CHINA'S ATTEMPT TO BECOME THE REGIONAL HEGEMON IN CENTRAL ASIA: AN ALTERNATIVE NEO-GRAMSCIAN ANALYSIS TO THE NEW GREAT GAME

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submitted by **SAFIYE ERGUN** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Science in Eurasian Studies, the Graduate School of Social Sciences of Middle East Technical University** by,

Prof. Dr. Yaşar KONDAKÇI
Dean
Graduate School of Social Sciences _____

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Işık KUŞÇU BONNENFANT
Head of Department
Department of Eurasian Studies _____

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Şerif Onur BAHÇECİK
Supervisor
Department of International Relations _____

Examining Committee Members:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Işık KUŞÇU BONNENFANT (Head of the Examining Committee)
Middle East Technical University
Department of International Relations _____

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Şerif Onur BAHÇECİK (Supervisor)
Middle East Technical University
Department of International Relations _____

Assist. Prof. Dr. Aslı YİĞİT
Atılım University
Department of Political Science and Public Administration _____

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Name, SURNAME: Safiye ERGUN

Signature:

ABSTRACT

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ERGUN, Safiye

M.S., The Department of Eurasian Studies

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Şerif Onur BAHÇECİK

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This thesis seeks to examine China's attempt to become the new regional hegemon in Central Asia. It provides an up-to-date alternative analysis to the New Great Game literature by criticizing its academic inadequacy. Instead of an analysis taking the Great Powers and their interests in its focus, the thesis offers a neo-Gramscian theory to explain today's relations and concentrates on the mutual relations between the actors. This research deals with China's attempt to establish a regional hegemonic structure over Central Asia by discussing the consent of the elite and local people in the region, and evaluates the intergovernmental formations such as SCO, BRI and AIIB as potential mechanisms of China's potential hegemony. It contains three major sections: the literature review on the New Great Game in Central Asia, the theoretical framework of neo-Gramscian perspective, and an empirical implementation of the theory to the relations of China and Central Asia.

Keywords: New Great Game, regional hegemony, neo-Gramscian approach, China, Central Asia.

ÖZ

ÇİN'İN ORTA ASYA'DA BÖLGESEL HEGEMON OLMA GİRİŞİMİ: YENİ BÜYÜK OYUN İÇİN ALTERNATİF BİR NEO-GRAMŞİCİ ANALİZ

ERGUN, Safiye

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Tez Yöneticisi: Doç. Dr. Şerif Onur BAHÇECİK

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Bu tez, Çin'in Orta Asya'da yeni bölgesel hegemon olma yolundaki girişimini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Yeni Büyük Oyun literatürüne, onun akademik yetersizliğini eleştirerek güncel bir alternatif analiz sunar. Tez, büyük güçleri ve çıkarlarını odağına alan bir analiz yerine günümüz ilişkilerini açıklamak için neo-Gramşici bir kuram sunmakta ve aktörler arasındaki karşılıklı ilişkilere odaklanmaktadır. Bu araştırma, Çin'in Orta Asya üzerinde bölgesel bir hegemonik yapı kurma girişimini bölgedeki seçkinler ve yerel halkın rızasını tartışarak ele almakta ve Şangay İşbirliği Örgütü, Kuşak ve Yol Projesi ve Asya Altyapı Yatırım Bankası gibi hükümetler arası oluşumları Çin'in bölgesel hegemonyası için potansiyel mekanizmalar olarak değerlendirmektedir. Bu tez üç ana bölümden oluşmaktadır: Orta Asya'daki Yeni Büyük Oyun üzerine literatür taraması, neo-Gramscici perspektifin teorik çerçevesi ve teorinin Çin ve Orta Asya ilişkilerine ampirik uygulaması.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yeni Büyük Oyun, bölgesel hegemonya, neo-Gramşici yaklaşım, Çin ve Orta Asya.

To my family

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
BRI	Belt and Road Initiatives
BTI	Bertelsmann Transformation Index
CIs	Confucius Institutes
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
OEC	Observatory of Economic Complexity
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important developments of the current century is considered to be the rise of China. The active role of China at the global level also influenced regional studies. China's strengthening worldwide has led to a new tendency in contemporary Eurasian Studies. Mostly, post-Soviet countries are in the focus of study as it is known in Eurasian Studies, hence regional research naturally developed parallel with the framework of Russia-related subjects. However, a developing perspective in favor of China has emerged in the last decades. For example, it is now important to know the Chinese language as well as Russian for the Eurasian Studies by reminding that knowing the regional language is an asset in area studies. The Central Asian region, thus, has become the sub-region to cover this China-related perspective the most, due to its geographical proximity to China and is neighboring countries. The thesis aims to contribute to this newly developing perspective in Central Asian Studies by adding a new one to the existed analyzes. Considering increased attention of China to the region, this thesis explores whether there is an attempted regional hegemony in favor of China in Central Asia.

Within the scope of Central Asian Studies, the most popular topics in recent years have been shaped by energy and water politics, geopolitics, security studies, regional integration and great power politics. This thesis aims to present a new lens on the subject of world politics by approaching the region from a neo-Gramscian perspective. In particular, in the summer of 2021, with the US fully withdrawing its military presence in Afghanistan and the Taliban formed a new government, studies on security and great power politics gained momentum. Also, the uprisings that

happened in Kazakhstan in early 2022 have resulted in attention to the region. Thus, the role of the Central Asian region in world politics has increased and will increase more and more in the future global studies.

While studying the great power politics in Central Asia, one frequently encounters a phrase that authors like to use both in articles and analyzes: The New Great Game. This term is frequently used and loved by the scholars, researchers and experts probably because it sounds sensational. Since it is a catchy term, many articles have been written on it. For this reason or another, the New Great Game has somehow found its way into literature. Currently, it is possible to see many articles on the New Great Game in the literature of Political Sciences and International Relations (IR) both in English and Turkish, thus ultimately the New Great Game has become a research topic. Although the concept is often used, the questions about what exactly the New Great Game is, what it contains and does not contain, how academically satisfactory the term and how does examine the current Chinese factor in Central Asia is have not been fully answered. The thesis, thus, starts with posing these questions and then seeks up-to-date and more critical answers. Considering the recent increasing Chinese role in Central Asia, the research question was generated as: "Does China have an attempt to become the regional hegemon in Central Asia from a neo-Gramscian point of view?" The main argument of thesis is formed around this question and it is claimed that there is an attempt of China to create a hegemonic regional structure towards its Western neighbors. This claim substantiated with China's varied attempts under the Cox's categorization of three social forces and the responses from the regional states. The concept of "attempted hegemony" is inspired by one of the articles of Guy Ben-Porat, a political scientist (2016). He defines the concept that an "attempted hegemony [occurs] when a group aims to change the political agenda by combining coercion with persuasion" (Ben-Porat 2016, 329). This research takes China's willingness to construct a hegemonic regional structure in Central Asia as an example of attempted hegemony.

