shame the Chinese government, and hope that such external pressures would push it to improve.

For instance, there was a public discussion organized by the Green Party at the Bavarian State Parliament on the 29th of April, 2008 where the president of the World Uyghur Congress (WUC) Radiby Kadeer, general secretary of Amnesty International in Germany Barbara Lochbihler, and Green party parliamentary Margarete Bause and others were present to discuss why China does not deserve to host the Olympics.31

My description so far might give the readers the impression that the Uyghurs are promoted by certain oppositional German politicians, while the diaspora themselves play more passive roles. This is, however, not a correct understanding of the cooperative nature of both sides of forces. The WUC, for example, has also sought to organize events to lead the discussion. In an event where the author was invited, the WUC cooperated with the Holland-based Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) to host a training seminar in Berlin for Uyghur leaders around the world from the 20th to the 24th of April, 2008. They particularly invited practitioners, officials, and scholars as speakers to inform Uyghur leaders of the procedures and tactics needed for effective international mobilization. Being a speaker and participant at this seminar, the author observed the aspiration of Uyghur leaders to learn from the experiences of professionals for their own operation. They also clearly expressed interests in learning from the experiences of the Tibetan movement and Taiwanese independence movement, as well as how other movements capitalize on the Beijing Olympic to promote their own agenda. This shows not only the aspiration to emulate strategies from parallel movements from other parts of the world, but also confirms that the discourses and ideologies supporting the Uyghur mobilization exhibit a transnational nature.32 Moreover, it is worth noting that the presence of the Green party at the setting (i.e. Ms. Frances Eqerer, representative of Ms. Margarete Bause of the Green Party) implies again the cooperative relationship between Uyghur diaspora and German politicians.

Keck and Sikkink’s concept of issue linkage is not without critique, though. Cortell and Davis (2000: 86) indicate that the “resonance” assumption is rough and

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31 This information can be found at Margarete Bause’s website, http://www.margarete-bause.de (accessed February 2, 2010).
does not specify how international norms become infused in domestic understandings.\textsuperscript{33} There has not been systematic research on this issue. In a similar vein, Risse notes, “If there is a complete match between the new transnational norms and the ideas embedded in a given domestic culture, we do not need conscious efforts by transnational actors to make the norms stick”.\textsuperscript{34} A certain degree of “incompatibility” between international norms and “the ideas embedded in a given domestic culture” is hence necessary to “ascribe causal weight to the activities of transnational actors”, as Risse addresses.\textsuperscript{35} As my research is preliminary, I do not have a clear explanation to this puzzle yet, but what I find so far is that even German parliamentarians and Uyghur activists have linked the Uyghur issue to the broader human rights issue, they have not been able to garner enough parliamentary supports to make any bills passed in favor of the Uyghurs. It appears that the pure nature of an advocacy issue does not determine the success or failure of a campaign. Rather, I discover party politics in Germany, which could be broadly counted as “a given domestic culture” as Risse illuminated above, are determinant for Uyghurs’ success.

Here is one example of the influences of German party politics. That is, pro-Uyghur arguments were mostly initiated by parties in opposition, not ruling parties. In other words, opposition parties were more daring in siding with the Uyghurs, while ruling parties appeared to have more interests to concern, and could not side with the Uyghurs easily.

For instance, in Bavaria, the power of the Bavarian State Parliament is hold by the Christian Social Union in Bavaria (\textit{Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern e.V., CSU}), a regional branch of the dominant nationwide Christian Democrats (\textit{Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands}, CDU). But the call to integrate Uyghur inmates into the Bavarian state is proposed by the opposition, namely the Green Party as well as SPD (cf. \textit{Bayerischer Landtag}, 16\textsuperscript{th} period, protocol, priority requests 16/317, 16/340, 16/346, 16/1262 and 16/1264). The CSU has been fairly dominant at the regional level; the oppositions are relatively powerless in terms of pushing forward pro-Uyghur bills.

