

TRANSPORTING CONFLICTS VIA MIGRATORY ROUTES: A SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS (SNA) OF UYGHUR INTERNATIONAL MOBILISATION

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Abstract

Transnational activism of the Uyghur diaspora in promoting the rights of their kindred back in China has been the focus of attention of the academia, press and media alike. This paper is a preliminary attempt at visualising the connections between Uyghur diaspora organisations, their sympathisers, governments and news organisations. A Social Network Analysis (SNA) of four data sets that chronologically record the diaspora's political activities from 2006 to 2009 was carried out towards this end. Offline Uyghur networks were analysed and its results compared to those of an SNA of websites that promote Uyghur interests online. Results corroborate the widely held view that World Uyghur Congress (WUC) and the well-known Uyghur leader, Rebiya Kadeer, play pivotal roles in mobilising Uyghur communities around the world. Although the WUC's online role is less prominent than its offline role, it wields considerable influence over Uyghur activism across the globe, as highlighted by the case study of Uyghur linkages in Australia. Uyghur American Association (UAA), which is active offline as well, emerges as a key information provider of Uyghur issues in cyberspace.

Note: *This paper documents a work in progress.*

About This Paper:

This paper is the result of research conducted during the author's NTS-Asia (Consortium of Non-Traditional Security Studies in Asia) Research Fellowship with the Institute for Human Security, La Trobe University, Australia in 2010. Organised by the RSIS Centre for Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies (the Secretariat of NTS-Asia), the annual NTS-Asia Research Fellowship allows young scholars to conduct research on non-traditional security issues in any of the 20 member-institutes in the Consortium of NTS-Asia. Find out more about NTS-Asia at www.rsis-ntsasia.org. More information about the RSIS Centre for NTS Studies can be found at www.rsis.edu.sg/nts.

Recommended Citation:

Chen, Yu-Wen, 2011, *Transporting Conflicts via Migratory Routes: A Social Network Analysis (SNA) of Uyghur International Mobilisation*, NTS-Asia Research Paper No. 5, Singapore: RSIS Centre for Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies for NTS-Asia.

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Acknowledgments:

This project was financially supported by NTS-Asia. I wish to thank Dr. James Leibold, La Trobe University, Australia, for his valuable comments at the paper's draft stage. I also wish to thank Delia A. Pop for her assistance with research in the Uyghur project. I appreciate the comments received from experts at Monash Asia Institute and La Trobe University, such as Professor Marika Vicziany, where early drafts of the work were presented. Lastly, I am grateful for the views of an anonymous interviewee who consolidated my understanding of Uyghurs in Australia. Any inaccuracy or mistake in the paper's content remains the responsibility of the author.

Introduction

This paper aims to visualise and analyse the connections that exist between Uyghur diaspora organisations, their sympathisers, governments and news agencies. The Uyghurs (or Uighurs) are Turks, and most of them perceive themselves as Sunni Muslims.¹ They are the fifth-largest minority nationality in the People's Republic of China (PRC), and the largest nationality in the northwestern region of Xinjiang (meaning 'new frontier' in Chinese), where they constitute nearly half of the region's population.² Some (albeit not all) Uyghurs in Xinjiang have vocalised a desire to preserve the Uyghur identity, and even to create their own state. By the Uyghurs' own definition, their state should be 'East Turkestan' or 'East Turkistan', not China. Not surprisingly, this is a desire that will admittedly be difficult to achieve from within China.³ At the core of this conflict is a clash of identities, where some members of the Uyghur minority in China have refused to switch their loyalties from kinship networks to a single Chinese state.⁴

Some Uyghurs who have fled China to avoid persecution have, as they settled in various corners of the world, started to ponder the possibility of influencing the politics of their new host countries to help support their kindred back in China. As China began to open up to the world, and exposed itself to criticism from Western governments and Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) for its human rights records, the Uyghur diaspora started believing that they could make their voices more heard by global audiences if they were better organised. Advances in communication technologies, in the recent decade particularly, have facilitated the realisation of this ambition. It is now much easier and cheaper for the Uyghur diaspora to communicate with each other and discuss their collective plans even when living in far-away countries. Currently, the Germany-based World Uyghur Congress (WUC) aims to serve as the umbrella organisation coordinating the activities of Uyghur diaspora all over the world.⁵

Some literature and even Chinese government documents have recorded the Uyghurs' international operations. While most studies believe that the WUC plays a vital part in coordinating Uyghur diasporic activities,⁶ these studies are highly qualitative and offer no

¹ Blaine Kaltman, *Under the Heel of the Dragon: Islam, Racism, Crime and the Uighur in China* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), pp. 1–3.

² Yuan-Kang Wang, 'Toward a Synthesis of the Theories of Peripheral Nationalism: A Comparative Study of China's Xinjiang and Guangdong', *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2001), pp. 177–95; James Stuart Olson, *An Ethnohistorical Dictionary of China* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998); Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* (Cambridge: Council on East Asia Studies, Harvard East Asia Monographs, 1991); Colin Mackerras, 'Uyghur-Tang Relations, 744–840', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2000), pp. 223–34.

³ Yueyao Zhao, 'Pivot or Periphery? Xinjiang's Regional Development', *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2001), pp. 197–224.

⁴ Chih-Yu Shih, *Negotiating Ethnicity in China: Citizenship as a Response to the State* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 11.

⁵ Interview of Dolkun Isa, the secretary general of World Uyghur Congress, on 9 March 2010 in Munich, Germany; Yitzhak Shichor, 'Changing the Guard at the World Uyghur Congress', *China Brief*, Vol. 6, No. 25 (2006), pp. 12–4.

⁶ Yitzhak Shichor, *Ethno-Diplomacy: The Uyghur Hitch in Sino-Turkish Relations* (Honolulu: East-West Center, 2009), pp. 50–1; Joanne Smith Finley, 'Chinese Oppression in Xinjiang, Middle Eastern Conflicts and Global Islamic Solidarities among the Uyghurs', *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 16, No. 53 (2007), pp. 627–54; Dru C. Gladney, 'Cyber-separatism', in *Dislocating China: Reflections on Muslims, Minorities and Other Subaltern Subjects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 229–59; Kristian Petersen, 'Usurping the Nation: Cyber-Leadership in the Uighur

systematic mapping of Uyghur diasporic organisations, alliances or networks.⁷ Because Uyghur mobilisation is still relatively nascent and small (compared with that of the Tibetans),⁸ it is both necessary and manageable to map the Uyghurs' international networks and to empirically examine where the WUC is positioned in the current framework of international networks.

This working paper is, in a way, an extension of the author's previous work, where a hyperlink analysis of URLs that posted information relevant to the Uyghurs was published.⁹ The hyperlink analysis was aimed to unearth the means of information dissemination that were being used by the Uyghurs to help raise the visibility of their cause. The analysis revealed that most URLs were based in liberal democracies, such as the US and Germany, where domestic opportunity structures are relatively more open and the public is more sympathetic toward human rights issues. This is also why the Uyghur diaspora has strategically attempted to frame their political interests in terms of human rights. Violation of 'minority rights' or 'human rights' is constantly raised in the discourses of the Uyghur diaspora.

This paper moves beyond the Uyghur's online presence and uncovers offline networks of actors who, by passively or actively attending Uyghur-relevant events, have been drawn into such Uyghur networks consciously or unconsciously. Social Network Analysis (SNA) was the primary analytical tool used for the visualisation of the Uyghurs' transnational linkages in this attempt. A qualitative literature review was also carried out to support the findings of the SNA. The results of this quantitative-qualitative study of the Uyghur setting become significant as they not only outline the diaspora's international networks but also provide further empirical proof of spillover effects often noted in other conflict studies.

A brief historical review is provided in the paper's second section. The third and fourth sections present an empirical study of the Uyghurs' international networks, with the third section dedicated to the SNA and the fourth comparing online Uyghur networks with their offline counterparts.¹⁰ The fourth section also provides a more comprehensive view of international Uyghur mobilisation. Methods and data have been presented only in their

Nationalist Movement', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2006), pp. 63–73.

⁷ Michael Clarke, 'China, Xinjiang and the Internationalization of the Uyghur Issue', *Global Change, Peace and Security*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2010), pp. 213–29; *China Daily*, 'Rebiya Not Entitled to Represent Uyghur People: Former Xinjiang Chief', 11 July 2009, http://www2.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009xinjiangriot/2009-07/11/content_8416140.htm (accessed 20 December 2010); Ministry of Public Security of the People's Republic of China, *List of the First Batch of Identified 'Eastern Turkistan' Terrorist Organizations and Terrorists* (Beijing: Ministry of Public Security of the People's Republic of China, 2003).

⁸ As senior Uyghur observer, Colin Mackerras, states, 'in my opinion it is extremely unlikely that they (Uyghurs) can match the Tibetan exiles as an effective force in the foreseeable future'. See Colin Mackerras, 'Xinjiang at the Turn of the Century: The Causes of Separatism', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2001), pp. 289–303; Shichor, 'Changing the Guard at the World Uyghur Congress', pp. 12–4.

⁹ Yu-Wen Chen, 'Who Made Uyghurs Visible in the International Arena? A Hyperlink Analysis', Global Migration and Transnational Politics (GMTTP) Working Paper, Center for Global Studies (Fairfax, VA: George Mason University, 2010); Richard Rogers, *The End of the Virtual: Digital Method* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 2009).

¹⁰ This study is not longitudinal in nature, as existing documents are not sufficient for the coding necessary for such a study. However, if the Uyghurs continue to systematically record their activities, researchers can continue to code their activities into SNA data for a longitudinal study in the future.

respective sections, rather than as an overall section dedicated to methodology and data, as different data sets were used for the third and fourth sections. In the fifth section, a brief case study of Uyghur networks in Australia is presented. The concluding section summarises the study's findings and delineates relevant topics, which though not addressed in this paper are to be the subject of future research efforts.

Transporting Conflicts via (Forced) Migration

The main focus of this paper is the contemporary Han-Uyghur relationship, and how their frictions have led some Uyghurs to migrate and seek external help, thus transporting their conflicts to the international arena. Beijing's ineffective and weak governance of the Xinjiang region during China's tumultuous Republican period invited the Uyghurs to found a state. In November 1944, the Eastern Turkestan Republic (ETR) was established 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 Turkey, and then to other parts of the world. Albeit in exile, these leaders carried with them one shared possession – Uyghur nationalism – which they later sought to revive overseas in various contexts.¹¹ For example, over the last four years, a burgeoning aspiration has been noticeable among Uyghur leaders and constituents during Uyghur meetings (e.g., seminars, conferences) in Western Europe and North America to raise the visibility of the Uyghur cause in the hope that such efforts would gather direct support for Uyghur self-determination and create international leverage to counter the Chinese regime's suppression.¹² This contemporary aspect of Uyghur diasporic activism is the core of this study.

The internationalisation of ethnic/identity conflicts, or the ethnicisation of international politics, is not new; nor is it exclusive to the conflict between the Uyghurs and the Chinese government. Ethnically defined non-state actors elsewhere and beyond China, such as the Basques in Spain and the Chechens in Russia, have actively used international channels to advance their causes in our times, when the traditional functions and boundaries of states are more or less challenged and eroded.¹³

As with other ethnically defined non-state actors, the Uyghur diaspora has opted for transnational strategies not simply because they are unable to make changes from within China. Rather, and more importantly, transnational strategies permit the Uyghurs to show the Chinese government that the issue has reached international audiences. By signalling that 'even outside China, there are people supporting the Uyghurs', the Uyghur diaspora expects the Chinese government to be forced to pay attention and to cease dismissing

¹¹ Shichor has conducted a comprehensive historical review of the Uyghur diaspora. See Shichor, 'Changing the Guard at the World Uyghur Congress', pp. 12–4.

¹² Clarke, 'China, Xinjiang and the Internationalization of the Uyghur Issue', pp. 213–29; Martin I. Wayne, *China's War on Terrorism: Counter-Insurgency, Politics and Internal Security* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 103–5.

¹³ Yu-Wen Chen, *Transnational Cooperation of Ethnopolitical Mobilization: A Survey Analysis of European Ethnopolitical Groups* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009).

their nationalist requests as mere noise. From another angle, transnational cooperation enables the Uyghurs to internationalise the issue of contention while expanding the conflict to the international stage, thus cautioning PRC leaders to consider conceding if they do not wish to see the conflict spill beyond the state's boundaries.