1.1. Outline and the Approach of the Thesis

This section will mention about the resource usage and then the thinking method of the thesis with a specific interest to the Coxian way of interpretation. The diversity of

sources in the literature review chapter was tried to be filtered by the basic texts on the subject and divided into perspectives. Although primary sources were mostly used in the theoretical chapter, sometimes secondary sources were also included for a clearer explanation. In the third empirical chapter, varied data are interpreted. The data used for different contexts and purposes were collected and reinterpreted under the scope of this study. While some data figurated from the prestigious articles, some were drawn from academic projects which are available online. Among these projects, the first one is the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), where I have accessed for data on imports and exports between China and each regional state. OEC was originally a master's thesis written by Alex Simoes in 2012. It now integrates and distributes data from various sources as an online data visualization and distribution platform focused on the geography and dynamics of economic activity. The other one is the Bertelsman Transformation Index (BTI), which I used the figure of Kazakhstan's political trends compared to China. BTI analyzes the trends of social change in developing countries towards democracy or authocracy and market economy based on a qualitative expert survey, in the light of a standardized codebook. In order to minimize subjectivity, quantitative data is also used as a guide and one local as well as one foreign expert are together involved in the evaluation process as a rule. Thus, it is possible to compare the social change trends in countries with each other without diverging from a scientific line.

After a brief explanation of the resources of this study, the thinking method of the research and also Cox's method is discussed. Neo-Gramscian theory is comprehensive and satisfactory in explaining the international system. However, how would it be possible to study the Central Asian region through this theory? This was a big challenge for the thesis. There were some studies that might be the sources of inspiration to increase the awareness that a system-level theory could also be studied at the regional level, but this was not a strong enough argument to encourage this research. When the further readings on Robert W. Cox are developed, it is possible to reach that he evaluated Gramsci's ideas on the European example in one of his articles (ch10 in Gill et al. 1993). Then, the main motivation to determine the method of the thesis has become that Cox had already done this himself. With a reference to him, this research attempts to make such an assessment on Central Asia

and the possible "change" that the region is witnessing recently. It is not common to study neo-Gramscian approaches on a regional level in the literature. There are studies that examine the concept of hegemony on regions regarding the dominant role of the actors (Khalilzad 1995; Lind 2018), but it is not common to examine hegemony through a "change" in a neo-Gramscian way in regional studies. Therefore, this idea is one of the most important approaches that distinguishes the thesis from other academic works and is the answer to why this thesis is important for literature.

In neo-Gramscian school of thought, pioneered by Robert W. Cox, the concepts of political theory such as the state, power and system etc. and their interrelationships are examined by their origins and "processes of change" from a "historical perspective", instead of interpreting them as given and fixed as in the traditional positivist approaches. Robert Cox's methodology has developed around two basic concepts: one is historicism (Leysens 2008, 41-45), and second is hegemony (Okur 2015), which will be elaborated in the separated section in Chapter 3. The theory, on the other hand, questions the contemporary world order, internationally accepted norms, the roles of institutions and their relationship ontologically and epistemologically. In parallel with this, the concept of the state, for example, is far from conceptualizing a distinct and independent formation in Cox's understanding; he perceives the state as a complex of all those economic, political and cultural relations. In Cox's epistemology, the analyses in political science are not the goals, but the beginnings on the way to the goal (Bieler and Morton 2003). For instance, he mentions the possibility that multilateralism might become a tool to achieve such goals, not the goal itself. He actually believes the knowledge that scholars reach via theories all have political aims. This is why Cox believed that the "theory is always for someone and for some purpose (Cox 1981, 128)." Leysens mentions in his book titled *The Critical Theory of Robert W. Cox: Fugitive or Guru?* (2008) that is why Coxian Critical Theory has an importance for the literature and what sets his theoretical framework. Normatively, it is valuable as it offers a non-mainstream alternative way of addressing issues such as social equality, means of production and diversity. Analytically, it offers a set of views to better understand how social and structural change occurs. "To account for change, therefore, requires a focus on

(contradictions) within states, and on the distribution of power between social forces. These dynamics will also have an effect on the nature of the international system (…) [and will lead] the reshaping of power relations over a prolonged period of time" (Leysens 2008, 23). On the other hand, Timothy Sinclair, a political scientist, discusses Cox's method of historical structures in one of his articles (Sinclair 2016). Explaining IR as complexes of the state and civil society, Cox proposes a historical materialist approach that focuses on the relations between structure and superstructure based on economic relations as a way to avoid the static and timelessness of neo-realism. In his article, Sinclair mentions two triangle of Cox's approach: one categorizes the forces (material capabilities, ideas, and institutions) and the other categorizes the spheres (forms of state, social forces, and world orders) (Sinclair 2016, 4-5). This thesis focused on the former triangle of social forces as an analytical tool.

Production occupies a very important place in Cox's conceptualization. In his understanding, there is not only a production related to capital, but also the production and reproduction of all social relations and knowledge and jurisdictions; he points out a complex hegemonic system. That is why he separates the concepts of international-economy and world-economy. "The international-economy model connects national economies by flows of goods, capital, and specie. Where the international-economy model focuses on exchange, the world-economy model focuses on production" (Cox 1987, 244). One of the most important roles in ensuring this production falls on institutions. The world-economy model "consists of transnational production organizations whose component elements are located in different territorial jurisdictions (Cox 1987, 244)." With such an organizational structure, there is the production and transnational transport of capital, and ideological and political models. The concept of transnationalization in Coxian way refers to the importance of organizations and intergovernmental institutions in establishing hegemony. Institutions are evaluated as the "mechanisms of hegemony" (Cox 1983, 172) to spread the whole of economic, social and political values from the center to the periphery. Considering the example of world hegemony, Cox evaluated the means of establishing pax-Americana as Bretton Woods's institutions. He takes the period after 1960 as "the postwar reconstruction phase passed into a

phase of world-economy expansion under the aegis of Bretton Woods" (Cox 1987, 256). Herein lays the answer to why regional formations are studied with a specific interest in this thesis: Intergovernmental initiatives are the key to the spread of hegemonic structure; there would be no hegemony without them.

To sum up, the thesis consists of three main parts. After a literature review on the New Great Game, various criticisms will be presented on this. Secondly, neo-Gramscian theory will be proposed as an alternative analysis instead, as it is more suitable for today's contemporary world. Then, the conceptualizations of Gramsci and neo-Gramscian theory will be detailed. Following the same theoretical section, the reflection of neo-Gramscian theory in regional studies will be mentioned. Lastly, the implementation of the neo-Gramscian approach to the example of China's active involvement in Central Asia will be made by the responses from the region and by the cases that cover the regional organizations to provide further evidence for the claims of the thesis.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE NEW GREAT GAME IN CENTRAL ASIA

The New Great Game is a discourse formed by the depiction of the power struggle over Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which was formerly called the Great Game. Central Asia has witnessed a power struggle of the Great Powers in every period of history. Exerting influence over Central Asia is mostly associated with power politics and increasing the possibility of control over other regions of the world. Dominating Central Asia has always been a strategic decision; and sometimes this has become a goal itself while sometimes it has become a means to achieve greater goals (Kafkasyalı 2012). This region, which has been attractive to great states for centuries, somehow, was deemed worthy of being the "center". As Nicola Contessi pointed out "bringing together parts of Asia that are fundamentally distinct, (…) [makes] Central Asia positioned to play an unprecedented pivotal role" (2016, 11). Regarding the importance of the region especially for the Great Powers, any struggle and conflict of interest between them has become a popular subject of study.