Members of the CSU are afraid that the inmates who are kept in Guantanamo are not innocent as some results might show. For instance, although the U.S. federal courts did rule that most Uyghur detainees posed no tangible threats to the U.S., some of them have been proven or have personally admitted to have certain connections with Al-Qaida. Whether these inmates were radicalized during their

\textsuperscript{34} Thomas Risse, “Transnational Actors and World Politics”, in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, Beth A. Simmons (eds.) \textit{Handbook of International Relations} (London: Sage, 2001).
\textsuperscript{35} Risse, “Transnational Actors”, p. 267.
stay at the Guantanamo prison is also a concern. The majority of the CSU does not want to risk any threat to the Bavarian and German national security. The Bavarian minister of interior, Joachim Herrmann, has also expressed wishes to first clarify whether the intake of inmates could increase hazards or invite danger for the people living in Bavaria and Germany.\textsuperscript{36}

By observing documented legislative debates, we also notice a disagreement among Bavarian parliamentarians regarding who shall assume responsibility for the Uyghur inmates. Some CSU members place the emphasis on the fact that the U.S. is primarily responsible for solving the Guantanamo issue and for the rehabilitation and compensation of the inmates. This debate had as well taken place in the federal Parliament. At the federal level, the Liberals are not in favor of a reception of Guantanamo inmates due to the fact that they see the U.S. in charge of indemnification. They were arguing that the U.S. needs to find solutions for the injustice which has happened in Guantanamo.

Another argument against a reception of the Uyghur prisoners by Germany used by CSU members is the fact that the U.S. authorities did not address Germany with any specific request to receive Guantanamo inmates at the time when proposals had been debated in parliament (in January and February, 2009).

At the federal level, the CDU and the SPD formed the government coalition. These two ruling parties appear to be more cautious than the oppositional parties regarding this issue.\textsuperscript{37} For instance, the then-foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) said publicly, that Germany will respond to such requests “only once they have been made” (cf. protocol 16/11, February 4, 2009, p.42).

A couple of months later, such request had been indeed made by the U.S. government, the then-interior minister, Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU), was one of the main opponents of admittance of Uyghur Guantanamo detainees at the federal level. Not only was he worried about the national security, but he also did not see a legal foundation for accepting the Uyghurs. Interestingly, the aforementioned Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who at that time started to run for the German chancellorship, spoke in favor for accepting Guantanamo inmates. This manifests the importance of party politics. Whether the Uyghur issue would be attended to or not depended greatly on the functions of party politics in Germany.


\textsuperscript{37} Another good example of the impact of party politics lies in the SPD’s different positions towards the Uyghur demands at the regional level of Bavaria and at the federal level. At the Bavarian level, the SPD is an opposition and was more daring in terms of favoring taking Uyghur inmates, whereas at the federal level, the SPD is the key coalition member of the government and has to stand with its CDP partners to oppose this agenda for fear of jeopardizing the well-being of the German security.
5. Tentative Conclusion & Future Work

In this paper, I presented some tentative findings of a network in formulation making the Uyghurs an issue in the cyberspace. Although online networks cannot be equated with offline networks, my empirical study demonstrates that the Uyghur issue has gradually garnered more international attention. After network analysis, I examined Uyghur advocacy in Germany.

What is missing in my network analysis and case study is the discussion on the “audience”. Who are the audience and what are their reactions? Take the online network for example.\(^{38}\) As Uyghur expert Dru C. Gladney has rightly mentioned, many Uyghurs in Central Asia and even in China were not fully aware of the existence of Uyghur-minded websites abroad.\(^{39}\) This is partly due to the Uyghurs’ constrained access to Internet information. But it could also be likely that these websites were initially not created to target the Uyghur audience back in China. This phenomenon directs us to critically rethink the effect of the aforementioned “boomerang pattern,” which, according to its creators Keck and Sikkink, was supposed to generate leverage abroad (i.e., pressure from “above”) and create pressure within the domestic arena (i.e., pressure from “below”) in order to open up a shunned domestic environment. My study appears to indicate that the Uyghurs’ transnational advocacy is still in its very nascent stage. Spreading Uyghur news and making their issues known are the current tasks facing Uyghur-minded activists. These actors have unequally targeted the audience in Western societies where the activists believe they can garner more sympathy and resonance.\(^{40}\)

