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# The Silk Road Revisited? Locating Xinjiang in the 'China Dream' 重走“丝绸之路”？论新疆在 “中国梦”中的位置

Anna Hayes

*James Cook University, Australia*

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## **重走“丝绸之路”？论新疆在“中国梦”中的位置**

[Anna Hayes](#)  
[James Cook University](#)

[East Asia Security Centre](#)  
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## The Silk Road Revisited? Locating Xinjiang in the ‘China Dream’

**Abstract:** For the most part, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) and its peoples are an uncomfortable fit in both the Chinese state and the China Dream. However, XUAR is an integral part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Therefore, the success of this initiative, and the China Dream, has increased the importance of this frontier region. No longer just a comfortable buffer zone between China and its neighbours, XUAR is now an important zone in China’s new Silk Road Economic Belt. However, alongside these developments instability within XUAR has been heightened. Terrorist incidents linked to the region have occurred in other parts of China, including Beijing, and the region has even attracted the attention of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). One key element in the rise of unrest across the region has been the disempowered development that occurred as a result of the former Great Western Development Scheme (GWDS), which was an earlier component of China’s ‘turn west’ strategy. Given the BRI in XUAR is currently following a similar economic development pattern to the GWDS, the stage is set for the BRI to further deepen human insecurity and economic disadvantage along ethnic lines across the region. This paper cautions that the increase of human insecurity and regional unrest poses serious challenges to the People’s Republic of China’s continental frontier and ultimately the ‘China Dream’.

**Keywords:** Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China Dream, Belt and Road Initiative, Great Western Development Strategy

### 重走“丝绸之路”？论新疆在“中国梦”中的位置

**摘要：**不论是对中国还是“中国梦”来说，新疆维吾尔自治区及该地区的居民都令人感到有些别扭。但与此同时，新疆也是“一带一路倡议”中不可或缺的一部分。为了促进这个倡议以及“中国梦”的成功，新疆的重要性近年来大幅提高。它不再仅仅是中国与邻国之间的缓冲区，而且还成为了中国新的“丝绸之路经济带”的一个重要组成部分。然而，随着这些新的发展，新疆内部的不稳定性也在增加。包括北京在内的中国其他地区出现了与新疆有关的恐怖主义事件。该地区甚至吸引了伊拉克和黎凡特伊斯兰国（ISIL）的注意。导致这个地区出现动荡的一个关键因素，是之前“西部大开发”计划造成的被动式发展（西部大开发是中国早期“转型”战略的一个组成部分）。鉴于“一带一路倡议”与“西部大开发”计划的经济发展模式类似，“一带一路倡议”注定会进一步加剧该地区各民族之间的安全形势恶化和经济上的不利形势。本文提出警告，该区域安全形势恶化和动荡加剧将对中国大陆边境地区以及最终的“中国梦”构成严重的挑战。

**关键词：**新疆维吾尔自治区，中国梦，一带一路倡议，西部大开发战略

## THE SILK ROAD REVISITED? LOCATING XINJIANG IN THE ‘CHINA DREAM’

Described by Mackinder, more than a century ago, as the geographical pivot of history, Central Asia has again risen as a region of strategic and economic importance. Beijing has injected significant funding into its frontier region, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), and the planned construction of infrastructure along this new Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) is staggering. In 2011/2012, XUAR received 47.8 billion yuan in investment funds from the Central Government, with a further 34 billion yuan allocated in special funding and subsidies.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, in March 2016 Xinhua reported that the Central Government had provided 600 billion yuan<sup>2</sup> to the region over the previous 6 years.<sup>3</sup> However, alongside these developments there has been an increase in regional unrest among the minority nationalities in XUAR, with protests, attacks, raids and retaliations becoming more frequent. This paper highlights some of the tensions in the region, and locates them within the uneven economic development, and associated problems, that have accompanied the Great Western Development Strategy (GWDS). In doing so, it examines how XUAR is situated within the China Dream and cautions that there needs to be serious attention directed to avoiding further disempowered development in the region if the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is to be successfully implemented in XUAR.