Some scholars separate power competition and cooperative relations in Central Asia into four different historical periods (Kafkasyalı 2012) while some separate into three (Smith and Berman 2011). The first one is the period which covers the emergence of the Hun Empire, Seljuk Empire, Genghis (Mongolian) Empire and Timur Empire in the region, and their competition on occasion or cooperation on occasion with the other major powers at the time. The Second period is what we call the Great Game, which refers to the competition between Russia and Britain in the late 19th and early 20th century. Those who divide the process into three periods, start from here, the Great Game. The third period is the Cold War period in which the USSR and the US

were the great powers of the world system. The last and the fourth period is the post-Cold War period, which covers the efforts of the winner of the Cold War, the US, to reshape the international system by promoting its values and privileged position. This period also comes with the rivalry of major powers to the US; those are mostly Russia and China (Kafkasyalı 2012, 22). The last period in this classification is titled as the New Great Game. Before mentioning about the New Great Game in detail, I will briefly mention the origins of the Great Game.

The Great Game expression for Central Asia can be regarded as an old discussion. The term Great Game was coined by the British intelligence officer Arthur Connolly to describe the power conflict and competition between Tsarist Russia and Britain in the 19th century (Paul 2012, 70). Connolly was an officer at the British East India Company, which was acting in India to serve the British Empire. It is possible to encounter this term first in Connolly's book *Journey to the North of India, overland from England, through Russia, Persia, and Afghanistan* that was first published in 1834. However, the one who provided popularity to the term is Rudyard Kipling owing his novel called *Kim* in 1901. He wrote his novel in this Great Game background, which increased the discussion of the Great Game thesis and allowed it to become widespread (Kafkasyalı 2012, 256).

The Great Game in Central Asia itself consists of three stages according to Ahmed Rashid – a journalist and foreign policy expert (2002). The first stage started with the expansion of the Russian Empire in Central Asia and the Caucasus. The Russian Empire took the dominance of the region by invasion of the khanates in Central Asia. In the 1880s[1], the whole region was almost under the control of Tsarist Russia. This was perceived as a security threat of India by Britain and started a big struggle between Russia and Britain which would continue until the 20th century. In 1898, Lord Curzon (just before he became the Viceroy of India) himself confess this game-like political situation between the two: "To me, I confess they are pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a game for the domination of the world" (Lord Curzon, reached by Rashid 2002, 145-146). The colonial struggle between

[1] Around these years, China was started to be visible in political arena of the world by its takeover of today's Xinjiang region, besides the US was started to be an important actor.

two great powers proceeded until the Anglo-Russian Convention in 1907. The second stage started with this agreement which gave Afghanistan to Britain and Central Asia to Russia in return. This development gave a new phase to the rivalry relations of those Great Powers and ended with an alliance during World War II. Ultimately, the Russian dominance in Central Asia remained until the collapse of the USSR in 1991. After the dissolution of the USSR, the region witnessed a more complicated and multi-actor competition area, which is called the third stage of the Great Game. The new major powers were eager to fill the void that existed after the Soviet Union (Qamar and Zafar 2014; Erdoğan 2020). This third stage is what the sources call the New Great Game in which more states, in particular namely the US, Russia and China, have been involved in the competition in Central Asia as a result of increasing conflicts of interest. By referencing the historical background, this thesis will mostly focus on the last period of the time which is the New Great Game.

2.1. The New Great Game

The concept of the New Great Game has been used as an acronym for contestation in "influence, power, hegemony and profits", by mostly referring to natural resources in Central Asia and the Caucasus (Edwards 2003, 83). Another comment to define New Great Game comes from Boris Rumer – the author of several books on Central Asia. He says that the newer Great Game has not been played between the colonial powers but their "former minions" which are trying to define themselves in international politics (B. Z. Rumer 1993). In a magazine article he wrote in 1997, Ahmed Rashid named the race for dominance and competition over the region as the New Great Game. This game was happening between the Great Powers such as Russia, China and the US and the regional middle powers such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and the oil companies, which are perhaps the most powerful actors of all of them (2002, 145). This label, the New Great Game, coined by different authors is then accepted by the experts of the region, politicians as well as the academicians such as Atal (2003), Kleveman (2003), Kellogg (2003), Sullivan (2007) and Kim and Indeo (2013).

On the other hand, Stephen Blank (ch13 in Kavalski 2010) and some other scholars (Freire and Kanet 2010; Laruelle et al. 2010; Cooley 2012; Blank 2012) mention

three dimensions of the New Great Game: the great and the prior powers, secondary ones and the regional countries in Central Asia. And the third one, the regional states, rarely has become the study subjects. Additionally, their greatest contribution is to add an Eastern perspective to the New Great Game. In all five cited studies, it is possible to say that the scope of the New Great Game was expanded and included the developing powers of Asia to be the seconday powers, such as Turkey, Iran, India, Japan and even South Korea etc. as new players of the game. According to Pradhan, Turkey and Iran were the most potential countries because of their ethnic, religious and language proximity to the region. However, they could not be the great players of the game with their limited political and economic capacities (Pradhan 2018, 14). Contessi, on the other hand, draws attention to another issue on the New Great Game and mentions the possibility of any integration of Central Asia within an Asian identity, "into a single Eurasian landmass" (Contessi 2013, 239).

Aside from these developments in the literature, Central Asia had become the focal point of economic and political interests due to its important location and energy resources. It is also a strategic region for security, with its proximity to Afghanistan and the radical Islam. Because of all these, the New Great Game has become a literature used to describe conflicts of interest and power relations over the region. However, its statism and disregard of the will as well as the role of the regional states make it open to critism. Nonetheless, those seeking answers to the question of why there is a New Great Game in Central Asia mostly drew attention to these three features: (i) geopolitics, (ii) security perspective and (iii) the energy resources and economy.

2.1.1. Geopolitics

The New Great Game is mostly examined via the centrality of Central Asia. The best-known theory of geopolitics of Central Asia is propounded by Halford John Mackinder (1961-1947) who is a British geographer and academician. He is known as the father of the concepts of geopolitics and geostrategic by creating the term "Heartland" to highlight the superiority of the land power over the sea power in world politics for the future. The Heartland, or the World-Island, of Mackinder is often understood as the Central Asian region (Zabortseva 2012, 169). In fact, because

of his belief that land power is more significant than sea power, his choice of Central Asia as the Heartland is not coincidental. Central Asia is a land-locked region and it is impossible to reach through sea or ocean to the region. Mackinder first mentioned Central Asia as the center of Eurasia and called it the Pivot area in his book *The Geographical Pivot of History* in 1904. Then, he developed his ideas and asserted this Heartland – or World-Island concept, and highlighted the region's importance for the world in his work titled *Democratic Ideals and Reality* in 1919 (Kurecic 2010, 22). With a reference to his own words in this book, which is republished in 1942, it is possible to take the Heartland in a broader sense as greater Central Asia, including today's Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and plus "western Siberia and the northern portions of Iran and Pakistan" (Kurecic 2010, 22):

> The Heartland is the northern part and the interior of Euro-Asia. It extends from the Arctic coast down to the central deserts, and has as its western limits the broad isthmus between the Baltic and Black Seas (Mackinder 1942, 197-198).

