

Norms versus Interest: Explaining International Responses to China’s Human Rights Policies in Xinjiang

Vorathip Plengpanit

Abstract

How can we better understand the effects of soft power on human rights? This thesis examines how this effect is seen through China’s use of its tools of foreign policy influence to encourage other governments not to condemn Chinese violations of human rights in Xinjiang.¹ It asks whether these tools of Chinese foreign policy tend to influence the public positions that other governments take on this sensitive issue and which, if any, of these tools is most effective. The hypotheses that I will test regard the intuition that Chinese supplies of arms, investment, and trade are more important than other, commonly cited explanations for the positions taken by these other governments, but only when recipients of Chinese influence efforts have no substitutes for the Chinese supplies of arms, investment, and trade. In fact, I find that China buys very little support with its economic tools of foreign policy; only a moderate amount with its arms sales. Rather, much of the influence of these tools is to encourage countries to remain silent, choosing neither to support nor condemn China. My findings suggest that equally and more consistently important is the normative commitment of different countries to Human Rights in their own politics as an influence on their public stance on China’s practices in Xinjiang. Policy-wise this paper reflects an intriguing conclusion that in spite of the emphasis placed on the increasing influence soft power has, norms maintain a large hold on that position of influence over power-interest aspects of soft power when it comes to human rights.



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¹ Initially sought to term as “soft power” however determined to be too broad and instead narrowed to “foreign policy influence”

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Abstract

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1 Can China Buy a Pardon?

Uyghur separatism within China has long provoked the reaction of a certain degree of discrimination among Chinese, especially Han Chinese. And the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took a similar stance; for example, it permitted “no Uyghurs” signs to become commonplace within China.² The attack on the Twin Towers in New York on the 11th of September 2001, led the CCP to portray separatism in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) as “intimately connected to Islamist insurgencies/movements in neighbouring Central Asia and Afghanistan.”³ This led to nearly a decade of ever increasing crackdowns, “reeducation camps”, and ultimately, alleged violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and indoctrination of minorities.⁴ According to Reid Standish:

In recent years, the Chinese government has built the world’s most advanced surveillance state in Xinjiang, the western region bordering Central Asia. Bolstered by public video surveillance, regular scans of digital devices, and coded ID cards used to track the movements of their holder, the Chinese Communist Party has erected a massive internment program targeting the Muslim population, especially Uighurs, but also Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and other Muslim minorities.⁵

China has pushed to deter international criticism of these policies as much as possible, employing its tools of foreign policy influence as means of either rewarding countries that abstain from condemning their human rights record or punishing them for condemnation. Yet,

² Fallow, James. “On Uighurs, Han, And General Racial Attitudes In China”

³ Clarke 2008

⁴ HRW, “China: Free Xinjiang ‘Political Education’ Detainees”

⁵ Standish, Reid. “Our Government Doesn’t Want To Spoil Relations With China”

sorting out the effect of Chinese influence operations from the other causes of positions taken by other countries can be difficult when looking at individual countries. Turkey's case can be used to illustrate this: Turkey is cross-pressured by Chinese influence, ethnic and religious affinity with the Uyghurs, and its own troublesome secessionist violence involving the Kurds. As Erdemir and Kowalski "by all accounts, Turkey would seem to be a natural ally in the fight for Uyghur rights."⁶ Not only does Turkey hold religious affinity as a Muslim-majority country, but also an ethnic affinity, having around 60,000 Uyghur Turks "who managed to escape China over the years"⁷. And the Uyghurs constitute one of the ethnic groups within the Turkic-language family that Turkey has sought to cultivate. Nevertheless, Turkey's official position has been to remain conspicuously silent:

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who sees himself as a champion of Muslims around the world, has been uncharacteristically demure when it comes to the Uyghur issue. In July 2019, when a group of 22 states, including 14 of Turkey's NATO allies, issued a joint letter to the 41st session of the United Nations Human Rights Council to condemn China's "mass arbitrary detentions and related violations" of Uyghurs and other minorities, Ankara looked the other way.⁸

Turkey's "growing need for Chinese investment at a time when Western capital is fleeing Turkish markets", is by all implications what has been driving Erdogan's compliance with Beijing's demands "not to speak out against China" and extend this message to any activist

⁶ Erdemir and Kowalski. "China Buys Turkey's Silence on Uyghur Oppression"

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

sentiment in Turkey.⁹ Yet, the example of Turkey also points out how difficult it is to unravel the many constraints that might influence an individual country's position on the Xinjiang issue.

Turkey has also taken a strong position against secessionist projects in other countries because it has fought an insurgency within its Kurdish minority seeking independence.

The official Chinese Government rationale behind its increasing crackdowns revolves around concerns of terrorism. When analyzed further, however, findings are inconclusive that Uyghurs and violence in Xinjiang can be defined under the human security theory of terrorism and relevant parameters. Case in point, Clarke (2008) found that while Uyghur separatism and terrorism conforms to some extent of the human security theory of terrorism, "impetus has been given to the various separatist organisations in the region by the development of interconnections between the largely internal aspects of China's policy of integration in the region and the wider Central and South Asian dynamic of Islamic radicalism since 1990"¹⁰ He concludes in agreement with the note of another scholar who states that while there have been violent incidents, there is no real threat to Chinese rule in Xinjiang, that Islamic radicalism is a marginal phenomenon in the region.¹¹

This brings up the question of how has the international community responded to Chinese violations of human rights? That is, why do countries take different public positions on human rights violations in Xinjiang by China? In light of these events and questions, it is intuitive that many have elicited the concern that China appears to be buying friends or diplomatic allies with its economic might. Furthermore reflected through the human rights issue, it's become a concern that on such extremely sensitive issues for China, other countries's public positions on China's

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Clarke (2008)

¹¹ Ibid.

human rights violations will be constrained once those countries become dependent on China's economic incentives.