Currently, the WUC is the most known Uyghur umbrella organisation. Founded in 2004, it is headquartered in Munich, Germany, where most Uyghur diaspora in Germany reside.¹⁴ The WUC does not have individuals as members, but 26 member organisations that are located around the world. The Uyghur American Association (UAA), Uyghur Australian Association and Uyghur Canadian Association, for example, are WUC members from the US, Australia and Canada, respectively. Leaders of these 26 member organisations also serve different functions in the WUC. For instance, the WUC executive chairman, Alim Seytoff, is also the general secretary of the Washington-based UAA. Likewise, Rebiya Kadeer, the 'Dalai Lama' of the Uyghurs, is head of the WUC in Germany and simultaneously serves as president of the UAA in the US.¹⁵ As Shichor notes, the reason behind Kadeer being the leader of the Uyghur diaspora is her unique credibility, which is otherwise hard to find among the diasporic community.¹⁶

As a successful businesswoman, Kadeer was elected to the government of Xinjiang in 1987 and promoted to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in 1992. In August 1999, however, she was arrested on her way to meet a US Congress delegation in Urumqi and suffered personal persecution by the Chinese authorities, spending nearly six years in prison until she was released on March 17, 2005, due to international (primarily US) pressure. She was allowed to leave China for the United States where her husband was living ... she quickly became the president of the Uyghur American Association and was nominated for the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize.¹⁷

It is hard to believe that the Chinese regime would actually concede to the Uyghurs' demands simply because the Uyghurs have been able to mobilise internationally and find international leverage. The establishment of Shanghai Five in 1996, with China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as members, which transformed into Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001 following the inclusion of Uzbekistan, demonstrates well China's ambition to control and curtail Uyghur activities in Central Asia.¹⁸ Though both mobilisation and counter-mobilisation contribute to the internationalisation of the conflict, the issue of counter-mobilisation is not discussed in this paper.

¹⁴ It is estimated that there are 500 to 600 Uyghurs in Munich, and in total around 700 Uyghurs in Germany. This number has been reported in parliamentary documents in the Bavarian Parliament several times. See *Entscheiderbrief*, September 2009, No. 16, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für Migration and Flüchtlinge*, BAMF).

¹⁵ Interview of Dolkun Isa, the secretary general of World Uyghur Congress, on 9 March 2010 in Munich, Germany.

¹⁶ Shichor, 'Changing the Guard at the World Uyghur Congress', pp. 12–4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Michael Clarke, 'The Problematic Progress of "Integration" in the Chinese State's Approach to Xinjiang, 1759–2005', *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2007), pp. 261–89; Michael Clarke, 'China's Internal Security Dilemma and the "Great Western Development": The Dynamics of Integration, Ethnic Nationalism and Terrorism in Xinjiang', *Asian Studies Review*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (2007), pp. 323–42; Colin Mackerras, 'Xinjiang at the Turn of the Century', pp. 289–303.

The most commonly seen transnational mobilisation strategy involves the provision of information, and is often called 'information politics'.¹⁹ Information politics plays a pivotal role in raising the prominence of the Uyghur issue. For example, reports on the plight of their brethren were created and delivered to UN venues by members of the Uyghur diaspora.²⁰ Uyghur activist propaganda usually centres on discrimination against and oppression of the Uyghurs in China as well as their need for a homeland. The diaspora has endeavoured to frame the issue in terms of human rights violations and suppression of minorities, as opposed to terrorism, which has been the Chinese government's approach on the matter.

Information politics is played out in cyberspace, as well. As Petersen observed, until the late 1970s, the Uyghur diaspora was not at all effective in spreading their cause to the international community largely due to the 'limited media' that Uyghur leaders were able to employ.²¹ The arrival of the Internet gave like-minded Uyghur activists easier and cheaper means of interaction and further reinforced some of the shared rhetoric and images that were needed for the continuation of their self-determination struggles.²²

The virtual world of the Internet facilitated the emergence of several websites dedicated to the cause of Uyghurs' self-determination, such as that of the UAA, which has grown more sophisticated over the years. The UAA website not only contains press releases and statements of position but also links to other online forums where like-minded supporters share the Uyghurs' views.²³ The websites' impact is both technological and psychological, apart from, more significantly, having a reach that is beyond national borders.

Besides providing information to key international players who might be able to exercise pressure on the PRC, the Uyghur diaspora organises protests and cultural events in various parts of the world. While demonstrative tactics might not have a direct or immediate impact on decision makers or policies, they help to draw the attention of the press, media and the public, whose sympathies and influences could further weigh on policy makers. Additionally, the more sympathisers there are, the more likely it is that individuals of the Uyghur community will feel further emboldened about their cause, thus prompting hitherto latent supporters to turn vocal and active.

As the Uyghur diaspora's efforts are present in both the offline and online spheres, this paper presents these networks in both contexts. The offline networks are looked at in the next section. Bearing in mind that current literature relies largely on qualitative analysis,

¹⁹ Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 12–3; Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity, the Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, Volume II* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

²⁰ *World Uyghur Congress: Activity Report, October 2006–March 2009* (Munich: World Uyghur Congress, 2009).

²¹ Chen, 'Who Made Uyghurs Visible in the International Arena?' p. 4; Petersen, 'Usurping the Nation', pp. 63–73; Wayne, *China's War on Terrorism*, pp. 103–5.

²² Gladney, 'Cyber-separatism', pp. 229–59; Kanat Kilic, 'Ethnic Media and Politics: The Case of the Use of the Internet by Uyghur Diaspora', *First Monday*, Vol. 10, No. 7 (2005),

<http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1259/1179> (accessed 9 December 2010).

²³ Chen, 'Who Made Uyghurs Visible in the International Arena?', p. 5.

this study is the first of its kind to employ first-hand quantified data sets to analyse the Uyghur networks.

Offline Uyghur Networks

Methods and Data Sets

SNA is widely used as a tool in sociology, organisational behavioural studies and other disciplines. Its use in political analysis, particularly in conflict studies, only came into prominence in recent years when a number of studies that employed the tool were published in famed international journals, such as *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. SNA is different from conventional statistical analysis in the sense that SNA explores the relationships between actors, and not the attributes of the actors themselves.²⁴ In the study of politics, accordingly, scholars use SNA to observe the relationships and interactions of political actors because it is assumed that only with interactions can political influences be made, thus shaping the development of politics under study.

For instance, Maoz et al. examined the different kinds of international connections between states, which they termed as 'affinity', and found that these different kinds of affinity affect the likelihood of conflicts between states.²⁵ Hafner-Burton and Montgomery looked at the relationship between states as exhibited by their memberships in International Governmental Organisations (IGOs). This study, which also used SNA, revealed that IGO memberships create a disparate distribution of power in the international system, thus shaping the conflict between states.²⁶ Similarly, Hämmerli et al. identified actors in the Chechen conflict and tracked down their most conflictive and cooperative ties using SNA in 2006²⁷ although the conflict had been studied for years using more conventional approaches. In most cases, such political network analysis is more quantitative in nature.

A key reservation against such research efforts are often queries, such as 'why is it necessary to use a different method to identify the actors, which might have been noted in existing literature?' or, as Hämmerli et al. pose in their paper, 'is the network approach therefore largely obsolete?'

As Hämmerli et al. rightly assert in response, a network approach is necessary for the sound scientific development of conflict studies. This is because network analysis might or might not generate conclusions similar to those reached by existing conflict studies. When

²⁴ Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust, *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²⁵ Zeev Maoz, Ranan D. Kuperman, Lesley Terris and Ilan Talmud, 'Structural Equivalence and International Conflict: A Social Network Analysis', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 50, No. 5 (2006), pp. 664–89.

²⁶ Emilie M. Hafner-Burton and Alexander H. Montgomery, 'Power Positions: International Organizations, Social Networks, and Conflict', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (2006), pp. 3–27.

²⁷ August Hämmerli, Regula Gattiker and Reto Weyermann, 'Conflict and Cooperation in an Actors' Network of Chechnya Based on Event Data', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (2006), pp. 159–75.

SNA does identify the same key actors and the same patterns of interactions among actors, it empirically and scientifically confirms existing conclusions. When it does not, it gives researchers the opportunity to reflect upon existing conclusions. Hämmerli et al.'s study, for example, found that SNA both confirmed and invalidated the roles of certain actors in the Chechen conflict.

In the present context, the network approach is useful as a means to empirically confirm the prevailing view shared by the Chinese government and some Uyghur observers that the Uyghur issue is being spread to international audiences by certain international networks 'out there'.²⁸ In this study, SNA was mainly used to map offline Uyghur networks and identify actors that are most central and prominent in these networks while also delineating those that operate on the periphery.²⁹ As the results will demonstrate, SNA helps confirm the roles of existing actors in the Uyghur diasporic network and deepens our understanding of their embedded ties.

As in the study by Hämmerli et al., primary actor-event data sets were created by coding existing documents for the present study.³⁰ The SNA data sets were originally sourced from the activity reports of the WUC, which has tried to document its activities since its foundation in 2004. To date, the WUC has published two activity reports – the first report from 2004 to 2006 mostly contains press releases, while the one from October 2006 to March 2009 includes a chronologically recorded list of Uyghur diasporic activities. The latter contained information more suitable for coding into SNA data sets.

Using the second WUC activity report, four data sets were created to record the actors and events that occurred in the years 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009.³¹ This part of the work resembled content analysis, where available information was coded into quantifiable data. The data sets for 2006 and 2009 were smaller as the activity report only included information from October to December for 2006 (42 events and 56 actors) and from January to March for 2009 (35 events and 53 actors).³² The data sets for the years 2007 (146 events and 166 actors) and 2008 (94 events and 133 actors) were complete, with all occurring events being recorded (Table 1).

²⁸ Shichor, 'Changing the Guard at the World Uyghur Congress', pp. 12–4; Clarke, 'China, Xinjiang and the Internationalisation of the Uyghur Issue', p. 214; *China Daily*, 'Rebiya Not Entitled to Represent Uyghur People: Former Xinjiang Chief', 11 July 2009, http://www2.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009xinjiangriot/2009-07/11/content_8416140.htm (accessed 20 December 2010).

²⁹ Robert A. Hanneman and Mark Riddle, *Introduction to Social Network Methods* (Riverside: University of California, 2005), <http://faculty.ucr.edu/~hanneman/>

³⁰ The well-known Swiss Peace Foundation has a FAST data bank that allows researchers to quantitatively study various conflicts around the world using event data. I was also inspired by the FAST project to create my own Uyghur event data set. For more information on the FAST project, please visit <http://www.swisspeace.ch> (accessed 20 December 2010).

³¹ Readers can download the data sets at http://www.yuwenjuliechen.com/research/uyghur_networks

³² The WUC activity report does not always have detailed information of what actors were engaged in particular events. For instance, instead of noting the exact name of an organisation taking part in a protest, the WUC sometimes only vaguely states that the participants were 'supporters from Turkey.' In such cases, this piece of information is not documented in the data set. Also, at times only the most important participants of an event are mentioned. This was not a problem for the present analysis, as what was most important was to understand the networks between the key players involved. So, it sufficed to have the names of the core participants.

Table 1: Overview of offline network data sets.

Year	Number of Events	Number of Actors
October–December 2006	42	56
January–December 2007	146	166
January–December 2008	94	133
January–March 2009	35	53

Although these data sets only cover Uyghur activities from 2006 to 2009, and do not track the networks prior to 2006, they do provide a snapshot of Uyghur activities from the time when the WUC was established. As the results of the SNA show, the WUC indeed has a central role in coordinating Uyghur events worldwide, and so it becomes vital that its significance in the contemporary Uyghur networks be understood. The analysis' results further justify the use of data sets in the study.

As each data set coded contains both actors and events, the data generated is often called two-mode data. These data sets are also said to be affiliation data sets, as they allow a study of the affiliation between actors as seen from the events that these actors participated in together. From the analysis of such data, a picture of the macrostructure in which Uyghur-relevant actors are nested can be constructed.

Initial coding of these data sets was straightforward – an actor documented as being involved in an event in the WUC activity report was awarded a score of 1, while the ones not involved were given 0. The process generated a binary data set. On 5 February 2007, for example, a WUC representative, Asgar Can, was sent to the Bavarian Parliament to speak on the Uyghur situation during a German-Turkish cultural week.³³ This is reflected in the 2007 data set, where 5 February is entered as an event and two actors, the WUC and the Bavarian Parliament, are coded 1 as they were both involved in the same event (i.e., the German-Turkish cultural week).