The definition of the Heartland consists of two regions: the inner crescent and the outer crescent. While the inner crescent covers the lands that mentioned above, the outer crescent draws a bigger circle and also takes the surrounding oceans to its scope. Mackinder highlights that whoever takes the Heartland under control will take a big advantage thanks to the importance of the region in the context of land power. The concept of Heartland has retained its dominance in geopolitics for a long time. For example, the German geographer Haushofer advanced Mackinder's theories and used them to serve German expansionism under the Nazi rule (Mackinder 1942, xxi). The main criticism came to Mackinder from Spykman. Although he believed in the Heartland theory, he was focusing on the defensive posture of the peripheral democracies that located in the Heartland while Mackinder was focused on the offensive roles of the land power in the Heartland. Additionally he gave the inner crescent a new title called Rimland (Mackinder 1942, xix). As a result, it is covered that the geopolitical aspect of the New Great Game is mostly associated with the Heartland conceptualization of Mackinder. However, it should be discussed how much this emphasis on the landlocked structure of Central Asia reflects the present,

where sea power is as important as land power. Moreover, this assessment remains reductionist as it focuses on the geography of Central Asia.

2.1.2. Security Perspective

Proponents of the security perspective associate the New Great Game with the region's security-related value to the Great Powers. Richard Weitz and the like-minded scholars spearhead this view and take the security-related importance of Central Asia when they discuss the New Great Game; this perspective is mostly developed within the 9/11 events.

The breakup of the USSR resulted in a security gap in Eurasia. This gap could not be filled by Russia, because Russia was weak due to the effects of the dissolution. And the external neighboring states did not want to engage in the region due to the possible Russian reaction. China was also a weak state at that time (Kurecic 2010, 29). The US was the only major powerful actor. Thus, the winner of the Cold War was the one who had the advantage. The location of the region was strategic, the region had rich energy sources and lastly the US wanted to promote the victory of liberal-capitalism to the world. Those three were the main motivations of the US to connect with the region, so NATO announced a program called Partnership for Peace in 1994, and the post-Soviet countries participated in this program of NATO. However, the New Great Game had started in the aspects of security just after the 9/11 events.

The 9/11 events in 2001 formed the basis of the New Great Game on security, which resulted in the US's new security concerns over the region. The US announced that the Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan was responsible for this terrorist attack and deployed in the region militarily. Later, the US invaded Iraq in 2003, so the US armed forces deployed to the states surrounding Central Asia. Then, the military presence of the US in the region was on the agenda at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO) summit in 2005 participated by Russia, China and most of the Central Asian nations; and the necessity of the military withdrawal of the US and its collaborators from the region was discussed (Weitz 2006). With this hard power engagement of the US, the discussions to break the Russian hegemony in Central Asia came to the

agenda (Edwards 2003, 87). The US troops were to be deployed in Central Asia until 2014; later this space was willingly filled by China's various economic investments.

Brzezinski, a Polish-American diplomat and political scientist, claimed that the US does not want to see Central Asia under the control of one single power, since the region's geopolitical importance provided by its energy capacity and security related turmoil; stated that this is one of the priorities of the US foreign policy strategy (Edwards 2003, 96). The proximity of Central Asia to Afghanistan made the region significant. After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, as a part of the campaign "War on Terror" led by Bush's administration, the US signed military based agreements with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan; agreements on material transshipments and flight rights with Kazakhstan; and an agreement to use the airport in Dushanbe, Tajikistan (Berman 2004, 60). These developments boosted security based bilateral relations between the US and the Central Asian countries. The security challenges and anti-terrorism can be counted as the main pushing factor for the US to be engaged with Central Asia, besides the energy reserves. The US ties with the region started with Uzbekistan which was the regional dominant country at that time, since it has borders with all other Central Asian countries and has the biggest population within the region. However, the relations did not go well especially after the Andijan Massacre in 2005. Thus, Uzbekistan tended to have contacts with Russia and China while the US interest shifted to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. These three were strategic countries for the US because of being neighbors to China. After 2014, when the US announced that NATO armies will withdraw from the region, the US presence in the region started to be replaced by China's initiatives. In particular, the US presence almost disappeared after the complete withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021.

In terms of security, Central Asian states are mostly dependent on Russia. Kremlin made security collaborations with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. These cover military exercises, cooperation on border security, weapon trade etc. Russia consolidated its military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan beside its eagerness to make a joint air defense system with Kazakhstan (Omelicheva 2018, 7). Additionally, there are huge people flows between Russia and Central Asian states

which render Central Asian nations dependent on Russia. Regarding these, Russia and its influence cannot be underestimated in Central Asia. In the first years after the dissolution of the USSR, Russia was focused on domestic issues and had to struggle with the challenges to become an established independent state. When the region attracted the attention of the other major powers, Russia did not just leave the region to the US and China. Both the US and Russia have military bases in Kyrgyzstan which is not such an important or powerful country in the region but is a good point for its proximity to China. Compared to the first years of independence, Russia's effect over Central Asia is much less. Rajan Menon – a political scientist, indicates the changes in New Great Game after 9/11 and describes Russia's posture in the region as "ambivalent and weak" and underlines that Russian influence has not disappeared with the inclusion of the US in the region, but has been severely broken (2003, 191-192). Pradhan gives the "Pentagon Report of 2018" to prove the US sees China, not Russia, as a potential global threat to itself (2018, 15). To summarize, it was stated that the arguments about the security of the New Great Game generally remained within the framework of the events of 9/11. The definition of security in this perspective is shaped around the 9/11 and based on the great powers, and this makes its scope narrow. Also, with an information update that the US completely withdrew from Afghanistan in August 2021, it should be discussed whether this perspective really represents today.

2.1.3. Energy Resources and Economy

The other perspective on the New Great Game is energy politics. In addition, the location of the region is at important routes for energy transit, the countries are rich in energy reserves as well. The quality and the quantity of oil, also, are at high levels in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea basin. Kazakhstan draws attention with its rich oil, coal and uranium resources while Kyrgyzstan takes the lead in hydroelectric energy production. The gas reserves of the Uzbek and Turkmen lands are very attractive, on the other hand (Pradhan 2018, 12). For the great powers, the main aim is to control the transformation of energy and contest the pipeline projects (Kurecic 2010, 32). At this point, concerns on energy security come as an issue for the Great Powers in the region. For example, the security of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline is crucial for the US because it is an alternative route that is not under the control of

Russia about the Caspian oil; the same situation is for the South Caucasus Pipeline. In addition, it is known that the US did not want to call for the Russian companies to be involved in the construction of the Trans-Caspian pipeline because of the geo-economic gains of the US since it is not eager to see a powerful rival (Kurecic 2010, 38).

Kurecic, a political scientist, analyzes the economic interests-based understanding of the New Great Game and prefers to title it as geo-economy and geo-strategy. He takes Russia, the US and China as the rival powers for abundant oil and gas reserves in this "strategic game" played in the region. According to his evaluation, there are some reasons for the strategy of the major powers in this game. One of them is preventing the other actors from being involved in the region because the one who took a bigger place means to have a bigger portion of the energy. Hence, the US and China want to displace the Russian effect as well as the Russian infrastructure in the region that is coming from the Soviet heritage while Russia and China are almost in cooperation to be against the US. By ignoring the conflicts of interest among themselves for a while, they act with the instinct of setting a single opposing target and pushing it out of the region (Kurecic 2010, 23). Hence, this makes the game more complicated as Rashid's words, a "complex quagmire of competing interests" (2002, 145). It is suitable for the nature of the game where the interests of the states and they can cooperate for these interests apart from being rivals as the New Great Game experts say. However, when we look at the energy and economic relations established with the region today, China has left the other two countries far behind. Considering the rise of China, the topicality of the New Great Game on energy competition should be discussed.