This thesis will test those questions and whether those concerns hold true by identifying patterns in the attributes of states that correlate with their public positions on this issue. In order to do so, I focus on official declarations on the XUAR issue in the UN Human Rights Commission. I focus on the impact of Chinese tools of foreign policy influence on those positions. In this thesis, these tools of influence are foreign aid, arms transfers, investment, and trade between China and target countries.

1.1 The Hypotheses of Buying Friends

The widespread concern about Chinese tools for foreign policy influence hypothesizes that other countries are more influenced by Chinese tools of foreign policy when they are more dependent on China and have fewer substitutes for or alternatives to China as a source of goods, investment, arms, and aid. Testable hypotheses of this concern distinguish the specific tools of foreign policy influence and the availability of alternative sources. The various tools of foreign policy influence differ in their effectiveness. Trade and investment likely fit this potential for substitutes more so than foreign aid or arms transfers. In terms of trade, there's more of a reciprocal exchange with only moderate levels of dependency relative to other aspects given the wider space of the global market. If China were to close trade to a country, theoretically, there are over a hundred other countries to trade with. In terms of investment, intuition implies a nearly similar position where if China halts investment in a country, there are other potential opportunities left for that country

to seek out foreign investment. In addition, the country is able to potentially seize existing assets already within its borders. However, in comparison to trade, there is increased vulnerability to dependency given that investment is a one-way flow coming from China where there is inherent advantage through its economic power. The threat of losing direct investment from China would likely still have a larger impact, essentially losing the “highest bidder,” and in turn, on a country’s overall foreign policy towards China.

Alternatively, there are fewer substitutes for arms transfers and foreign aid. Both inherently hold the same nature of a “one-way” flow as investment. Foreign aid is often crucial to the receiving country, all the more amplified by most cases of the receiving country being a developing country. Disruptions of arms transfers can be very costly to the recipient, revolving around whether or not alternative sources of arms are available.¹² China may export different types of arms with specific parameters such as various caliber sizes, decommissioned tanks that require a continuous supply of shells specific to the tank’s barrel/breech systems, or certain technological systems that require continuous maintenance by Chinese technicians. If a country becomes dependent on continued imports of Chinese arms, a sudden cut-off from this source will not only cause them to lose supply but finding a potential substitute for arms may be more difficult given they would need to find a country that produced the same if not most similar types of arms in order to be compatible with existing arms assets. However, I argue that in comparison to foreign aid, the overall influence of arms transfers is lower given the intuitively wider range of potential buyers/sellers for arms dealing whereas foreign aid is more narrowed in its “market.” Furthermore, arms transfers aren’t necessarily accustomed to being directed at developing countries, at least to the same extent as foreign aid.

¹² Avila et al. 2017

1.2 Hypotheses

Thus, the widespread concern about China buying friends can be summarized as hypotheses:

H₁: *Countries receiving more foreign aid are less likely to condemn or criticize China's human rights record.*

H₂: *Countries receiving more arms transfers are less likely to condemn or criticize China's human rights record.*

H₃: *Countries receiving more Chinese investment are less likely to condemn or criticize China's human rights record.*

H₄: *Countries conducting a larger share of their foreign trade with China are less likely to condemn or criticize China's human rights record.*

1.3 Alternative Explanations

What are the existing explanations for why states take the positions they do on other states' human rights records? A key debate over the foreign policy behavior of states is the debate over the role of norms (or identity) and interest in shaping the lines of conflict and cooperation among states; identity being for example moral affinities such as religious or linguistic affinity; interest being economic interests.

1.3.1 Norms-Driven

Political-sociological approaches to foreign policy stresses identities, beliefs, and norms as sources of conflict and cooperation among countries. Michael Doyle's argument that "Liberal states have created a separate peace" with one another but will even fight wars with non-liberal states "to support liberal allies against nonliberal enemies" represents one of the more influential recent works regarding the role of liberal norms within states and their behaviors.¹³ Doyle's theory asserts that liberal states/democracies seek to protect and promote their values. In extrapolating and applying this to the case of human rights violations in Xinjiang, this predicts that liberal democracies are the states most likely to oppose China's policies in XUAR.

Chief among influential arguments for the role of identity in a country is Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" hypothesis in which he states that after the Cold War the primary lines of cooperation and conflict will be drawn along lines of religion-based civilizations. He states that because "underlying values, social relations, customs, and overall outlooks on life differ significantly among civilizations. [...], the major differences in political and economic development among civilizations are clearly rooted in their different cultures."¹⁴ As a result, he expands on this theory stating that "Alignments defined by ideology and superpower relations are giving way to alignments defined by culture and civilization."¹⁵ We can apply and further extrapolate Huntington's theory to predict that countries that share religious ties with the Uyghurs should be more likely to oppose China's policies in XUAR. Interesting to note nevertheless is that Huntington also saw an emergence of Confucian-Islamic ties which would indicate an increased disposition of Muslim states to ally with China.¹⁶ One such example