A two-mode data set can be tackled in various ways. For this study, the four data sets were converted into four actor-by-actor one-mode data sets that recoded the strength of relationships in terms of the number of actors that were present at common events, that is, the relationship of actors was assessed in terms of how often they met. This information was then processed using the SNA software into a graphic visualisation of the Uyghur networks.³⁴

SNA data sets and results are not meant to replace conventional qualitative analyses and case studies, but rather to empirically strengthen current findings and understanding of various issues. In fact, a systematic SNA of the Uyghur networks requires expert knowledge of the Uyghur scenario and constant reference to existing literature to interpret and explain why the networks are depicted as such in the figures.

³³ *World Uyghur Congress: Activity Report, October 2006–March 2009.*

³⁴ The procedure of converting two-mode data sets into one-mode actor-by-actor data sets is available at http://www.yuwenjuliechen.com/research/uyghur_networks

The SNA approach is not without limitations. A key drawback of the data sets is that they do not account for the importance of the linkages between actors. This is an area that needs redress from future qualitative case studies or, even perhaps, a network analysis using a new set of SNA data that also measures the importance of these connections.

Another limitation worth mentioning here is the origin of these data sets. There is a shortage of available documents on Uyghur diasporic activities over long time periods that can be used for systematic coding for comparison purposes. The most organised information available is that from the WUC reports. While this is the first time these reports have been coded into SNA data, there is also an associated potential for inherent bias for events recorded in the reports. It is likely that the WUC has more comprehensive records of its own activities than those of other Uyghur organisations, and that as a result several other significant events and actors have been overlooked. Furthermore, the quality of the WUC reports cannot be easily cross-validated, as this paper represents the first quantitative study of the Uyghur issue and no analogous data is available from elsewhere.

Researchers who wish to undertake a network approach to the issue in the future could conduct surveys of relevant actors that invite a self-evaluation of their connections with other actors, also taking into consideration the frequency, strength and importance of such associations. While the quality of self-report surveys for such studies and the subjectivity of data thus generated might be a real concern for some observers, it is inarguable that there is no ideal method to study the Uyghur networks. This is a problem that is faced by nearly all kinds of social sciences studies. Although 'triangulation' of sources and methods was proposed in an earlier study as an alternative means of increasing the validity of findings, all such methods carry an inherent bias; triangulation can only help cross-validate findings from other methods. The methods demonstrated and proposed in this paper are only meant to help synthesise a more empirical grasp of the Uyghur networks.³⁵ Future quantitative studies will be required to attempt a cross-validation of the present study's findings.³⁶

The next section of this paper presents the visualised offline Uyghur networks. To avoid the potential pitfall of network analysis moving beyond the study of organisations and examining only the interaction of organisations at a higher abstract level,³⁷ concrete examples gleaned from secondary literature reviews have been used at times along with the SNA to enrich the discussion.

³⁵ Wasserman and Faust, *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications*; Hanneman and Riddle, *Introduction to Social Network Methods*; Hämmerli, Gattiker and Weyermann, 'Conflict and Cooperation in an Actors' Network of Chechnya Based on Event Data', pp. 159–75.

³⁶ Wasserman and Faust, *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications*; Hanneman and Riddle, *Introduction to Social Network Methods*.

³⁷ Thomas Olesen, 'The Transnational Zapatista Solidarity Network: An Infrastructure Analysis', *Global Networks*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2004), pp. 89–107.

Offline Networks

There are a number of free and commercially available SNA software programmes that can be used to process data sets. The Netdraw package on UCINET was used in this study to visualise the Uyghur networks.³⁸ Figures 1 to 4 represent the networks of actors that have, *directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously*, contributed to the dissemination of the Uyghur issue by their presence at Uyghur-relevant events. Note that ‘directly or indirectly’ and ‘consciously or unconsciously’ are highlighted to underscore the possibility that some actors may not have been active participants in these events, but were instead information receivers, such as government departments or UN agencies. However, they are part of the Uyghur networks as they could possibly have been approached or even lobbied. The term ‘Uyghur network’ therefore, as used in this analysis, includes not only core Uyghur diasporic organisations and their sympathisers but also certain actors who might have been drawn into the framework involuntarily.

The figures depict the five most important types of actors in the Uyghur networks using different colours. It is possible that in some places, especially in Figures 2 and 3 where the data sets cover several actors and events, the labels of some nodes overlap those of others and make them (partially) unreadable. This problem is unavoidable though as Netdraw attempts to process and present all relationships between the various actors from the large data sets. The analysis, nonetheless, remains largely unaffected as most key actors are captured in the figures. The Uyghur networks shown in Figures 1 and 4 are less complicated as the data sets for the years 2006 and 2009 were smaller. Figures 1 and 4 are in fact simpler versions of Figures 2 and 3, and all four figures paint a similar picture of these networks.

The first actor type, i.e., the NGOs, is represented as red nodes. Many of these organisations, such as Uyghur Australian Association and Uyghur Canadian Association, advocate solely the Uyghurs’ self-determination cause, while other actors, such as Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF), Minority Rights Group International (MRG), Amnesty International (AI) and National Endowment for Democracy (NED), have a more general human rights focus.

The NED, for example, is clearly seen in the centre left of Figure 3. The NED merits special mention as the US institution supports part of the WUC’s operations. The NED as an NGO is aimed at strengthening democratic institutions around the world, and receives financial support from the US Congress, which it in turn distributes to other NGOs around the world, including to organisations that promote Uyghur rights.

³⁸ Steve P. Borgatti, Martin G. Everett and Linton C. Freeman, *UCINET 6.0 Version 1.00* (Natick: Analytic Technologies, 1999); Steve P. Borgatti, Martin G. Everett and Linton C. Freeman, *UCINET for Windows: Software for Social Network Analysis* (Harvard, MA: Analytic Technologies, 2002).

This first type of actor is quite pervasive in all four figures. This confirms the view shared by Uyghur observers and the Chinese government that human rights NGOs and Uyghur diasporic organisations are active in advocating the Uyghur cause.³⁹ Human rights NGOs may not necessarily agree with the independence of Xinjiang, but are generally sympathetic to the human rights problems that the Uyghurs are facing in China.⁴⁰

The WUC also appears to have high-frequency contacts with other actors in all four figures, with several actors being linked to it. While this could be taken as confirmation of the WUC being the umbrella organisation of the Uyghur diaspora, there lingers the possibility that the frequency with which the WUC is linked to other actors is slightly exaggerated in all four figures for reasons mentioned earlier.

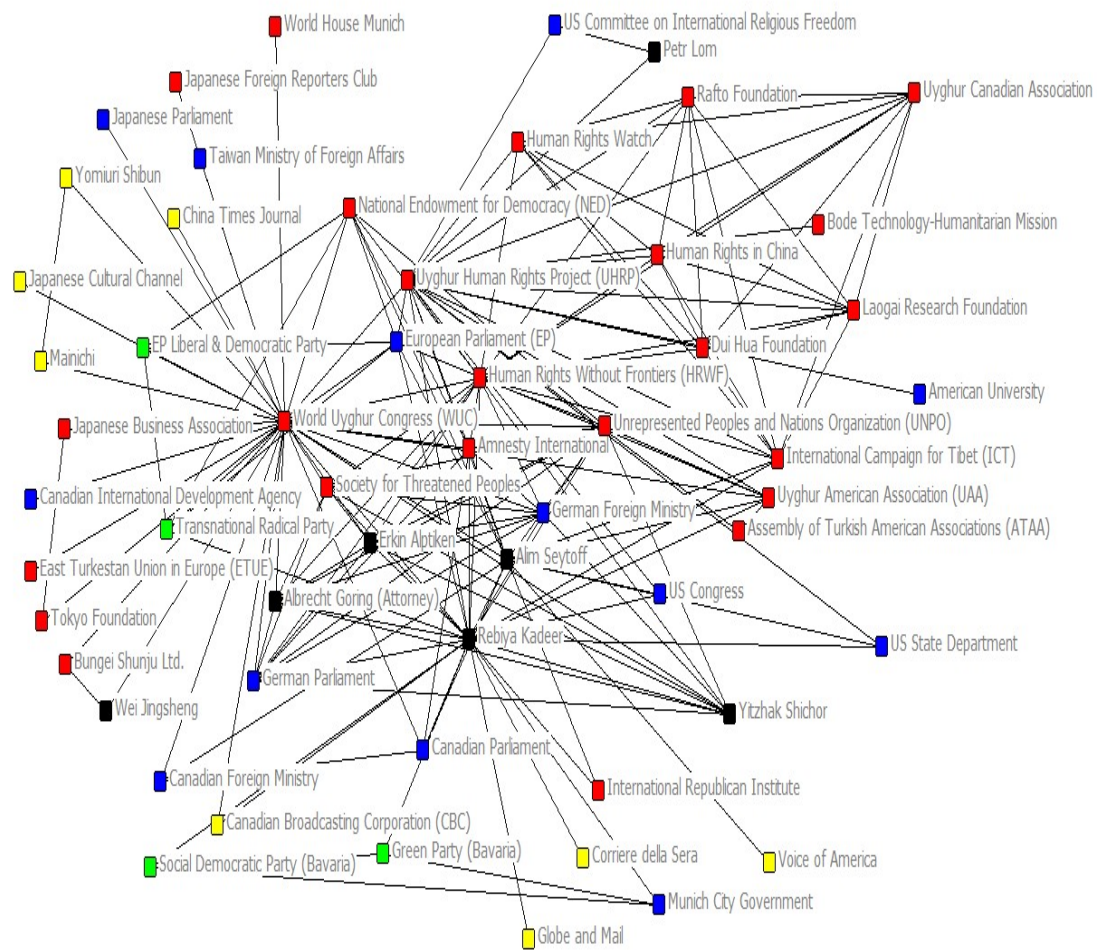
The second type of actor represents individuals, such as political activists, politicians and scholars. They are represented as black nodes in the figures. Special attention has been given to the role played by the well-known Uyghur leader, Rebiya Kadeer, in the figures, who is often mentioned separately in the WUC reports. The reports mention Kadeer as representing the WUC or the UAA on occasion, but give no mention of her affiliation or the organisation she represents at times. She has consequently been treated as an individual 'actor' in this study whenever mentioned in the reports, mainly to determine exactly how politically active this Dalai Lama-like figure of the Uyghurs actually is.⁴¹

³⁹ Amnesty International, *People's Republic of China: Gross Violations of Human Rights in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region* (London: Amnesty International, 1999); Amnesty International, *People's Republic of China: China's Anti-Terrorism Legislation and Repression in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region* (London: Amnesty International, 2002); Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, *Repression in China – Roots and Repercussions of the Urumqi Unrest* (The Hague: Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, 2009).

⁴⁰ Clarke, 'China, Xinjiang and the Internationalization of the Uyghur Issue', p. 226; James Millward, *Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center, 2004), p. 17.