2.2. Critics and Gaps of the New Great Game Literature

The New Great Game is an expression of the power struggle of mostly the Great Powers in Central Asia; those are mostly taken as Russia, the US and China. The focal point for the New Great Game is the interests, since the developers of the literature take the clashes of interests to the core of their claims. Regarding the literature review, it might be said that the New Great Game reflects the realist school of thought, since the interests of the states determine their relations towards the

region. More specifically, security and energy politics with geopolitics are the study fields of International Relations that explain the interest-oriented relations taken under the New Great Game. Regarding this, the thesis will make some criticism towards the place of the New Great Game in these disciplines of IR and touch on some of its gaps academically, arguing that the New Great Game does reflect only partly and one-sided of the current developments.

If the origin of the New Great Game is remembered, the power struggle and the colonial mindset-based rivalry between Britain and the Russian Empire were forming the core of this argument, the Great Game. The New Great Game was created with a reference to the past and counted as the last stage of the Great Game (post-Cold War period), which is mentioned in previous sections, and thus it is the continuation of it. Because of this connection, it is useful to look at the Great Game concept in more detail. The term which is based on the understanding of imperialism with conquest and exploitation is describing a relationship where there is one sided gain has now become the name of a historical event. When someone mentions the Great Game, people can understand that it refers to the rivalry between Russia and Britain in the 1800s. Thus, the term Great Game actually is quite similar with the Eastern Question[2] in the literature; both are historical terms to refer to a historical event. The same argument applies to the New Great Game. The term New Great Game, which expresses a power struggle over Central Asia in the post-Soviet period, is still being frequently used, even after 30 years. This causes the New Great Game to constantly expand and change shape as scope, actor and location. Consequently, it seems that the term used to express a relationship type in the past (Great Game) has turned into a usage that expresses the post-Soviet period, which is its current extension. In this regard, how epistemologically accurate is it that the New Great Game literature is constantly studied by expanding its scope and reproducing it? Since the terms are historical, subjecting them to a constant reproduction brings along scientific suspicions in terms of epistemology.

[2] It is a historical term used to describe the strategic and political rivalries of European states over the Ottomans between the 18th and 20th centuries, when the Ottomans were weak and in great instability.

While it is common to examine the Great Game under imperialism, no argument has been drawn for the New Great Game through the lens of neo-imperialism. The new version of the Great Game is the New Great Game, and the new version of imperialism is counted as neo-imperialism. Nevertheless, the absence of a neo-imperial assessment of the New Great Game is a major shortcoming. Moreover, does the New Great Game fit into the frames of neo-imperialism? The first emergence of the term neo-imperialism occurred with the introduction of the concept of neo-colonialism. "Neo-colonialism" was introduced by Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana and one of the pioneers of Pan-Africanism, in his book *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* published in 1965. The book claimed that the influence of former colonial powers and new Great Powers continued in independent states such as Ghana. Despite being independent, external actors still had a decisive impact on the political, economic and socio-cultural characteristics of these countries, which are provided by a variety of indirect control mechanisms such as the international financial institutions, the multi-national corporations etc. This term, which is frequently used today, is now mostly evaluated in terms of the new superpower – the US, rather than the old colonial powers (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2013, 177-178). Then, it is possible to define neo-imperialism as the domination of a developed state over the developing state or states with global institutions and an ideological language. And the imperial state needs to have a "powerful 'absorptive capacity'" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2013, 67). In the light of these explanations, the conflicts of interest of the Great Powers over the regional states, which are developing nations, can be studied as neo-imperial conflicts of interest. It seems, thus, possible to examine the New Great Game from the perspective of neo-imperialism, but there is no study so far. This has not been done so far is a major deficiency in the New Great Game literature.

Another lacking point comes from within the New Great Game literature and is related to the dominant roles of the great powers in the region. When the Great Game and the New Great Game are considered together, it is possible to ask the question of "is there any kind of partition of Central Asia between the Great Powers?" For the Great Game, the answer would be yes, because of the colonial rivalry. In particular, after the Anglo-Russian Convention in 1907, Afghanistan was given to Britain while

Central Asia was given to Russia. However, for the New Great Game, there does not seem to be a modern version of this partition. There could have been an analysis of sectoral (defense, energy etc.) sharing between the major powers in Central Asia, but there is no in the literature with a reference to its past, Great Game. This is a missing point in the New Great Game literature.

From the geopolitics aspect of the New Great Game, Matthew Edwards' criticism has been taken as reference at most for the following parts. Geopolitics may have different meanings in terms of usage, but as a discipline:

> Theoretical Geopolitics studies the relation between physical space and international politics, develops models for the spatial division of the world into cooperating and competing parts for historical, economic and political reasons, and analyses how the participants interpret the political, economic and military consequences of this division. … The Geopolitics of a state or other territorially defined society means its pursuit of geographically dimensioned aims that are connected with its economic and political position, security and culture (Osmo Tuomi, cited in Edwards 2003, 95).

Those working on the New Great Game use the term geopolitics without detailed exploration and articulation of what geopolitical theorists have put forth. For example, Mackinder's concepts of "geographical pivot of history" and "the heartland", which were mentioned in the section 2.1.1. These concepts cover "only part of Central Asia and the Transcaucasus lie in the 1904 "Heartland" and, proportionally, even less in the 1919 version" (Edwards 2003, 96).

> It is interesting that the continual revisions of Mackinder's ideas—coupled with his dislike of the term 'geopolitics' and his aversion to geopolitical determinism—have been ignored by many analysts who have taken the 'Heartland' and applied it to the concept without reservation or detailed examination. Added to this, the historical limitations of Mackinder's ideas, and the change in the reality of the political, economic, resource and military situation since his views were proposed, means that there is a considerable limitation on how applicable they can be now (Edwards 2003, 96).

Hereby, "the academic use of geopolitics in much of the literature on the New Great Game is one that fails to do justice to the discipline" (Edwards 2003, 97). According to him, the New Great Game surrounds the geopolitical discourses but never exactly

meets its aims, techniques, scope and frame. The New Great Game proponents use this term with no reference to what they exactly point out to which aspect of geopolitics. The remark for regional competition is understandable for geopolitics, but the New Great Game falls short to analyze the geopolitics of Central Asia. Edwards claims that the New Great Game skipped the detailed analyses of what has happened in modern Central Asia and served as an "inaccurate" and "misleading analogy" while he found the whole aspects of the New Great Game suspicious. He opens the discussion on the possibility of the New Great Game is a total failure:

> The linking of the New Great Game with geopolitics does neither justice as their contemporary use has often been intellectually lax and capriciously all-embracing, driven by the obscure romanticism of a bygone era. Both the New Great Game concept and the discipline of geopolitics need to be subjected to intellectual and academic rigor—and the reality is that for much of the past decade this has not taken place effectively (Edwards 2003, 97).