### The ‘China Dream’

The ‘China Dream’ is the latest stage in the conceptual evolution of policies concerning the rise of China, post the 1949 establishment of the People’s Republic of China. It is essentially the fulfilment of the long-held desire to increase the economic and political might of China, to the point that China eventually reaches great power status, surpassing all other state economies and taking the ‘crown’ from Washington, as the world’s leading power.<sup>4</sup> In speeches detailing the China Dream, China’s President Xi Jinping has articulated that it is also about the rejuvenation of China, or the Chinese ‘renaissance’, a desire that was earlier articulated by former President Hu Jintao. Here we see the desire for China to have finally reached a period of recovery following the century of humiliation<sup>5</sup> at the hands of outside forces, which curtailed China on the world stage. According to Xi, the China Dream involves the ‘great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation’ and within this rejuvenation it is hoped that the Chinese state will become ‘a rich and powerful country’.<sup>6</sup> As part of the China Dream, and fully actualising this Dream, the Chinese Communist Party has devised the BRI.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sheng Li, *Xinjiang of China: Its past and present* (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> This figure includes the amounts specified above for the 2011/2012 period.

<sup>3</sup> “Xinjiang allocated major funding to improving livelihood”, *Xinhua*, 5 March (2016), accessed 21 June 2016, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-03/05/c\\_135158719.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-03/05/c_135158719.htm).

<sup>4</sup> William Callahan, “History, Tradition and the China Dream: socialist modernisation in the World of Great Harmony”, *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 96, (2015), 1–19, doi:10.1080/10670564.2015.1030915

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion of the century of humiliation, see Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical memory in Chinese politics and foreign relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Cited in *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> This initiative was previously called the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative. However, at the 2016 East Asia Security Symposium participants were informed that the initiative had undergone an official name change due to it comprising of many belts and many roads, which the former name did not accurately reflect.

## *The Belt and Road Initiative*

The BRI was initially launched in September 2013 when President Xi Jinping announced his plan for a new Silk Road Economic Belt during his 10-day tour of the Central Asian Republics. The BRI refers to the revitalisation of the old, networked, large-scale inland caravan trade routes that have since become known as the Silk Roads (new Silk Road Economic Belt) and the old, networked Indian Ocean trading networks (Maritime Silk Roads). China's involvement in and access to these historic trading networks, along with the development of commerce within China following the introduction of coins and later paper money, saw it develop into the 'first market society' in the world.<sup>8</sup> However, experiences during the Yuan and Ming dynasties resulted in rising xenophobia within China and it sought to limit its interactions with foreigners. This led to China ending its commercial-imperial expansion and it retreated from the Old World web of networked trade.<sup>9</sup> This weakened China's power in a global sense, resulting in what McNeill and McNeill have argued is '...perhaps the greatest might-have-been of modern history'.<sup>10</sup> Thus, having become increasingly disconnected from the reality of the emergent global society, the Chinese very quickly became out-powered by the sea-faring European merchants and their home states. Even so, trade did continue and for much of this time it was on Chinese terms, with the Chinese demanding payment for their goods in the form of silver. As a result, for many years, much of the world's silver flowed into China.<sup>11</sup> However, their reduced power within what was becoming a Euro-dominated global system saw China unable to play any significant role in global affairs.

Broadly speaking, the BRI aims to reinvigorate those Old World large-scale trading networks, providing an extensive land-based trade network that will link China to Central Asia, the Middle East, Europe, the Mediterranean and North Africa, as well as maritime trading routes that will further link China to several other states and regions, from the South Pacific right through to Europe. In official discourse on the policy, the BRI is presented as an initiative that seeks to open up the Chinese hinterland as well as to promote cooperation with other states. It embodies what is described as the 'Silk Road Spirit', which is defined in a rather nostalgic way as the multi-generational approach to exchange and cooperation that operated along the Silk Road – an approach that purportedly favoured '...peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit'.<sup>12</sup> The National Development and Reform Commission also emphasises that the BRI upholds China's Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, the mainstay of its foreign policy since 1954, and that it seeks to ensure 'mutual benefit and common security' and to 'deepen political trust'.<sup>13</sup> Among its priorities are: policy coordination; facilities connectivity; allowing for unimpeded trade across the Belt and Road; financial integration; and people-to-people bonds aimed at

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<sup>8</sup> John Robert McNeill and William McNeill, *The Human Web: A bird's-eye view of world history* (New York: W W Norton, 2003), 121.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid and Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: The Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982)

<sup>12</sup> National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, with State Council authorization, "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road", *National Development and Reform Commission*, March (2015), accessed 18 April 2016, [http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330\\_669367.html](http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330_669367.html).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

generating a ‘harmonious and friendly cultural environment and public opinion’.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, this is an initiative that incorporates many other parts of the world, including many of China’s Asia-Pacific neighbours.