¹³ Doyle 1986

¹⁴ Huntington 1996

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Huntington 1993

is through arms transfers where even in Huntington's identity-driven argument, he notes that Confucian-Islamic ties have been "most extensive and most concrete, with China playing the central role in the transfer of both conventional and nonconventional weapons to many Muslim states."¹⁷ These transfers would include construction of a nuclear reactor in the Algeria; the sale of chemical weapons materials to Libya; the provision of CSS-2 medium-range missiles to Saudi Arabia; the supply of nuclear technology or materials to Iraq, Libya, Syria, and North Korea; and the transfer of large numbers of conventional weapons to Iraq.¹⁸

Further supporting this theory of identity or norms, Huntington notes that the alternatives to religion-based civilizations have been coalition based on nationalism and ideology, however in the parameter that it *was* the prevailing drive in the 19th and 20th centuries and have been superseded by civilizational coalitions in the 21st.¹⁹ While scholars dispute Huntington on whether these alternative drives are no longer existing as Huntington implies, we can still extrapolate what these alternatives lead us to predict. In a world where ethno-national identity drives lines of conflict and cooperation, one may predict that shared national cultures with the Uyghurs would lead countries to oppose China's policies. In a world where ideology was most important, one might predict that countries with strong identities such as liberal democratic states are more likely to oppose China's policies.

However, this stress on norms as a primary force shaping foreign policy alignments can also be overlapped with other existing theories. For example, Frieden et al (2019) assert that states will only take action on human rights when faced with domestic pressure. Even then, a problem lies in that few governments hold intrinsic interest in promoting international human rights, only taking action to a degree higher than "toothless condemnation" when it further

¹⁷ Huntington 1996

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

overlaps with ulterior motives, weighing costs to business interests or other diplomatic initiatives.²⁰ For the purposes of brief reflection, we can observe the case of Kazakhstan in relation with Xinjiang where in spite of nearly 1.5 million ethnic Kazakhs within XUAR's borders, Kazakhstan's government has remained silent on its official position, neither condemning nor defending the camps, while also arresting its own citizens within its own borders for expressing anti-CCP/anti-Xinjiang sentiment.²¹ There is already a degree of domestic pressure within Kazakhstan, yet the country does not come close to even a "toothless condemnation", rather the state chooses to oppress. So, what is it that doesn't allow for this condition to see its expected results? Soft power or tools of influence.

1.3.2 Interest-Driven

A key argument against this norms-driven approach of political sociology and to the material-interests argument presented in the friends-buying hypotheses is one that stresses the power of the economic interests of the state. Stephen Walt finds no evidence to support Doyle's "birds of a feather flock together" liberal democracies theory for alliances, stating that "evidence shows that ideology is less powerful than balancing as a motive for alignment."²² Walt argues that states will either balance, ally with others against a threat, or bandwagon, align with the source of danger (that is, threats) on the basis of threats to national security.²³ To complicate this, it gives rise to the implication that a state might oppose China's policies in XUAR in the expectation that this would weaken China by supporting groups that create instability inside

²⁰ Frieden et al. 2019

²¹ Uatphanov, "One and a-Half Million Ethnic Kazakhs Live in China"; Reuters, "Dozens Detained In Kazakhstan At Anti-China Protests"

²² Walt 2013

²³ Ibid.

China or at least embarrass China in international diplomacy. Lee (2018) states that “international factors also influence state authority over territory” where a “systemic shift in the international system has fundamentally altered the relationship between external threat and internal political development by changing the calculations of states with respect to how they manage their threat environments”, case in point with XUAR.²⁴ It goes both ways, to and from China.

We further see Walt’s hypotheses through the attraction of abstaining from criticism again with Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan has declared a “multivectoral policy” with the definition of “a willingness to improve strategic, diplomatic and economic relations with the major geopolitical powers in the international arena ... China ranks as one of the highest priorities for Kazakhstan to collaborate with.”²⁵ In this case, we see Kazakhstan taking the aforementioned “bandwagon” route that Walt explains, aligning itself economically with China by increasing trade and commerce with China. Interestingly however, Walt also concludes that “neither foreign aid nor political penetration is by itself a powerful cause of alignment,” going so far as to say that “neither is an effective way to gain leverage except under very unusual conditions.”²⁶

Governments that feel that their political control at home is threatened by international calls for greater respect of human rights—particularly the rights of secessionist minorities—are also more likely to support China or at least abstain from condemning China. Boockmann and Dreher (2011) offer a hypothesis that “if these countries dislike resolutions directed against them, there is an instrumental motive for voting against resolutions directed against other countries.” The reasoning behind this stems from their central question of whether poor human rights records induce countries to go against human rights resolutions in the UN. They argue a reason

²⁴ Lee 2018

²⁵ Saurbek 2008

²⁶ Walt 2013

for this would be that “successful proposals for resolutions make further resolutions more likely, and countries with poor human rights records could be the targets of future resolutions.”²⁷ As a result, Boockmann and Dreher, in fact, find that “human rights records are not influential for voting.”²⁸ Their analysis suggests that rather than there being a causal effect between a country’s human rights record and their likelihood to vote for/against a human rights resolution, a more significant deciding factor is regional.

A human rights offender in a region in which human rights are respected tends to vote in favor of UN human rights resolutions, while a country respecting human rights in a region in which they are violated tends to vote against them.²⁹

This can be extrapolated to the Xinjiang case as when looking at a map of countries condemning and countries supporting China’s policies in the region, the conclusion holds firm with much of North America and Europe (as well as Japan, Australia, New Zealand), condemning and all countries supporting China being Eurasia, MENA, and the rest of Africa, all of which have poorer human rights records in comparison as seen in Figure 1.³⁰

²⁷ Boockmann and Dreher 2011

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ This geographical divide also corresponds to that of rich and poor as well as democracy and non-democracy divides.