The realist aspect of the New Great Game, takes the states as the main actors and their interests in Central Asia as the main sources of their policies. This breeds the biggest deficiency in this literature by giving no importance to the agency of the regional states. It was mentioned that the game was likened to chess. So to speak, the "game" actually takes its essence from its "players". The players are the great powers and the game turns between them. So why are there no Central Asian states among the players who decide the fate of the game? Central Asian states are among the middle powers of today, their political system and sovereignty are guaranteed under the UN. Their will that is mostly disregarded by the New Great Game directly affects regional politics. The New Great Game draws its frame with the interests of the great powers in the region by emphasizing the conflicts of those interests. Yet, more comprehensive analyses are made beyond great power policies while studying regional politics today. Besides the great powers, the middle and small powers also have a say in regional politics. Varied states are now active in order to define themselves in regional and global affairs. For example, India, Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey in this case, are the small and middle powers to have an influence on Central Asia. In recent studies on the New Great Game, these multi-actors, including Russia, the US and China are also examined. Thus, it is possible to say that the playground of the game has expanded. However, only few of them mention about the regional

states themselves. The agencies of the regional states are not taken into account in the New Great Game. However, for today's world, their will and consent has almost the biggest factor to determine their own destiny in politics. In addition, considering the interest-oriented approach of the New Great Game, the analysis of actors' cooperation under the New Great Game literature does not seem compatible with its main arguments. It is necessary to consider various cooperation agreements and diplomacy tools as part of the game. However, the New Great Game analogy refers to the rivalries of the great powers with each other rather than the idea that they are playing games with the states of the region. As a result, even if the New Great Game literature has expanded its scope by including some middle power states but exclusion of the will of the regional states is one of the biggest shortcomings of this literature.

Also, when today's increasingly globalized world is taken into consideration; it is possible to talk about a multiactor order. The non-state bodies and supra-state actors are also involved in the region today. Intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, multilateral projects, companies and even terrorist organizations now have decisive roles in regional politics and actively affect the balances. Studying the current multi-state projects, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, and also some intergovernmental organizations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, is difficult to review under the New Great Game. That kind of intergovernmental or supra-national formations does not fit exactly to the essence of the New Great Game, since this is an analysis based on state rivalry and is insufficient to cover supra-state structures. Even if these supra-state bodies were examined under the New Great Game, they would cause the reproduction of statism as they were underestimated as only tools that serve the interests of the states. In contrast, neo-Gramscian way of thinking mentions institutions as "mechanisms of hegemony" and provider of the "certain semblance of universality". Hence, it does not be compatible with the nature of the game to examine the supra-state and non-state actors.

On the other hand, one of the most important developments of the 21st century is China's rise and its increasing role in the region. New Great Game literature mostly

mentions China's rise as the winner of the game, which is in fact quite ambitious to this study. Various initiatives that China has developed and its assertive statements have led to hegemony debates in the region. It is argued that with the rise of China, accompanied by its assertive rhetoric and policies, the power to dominate the region has shifted to China under a "mutual ratification". According to some, the rise of China in Central Asia is evaluated as a coincidental outcome:

> It isn't clear that even China grasps the incidental impact of its regional activity in reshaping Central Asia or how it is perceived by regional states, as Chinese actors are simply so focused on developing Xinjiang and extracting what they want from Central Asia. With Russia's influence in the region at historically low ebb and the widespread perception across Central Asia that the United States will strategically abandon the region once most combat troops have withdrawn from Afghanistan, Beijing has carved out an inadvertent empire. Lacking a clear strategy and attempting to keep a low profile (a characteristic Chinese approach), China has become the most consequential actor in Central Asia (Pantucci and Petersen 2012).

Their estimation in 2012 has become true today; the US completely withdrew from Afghanistan by the end of August in 2021. While Pantucci and Petersen admit that China is focusing on its own interests in the region, they assess this "incidental" (Pantucci and Petersen 2012). However, there are clues that China is eager to build a hegemonic structure in the region. Considering this and China's interests in the region, finding the increasing influence of China in the region by chance is quite optimistic. The desire to increase the power of influence where interests are nourished is a strategic policy and is a familiar state behavior. Also, as Robert Cox argues "Action is purposive" (1987, 393). If there is an engagement of any kind, that means there is a purpose there. In any case, intentionally or not, China's increasingly active role, with the gap left by other major actors, has started a journey for China to become a potential regional hegemon. In particular, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization that was established in 2001 under the leadership of China, and the Belt and Road Initiative, which was put forward by China in 2016, reinforced much more the structural role of China in the region. And with the recent establishment of the new Taliban government in Afghanistan, signs that China will play a "constructive role" in the country also make China have big potential in the wider Central Asian region today and in the future.

According to Ramakrushna Pradhan, China is already a hegemonic power in Central Asia. He criticizes the New Great Game as it no longer exists:

> The much-hyped New Great Game rhetoric in Central Asia is nothing more than a competition over scramble for oil and gas and the struggle to influence the country to control and administer the resources and their transportation facilities. Apart from this, the logic of great game is a mere myth (Pradhan 2018, 16).

With the announcement of the US withdrawal from the region in 2014, the US ended its dominant presence in the region with its own hands. On the other hand, Russia's power in the region has been severely weakened by the economic difficulties experienced by the US and the EU sanctions against Russia, especially after the Ukraine crisis. Thus, the New Great Game is just a "speculation" according to Pradhan (2018, 27). He claims that "China is the only country at present in Central Asia with a rising profile while others are either retreating or are sidelined", especially with the Belt and Road Initiative (2018, 16). After mentioning these facts about China, he states on the same page that he finds the New Great Game quite exaggerated and that the game can only be rationalized by calling it "myth". The New Great Game analogy explains China's rise as the end of the game, so falls short of explaining that regional hegemony has "started" to be in favor of China with the consent of the regional states but not yet has been achieved, as it is claimed in this study.

Turning back to the questions of this literature review that is asking the sufficiency of the New Great Game to analyze today's relations in Central Asia, the thesis touched on the drawbacks of the New Great Game literature. In particular, when contemporary developments are considered, the New Great Game could not go beyond being an analogy due to its lack of theoretical background as well as its ignorance of the regional states' will. It could not include China's current dominant role in the region through the consent of the regional states. Instead, this thesis proposes a neo-Gramscian approach in order to overcome the theoretical lack and to emphasize that China has attempts to be the hegemon power in Central Asia. The neo-Gramscian approach in building a hegemonic structure in the region is

compatible with the examples of the Central Asian region and China. There are a couple of features that make this theory proper to this study, which will be elaborated in the following sections. Briefly; the facts that the emergence of an expanding literature in the greater regional definition of Central Asia in recent years, the frequent reminders of the historical ties with the region by the Chinese authorities, the location of the Xinjiang region and the Uyghurs' socio-cultural affinity to the region, the Chinese sympathy of the regional leaders and elite interest groups and their belief on opportunities for all that China has provided, the open invitations of the new Afghan Taliban government to China, Russia's recent loss of power and prestige world-wide, the "change" that the regional states are witnessing in their economy, the promotion of "China model", "Shanghai Spirit", "Silk Road Spirit" and their effects on the regional states as well as the active role of Confucius Institutes in the region, the need of the regional states for another actor to create a regional structure, and China's regional initiatives are the features make worth them to study under this theory. A discussion of hegemony based on reciprocal relations between the actors and social forces, rather than a rival interests-oriented assessment in the New Great Game, would better explain the current relations in Central Asia.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Neo-Gramscian school of thought is one of the main critical approaches in International Relations. Its principal scope is trying to understand the world order by criticizing both liberal and realist ways of thinking. The theory takes its basis from Antonio Gramsci. It is necessary to take a journey to its origin, to Gramsci, in order to understand the intellectual foundations of the theory. Hence, before delving deeper into the neo-Gramscian thinking, first, I would like to introduce Gramsci and his theoretical approach. Second, the pioneers of the theory, Robert W. Cox and Stephen Gill's contributions are covered. Lastly, the critical approaches to the regional studies are roughly mentioned in order to provide a transition before examining the theory in the Central Asian region and Chinese example.