At the East Asia Security Symposium held in Beijing in 2015, official explanations of the policy were more solidly focused on the BRI goals in the east, and there was much discussion on how the BRI would facilitate China’s regional philanthropy in the Asia-Pacific. Speakers provided an overview of the policy that saw China playing a ‘father-role’ or a ‘big brother’ role to smaller states within Southeast Asia – in particular, Laos and Myanmar were mentioned.<sup>15</sup> A number of speakers identified the policy as being ‘win-win’ for these states and for China, stating that China would help to guide the development of such states. At the same time, there was a clear acknowledgement that it is intended the policy will be economically advantageous for China, providing greater command of market share across these regions, as well as ensuring energy security across Central Asia. These sentiments are in line with official documents on the BRI, which refer to the ‘mutual benefit’ of the initiative, and that it will lead to outcomes that are ‘win-win’.<sup>16</sup>

However, for the purposes of this paper, the focus of this discussion must be centred on China’s western regions and its neighbours in Central Asia. Like the Great Western Development Strategy (GWDS) that came before it, a strategy that is ongoing and has been subsumed into the BRI, the SREB dynamic of the BRI is part of China’s ‘turn west’ strategy. Similarly, the current formulation of the policy will also initially see northern areas of XUAR prosper, while southern areas of XUAR are not yet fully included as part of the Belt initiative.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, SREB could replicate what occurred in the GWDS, and it is this economic approach that is deeply concerning for XUAR, a region that already experiences serious periodic outbreaks of unrest.

## **The BRI and XUAR**

Given the BRI is a further development of the GWDS it is reasonable to assess the outcomes of the GWDS in order to hypothesise the likely future outcomes of the BRI for the region. When it began in 2000, the GWDS was an attempt by the Chinese government to improve living standards, infrastructure and ethnic relations in frontier regions like XUAR, Tibet and Inner Mongolia, as well as other inland regions of China. However, even though minority nationalities were a key target group in official statements of these policies, the top-down approach to implementation of the policies ultimately led to what Andrew Fischer has called ‘disempowered development’.<sup>18</sup> This disempowerment has resulted because the GWDS has largely been centred on a ‘flow on effect’ or ‘trickle-down effect’ model of economic development. This model embraces the notion that initially some will fare better than others, but economic benefits are expected to trickle out so that eventually all members of the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, the paternalism of this kind of language was not recognised by those making such statements.

<sup>16</sup> National Development, “Vision and Actions”.

<sup>17</sup> Officials at the East Asia symposium did include Afghanistan and Pakistan in the long-term goals of the BRI. However, given the continued instability of parts of these regions one official stated that full realisation of the intended goals in these parts could be years away, indicating that China is taking a long-term approach to the full-realisation of the BRI.

<sup>18</sup> Fischer used this term to describe what was occurring in Tibet as a result of government policies there. It is a term that has equal resonance with the situation in XUAR and is used accordingly. See Andrew Fischer, *The Disempowered Development of Tibet in China: A study in the economics of marginalisation* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013).

community will benefit from the initiatives and the increased economic wealth generated as a result of the policy. However, the key problem with this type of approach, especially in troubled regions like XUAR and Tibet, is that so far, the key beneficiaries of the policy have largely been Han Chinese living in these regions, to the detriment of non-Han ethnic groups who have tended to experience further economic marginalisation. Therefore, while the GWDS was intended to improve living conditions and opportunities for minority nationalities, in XUAR it was originally focused on the development of urban cities in the north, particularly the region's capital Urumqi, mainly populated by Han Chinese, rather than the poorer rural areas in southern XUAR, like Kashgar, mainly populated by the Uyghurs. This has caused there to be increasing wealth disparity among XUAR's population based on location and ethnic identity.