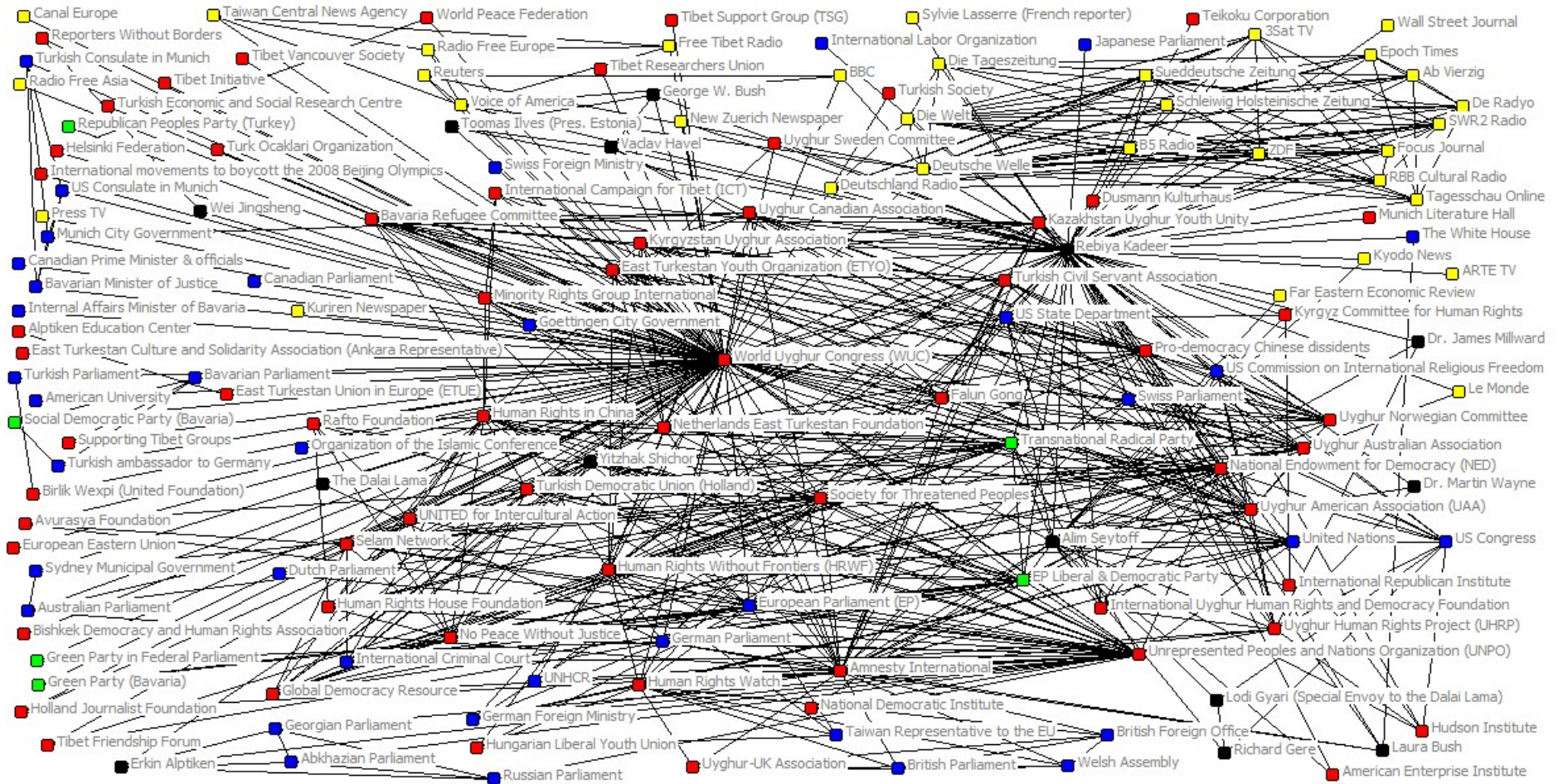
⁴¹ *New York Times*, 'Rebiya Kadeer', 30 July 2009, http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/people/k/rebiya_kadeer/index.html (accessed 3 September 2010).

Figure 1: Offline Uyghur networks (October–December 2006).



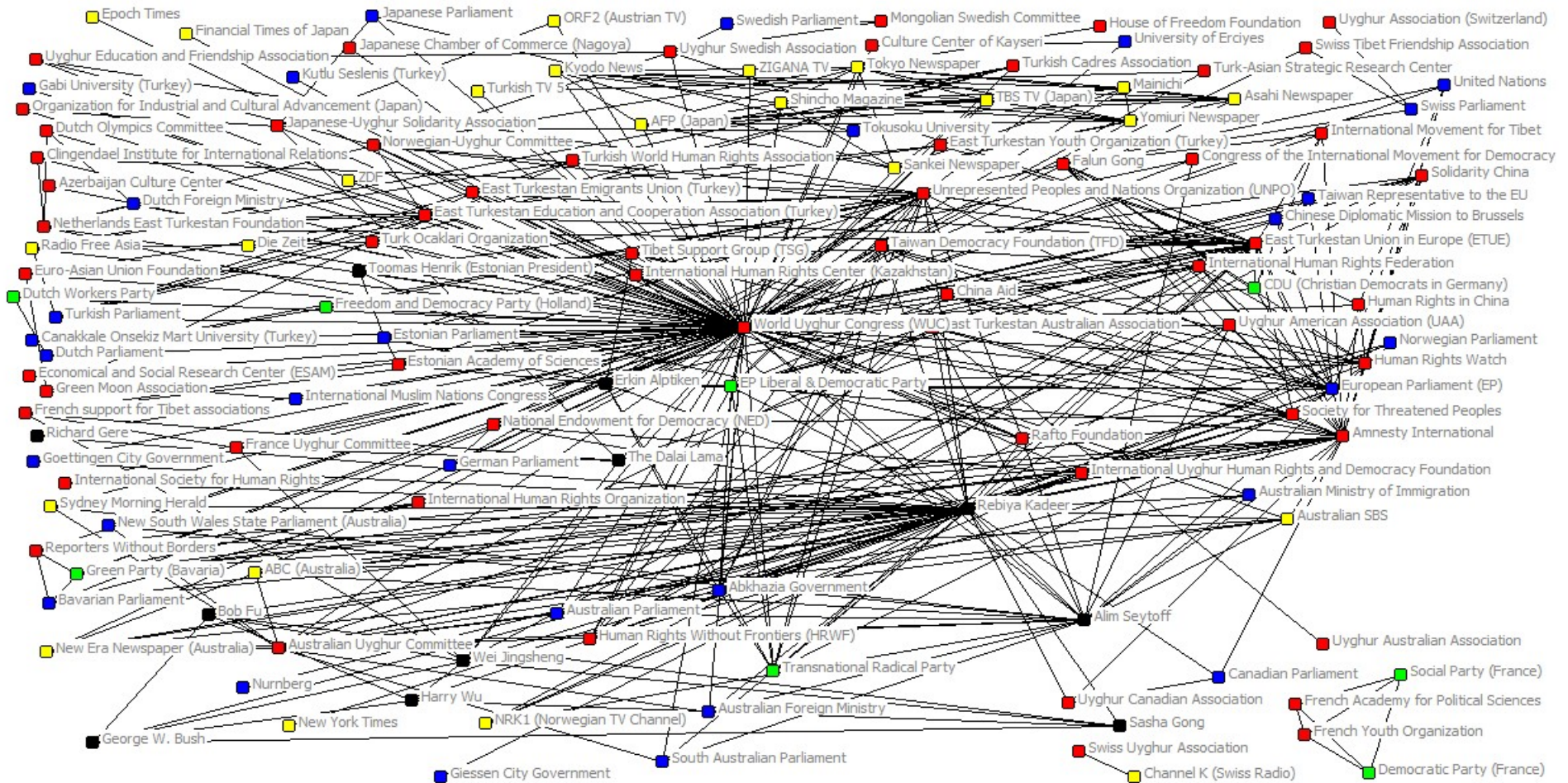
Note: Red = Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs); blue = governments, parliaments, International Governmental Organisations (IGOs) and universities; yellow = news organisations; black = individuals; green = political parties.

Figure 2: Offline Uyghur networks (January–December 2007).



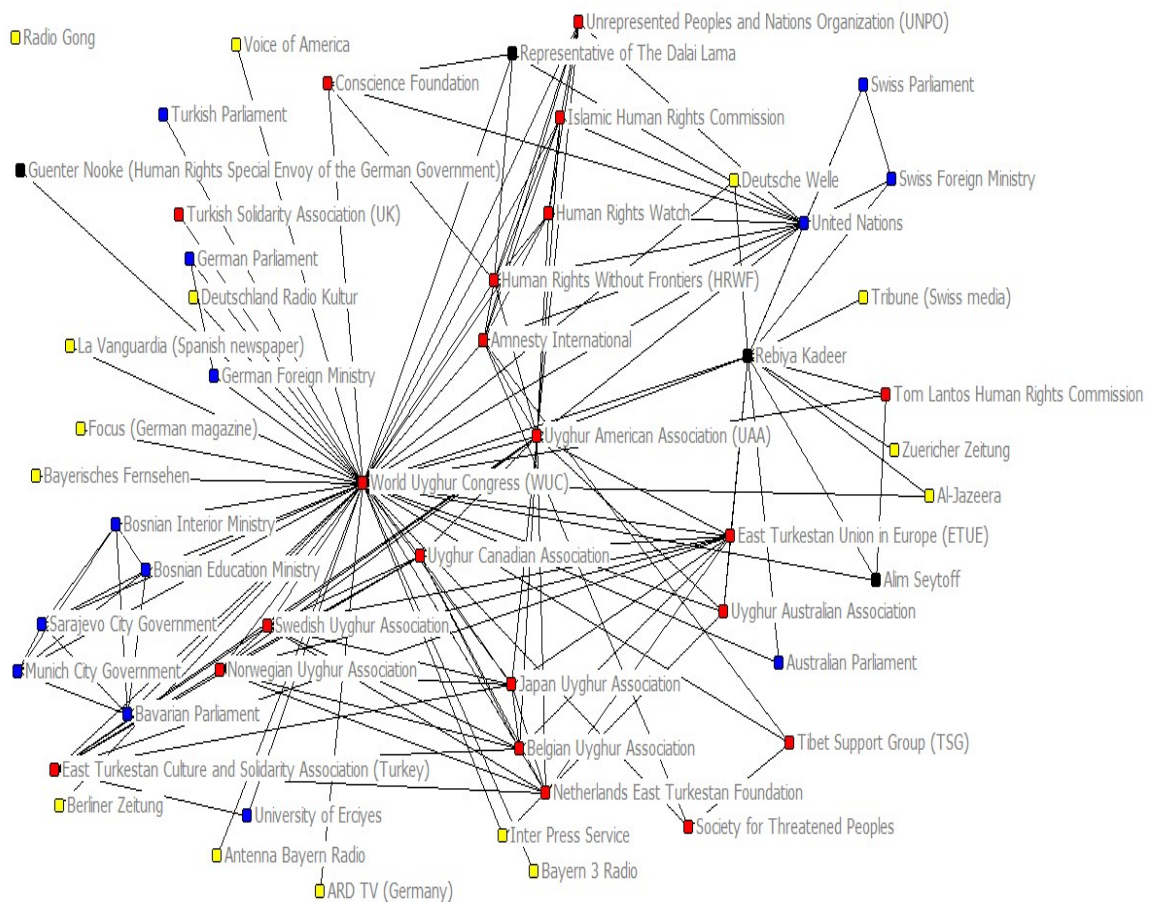
Note: Red = Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs); blue = governments, parliaments, International Governmental Organisations (IGOs) and universities; yellow = news organisations; black = individuals; green = political parties.

Figure 3: Offline Uyghur networks (January–December 2008).



Note: Red = Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs); blue = governments, parliaments, International Governmental Organisations (IGOs) and universities; yellow = news organisations; black = individuals; green = political parties.

Figure 4: Offline Uyghur networks (January–March 2009).



Note: Red = Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs); blue = governments, parliaments, International Governmental Organisations (IGOs) and universities; yellow = news organisations; black = individuals.

As all four figures reveal, Kadeer has highly frequent links with other players. This pattern is most obvious in Figures 2 and 3, where she has clearly created a circle of her own, which is comparable to that of the WUC. What is not clear from the figures, however, is the amount of effort she has personally made toward creating this circle. As Kadeer is head of both the Germany-based WUC and the US-based UAA, it is possible that most of her activities are arranged or coordinated by the staff of either the WUC or the UAA. It is unclear how autonomous she is as an individual activist in spearheading the Uyghurs' cause.

The third type of actor includes news organisations, such as Voice of America, Free Tibet Radio and Taiwan Central News Agency, which are represented in yellow. They are prevalent in the four figures, and are shown in the maps as journalists from these agencies have interviewed Uyghur representatives. Most of these interviews are published, and thus contribute to the dissemination of Uyghur issues.

Blue nodes represent the fourth type of actor, which include governmental agencies, parliaments, IGOs and universities. While not as pervasive as NGOs (red nodes) and news agencies (yellow nodes), these actors are involved in the Uyghur networks either because they were approached (e.g., lobbied or petitioned) by Uyghur activists or because they have cooperated in hosting Uyghur-relevant events. The Bavarian Parliament (*Bayerischer Landtag*) in Germany, for instance, is clearly visible in the lower left corner of Figure 4. The Bavarian Parliament's regional capital, Munich, harbours the largest Uyghur community in Europe and is the headquarters of the WUC.

The fifth type of actor is less common in the four figures. They are political parties and are represented by green nodes. For example, regional factions of the federal parties in Bavaria, Germany, such as the Bavarian branches of the Green Party and the Social Democratic Party, have raised discussions on the Uyghurs in Bavarian legislative debates.⁴² Their presence is more clearly manifested at the bottom left corner of Figure 1. Both parties have worked together to submit direct proposals that explicitly call for the German reception of Uyghur Guantanamo inmates, an issue that was the result of US President Barack Obama's desire to close US's detention camp in Cuba. The US administration was on the look out for countries willing to offer asylum to the original 22 Uyghur inmates of Guantanamo Bay. For instance, political asylum was offered to five Uyghurs in Albania and four in Bermuda. Whether Germany should accept Uyghur inmates as well was deliberated on in the German parliamentary discussions.