To preface however, initially there were four tools of influence which would serve to be my main independent variables as mentioned in section 1. However, both my advisor and I have had no success in finding datasets on Chinese foreign aid in each country that went up to at least 2017. Ideally, data from 2018-2019 was needed. Certain datasets such as AidData's Global Chinese Official Finance Dataset only go up to 2014. For other sources that fit the year interval, I question the reliability of. For example, there is a dataset on the outflow of Chinese foreign aid compiled by the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, National Bureau of Statistics, and State Administration of Foreign Exchange. Others would fit the year interval and come from more reliable sources however were only limited to certain regions of the world such as John Hopkins's China-Africa Research Initiative or the Boston University Global Development Policy Center's China-Latin America Finance Database. A lack of a single dataset that guarantees the same parameters puts the reliability of using all these various regional datasets together as, well, unreliable.³²

2.2 Dependent Variables

My dependent variables ask whether countries publicly criticized, publically supported, or remained silent on China's human rights record in Xinjiang. This is operationalized by whether the country's UN ambassador signed one of the 2019 and 2020 letters supporting or condemning China on this issue.³³

³² I address this limitation on research design in my Conclusion & Implications section.

³³ As a note, it was initially planned to supplement this dependent variable with UN General Assembly (UNGA) votes on resolutions however no resolution as of yet has been had on China's human rights record since the Tibet Sovereignty Debates in 1959, 1961, and 1965. This may serve as an example of how successful China has been since the People's Republic of China (PRC) took the seat, keeping such topics off the agenda during UN General Assemblies.

The 2019 letter originated when a group of 22 nations submitted this to the president of the UN Human Rights Council and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, condemning China and calling for an end to the detention programs in XUAR. Shortly after, a group of 37 countries submitted a letter supporting and defending China's policies; this was followed by a third letter in 2019 with 13 more countries supporting China, bringing the total up to 50. The 2020 letters originated when German Ambassador Christoph Heusgen presented a statement on behalf of 39 countries, condemning China and stating that the signatories were "gravely concerned about the existence of a large network of 'political re-education' camps," and calling on China to allow immediate access to Xinjiang for independent observers.³⁴ Again in response, a group of 45 countries (not identical to the 2019 supporting group) signed a statement defending China and its policies.³⁵

In order to better analyze and interpret whether a country is less/more likely to condemn/support China or stay silent, I have operationalized my dependent variable into three separate variables for each year (2019 and 2020). Two binary variables, *Support[year]* and *Condemn[year]*, represented in the dataset by *supportare* coded 1 when a country signed one of the letters supporting or condemning China, respectively, and coded 0 if the country signed the

³⁴ 2019 Statements of 22 countries condemning China can be found at <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/223/89/PDF/G1922389.pdf?OpenElement>

2019 Statements of 50 countries supporting China can be found at <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/240/77/PDF/G1924077.pdf?OpenElement>

2020 Statements of 39 countries condemning China found at <https://new-york-un.diplo.de/un-en/news-corner/201006-heusgen-china/2402648>

2020 Statements of 45 countries condemning China found at <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/2020-edition-which-countries-are-for-or-against-chinas-xinjiang-policies/>

³⁵ Among these countries is Palestine. I have removed this from my dataset because even though they signed supporting China in 2020, I have narrowed my dependent variable to observing only UN member states among which Palestine is not a part of.

other letter or signed neither letter. For presentational purposes, each variable is multiplied by 100.

To further refine and understand which countries made the effort to participate in the first place, I coded a third binary variable; *Participation[year]*, which indicates countries that signed any one of the letters that year on China's human rights record. In order to control for the countries that chose not to sign either letter, the regressions for *Support[year]* are run in two different formats: the first includes all UN member-states, the second includes only those member-states that participated by taking a public stance (*Support | Participated[year]*).

2.3 Independent Variables

The core independent variables that will be used to test the effect of Chinese tools of foreign policy influence measure Chinese arms transfers to, trade with, and investment in each country. Each is scaled so that the minimum value is 0.0 and the maximum observed value is 1.0.

Two variables measure Chinese arms transfers: *Chinese Imported Arms*, represented in the dataset by *Imp_ch_arms[2018/2019]*, represents the value of Chinese arms imported by each country. *Chinese Arms Ratio*, represented in the dataset by *CH_armsratio[2018/2019]*, represents Chinese arms imported by each country as a percentage of the total amount of arms imported by the country. These data are from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Arms Transfers Database (SIPRI ATD), which shows all international transfers of major conventional arms since 1950. I use SIPRI's common unit, the trend-indicator value (TIV) which measures the volume of international transfers of major conventional weapons by

the known unit production costs of core sets of weapons. This estimates the quality and numbers of arms transferred rather than the financial value of individual deals.³⁶

Chinese Trade-GDP Ratio, represented in the dataset by *TGDP_Ratio2018*, measures the ratio of total trade with China to GDP for each country. Each country's total exports to and imports from China in 2018 (most recently reported year) is taken from the World Bank's World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS). The sum of each country's exports and imports with China is divided by the country's 2018 GDP.³⁷

Chinese Investment-GDP Ratio, represented in the dataset by *CH_InvGDP2019*, measures the ratio of Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) in each country over the previous 15 years to the recipient's country's 2019 GDP. FDI data are from the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) China Global Investment Tracker dataset. The measure of investment is the cumulative data of Chinese FDI from 2005-2019.