In addition, this outcome has occurred despite the fact that the GWDS was introduced largely to improve conditions in the south-western areas of XUAR,<sup>19</sup> which continue to be its poorest regions. This is best illustrated by the experiences of Kashgar, which is located in southern XUAR near the borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan. Since 1949, the economic situation in Kashgar has been problematic. Following the Sino-Soviet split in 1954, this important trading hub in Central Asia was cut off from its traditional economic links to kinship groups and trading partners in Soviet Central Asia. As a result, the economic development of the region was stifled for decades. Thus when the GWDS finally came to Kashgar, the impact has been a shockingly rapid economic transition along with considerable infrastructure and demographic changes to the city.

### ***Kashgar***

The most noticeable change is of course the destruction of Old Kashgar, which has radically transformed the vista and way of life in the city and has been regarded by some Uyghurs as an attempt by Beijing '...to break up their communities and reduce their influence in the city'.<sup>20</sup> For the most part, the rapid pace of change in the city has seen extraordinary development and modernisation occur alongside widespread destruction of the traditional way of life for Kashgar's Uyghurs. This rapid pace of change was always going to cause some feelings of discontent. Further, given that Kashgar Prefecture has been a locus for a series of violent incidents, including outbreaks of machete attacks, bombings, attempted hijackings of planes and the murder of an Imam in Kashgar who was castigated as being pro-China, a further economic divide in XUAR between north and south, and along ethnic lines, sets the scene for continued unrest and social tensions.<sup>21</sup>

In May 2010, the Chinese government afforded Kashgar the status of a special economic zone. Beijing hoped to increase the economic prosperity of the city, and the wider region, making Kashgar an important investment hub for both Chinese and international investors. In Kashgar city in 2012, local residents reported that they were experiencing improved financial situations as a result of recent government measures. They stated that prices for agricultural outputs were higher, and more stable, than in previous years. In addition, water canals along the roadside used for household and farming purposes were being upgraded by local authorities. There was

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<sup>19</sup> Colin Mackerras, "Ethnicity in China: The Case of Xinjiang", *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 8, no. 1, (2004), accessed 1 May 2010, [www.asiaquarterly.com/content/view/full/142/40/](http://www.asiaquarterly.com/content/view/full/142/40/).

<sup>20</sup> Michael Dillon, "Death on the Silk Route: Violence in Xinjiang", *BBC*, 3 August (2011), accessed 29 April 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/mobile/world-asia-pacific-14384605>.

<sup>21</sup> Colin Mackerras, "Xinjiang in China's Foreign Relations: Part of a new Silk Road or Central Asian zone of conflict?", *East Asia* 13, (2015), 25-42, doi: 10.1007/s12140-015-9224-8.

much evidence of this increased prosperity in rural townships with donkey carts being replaced by motorised carts, and many families had purchased scooters. There was also considerable home renovation and maintenance works being undertaken, with small local roadways littered with bricks, mortar and building supplies as local homes underwent facelifts, including new brickwork, doors and windows.<sup>22</sup>

However, local residents were concerned by the migration of Han Chinese farmers to the region. These new migrants were establishing larger farms in the local area, evidenced by many Uyghur farm buildings and walls being torn down to make way for larger farming plots for the Han Chinese farmers. There was a feeling that these farms could supplant the local farmers in years to come, and that they might use up valuable water resources, leaving local farmers wanting. Therefore, although the Uyghur farmers were experiencing increasing levels of prosperity, it was tempered by an uncertainty about the future due to the increase of Han Chinese farms in their neighbourhood and the changes this may bring.

It is also probable that Beijing hopes that their attempts to increase economic prosperity in and around Kashgar will also quell local resentment toward the Chinese government over the demolition of Old Kashgar. As more and more of Old Kashgar disappears so too does the traditional Uyghur way of life in urban Kashgar. In 2012, locals remarked that had I visited Kashgar just four years earlier it would have been a completely different vista, more like the Old Silk Road, than a growing urban landscape replete with tall apartment complexes and similar buildings. In fact, the Chinese government's destruction of Old Kashgar has been cited as one of the reasons for the violence that broke out in 2011 in Kashgar and Hotan, on the eve of the anniversary of the 2009 Urumqi riots.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, it should be remembered that the rapid pace of change in the city has seen extraordinary development occur alongside widespread destruction of the traditional way of life for Kashgar's Uyghurs. As a result, it was highly likely that it would cause some feelings of discontent.