In addition to the different nodes, which are clearly noticeable in the figures, another prominent feature of these figures is the lines linking the nodes together, which denote that 'there is a relationship which ties the nodes at two ends of a line together'.⁴³ Frequent connections are evident between NGOs (red nodes), particularly the WUC, and governmental actors (blue nodes) and news organisations (yellow nodes). This pattern can be interpreted as the WUC reaching out to various other types of actors, especially government representatives and journalists. Secondly, the NGOs (red nodes) themselves show several interlinkages. This implies that coordination of events and exchange of information to advance the Uyghurs' shared interests is being spearheaded by key actors of the Uyghur networks, such as Uyghur organisations and human rights NGOs.

The 2008 Beijing Olympics is a case in point. Beijing's successful bid to host the event in 2001 undoubtedly gave various actors new momentum and an opportunity to sound their voices. The event was boycotted by the International Coalition to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong in China (CIPFG) under the banner of protesting against China's repression of Falun Gong members. Meanwhile, the New York-based Human Rights in China (HRIC) did not oppose the Olympic games, but repeatedly stressed the Chinese regime's repression of dissent in the name of creating stability for the Games and

⁴² 'Addicted to Freedom', Green Party,

http://www.gruene-bundestag.de/cms/english/dok/306/306475.addicted_to_freedom.html (accessed 1 September 2010).

⁴³ Wasserman and Faust, *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications*; Hanneman and Riddle, *Introduction to Social Network Methods*.

called for an improvement of human rights practices before the Games. Similarly, certain environmental NGOs, such as Greenpeace, raised concerns over the pollution that would be generated by the Games and called for preventative measures, but did not oppose the Games itself.⁴⁴

Uyghur activists also seized the opportunity to express and vocalise their views. In August 2008, the WUC initiated a number of protests around the world, which were attended by some human rights NGOs. In Germany, a public discussion was organised by the Green Party at the Bavarian State Parliament on 29 April 2008 to discuss why China did not deserve to host the Olympics. The event saw many attendees, including Rebiya Kadeer, Barbara Lochbihler (general secretary of AI in Germany) and Margarete Bause (parliamentarian of the Green Party).⁴⁵ Similarly, a joint demonstration organised in front of the PRC embassy in Washington, DC, saw Rebiya Kadeer, Elisa Bermudez (of Reporters without Borders), Doma Norbu (of the Tibetan movement) and others contribute public speeches amid protests on 7 August 2008.⁴⁶

Interlinkages also exist between news organisations (yellow nodes), and are most obvious among those situated in the same country. A quintessential example is that observed in the upper right quadrant of Figure 2, where the German press and media are seen reporting Uyghur-related news. For instance, many German journalists seized the opportunity to interview Rebiya Kadeer during her visit to Germany between 19–21 May 2007, when she was interviewed by *Deutsche Welle*, RBB Cultural Radio, *Die Welt*, and *Focus Journal* among others.⁴⁷

When compared with those between NGOs (red nodes) and news organisations (yellow nodes), links between government or government-sponsored institutions (blue nodes) are rare, the reason being that each governmental institution is usually lobbied separately by Uyghur activists in its own country. As each 'host country' will have its own domestic structure(s), policies and attitudes toward its Uyghur inhabitants, Uyghurs living in different host countries use different ways to influence policy makers in these countries. The likelihood of exchanges between governments on how to tackle the country's Uyghur demands is therefore relatively low.

In summary, the SNA of offline Uyghur actors empirically proves the main role of NGOs in sounding the Uyghurs' voice. It also confirms the widely perceived notion that the WUC and Rebiya Kadeer play pivotal roles in mobilising Uyghur communities around the world. While national self-determination, as a cause, is usually not encouraged by governmental actors or IGOs due to an innate respect for sovereignty, such aloofness often stirs

⁴⁴ See the website of Human Rights in China, <http://www.hrchina.org> (accessed 20 December 2010); Greenpeace, 'Coca Cola and Greenpeace – Cooling the Beijing Olympics', <http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/news/coca-cola-and-greenpeace-coo> (accessed 20 December 2010).

⁴⁵ The author interviewed Margarete Bause, the Green Party's Parliamentarian, in Bayern on 9 March 2010. Margarete Bause is the parliamentarian most active in advocating the Uyghur cause in Germany.

⁴⁶ *World Uyghur Congress: Activity Report, October 2006–March 2009*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

backlashes from non-state actors, who either sympathise with the cause or at least believe in the human rights angle behind such quests. This is empirically confirmed by the present network typology.

Comparison of Offline and Online Networks

To determine any discrepancy between offline and online Uyghur networks, URLs that posted Uyghur-relevant information were examined via a hyperlink analysis as part of the general SNA. A data set of online networks, created in a previous publication, was used to generate an SNA map for comparison with the offline networks.⁴⁸ The data set used for online networks is introduced below.

Methods and Data Sets

The online actors were not sampled independently in this study, as in many other studies, as the main area of focus was the relationship between various actors. Instead, the *full network method* was used by taking a census of the connections in a population of actors. The WUC data was compiled initially, as the WUC has listed organisations that have supported the Uyghur cause. While many of these organisations have their own websites, some sites are non-functional and only 15 organisations with working websites could be short-listed. This list helps to identify organisations that are known, *a priori*, to be part of the online Uyghur network.

The URLs of these organisations were the starting points for the analysis, and were pasted into IssueCrawler, which is a hyperlink analysis software available online. IssueCrawler harvests URLs, capturing the outlinks from the starting points and returning co-linked sites.⁴⁹ The result was a binary matrix of the relationships between the sites. 82 nodes were retrieved with 323 linkages in the network, and this information was then processed into a graphic visualisation of the Uyghur online networks, as seen in Figure 5.⁵⁰

Macro Differences and Similarities

As in the present study, the different types of actors were demarcated using colour in the earlier study of online networks as well. The categorisation of colours and types of actors were comparable between the two studies. The focus of this study is, however, detailed

⁴⁸ Chen, 'Who Made Uyghurs Visible in the International Arena?'

⁴⁹ These URLs were (1) www.uyghurcongress.org, (2) www.uyghurcongress.org/en/?p=425, (3) www.uygur.org, (4) www.uyghuramerican.org, (5) www.uyghuramerican.org/pages/Quick-Links, (6) www.uhrp.org, (7) www.uyghurcanadian.org, (8) www.uygurie.com, (9) www.uighur.org.uk/, (10) www.oost-turkestan.nl, (11) www.gokbayrak.com, (12) www.rfa.org/uyghur, (13) www.unpo.org, (14) www.hrwf.net, (15) www.amnesty.org, (16) www.ned.org and (17) www.gfbv.de/. Note that these links might have been changed or removed by their webmasters following the paper's publication.

⁵⁰ As with the offline network data sets, the Netdraw package on UCINET was used to visualise the online networks. The data matrix was stored in a format that was analysable by UCINET. Readers can download this data at http://www.yuwenjuliechen.com/research/uyghur_networks

analyses of the offline Uyghur networks. It should be noted that some actors have been marked in grey in the figures, not because they are unimportant but because a discussion of these actors is beyond the scope of this paper.

A number of 'macro' differences are noticeable between the online and offline Uyghur networks. To begin with, actors in the offline sphere are more numerous than those in the online realm, and they are more widely spread geographically as well. For example, offline actors from Turkey, such as the Ankara representative of East Turkestan Culture and Solidarity Association, and Central Asia, such as Kyrgyzstan Uyghur Association, confirm qualitative studies of the existence of Uyghur diaspora communities in these regions.⁵¹ However, corresponding actors from Turkey and Central Asia are not reflected in the online networks. This observation points not to a defect in the methodology employed or data set collected, but to the fact that many offline actors either do not have a virtual presence or have websites that were non-functional at the time of study. Any of the latter possibilities would result in the IssueCrawler software not detecting an online presence even if the organisations are active in the field.⁵²

The absence of Uyghur websites in certain Central Asian countries provides empirical proof of the hypothetical nexus between ethnic mobilisation and modernisation, as discussed in the current literature.⁵³ Modernisation, such as the development of the telephone and the Internet, has to a certain extent stimulated cross-border exchanges although it has an unequal impact in different countries. Organisations from more affluent and advanced countries, such as the US, appear to be more active online because their countries are more integrated into the global economic and political system. Benefiting from such benign conditions, these organisations therefore have easier and better access to the world and can use modern technologies to advance their causes more effectively. Conversely, the less developed political and social conditions, such as limited nationwide Internet infrastructures, in Central Asian states may have restricted the use of online tools by Uyghur organisations in these countries for the purposes of fostering the Uyghur cause.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Rustam Mukhamedov, 'The Uyghur Minority in Kyrgyzstan', *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, 9 November 2002, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/387/print> (accessed 1 September 2010).

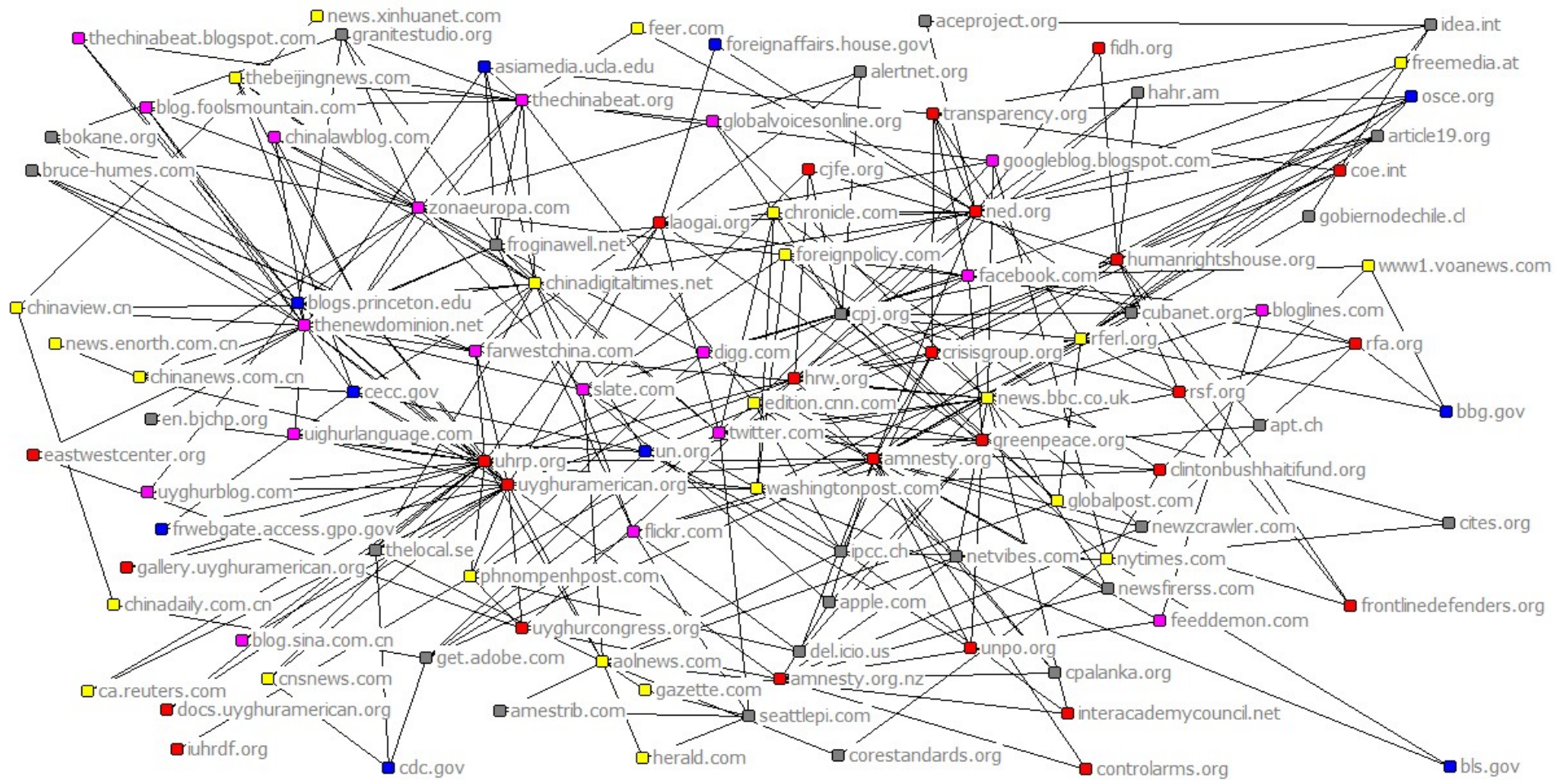
⁵² Petersen, 'Usurping the Nation', pp. 65–6.