Obviously, the Uyghur mobilization has not been able to really create significant leverage that could make the Chinese government concede, nor has the internationalization of the Uyghur issue been able to consolidate Uyghur unity within China. In other words, we see little pressure “from above” and “from below” to change the Chinese government’s management of the Uyghur issue. By contract, we see the Chinese regime has shown strong attempts to counter Uyghur mobilization. For instance, the Chinese Ministry of the Interior has pushed the German authorities to close the WUC in Munich since 2001 and to deport the WUC.

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\(^{38}\) I have so far not studied the reactions from the German public due to lack of ready data for analysis. I have not found surveys done to explore the views of the German public. This awaits future research to complete.

\(^{39}\) Gladney, Cyber-separatism.

\(^{40}\) My observation echoes Petersen’s observation that “the anticipated audience for these sites is educated Uyghur émigrés, and the general Western population or legislators who may be interested, or apt to be interested, in Uighur advocacy and human right issues”. See Petersen, “Usurping the Nation”, pp.66.
staff to China. But the German government has not agreed to cooperate.  

With regards to the studied Guantanamo debate, it was not able to achieve any parliamentary success before it faded in Germany, due to the American's successful deal with the pacific island nation Palau to accept some of the Uyghur inmates. Whether there will be another wave of German discussions or not deserves continued observation to discover.

Appendix 1: Methodological Notes on the Hyperlink Analysis

SNA is different from conventional statistical analysis in the sense that SNA explores the relationships between actors, not the attributes of actors. There are quite a number of free and commercial SNA software that can enable the visual and mathematical measurement of relationships between organizations.

Because my attention is on relationships, the actors cannot be sampled independently, as in many other types of studies. Rather, I use a full network method by taking a census of ties in a population of actors. An actor is defined as the website (URL) of an organization that has posted links, discussions or press releases regarding the Uyghurs. The URLs of two types of organizations fit into my criteria:

1. Uyghur organizations that are mostly established and maintained by the Uyghur diaspora in different parts of the world, such as the World Uyghur Congress (WUC) in Germany.

2. Non-Uyghur organizations that have responded to the Uyghur case. They have used various ways to communicate with the first category of Uyghur


organizations, and have conveyed their positions regarding the Uyghur issue to other potential interested actors around the world, such as the Germany-based Society for Threatened Peoples (Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker, GfbV).

I begin with the list of organizations on the website of the WUC. The WUC is known to be one of the main Uyghur umbrella organizations at present. WUC has listed these organizations because they have supported the Uyghur cause. Some of the organizations have their own websites. After double-checking the web links, I found that some do not work, and I ended up with 15 organizations on my list. This list helps to draw a boundary of the organizations that are known, a priori, to be in the Uyghur network.

The URLs of these organizations are called “starting points” for my analysis. They were pasted in the online hyperlink analysis software IssueCrawler. IssueCrawler harvests URLs, capturing the starting points’ outlinks and returning co-linked sites. The result is the generation of a binary matrix of the relationships between these sites. I retrieve 82 nodes with 323 linkages in the network. This information was then processed into a graphic visualization of the Uyghur networks, as demonstrated in Figure 1.


46 This data matrix has been stored in the format which can be analyzed by UCINET, a commonly-used social network analysis software. Readers can download this data at http://www.yuwenjuliechen.com/uyghur.html. About UCINET, please see Borgatti, S.P., M.G. Everett, and L.C. Freeman, UCINET 6.0 Version 1.00 (Natick: Analytic Technologies, 1999).