### **Incidents of violence and external interest**

For Beijing, perhaps the most complex element of the continued unrest in XUAR has been the rise of outside interest in the domestic politics of its frontier region. The July 2009 Urumqi riots, and subsequent crackdowns and terrorist incidents across the region since that event, have attracted the attention of many external observers, including from the Muslim world. Shicor argues that public awareness of these events has grown across the Middle East, and there is a growing solidarity for the Uyghurs among segments of the population and some media outlets.<sup>24</sup> In addition, Islamist terrorists like the now deceased Abu Yahya al-Libi have been vocal critics against China, and in 2014, the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) began identifying China as a target for jihad, with another publication identifying China as a *kafir* (infidel) country and therefore a 'legitimate target of "offensive jihad"'.<sup>25</sup> As a result, it would appear that Central Asia has the potential to become both a zone of opportunity and a zone of conflict for China.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ethnographic field research by the author. Kashgar Prefecture, 7-11 September, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Dillon, "Death on the Silk Route".

<sup>24</sup> Yitzhak Shichor, "See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil: Middle Eastern Reactions to Rising China's Uyghur Crackdown", *Griffith Asia Quarterly* 3, no. 1, (2015), 69-71.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 74.

<sup>26</sup> Mackerras, "Xinjiang in China's Foreign Policy".



Perhaps then it is unsurprising that the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has also identified China as a target for jihad. In a speech on July 4, 2014 the leader of ISIL, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi not only called on Chinese Muslims to join ISIL's cause, but he also threatened to seize the territory of XUAR. He identified East Turkestan (XUAR) as a historically legitimate part of the ISIL caliphate, referring to the region's pivotal position within Islamic Central Asia. Thus again, history comes to the fore for this region. Leaked ISIL registration documents identified between 114-167 Uyghur fighters (from China) among the 4000 fighters the documents pertained to. Given that many Uyghur fighters take their families with them, and that this is just a portion of ISIL registration documents, this data leak appears to corroborate official Chinese estimates of approximately 300 Uyghurs having left China to fight with the Islamic State.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, Muhammad Amin, an 80-year-old Uyghur, appeared in one of ISIL's sophisticated recruitment videos, which was clearly aimed at recruiting other Uyghurs. In the video, Amin was interviewed by a member of ISIL and he stated that he '...was subjected to oppression in Turkestan at the hands of the Chinese' and that he and his wife, along with his daughter and four grandsons had all travelled to Syria to join ISIL after he saw a video of his son being killed while engaged in jihad in Syria. The video shows Amin and other men training for battle, and Amin expresses his desire to be sent into battle. The video also shows children in a school classroom, complete with ISIL flag, and ISIL uniforms, and one boy recites a poem about the glory of martyrdom. Disturbingly, it ends with a boy of around 10 years of age issuing a direct warning to China. He states:

O Chinese *kuffar* (non-believers), know that we are preparing in the land of the *khilafah* (caliphate) and we will come to you and raise this flag in Turkestan with the permission of Allah.<sup>28</sup>

The release of this video must be of concern to Beijing, especially given regional acts of violence have now spread to other regions in China, including Beijing. In October 2013, Beijing was rocked by a suicide incident at the Gate of Heavenly Peace, in front of Tiananmen Square, which killed five people; two civilians and the three perpetrators. Another deadlier incident, the Kunming Train station knife attack, occurred on 1 March 2014. It led to the deaths of 29 civilians and four perpetrators, with more than 140 others injured.<sup>29</sup> Official explanations of these events have identified both as acts of terrorism, carried out by Uyghur terrorists.<sup>30</sup> The location of these violent incidents outside of XUAR, combined with ISIL interest in provoking more such incidents in China, demonstrates this problem is spreading, both domestically and regionally.