⁵³ Chen, *Transnational Cooperation of Ethnopolitical Mobilization*; Susan Olzak and Kiyoteru Tsutsui, 'Status in the World System and Ethnic Mobilization', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 42, No. 6 (1998), pp. 691–720; J. P.

Linstroth, 'The Basque Conflict Globally Speaking: Material Culture, Media and Basque Identity in the Wider World', *Oxford Development Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2002), pp. 205–22.

⁵⁴ Petersen, 'Usurping the Nation', p. 66.

Figure 5: Online Uyghur networks (12 March 2010).



Note: Red = Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs); blue = governments, parliaments, International Governmental Organisations (IGOs) and universities; yellow = news organisations; pink = newly developed online platforms; grey = others.

Another stark difference between the two network types is that almost no actors directly engaged in the offline Uyghur networks originate from China. Government officials in the PRC would understandably not want to further the Uyghur cause, offline or otherwise, although it is possible that Chinese representatives attending international conferences occasionally meet Uyghur sympathisers by chance. Even so, it is not natural for the two sides to talk or exchange views, even in foreign lands.

In the case of online Uyghur networks, on the other hand, some (albeit few) URLs are indeed based in China. These are usually on the sidelines and are mostly hosted by Chinese state-owned news agencies (e.g., news.xinhuanet.com). Their isolation and marginal location point to the fact that these sites are not really contributing to the dissemination of the Uyghur issue, at least not consciously or actively. It is also likely that the propaganda being spread by such agencies is of a different kind.

Thirdly, where the offline networks are concerned (as opposed to the online networks), there is evidence of cooperation or meetings between the Uyghurs and the Tibetan and Taiwanese independence movements as well as overseas Chinese dissident networks, although each of these movements has a different historical connection with China and they work toward different political objectives. For instance, the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) is seen in the middle right edge of Figure 1 though the organisation's URL is not seen in Figure 5. Similarly, in Figure 6, which depicts a more recent map of the online Uyghur networks, a Tibetan website, Save Tibet (savetibet.org), is seen.

Interestingly, a pervasive presence of other potentially anti-China movements is absent from the networks overall, probably for the reason that cooperation in the online arena among activists from such diverse movements is limited regardless of their exchanging views and information in the offline settings. It is possible that many of these actors exchange views in the offline environment due to the anti-China stances they share, but do not cooperate on a deeper level as each movement has disparate ultimate aims concerning their relationship with China. For example, activists promoting Uyghur self-determination doubt the Taiwanese self-determination movement because they believe the Chinese and the Taiwanese 'would ultimately share a common cultural heritage'.⁵⁵ Also, Uyghur activists cannot overlook their past experience of dealing with the 'autocracies of the Guomindang party' in Xinjiang.⁵⁶ Where the Tibetans are concerned, the 'Uyghurs feel themselves closer to Tibetans than Taiwanese', but activists from these two movements still retain 'deep discomfort with each other's political aim'.⁵⁷ As was aptly pointed out by the anonymous interviewee, 'for Uyghurs, to claim for greater autonomy on Tibetans' part may seem to be unrealistic for the ultimate solution for the *Minzu* (ethnic) issue in China; for Tibetans, to claim for the independence or outright self-determination on Uyghur's part may be detrimental to their own case, given that it would render China more

⁵⁵ Interview of an anonymous representative of Uyghur Australian Association on 5 November 2010.

⁵⁶ Ibid. For information of the Guomindang's rule in Xinjiang, see Mackerras, 'Xinjiang at the Turn of the Century', pp. 289–303; Clarke, 'The Problematic Progress of "Integration"', pp. 269–78.

⁵⁷ Interview of an anonymous representative of Uyghur Australian Association on 5 November 2010.

hardened to resolve the *Minzu* issue once and for all'.⁵⁸ In summary, even though the activists from these diverse movements are not averse to cooperating in the offline environment, in actual fact, deeply held reservations have prevented them from establishing consistent shared discourses online.

Lastly, it is important to appreciate that the story of the Uyghurs' international presence is not just about an allegedly oppressed minority's struggle for living space. The majority of Uyghurs today perceive themselves as Sunni Muslims. The Uyghurs have attempted to attend some (albeit not many) Islamic meetings. For instance, the WUC sent a delegation to attend the Seventeenth International Muslim Nations Congress in Turkey in May 2008, which is reflected in the center left of Figure 3.⁵⁹ Similar Islamic associations are not seen in the online Uyghur networks (Figure 5), indicating a gap between the two network types.

It is likely that the Uyghurs will become a part of another (broader) online network that focuses on the Islamic cause, but this will have to be further investigated by future research. As far as 'making the Uyghurs a distinct issue of debate online' is concerned, the existing Muslim links of the Uyghurs do not contribute to this end. As Kanat Kilic, a researcher who has studied the Uyghur virtual presence, points out, this may be because the 'virtual Uyghur identity is a secular, nationalist and western-oriented' one.⁶⁰ This has been intentionally cultivated to differentiate themselves from other radical Muslim groups around the world.

The study of the macro differences and similarities between online and offline Uyghur networks revealed at least one interesting commonality between the two – no evidence of the existence of any terrorist elements or organisations was evident in either. Although some human rights organisations have attempted to delink the Uyghurs' Muslim connections from the rubric of Islamic terrorism, the American and Chinese governments have identified some terrorist elements, such as Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), in Uyghur communities.⁶¹ This adds further dynamics to the international networks of the Uyghurs and complicates China's reactions to the Uyghur separatist movement. While such potential links to terrorist groups is not evident from either network, this exclusion, if indeed it is one, is hardly surprising, as the WUC's Uyghur activity report is unlikely to reveal any such links (if they do exist) in the offline environment. The reason behind the absence of terrorist links in the online networks as well is unclear and needs to be investigated in the future.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ *World Uyghur Congress: Activity Report, October 2006–March 2009*.

⁶⁰ Kilic, 'Ethnic Media and Politics: The Case of the Use of the Internet by Uyghur Diaspora'.

⁶¹ Kevin Sheives, 'China Turns West: Beijing's Contemporary Strategy towards Central Asia', *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 2 (2006), pp. 205–24; Chen, 'Who Made Uyghurs Visible in the International Arena?'; Ministry of Public Security of People's Republic of China, *List of the First Batch of Identified 'Eastern Turkistan' Terrorist Organizations and Terrorists*.

Micro Differences and Similarities

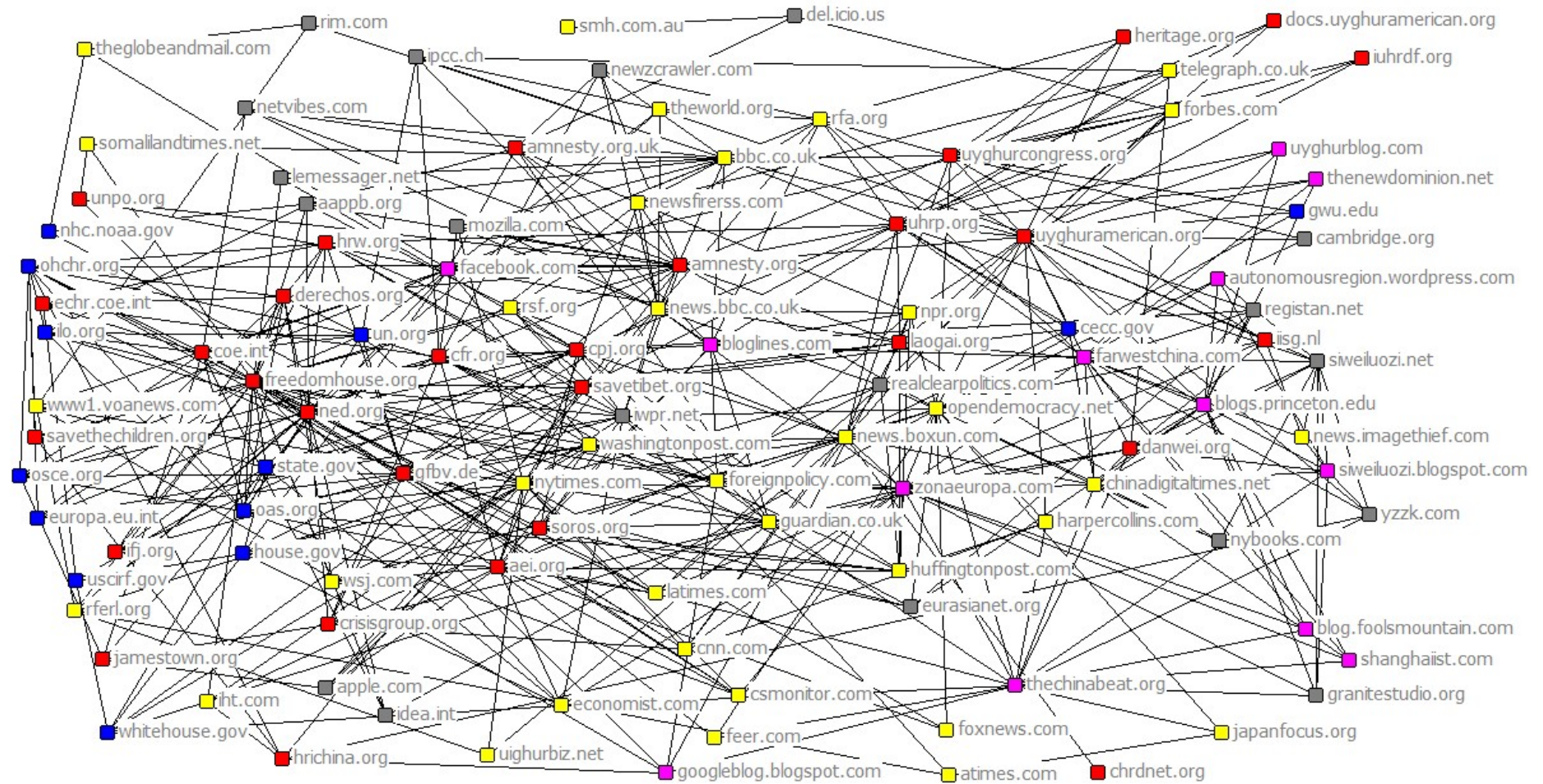
After the macro picture, the actors (i.e., nodes) in both 'realities' are now looked at in detail. NGOs (red nodes) are again the centre of attention in the online networks. AI and the NED are both present in the online and offline networks. The UAA (uyghuramerican.org), which is active offline, appears to be the main Uyghur information provider in the online reality, while the WUC (uyghurcongress.org), which is active in the offline reality, seems to be less so in cyberspace. Correspondingly, the WUC has fewer linkages than the UAA in Figure 5.

The paucity in the WUC's linkages in Figure 5 may have been due to its website not functioning properly during the period of study (December 2009–March 2010). The secretary general of the WUC, Dolkun Isa, confirmed this in an interview by stating that the organisation's URL was hacked at the time (possibly by hackers from the PRC). The WUC's web domain, which was originally located in Canada, was relocated to Germany following this episode. It is likely that IssueCrawler was unable to consistently identify the WUC's online presence and links due to the above change and the URL's unstable web presence.⁶²

The absence of the WUC's URL in Figure 5 was verified by a second round of data collection using IssueCrawler between August–September 2010 to overrule the odds of the website having malfunctioned in the earlier study. The methods employed were identical to the first study. Figure 6 shows the online Uyghur networks created from the data set generated on 31 August 2010. Although Figures 5 and 6 look dissimilar at a glance, due to the various websites being linked differently during the two time periods studied, the general patterns depicted in both figures are similar.

⁶² Interview of Dolkun Isa, the secretary general of World Uyghur Congress, by the author and research assistant, Delia A. Pop, on 9 March 2010 in Munich, Germany.

Figure 6: Online Uyghur networks (31 August 2010).



Note: Red = Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs); blue = governments, parliaments, International Governmental Organisations (IGOs) and universities; yellow = news organisations; pink = newly developed online platforms; grey = others.

The UAA emerges as a larger information provider than the WUC. Figures 5 and 6 also show other websites, such as Save Tibet and the *New York Times* (nytimes.com), as sizable information providers. These sites appear in the online maps because they are either linked or have tried to link up with other Uyghur-relevant websites during the period of study, and hence are part of the overall network, which treats the Uyghurs as an issue in cyberspace.