3.1. Antonio Gramsci

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) is an Italian theorist and one of the figures that was able to create his own direction out of critical theories. His most popular work is the *Prison Notebooks*, which covers a series of essays he wrote while he was sentenced to prison by the Italian Fascist regime between 1929 and 1935. Gramsci built up his ideas and conceptualizations mostly based on history. He contributed to academic and Marxist literature with various concepts, such as: hegemony and consent, historical bloc, passive revolution, counter-hegemony[3], war of movement and war of position. The starting point of Gramsci was his consideration of the revolutions. According to Marx, transition to socialism through a revolution would happen first in the countries that capitalism strongly dominates (Malecki 1973, 952). However, this

[3] The concept of counter-hegemony in fact was not used by Gramsci himself but associated with him (Worth 2015, 147).

did not happen that way, especially for Western Europe. There were no revolutionary transitions to socialism even though the Western European countries were capitalist. In addition to this, the first socialist revolution had happened in Russia which was a poor and largely agrarian country. Gramsci questioned the reason for this situation deeply (Hunter 2020; Tınas 2018). The second pushing factor for his consideration was the writings of Machiavelli. While Machiavelli was in search in his book *The Prince*, of the leadership concept for a united Italy and focused on the problems during the foundation of a state. Gramsci examined the Modern Prince in search of the leadership concept for an alternative to fascism as well as to study the nature of the revolutions. Hereby, it is possible to say that Gramsci took the image of power with a mixture of man and beast corresponding to coercion and consent from Machiavelli's "centaur" (Cox 1983, 164). In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci mentions centaur from a method he called "dual perspective". The dual perspective can display in every moment of life or political actions. The whole complexity of life as well as politics can be demoted to two basic elements of Machiavelli's centaur: half animal and half human. The dual perspective comprises "coercion and consent, authority and hegemony, violence and civilization" that represents the power relations in a society (Hoare and Smith 1992, 169-170).

3.1.1. His Understanding of Hegemony

Gramsci considered mainly the question of how classes or social groups in a society take over and maintain power. His understanding of hegemony is directly related to his understanding of power understood as the mixture of "coercion and consent". He re-built up the concept of hegemony from this power definition. I used the verb re-build instead of build, because he carried the Marxist doctrine one step forward. While the Marxist teaching conceives hegemony in line with a structural exploitation ideologically (this is more of an "authority" than hegemony, according to Gramsci), Gramsci reinterpreted the term and added the feature of consent which is created by the hegemonic elites. In Northern and Western Europe, the hegemony of the bourgeois class was perfectly set, because the system involved some concessions to the proletariats in return for the acceptance of status quo. This kind of a win-win relationship was preventing a possible revolution as well as providing the sustainability of the capitalist system. The hegemonic class and the civil society were

interwoven to each other (Cox 1983, 163-164). In fact, the basic point of Gramsci's hegemony concept lies in that kind of a control mechanism where physical power or coercion exists together with intellectual and cultural persuasion or consent. The hegemonic class takes the consent of the elites of the dominated class through ideologies. Here, ideologies have a "cement" role between these two classes according to Gramsci. The ideologies created by the hegemonic elites fill all the gaps by dispelling the doubts on the elites of the proletarian side. Therefore, both sides have become more cohesive to each other. On the other hand, the existence of consent in Gramsci's hegemony does not end the coercion totally. Democratic or authoritarian political superstructures combine coercive and consensual elements and thus continue to rule consistently. Hence, Gramscian hegemony is "consensus protected by the armor of coercion" (Okur 2015, 138).

3.1.2. The Concept of Historical Bloc

It is known that Gramsci's views on history were influenced by Vico, Braudel and Sorel. Gramsci gave a reference to Georges Sorel for his interpretation of historical bloc, though Sorel's understanding was different from Gramsci, and actually he had never used the term historical bloc. Sorel drew attention more to the myths for analyzing revolutionary movements, where people mobilize in order to overthrow the constructed social order and re-establish a new one. He evaluates the social myths as disincentive to the possible revolutions; revolution is inevitable when the myths are not enough. For Sorel, a sarcastic collapse of the system is needed for the foundation of a new social order. According to Gramsci, however, it is enough to replace the established order when the new one is more powerful than the older one; there is no need for a total collapse of the older order with its revolutionary nature. This is exactly what Gramsci means by historical bloc. His historical bloc conception is a dialectical term; it covers the accumulation of the components to create a bigger unity. Gramsci correlates the chance of success of groups to their economical position in relations of production to realize a hegemonic struggle and overcome a historical bloc (Okur 2015, 138). In a historical bloc, material conditions, such as the means of production and social relations, collocate with the ideas. The components of a historical bloc are defined by Gramsci as objective and subjective or structure and superstructure. Thus, the hegemon is required for the existence of a historical

bloc. When a historical bloc is constructed, the intellectuals and the elites have a big role to produce the knowledge and to influence the masses. All groups in a society have their own intellectual class or at least have a tendency to create it. In particular, the hegemonic intellectuals have to construct political, social and economic ideas, and those are needed to be more convincing compared to the other ideas of intellectuals and needed to dominate them by melting those ideas within the hegemonic ones. According to Gramsci, there is no independent intellectual class; they are all dependent on their own social stratum. One point needed to draw attention to here is that Gramsci does not talk about a hegemony at the level of states, but rather the hegemony of social classes over each other (Robinson 2005, 564). In other respects, the role of the state here is to spread a common culture for the maintenance of a historical bloc. Gramsci classified the process of creating a historical bloc into three consciousness levels: first the "economico-corporative" which has an awareness for the best interests and have the leading position; second, the "solidarity or class consciousness" which covers the whole segments of the society but stuck in an absolute economic level; third, the "hegemonic" which provides a harmonization between the interests of the first and the interests of the second groups as well as to express those interests with universal ideologies. Thus, a hegemony indeed represents a transition or a linkage between two main classes; by providing the balance between the interests of the elite class and giving a kind of pleasure to the sub-classes (Cox 1983, 167-169). Gramsci never separates the material elements from the social elements; he cares about the context and evaluates the power relations by looking for depth that covers the whole segments. Thus, his understanding of historical materialism is holistic and inclusive.