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<sup>27</sup> See Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, "Chinese Muslims have joined the Islamic State", *Foreign Policy*, 20 July (2016), accessed 14 October 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/07/20/report-100-chinese-muslims-have-joined-isis-islamic-state-china-terrorism-uighur/>; and Jeremy Page, with Maria Abi-Habib, "Over 100 Chinese Fighters have joined Islamic State in Syria", *Wall Street Journal*, 25 July (2016), accessed 14 October 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/china-terror-claims-bolstered-by-new-evidence-1469435872>.

<sup>28</sup> Tom Wyke and Jenny Stanton, "Is this the oldest jihadi in ISIS? Elderly man flees China with his family to fight alongside terror group in Syria", *Daily Mail*, Australia, 4 June (2015), accessed 18 June 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3110022/Is-ISIS-oldest-jihadi-Elderly-man-flees-China-family-fight-alongside-terror-group-Syria.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Clarke, "Why is Xinjiang violence escalating?", *BBC World News*, 23 May (2014), accessed 12 July 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-27534049>.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Clarke, "China's terrorism problem goes global", *The Diplomat*, 7 September (2019), accessed 14 October 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/09/chinas-terrorist-problem-goes-global/>.

In a promising development, in March 2016 Xinhua reported that the Central Government had granted 110 billion yuan in funding to the region for the 2016 financial year. This money, intended to ‘improve livelihoods’, was allocated to 100 projects across the region.<sup>31</sup> According to the Standing Committee of the Regional Party Committee:

About 10,000 villages in XUAR will receive 500,000 yuan each to ‘improve livelihood’...600 million yuan will be used for poverty relief in 1,200 poor villages, and 24 billion yuan will be used to build houses for 300,000 rural herdsmen.<sup>32</sup>

Clearly this funding is needed and is welcomed. However, the provision of housing to herds people, who are generally semi-nomadic, could be problematic if the finer details of the funding is the forced settlement of such peoples. Nonetheless, programs aimed at poverty reduction and improving human security in the region are both necessary and timely. They are also measures that are praiseworthy, but only if they are implemented in culturally appropriate ways that take into consideration religious and ethnic differences between Han and non-Han.

Perhaps, the recent rise of violent incidents linked to the region, as well as ISIL’s interest in human insecurity within the region, has provided Beijing with the impetus to speed up funding to the disempowered regions of XUAR. China must avoid further unrest in XUAR and beyond, so if the BRI adds additional layers to the economic disadvantage along ethnic lines in XUAR, the stage is set for a worrisome future. On the other hand, if it provides real opportunities and helps to close the gap between Han and non-Han in the region, it could be an important development for the region. However, China’s nationalistic pursuit of the China Dream is problematic because both XUAR, and the region’s minority nationalities, remain an uncomfortable fit in both the Chinese state and the China Dream.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

Therefore, XUAR has become an important and integral region in the realisation of both the China Dream and the current strategy for the SREB linking XUAR with Central Asia. Given the ethnic tensions that exist within this region of China, it is therefore problematic that the BRI largely remains a top-down initiative that will likely follow the pattern of the GWDS, that is Han residents in XUAR emerging as the first, and the key, beneficiaries of the strategy, with the minority nationalities receiving trickling flows as the initiative progresses. In order for the BRI to reach its intended domestic goals, it is imperative that the minority nationalities receive more of a ‘carrot’ from this type of development. The economic ‘trickle down’ effect is not sufficient, and will likely lead to a widening economic gap along ethnic lines, which may serve to fuel discontent especially when the rapid pace of change is seen as a full frontal attack on indigenous culture, traditions and society. Given the significant amount of investment China expects to pump into the BRI, it is vital that this policy succeeds as it is a key part of China realising the China Dream. Therefore, Beijing needs to incorporate a more grassroots approach to development in the region, one that involves a more inclusive approach, and which serves a wider array of interests if it is to secure the SREB and the China Dream.

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<sup>31</sup> “Xinjiang allocated”, *Xinhua*.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in “Xinjiang allocated”, *Xinhua*.

<sup>33</sup> For a detailed discussion of Chinese representations of minority nationalities in Xinjiang see Anna Hayes, “Space, place and ethnic identity in the Xinjiang Regional Museum”, in *Inside Xinjiang: Space, place and power in China’s Muslim Far Northwest*, ed. Anna Hayes and Michael Clarke (London: Routledge), 52–72.