The reasons behind the actors' links to Uyghur-relevant websites may be diverse. While hyperlink analyses do not reveal the reasons behind such link ups, it is possible to infer possible explanations. For instance, Save Tibet has a link up to the US-based Uyghur Human Rights Project (www.uhrp.org) on its website, as the two organisations are supportive of each other's human rights agenda.⁶³ In the same manner, news agencies (yellow nodes) are common actors in the online and offline Uyghur networks. These are mostly based in North America and Western Europe, such as the *Washington Post* and the BBC, and principally use NGOs (red nodes) as their information sources to further the dissemination of Uyghur issues to the public.⁶⁴

As in the case of offline networks, government websites (blue nodes) are rare in the online environment as well, or even more so than in the offline reality. Pink nodes, which represent newly developed social networking websites (e.g., Facebook), information-sharing websites (e.g., Flickr) and various forms of blogs, are not seen in Figures 1 to 4, but are present in Figure 5. Although such online channels are not formal institutions that scholars of conventional social movements usually analyse, the informality and accessibility of these venues have attracted many to use them.

In summary, a look at the micro differences and similarities between online and offline Uyghur networks revealed that the UAA, which is active offline, is a key information provider of Uyghur issues online as well. On the other hand, the WUC is very active offline, but is less so in the online environment. NGOs and news agencies are other key players in the online networks.

To make the abstract discussion of Uyghur networks more concrete, the SNA of offline and online networks was followed up with an exploration of the Uyghur linkages in Australia. This is presented in the next section.

⁶³ See the website of Save Tibet, <http://savetibet.org/resource-center/tibet-links> (accessed 20 December 2010).

⁶⁴ Axel Bruns, 'Methodologies for Mapping the Political Blogosphere: An Exploration Using the IssueCrawler Research Tool', *First Monday*, Vol. 12, Nos. 5-7 (2007), <http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1834/1718> (accessed 30 September 2010).

Uyghur Linkages in Australia

A case study of the Uyghur linkages in Australia was performed to specifically examine the 'ego networks' at play in the country.⁶⁵ The method used was largely SNA, but with a focus on the links between Uyghur organisations based in Australia. Ego-centred networks reveal patterns in the local (Australian) structures and tell us how embedded these are in the global Uyghur networks.

The focal egos of this study were Australia-based Uyghur organisations, such as Uyghur Australian Association and East Turkestan Australian Association,⁶⁶ which were examined to reveal associations with other actors. This section, however, only presents the results of analysis for the years 2007 and 2008 (Figures 7 and 8). The data sets for these years were used, as they were larger and contained more 'stories' and patterns for discussion.

It is obvious that Uyghur activities in Australia are embedded in the global Uyghur network. For one, many are linked to the WUC, indicating that most activities in Australia are seeds of the WUC. It is possible that the WUC either coordinated these events or had representatives who joined Uyghur-relevant events in Australia. For this reason, a qualitative review of the WUC activity report, a semi-structured interview with an anonymous Uyghur representative and available news materials were used to gather additional in-depth information.⁶⁷

Figure 7, which maps out the ego networks of Australia-based Uyghur organisations in 2007, provides a particularly good example of how Uyghur communities in Australia are coordinating with the WUC and other Uyghur communities around the world to advance their cause. 5 February marks the anniversary of the 1997 Ghulja massacre for the Uyghur diaspora, when a march by the Uyghurs in the Ghulja city of Xinjiang to demand for human rights and equality was suppressed by the Chinese regime.⁶⁸ The WUC took the lead to urge Uyghur communities in different parts of the world to commemorate this event. Marches and ceremonies were organised in Germany, Turkey, France, Belgium, Norway, the US, Canada, the Netherlands, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.⁶⁹ In Kyrgyzstan, for instance, a public feast (*Nazir*) for 'the souls of the perished' was organised by Kyrgyzstan

⁶⁵ The Uyghurs started to immigrate to Australia around 1917, and through family reunions and marriages, their population grew. After the aforementioned Ghulja incident in China in 1997, some Uyghurs obtained refugee status to settle in Australia. For a historical background of the Uyghurs in Australia, see the website of the East Turkestan Australian Association, <http://etaa.org.au/HTML%20Files/About%20ETAA.html> (accessed 7 October 2010).

⁶⁶ Uyghur Australian Association, <http://www.uyghuraustralia.org> (accessed 3 September 2010); East Turkestan Australian Association, <http://www.eastturkistan.org.au> (accessed 3 September 2010).

⁶⁷ Interview of an anonymous representative of Uyghur Australian Association on 5 November 2010.

⁶⁸ *World Uyghur Congress: Activity Report, October 2006–March 2009*; Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), 'East Turkestan: Massacre Remembered', 12 January 2007, <http://www.unpo.org/article/6144> (accessed 3 September 2010).

⁶⁹ Anna Skibinsky, 'East Turkestan: Massacre Remembered', *Epoch Times*, 12 February 2007, <http://en.epochtimes.com/news/7-2-12/51605.html> (accessed 20 December 2010); Al Jazeera, 'Protest Marks Xinjiang "Massacre"', 6 February 2007, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia-pacific/2007/02/20085251383512763.html> (accessed 19 December 2010); Amnesty International, *People's Republic of China: Rebiya Kadeer's Personal Account of Gulja after the Massacre on 5 February 1997* (London: Amnesty International, 2007).

Uyghur Association.⁷⁰ At the same time, Hussein Hessen, chairman of Uyghur Australian Association and the WUC representative in Australia, organised a march in Sydney, which was supported by not only the Uyghurs but also some local sympathisers and pro-democracy Chinese dissident groups. Over 150 people were reportedly present at the event.⁷¹

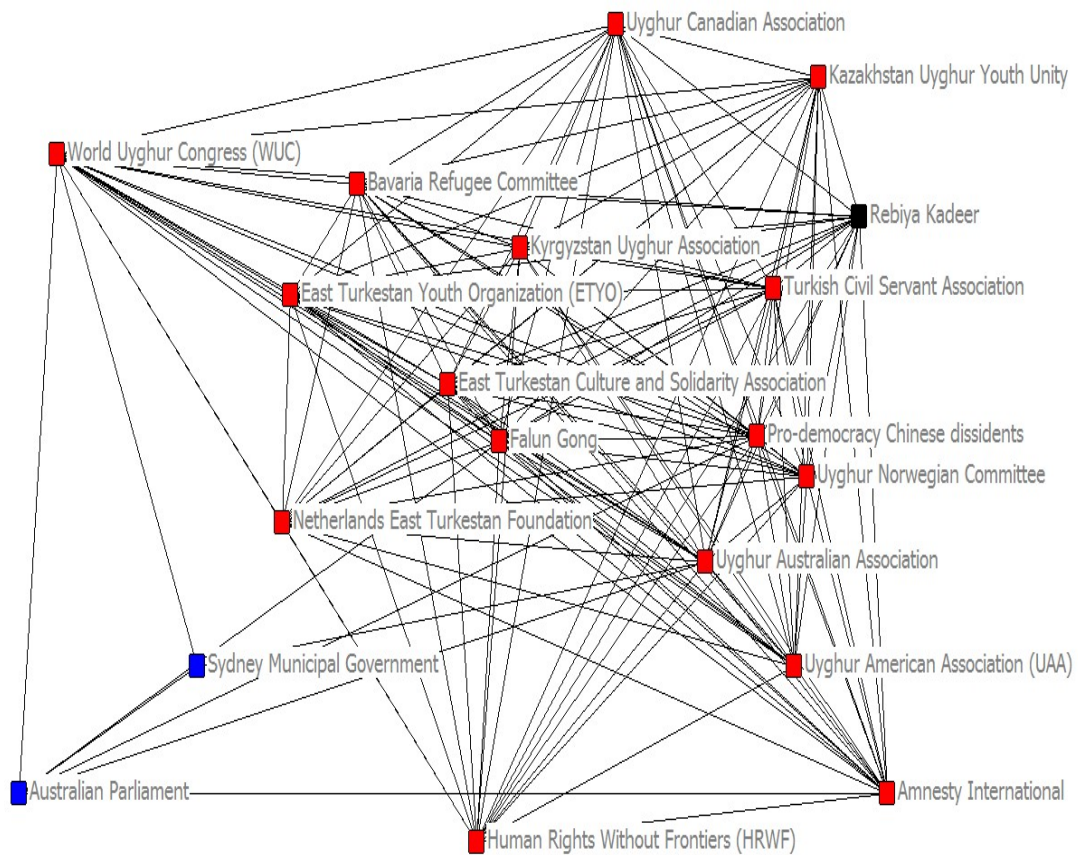
Besides mobilising Uyghur sympathisers, human rights NGOs and other pro-Chinese democracy NGOs, the Uyghurs in Australia have also reached out to policy makers. In Figure 7, ties are seen between the WUC, Uyghur Australian Association, the Australian Parliament and the Sydney municipal government. For instance, an Uyghur Soccer Competition and Uyghur Cultural Night was organised in Sydney on 8 April 2007 that saw several participants, including Uyghur soccer teams and fans from around Australia, and some Australian members of parliament and Sydney municipal government representatives.⁷² The government representatives were not just passive attendees at the event, but made speeches on current Uyghur issues. Uyghur cuisine and traditional Uyghur dances and music, organised by the Uyghur communities to chiefly entertain the guests, were also aimed at raising awareness of the Uyghurs' cultural identity as well as addressing their political needs.

⁷⁰ *World Uyghur Congress: Activity Report, October 2006–March 2009.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

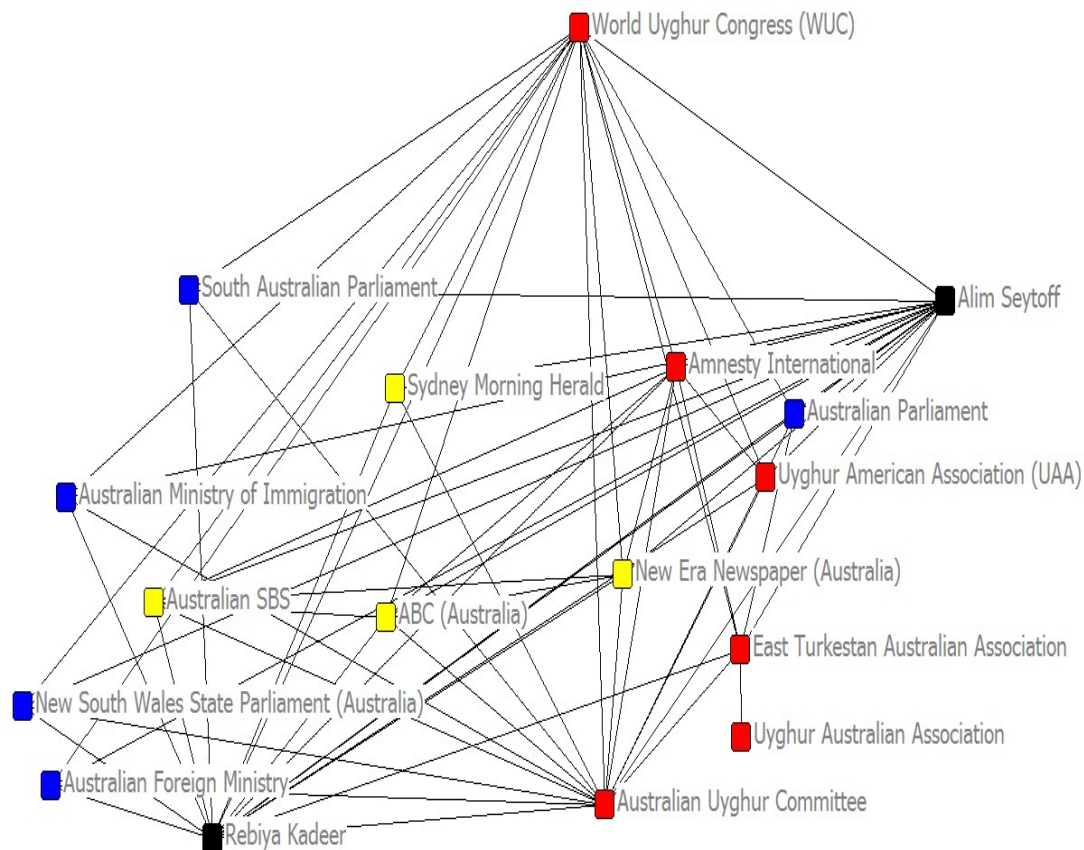
⁷² *Ibid.*

Figure 7: Ego Networks of Australian Uyghur Organisations (2007).



Note: Red = Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs); blue = governments or parliaments; black = individuals.

Figure 8: Ego Networks of Australian Uyghur Organisations (2008).