These three independent variables covering Chinese arms transfers, trade, and investment are used to test whether China's employment of these foreign policy tools of influence are actually effective and if so, which are more likely to explain why a country is more likely to condemn or support China's human rights record.

2.4 Control Variables for Alternative Hypotheses

I include four other independent variables to control for and test the alternative hypotheses introduced in Chapter One. These test the effect of the other country's human rights record, its own experience with secessionist movements, its religious affinity with the Uighur minority in

³⁶ SIPRI Arms Transfer Database

³⁷ As a note, some countries don't have export/import data reported up to 2018. This ranges from last reported in 1995-2017. At the advice of my advisor, to supplement the missing data, I estimated 2018 exports/imports only for countries reporting to at least 2015-2017, using each country's respective export/import data and GDP.

Xinjiang, and its tendency to bandwagon with or balance against China. Each variable is scaled so that the minimum value is 0 and the maximum possible value is 1.0.

The measure of each country's *Human Rights* record, *HR[2018/2019]* which ranges from 0 to 1, is calculated from the Freedom House Political Rights (PR) and Civil Liberties (CL) scores. PR ranges on a 0 to 40 point scale and CL on a 0 to 60 point scale, the more points being the more liberal the country is. I calculated the Human Rights score with the following formula:

$$\text{Human Rights} = ((\text{PR}/40) + (\text{CL}/60)) / 2$$

The Muslim percentage of each country's population, *Muslim Proportion*, tests the hypothesis that religious affinity with the Uyghur minority should incline that country to condemn China's policy in Xinjiang. This percentage ranges from 0 to 1.0. These data are from the World Population Review.

The proportion of each country's population that is claimed by secessionist movements, *Selfexclude*, is taken from the Ethnic Power Relations dataset (Vogt et al 2018). This tests the hypothesis that countries facing their own secessionist movements (and the larger the threat posed by those movements) are more likely to support China in its confrontation with the Xinjiang secessionist movement.

To test the balancing-bandwagoning hypothesis, which argues that geographic distance influences the foreign policies of states, the fourth control variable is the distance between Beijing and the capital of each country, *Distance to Beijing*.³⁸ These data are from Gleditsch (2001).

Due to the scaling of these variables, in viewing the regression tables in the following Results section, all coefficients are to be interpreted by as x variable (independent or control) moves from its minimum to maximum value, y variable (dependent) increases or decreases by

³⁸ Measured in kilometers, the correct unit of measurement.

the value of the given coefficient with a statistical significance of the respective p-value denoted in parentheses.

Table 1 Summary Statistics of all Variables

Variable	Observations	Min	q ₁	Mean	q ₃	Max	#NA
Support 2019	193	0.0	0.0	26.42	100.0	100.0	0
Condemn 2019	193	0.0	0.0	11.4	0.0	100.0	0
Participation 2019	193	0.0	0.0	37.82	100.0	100.0	0
Support Participated 2019	73	0.0	0.0	69.86	100.0	100.0	120
Support 2020	193	0.0	0.0	22.8	0.0	100.0	0
Condemn 2020	193	0.0	0.0	20.21	0.0	100.0	0
Participation 2020	193	0.0	0.0	43.01	100.0	100.0	0
Support Participated 2020	83	0.0	0.0	53.01	100.0	100.0	110
Imported Chinese Arms 2018	193	0.0000	0.0000	0.01324	0.0000	1.00000	0
Imported Chinese Arms 2019	193	0.0000	0.0000	0.01146	0.0000	1.00000	0
Chinese Trade-GDP Ratio 2018	158	0.0000	0.03039	0.06821	0.06822	0.64647	35
Chinese Investment-GDP Ratio 2019	193	0.0000	0.001813	0.063265	0.065473	1.00000	0
Human Rights 2018	193	-0.02083	0.33333	0.59387	0.87083	1.00000	0
Human Rights 2019	193	-0.0125	0.3208	0.5906	0.8750	1.0000	0
Distance to Beijing	193	0.0000	0.3432	0.4652	0.6061	1.0000	0
Muslim Proportion	190	0.0000	0.0030	0.2569	0.4477	1.0000	3
Self Exclude	149	0.0000	0.0000	0.00264	0.00000	0.18000	44

Estimation procedure: Summary Statistics (R Studio)

3 Results & Analysis

What exactly stirs up a country enough to participate in condemning a country’s human rights violations? What exactly makes it enough to keep them silent or even support that country regardless? There are five separate overarching conclusions we can draw from this thesis and the regression models I employ.