Note: Red = Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs); blue = governments or parliaments; yellow = news organisations; black = individuals.

Similar patterns are observable in the ego networks of 2008 (Figure 8). Figure 8 depicts again the WUC's role as the leading organisation facilitating Uyghur activism in Australia, as most nodes have ties to the WUC. In comparison with Figure 7, the network in Figure 8 has more actors from the press and media.

A quintessential example would be Rebiya Kadeer's visit to Australia in February 2008, where core leaders of the WUC, such as the US-based Alim Seytoff and the Germany-based Dolkun Isa, accompanied Kadeer. Events at the local level were coordinated by Hussein Hessen.⁷³ Kadeer's delegation met with Australian members of parliament, government officials, representatives of international organisations, foreign diplomats in Australia, journalists and the local Uyghur diaspora. For example, on this visit, the delegation visited the South Australian Parliament on 26 February 2008, where Kadeer made a report on the Uyghur situation. Over 300 Uyghur demonstrators, wearing traditional Uyghur clothes, staged a demonstration against the PRC government in front of the parliament building.⁷⁴ Likewise, on 28 February 2008, Kadeer made a presentation at

⁷³ Interview of an anonymous representative of Uyghur Australian Association on 5 November 2010.

⁷⁴ Ibid.; East Turkestan Australian Association, 'Ms Rebiya Kadeer and Delegates of World Uyghur Congress Arrived to Australia', 19 February 2008, <http://www.eastturkistan.org.au/en/news/20080219001.htm> (accessed 2 September 2010).

a press conference hosted by AI in Australia, which was attended by over 100 people. She was later interviewed by a number of Australian journalists from ABC News, the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), *New Era* newspaper and others.⁷⁵ Figure 8 reflects the event and depicts these actors as part of the Uyghur network in 2008.

As mentioned earlier, this paper does not tackle the issue of Uyghur counter-mobilisation, as the topic is beyond its scope and needs to be addressed in detail in future studies. However, a brief case is mentioned here at the end of this section in order to enrich our understanding of Uyghur activism and the PRC's counter-mobilisation in Australia.

The case occurred in 2009, when an international film festival was scheduled to take place in Melbourne.⁷⁶ The organiser's decision to show *The 10 Conditions of Love*, a documentary of the exiled Uyghur leader, Rebiya Kadeer, was met with severe opposition from the Chinese representation and supporters of China in Australia. The festival's website was hacked and sabotaged by Chinese supporters, leading to an investigation of the case by the Australian police. Various Australian news agencies covered the incident, drawing a strong public backlash in Australia.⁷⁷ While most of the general public in Australia was displeased with Chinese intervention in an Australian festival, some pro-China individuals continued to side with the PRC government, accusing the festival of inviting a 'terrorist' to the event.⁷⁸ The Uyghur diaspora in Australia, not surprisingly, reacted to defend their interests.⁷⁹ For instance, staff of the Uyghur Australian Association, who would have been Kadeer's host, pressed for a meeting with Foreign Minister Stephen Smith to discuss Kadeer's upcoming visit to Australia to attend the festival and other events.⁸⁰ At the international level, reports of the incident by major news agencies, such as the *Los Angeles Times* and the BBC, further helped sway international public opinion against the Chinese government's intervention.⁸¹

Finally, the documentary was screened at the Melbourne Town Hall, a much larger and more significant location than initially planned, in front of a larger audience comprising of a sympathetic public and Australian supporters of the Uyghur cause. Although originally meant to be just a cultural event initiated by the Australian film festival, the ramifications of

⁷⁵ Amnesty International, 'Fighting for Her Peoples' Rights: Rebiya Kadeer Visits Australia', 20 February 2008, <http://www.amnesty.org.au/china/comments/9233> (accessed 2 September 2010); SBS, 'Interview with Rebiya Kadeer', 5 March 2008, <http://www.uyghur1.com/interview-with-rebiya-kadeer-20080305/> (accessed 2 September 2010).

⁷⁶ I wish to thank Dr. James Leibold for bringing this case to my attention.

⁷⁷ *The Guardian*, 'Rebiya Kadeer Row Engulfs Melbourne Film Festival', 15 July 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/jul/15/rebiya-kadeer-melbourne-film-festival/print> (accessed 3 September 2010).

⁷⁸ *The Australian*, 'Uighur Rebiya Kadeer Gets Visa Despite China Protest', 30 July 2009, <http://www.uyghurnews.com/american/Read.asp?UighurNews=uighur-rebiya-kadeer-gets-visa-despite-china-protest&ItemID=YU-8120099954102838543855> (accessed 3 September 2010).

⁷⁹ Interview of an anonymous representative of Uyghur Australian Association on 5 November 2010.

⁸⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'Kadeer Film Hailed as a Win for Freedom', 8 August 2009, <http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-national/kadeer-film-hailed-as-a-win-for-freedom-20090808-ed79.html> (accessed 3 September 2010); *Brisbane Times*, 'Chinese Hack into Film Festival Site', 26 July 2009, <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/chinese-hack-into-film-festival-site-20090726-dx2b.html> (accessed 3 September 2010).

⁸¹ *Los Angeles Times*, 'Uyghur Tensions Show up at Australian Film Festival', 25 July 2009, <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jul/25/world/fg-china-uyghur-film25> (accessed 8 December 2010); BBC, 'Chinese Hack Film Festival Site', 26 July 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8169123.stm> (accessed 8 December 2010).

events associated with it called upon Uyghur supporters, opponents and bystanders to defend their individual positions. Both mobilisation and counter-mobilisation were witnessed, thus making the issue of China-born Uyghurs more widely known in Australia.⁸²

While this paper does not focus on the question of Uyghur impacts, the Melbourne incident proves that in spite of the Uyghurs not being greatly influential in their activities,⁸³ they have learnt to capitalise on symbolic events or crises. The incident presented Uyghur diasporic organisations with an opportunity to use symbolic politics,⁸⁴ and served as a catalyst for persuasion through which they could create awareness and expand their networks.

Conclusion

The Uyghur networks that many political observers, practitioners and scholars believe to exist are visualised in this paper. International networks are actively involved in both the offline and online spheres in making the Uyghurs an important issue beyond China. Some actors are initiators or sympathisers, who have more active roles in debating the Uyghur issues and participating in organised events, such as the NGOs. There are also other actors who are relatively neutral, such as the news agencies, who only seek to report the Uyghur issues. Despite being more passive, their presence at Uyghur events makes them part of the Uyghur networks. Overall, the current networks appear fragmented and not very centralised as they involve several kinds of actors. Close and continued observation will be needed to ascertain whether these networks see a transformation toward a more polarised or more fragmented future, or proceed in both these directions.

Despite the fairly fragmented nature of these networks, the central roles being played by the WUC, the UAA and Rebiya Kadeer are undeniable in the present setting. This study empirically confirms the widely held perception that these actors are key players in mobilising Uyghur communities around the world. The UAA is active in both the online and offline networks, while the WUC's online role is less prominent than its offline one. The WUC, however, wields considerable influence over Uyghur activism in various corners of the globe, and this is further supported by the case study of Uyghur linkages in Australia.

Research is not always about discovering new material, but also includes efforts to verify current paradigms or already held beliefs using various scientific methods. Although some findings of this study are not entirely new to Uyghur observers, they do empirically confirm and consolidate the shared perceptions of observers and activists of these Uyghur networks.⁸⁵ While political observers may have doubted the WUC's role in the past and questioned its status as an

⁸² I wish to thank Dr. James Leibold for strengthening my argument here.

⁸³ I wish to thank Prof. Marika Vicziany for strengthening my argument here.

⁸⁴ Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, pp. 16–23.

⁸⁵ For instance, Shichor, 'Changing the Guard at the World Uyghur Congress', pp. 12–4; Clarke, 'China, Xinjiang and the Internationalization of the Uyghur Issue', p. 214.

umbrella organisation of the Uyghurs, the results of this SNA corroborate the WUC's position. The SNA data sets created for the present study are a valuable resource for future Uyghur studies. These can be accessed on the author's website and can be replicated for various other SNA analyses aimed at further empirical validation of the Uyghur networks.

This paper paves the way for further research on the growing networks of the Uyghurs.⁸⁶ There are several topics that are relevant to this discussion but have not been addressed due to the paper's limited scope. There is, therefore, a need for future research efforts that explore these areas. Some of these are mentioned in brief below.

Firstly, the impact of Uyghur diasporic activities needs to be explored to determine the extent of their success. The Uyghur diaspora, particularly those with strong political intentions, are successful in the sense that the diaspora has its own circle of friends and supporters who provide opportunities for it to speak out at venues, such as the UN, the European Parliament (EP) and in other international settings. What the Uyghur organisations are engaged in now is the spreading of their cause and their agenda, thus making themselves more visible to policy makers and individual sympathisers in liberal democracies. This means that present transnational activities that are aimed at achieving the Uyghurs' self-determination remain at an 'expressive' level and are at the information dissemination stage. They are not very successful in terms of actually persuading governments to enact binding legislation or policies that would openly support their causes. They are certainly not successful in forcing the Chinese government to concede, either. Quite the contrary, their activism only incites Chinese counter-mobilisation. Yet, this is the normal path of diasporic lobbying. Given time, and tactful use of symbolic events, it is not impossible that the Uyghurs will eventually enjoy the leverage to enforce more binding statements and legislation in the favour of their interests in liberal democracies. This is an area that needs sustained monitoring.

It is essential that observers not disregard the impact of Uyghur transnational activism simply because they lack tangible influence on government decisions yet. The play of 'expressive politics' is crucial in ethnic conflicts.⁸⁷ Even though participation in organised interests does not guarantee that their interests will be equally or effectively represented in the policy bargaining process in China or elsewhere in the world, the Uyghurs continue to join collective actions. The reason for this is that the act of being involved in the process carries symbolic meaning for the Uyghurs, who then establish a relationship based on the end result of their group participation – one of positive attachment if the result matches their preferences and one of expressive detachment if it does not.⁸⁸ Or, to put it differently,

⁸⁶ In an interview, the WUC secretary general, Dolkun Isa, stated that the WUC has future plans to set up offices in New York, Brussels, Geneva and Berlin in order to represent the Uyghurs in these crucial locations. As this will lead to further escalation of Uyghur mobilisation, the subject merits continued observation (interview by the author and research assistant, Delia A. Pop, on 9 March 2010 in Munich, Germany).

⁸⁷ Murray Edelman, *The Politics of Symbolic Action* (New York: Academic Press, 1971); Alexander A. Schuessler, *A Logic of Express Choice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press); Alan Batt, *The Welsh Question: Nationalism in Welsh Politics 1945–1970* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975).

⁸⁸ Edelman, *The Politics of Symbolic Action*; Schuessler, *A Logic of Express Choice*.

there are 'tangible benefits' for winners in this political bargaining, and 'symbolic reassurance for the rest who participate in the process'.⁸⁹ The Uyghurs need symbolic reassurance even though tangible benefits appear far-fetched at the present. This psychological incentive implies that the Han-Uyghur conflict would probably only escalate, not subside in the near future.

Secondly, more exploratory analyses are needed to understand the potential factions and clusters within the Uyghur networks. It is not clear yet what kinds of factions exist in the networks. It is also important to clarify potential factors that might drive the formation of factions and clusters in their networks. For instance, what kinds of roles do national identity, religion, political ideology and political stance toward the Uyghurs' future play in the formulation of Uyghur networks and their factions?

In various studies of ethnic mobilisation, scholars have found that, in addition to ideological and political factors, practical matters such as financial capacity and resources can contribute to the formation of movement factions.⁹⁰ It is likely, although still hypothetical, that as the prominence of the Uyghur cause grows stronger and more visible, Uyghur individuals will increasingly be drawn to become more active. This may strengthen the force of Uyghur activism while at the same time create competition among ambitious Uyghur activists, as they in some cases compete for resources, reputation (e.g., 'I am the one representing the Uyghurs') and other such concerns. Competition could prompt individuals to contemplate creating their own niches and differentiate themselves from other Uyghur groups based on ideological differences, for instance. Factions could just be the result of power struggles and carving up turf among Uyghurs for their self-interests. These interesting questions and hypotheses are important for Uyghur analysts and their continuing efforts to unearth the dynamics at play in these networks. Sustained interest in the subject will further permit the accumulation of data sets that might eventually be useful for a longitudinal study, which is at this time deficient in current literature. Future studies will then help us gradually grasp the transformation of the Uyghur networks across a longer period of time.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Chen, *Transnational Cooperation of Ethnopolitical Mobilization*.