Table 2 Regression Results: Hypotheses and All Controls, 2019 Dependent Variables

	Support	Condemn	Participation	Support Participated
Imported Chinese Arms 2018	91.97 (0.00643)**	-13.067 (0.6503)	78.91 (0.08503) .	29.479 (0.2105)
Chinese Trade-GDP Ratio 2018	-82.64 (0.05807) .	-66.29 (0.0792) .	-148.93 (0.01317)*	-9.242 (0.8888)
Chinese Investment-GDP Ratio 2019	39.55 (0.20338)	1.423 (0.9578)	40.97 (0.33554)	8.186 (0.8051)
Human Rights 2018	-101.42 (1.17e-11)***	71.801 (1.17e-08)***	-29.62 (0.11250)	-130.235 (2.05e-12)***
Distance to Beijing	-16.11 (0.32962)	-57.718 (9.29e-05)***	-73.83 (0.00139)**	34.443 (0.0857) .
Muslim Proportion	-23.66 (0.02202)*	-3.547 (0.6891)	-27.21 (0.05388) .	-6.525 (0.6091)
Self Exclude	-73.07 (0.61807)	-179.324 (0.1597)	-252.39 (0.21008)	-252.331 (0.5883)
Constant	103.76 (3.01e-11)***	4.992 (0.6854)	108.75 (1.38e-07)***	122.371 (7.79e-10)***
Observations	129	129	129	54
R ²	0.4411	0.3774	0.1629	0.8421
Adj. R ²	0.4087	0.3414	0.1145	0.818

Estimation procedure: OLS regression (R Studio)

Significance: *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05, . p < 0.1

Firstly, we can see that among tools of influence, it appears only arms transfers buy China support from other countries, supporting H₂.³⁹ In Table 2, which uses positions taken in 2019, the regression *Support* shows a strong correlation and statistical significance that as a country receives more Chinese arms, it is more likely to support China. In Table 3, which uses 2020 positions as the dependent variable, this is not statistically significant, although the coefficient remains positive. On the other hand, Chinese FDI does not appear to buy support for China in either year, leaving H₃ unsupported. Lastly, while trade bears significance across regressions for *Support*, *Condemn*, and *Participation* in 2019, *Participation* appears to hold the greatest statistical significance. Because of this, we can infer that the primary effect of heavy trade with China in both 2019 and 2020 is not necessarily buying support but rather a certain degree of abstention — a greater likelihood that trade partners will avoid participating at all in taking a public position.

³⁹ The aforementioned alternative operationalization variable of arms ratios, *CH_armsratio[year]*, was used in another set of regression tables however it appears to have less significance in comparison to its counterpart variable *Imp_ch_arms[year]*, raw quantity of Chinese arms.

Table 3 Regression Results: Hypotheses and All Controls, 2020 Dependent Variables

	Support	Condemn	Participation	Support Participated
Imported Chinese Arms 2019	19.65 (0.4919)	-32.219 (0.2530)	-12.57 (0.757479)	55.836 (0.123)
Chinese Trade-GDP Ratio 2018	-104.77 (0.0130)*	-104.434 (0.0120)*	-209.21 (0.000588)***	21.531 (0.778)
Chinese Investment-GDP Ratio 2019	57.13 (0.0577)	-14.737 (0.6165)	42.39 (0.320538)	44.546 (0.130)
Human Rights 2019	-97.45 (1.14e-11)***	85.858 (6.38e-10)***	-11.59 (0.532210)	-130.295 (4.91e-14)***
Distance to Beijing	-12.03 (0.4491)	-73.027 (7.51e-06)***	-85.06 (0.000258)***	9.330 (0.679)
Muslim Proportion	-29.41 (0.0033)**	-6.785 (0.4836)	-36.20 (0.010820)*	-6.757 (0.570)
Self Exclude	-53.28 (0.7061)	-277.798 (0.0475)*	-331.08 (0.102060)	-27.769 (0.954)
Constant	97.38 (4.97e-11)***	16.715 (0.2104)	114.10 (2.86e-08)***	119.766 (2.90e-09)***
Observations	129	129	129	57
R ²	0.39	0.452	0.1683	0.8418
Adj. R ²	0.3548	0.4203	0.1202	0.8192

Estimation procedure: OLS regression (R Studio)

Significance: *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05, . p < 0.1

Secondly, the most consistent effect across both tables and the majority of regressions, is each country's Human Rights record. As seen in both tables and primarily regressions models for *Support* and *Condemn*, it implies countries with higher Human Rights scores are more likely to condemn China and less likely to support China. The magnitude of the Human Rights coefficients are also substantial and close in magnitude to the effect of trade as a constraint on support and condemnation. This is particularly important because it asserts that in spite of China's strategic foreign policy decisions in its tools of influence, the norms of a country remains a significant factor affecting the country's stance on human rights. Interestingly however, Human Rights scores do not appear to have a significant bearing on whether countries participate.

Thirdly, countries proportionately with larger Muslim populations are less likely to support China, but the results in the columns for *Participation* and *Support | Participated* suggests that this is mostly due to the greater likelihood that these states will choose to abstain from taking a public position rather than condemn China. When the analysis is limited to those countries that chose to participate, *Support | Participated*, larger Muslim proportion does not affect the likelihood of supporting China. Throughout, the magnitude of the coefficients suggests that the effect of moving from the lowest proportion to the highest proportion of Muslims is substantially less consequential than moving from the lowest Human Rights score to the highest Human Rights score. Intuitively, one may argue that religious and cultural affinity to Uyghurs interned in the XUAR camps, ie. being Muslim, ought to hold a great deal of influence in solidarity. However, this simply doesn't seem to be the case.

Fourthly, across both tables, it seems countries that have their own internal secessionist struggles, represented by *Selfexclude*, are not any more likely to support China or less likely to condemn it. There is no statistically significant coefficient estimate.

Fifth and lastly, the regressions appear to show a relationship between geographic proximity to China and public positions that conform to Walt's balancing hypotheses. In both tables, the regressions for *Condemn* and *Participation* state that the more distant the country is from Beijing, the less likely they are to take no public stance and instead remain out of the debate and in turn are less likely to condemn China. In other words, we can interpret this as the *closer* a country is to Beijing, the *more* likely it is to participate and as a result, is technically more likely to condemn China.

4 Conclusion & Implications

The results of this thesis demonstrate that China doesn't buy much in the way of friendship, at least as a direct correlation to its tools of foreign policy influence. Though it may indirectly scare away countries by increasing the likelihood for them not to participate, it appears countries are voting their principles, their identities, their norms, over pure interest-driven influences, as seen through the consistently high statistical significance of Human Rights in comparison to other variables. I believe these findings are especially significant as it goes against what much of the existing literature posits whereby it's almost an expectation for soft power or economic influence to hold fast in that influence. Instead, the results suggest that there is still a degree of identity and normative influence when it comes to human rights where economic power does not quite serve as the primary explanation.

The existing literature posits various explanations for a country's alignment and position on issues. Some argue that there is an intrinsic power interest-driven influence. For example, Walt posits that geographic distance influences foreign policies of states as a result of his balancing hypotheses. This is supported by the discussed results of the *Distance to Beijing* variable. Second, the third conclusion on proportion of Muslim population poses a degree of evidence supporting the interest-driven explanation. While at first it appears countries with proportionately larger Muslim populations are less likely to support China, we see that it is suggested this is only because these states likely choose to abstain from taking a public position.

In a sense, the data can be interpreted as showing how much Chinese economic power is able to keep countries silent on human rights, regardless of religious and cultural affinity.

That being said, on the other hand, most prominent through the results are the norms-driven explanations. Some such as Doyle and elements of Huntington state that liberal states or democracies seek to protect and promote their values where the lines of cooperation and conflict are drawn along that of religion-based civilizations, and underlying cultural values and customs are part of what determines a country's alignment.⁴⁰ This is supported by the aforementioned consistently high statistical significance of the Human Rights variable in comparison to all other variables whereby it supports the prediction that liberal democracies are more likely to oppose and condemn China's policies in Xinjiang given liberal democracies tend to be those with higher Human Rights scores. Furthermore, as stated, the coefficients' magnitudes show that moving from the lowest Human Rights score to the highest Human Rights score is among the most substantial when compared to all other statistically significant variables.

Nonetheless, these results may not be entirely generalizable to the public and should be interpreted with caution as there are inherent limitations to the research design — however, I expect that further research and refined models would reaffirm my conclusions. In that regard, I would like to address those limitations. One limitation to my research design was the exclusion of a Chinese foreign aid variable. As aforementioned in the Statistical Analysis section, unfortunately neither my advisor nor I were able to find up-to-date data or datasets for the outflow of Chinese foreign aid to countries. As a result, and at the advice of my advisor, I decided to drop the variable altogether, ultimately dropping my H_1 . Had I been able to find data and appropriately test H_1 , I believe it would have followed a similar result or statistical significance as arms transfers in H_2 . This is because, as I posit in section 1.1, the intuition of

⁴⁰ Doyle 1986; Huntington 1996

having lesser substitutes to a resource if it is cut off will make a country more dependent on it. I believe that foreign aid is among these such resources that have little substitutes especially if they come from a large economic source such as China. That being said, I evidently cannot support that intuition without proper data and testing.

A second limitation to my research design is the evidently small sample size ($n = 193$, 193 UN member countries) and observations in certain regressions, specifically the *Support | Participated* models. As seen in the Missingness Map in the appendices, this is primarily a result of the nature of my coding; coding NAs purposefully to countries that were absent in the *Support | Participated* models. The overall 193 sample size was also a result of the research design's nature where the size could not necessarily be expanded upon given they represent UN member countries and thus a large majority of the world's countries. Perhaps in future experiments, a different kind of dependent variable could be used in which its nature allowed for much larger sample sizes.

A third limitation would be the regressions themselves. As denoted in the tables, the regressions used are OLS regressions; and coupled with the nature of using binary dependent variables, this leads to a difficulty in interpreting the results as an estimation of probabilities. A solution to this that I took was rescaling my independent and control variables so that they all fit within a 0.0 to 1.0 range. However, the problem is still there as the dependent variables are still binary. Another potential solution would be to use a different estimation technique such as a logistic regression which would better describe and explain the relationship between binary dependent variables and non-binary independent variables. This solution was unfortunately not able to be pursued due to the time constraints of an undergrad thesis as re-running new regressions, especially a different kind, entails different methods of interpretation, and additional

procedures to generate meaningful probabilities. Thus, future research designs may benefit from starting off with logistic regressions if the dependent variables are binary.

How, then, do we proceed? Specifically relating to this thesis, I also initially wanted to do country case studies however the time constraints of an undergraduate thesis were again a culprit. For example, Kazakhstan serves as a potentially good case study where, as I mentioned, even though there have been domestic pressures within Kazakhstan against the CCP and in protest of Uyghur camps, supporting Frieden et al. (2019) whom posit that states take action on human rights, going beyond “toothless condemnation,” when faced with domestic pressures, it has not been the case and Kazakhstan has remained silent. Furthermore, it appears to align itself further with China economically, going against what the results suggest in which higher Muslim percentages of population should predict condemnation — of which Kazakhstan does not pursue while it does support the suggestion that being relatively closer distance to Beijing brings abstention to participate in the first place. Other improvements in future research are inherent in the fixes to the aforementioned limitations.

We have reason to be hopeful that in spite of the increasing sense that power, whether hard and coercive or soft and co-optive, is the withstanding force in influencing and thereby explaining countries’ foreign policies, when it comes to human rights, this does not appear to be the case. This is only furthered by recent events such as President Biden’s criticisms of Xi Jinping’s policies in Xinjiang, Canadian and US statements labeling Uyghur camps as genocide, and most recently, US and other Western economic sanctions on China.

Normative ideals appear to persist and maintain optimistic footholds.

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5 Appendices

5.1 Codebook | Variable Name Index⁴¹

Dependent Variables:

Support[year]

- Coded variable on joint statements, 0 = either condemn/absent, 100 = support; represents out of countries that put in effort to participate and vote, who also put in effort to support?

Condemn[year]

- Coded variable on joint statements, 0 = either support/absent, 100 = condemn; represents out of countries that put in effort to participate and vote, who also put in effort to condemn?

Participation[year]

- Coded variable on joint statements, 0 = absent, 100 = either condemn/support

Support | Participated [year]

- Coded variable on joint statements, 0 = condemn, 100 = support, NA = absent; represents out of those that participated, then what position they took

⁴¹ A full replication package for this project is available anytime at request to yplengpa@ucsd.edu. This package contains datasets compiled as well as the R scripts that allow for replication of all tables, graphs, and other figures in this manuscript.

Independent (Hypotheses) Variables:⁴²

Imp_ch_arms[year]

- Trend-Indicator Value (TIV); measures the volume of international transfers of major conventional weapons. Amount of arms imported by each country from China.

CH_armsratio[year]

- Total number of Chinese imported arms as a percentage of the total number of imported arms in each country.

TGDP_Ratio2018

- Calculated volume of trade of each country (sum of exports and imports from China to each country) divided by each country's 2018 GDP

CH_InvGDP2019

- Total sum of Chinese foreign direct investment in each country available from 2005-2019 as a percentage of each country's 2019 GDP.

Control Variables:⁴³

HR[year]

- Human Rights (HR) score. Calculated balanced score of Political Rights (PR) and Civil Liberties (CL) scores from FreedomHouse for each country. PR is on scale of 0-40, CL on 0-60. The following formula was used to calculate the Human Rights score:

- $\text{Human Rights} = ((\text{PR}/40) + (\text{CL}/60)) / 2$

DistBeijingkm

⁴² Variables listed are in variable names coded rather than full names such as those used in tables.

⁴³ Ibid.

- Distance of each country’s capital to Beijing in proper units of measurement

Muslim%

- Percentage of Muslim population out of total population in each country

Selfexclude

- Percentage of politically mobilized population that belongs to secessionist ethnic groups

5.2 Missingness Map

Figure 2 shows the overall missingness for the cleaned, recoded, and rescaled version of the dataset I compiled. Note that the two variables with the most missing data are those representing *Support | Participated* and are a result of coding NAs on purpose as discussed in the Statistical Analysis section. All following variables such as *Selfexclude*, *Muslim%* (*Proportion*), or those representing the Trade-GDP Ratio and variables used to calculate the ratio contain true missing data. There is simply no reported data for certain countries in each variable.

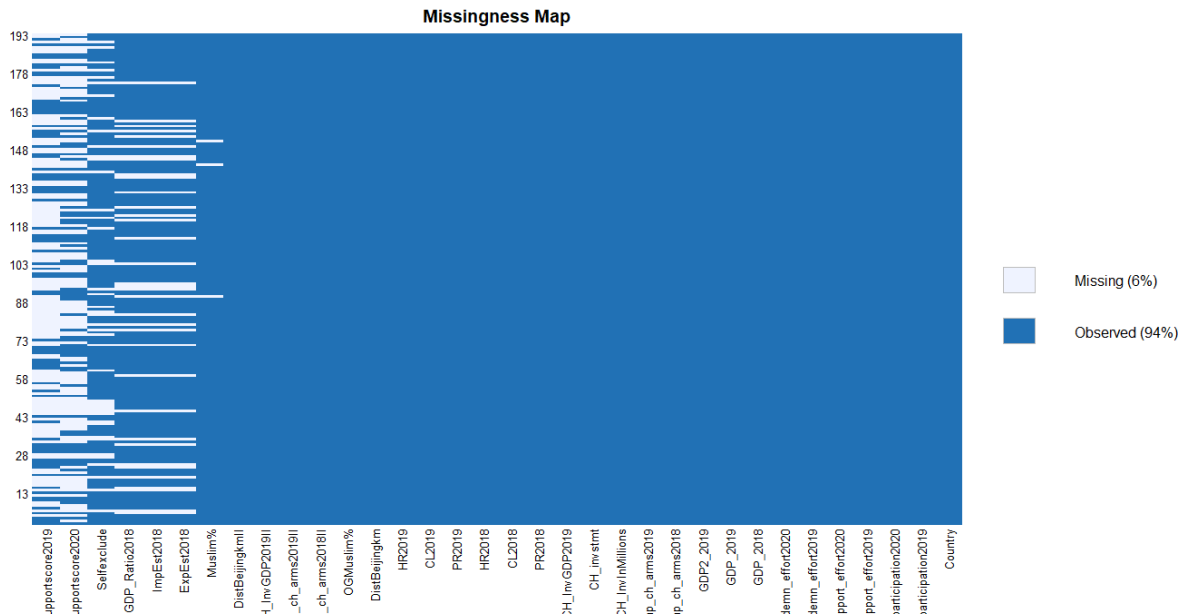


Figure 2: Dataset Missingness