3.2. Neo-Gramscian School of Thought

Neo-Gramscian school of thought is a critical Marxism-based approach in International Political Economy. The main representative of neo-Gramscian theory is Robert W. Cox, and Stephen Gill added another depth to the theory with the various books he edited. One of them is the book *Innovation and Transformation in International Studies* (Gill and Mittelman 1997), which the book is devoted to Robert

and Jessie Cox. The journal of New Political Economy[4] also has a place to spread this new critical perspective of IPE. Another work Gill edited with his Canadian colleague Claire Cutler, *New Constitutionalism and World Order* published in 2014. This book discusses the new constitutionalism types that came with the changing world via mentioning taxation system, global governance, multilateral relations and trade and market-based relations etc. The book also covers a critique to other schools of IR as well as discussing the possibility of global laws for today. Cutler is one of the prior scholars to study the international law aspect of neo-Gramscian theory. Another important developer of the theory is Christoph Scherrer, the German political scientist. He coined the term "double hegemony" to state the interwoven structure of the US national hegemony with the hegemony of the international class of capitalists. Moreover, from Amsterdam, Henk Overbeek put forward "transnational historical materialism" approach to neo-Gramscian perspective. He correlates state formation and world politics with transnational dynamics. On the other hand, University of Sussex has a reputation for the studies on the critical approach of IR. Kees van der Pijl, for example, pondered on International Political Economy with history of international thought as well as the foreign policy modes of the states, and he coined the conceptualization of "transnational capitalist classes". Enrico Augelli and Craig Murphy's work which is titled "America's Quest for Supremacy and the Third World: A Gramscian Analysis" published in 1988 has also another importance for the progress of the theory. They implemented Gramsci's ideas to International Relations to examine the US dominance in world politics.

Gramsci and his ideas were mostly at the intrastate and state-level of analysis as mentioned in the previous section. The concepts of hegemony and historical bloc of Gramsci clarified how the balances of socio-economy within the border of the states, and how the order can sustain without any rebel. Neo-Gramscian theory, on the other hand, carried Gramsci's ideas one step forward and developed them at the international level of analysis. Thus, the theory considers how social forces, states and the dominant ideologies are interrelated, how they balance the world order in the international arena, and what the roles of institutions are. In short, the focal point of

[4] An academic journal that has still published by Routledge since 1996. For more information: https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cnpe20/current

neo-Gramscian thinking is to figure out the relations between material conditions and ideologies in world politics.

The hegemony understanding of neo-Gramscian theory is different from other hegemony definitions of the IR schools of thought. The neo-realist and neo-liberal thinking were both focused on the coercion aspect of hegemony; neo-realists defend one-state coercion while neo-liberals defend a coercion that is based on international consensus. Neo-realist scholars, such as Gilpin and Mearsheimer, define hegemony as the concentration of power in the hands of one actor for establishing and also sustaining the order through coercion. In this understanding, the stability of the world order is dependent on the durability of the hegemon power, so when the hegemon power loses its durability, the order may go through turmoil (Tınas 2018, 179). On the other hand, the scholars of the neo-liberal thinking, such as Keohane, Krasner and Kindleberger, believe in institutionalization of the hegemonic power and the system it brings (Tınas 2018, 179). Similar to neo-realists, according to neo-liberals, a state-centric approach is also valid, and the world order is established by the hegemon power which has a stabilizer position and the relations between the hegemon and other states are based on material associations. The critical difference between neo-liberals from neo-realists is about the continuity of the world order. In contrast to neo-realists, neo-liberals claim that the system maintains regardless of the hegemonic power's durability thanks to institutionalization. The system and its institutions would already be well-established by one hegemonic state, so it will not be affected by the hegemon power whether it would become more powerful or even it would collapse. In other words, the system has continuity through institutions, because they are established for the common interests of the people and they are the tools for cooperation (Tınas 2018, 180). In addition to these two, it is possible to see hegemony debates under other approaches of IR, such as the hegemonic stability theory, the long-cycle theories and world-system approach. By including the neo-Gramscian theory, it is possible to say that the main common point in these six mainstream theories of hegemony is material and economic power. Neo-Gramscian understanding of hegemony covers some common points with them but has also something that distinguishes the theory from other hegemony conceptualizations is the consent, which refers to the state of tacit approval of the governed to the

hegemonic one. Institutions, especially the trans-national ones, and the political-economical patterns that are spreading through institutions are also quite important in the establishment of a hegemonic order, as Cox strongly mentions.

As Owen Worth – a political scientist at University of Limerick, clearly identifies in his book *Rethinking Hegemony* (2015), the concept of hegemony in fact has two different usages; one refers to a state leadership while the other sets an ideology in global politics. When we consider these two different understandings of hegemony over regions, it is possible to say that the concept of regional hegemony is mostly studied in the first sense in today's literature, and is defined to become the strongest and the dominant in the region without resorting to constant force in any way. Contributing to the subsidiary ideological aspect of the concept, the thesis attempts to study the theory at a regional level. Hereby, the state that wants to be hegemon must convince other regional states in a way. In order to do this, the hegemonic power needs to satisfy the interests of the other states in some way with a kind of win-win relationship, even if not in an equal ratio. The regional hegemon, who cannot establish its hegemony through an absolute power due to the fact that it is aware of the reality of free will and reason of the actors, resorts to indirect ways. Prys refers to these methods as "projection", which is accepted as "consent" in the Gramscian understanding:

> (…) projection implies the alteration or manipulation of preferences in an almost neo-Gramscian sense; for instance, the persuasion of neighboring states to enter into a free trade agreement that is in fact set up according to the regional hegemon's preferences. More abstractly, projection is expressed as structural power, manifested, for instance, in structures that 'distribute asymmetric privileges' but that 'also affect the interests of actors', often leaving them willing to 'accept their role in the existing order of things' (Prys 2010, 494).

There is another scholar who mentions the feature what Gramsci calls consent with a different name. Amitav Acharya – is a well-known scholar especially for non-Western perspective in IR, emphasizes the importance of power in the construction of regions. According to him, the "response" to the major state from the local level is more important than hard power in regionalism. While considering the construction of regions as a strategy for hegemonic powers, he also supports the idea that they can

be part of a counter-hegemonic project (2007, 642). Also, he studies the concept of "hegemonic regionalism" in one of his articles (1992). He examines hegemonic regionalism through the security-related dependence of developing countries on great powers and gave the example of NATO as a form of hegemonic regionalism. After covering Gramsci's ideas, the next section will examine the founding names Robert W. Cox and Stephen Gill's interpretation of Gramsci, and how they used his ideas to explain international relations in order to better understand the neo-Gramscian theory.

3.2.1. Robert W. Cox and His Conceptualizations

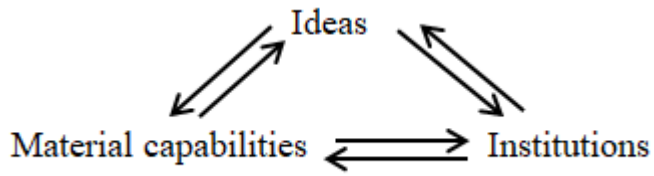
Robert W. Cox's works and his critical approach is one of the two founding perspectives for the "British School of International Political Economy" (the other is Susan Strange's works), as Benjamin J. Cohen states in his article (2007) on the difference between the American and British perspectives of IPE (Leysens 2008, 1). He is an internationally recognized academician as the pioneer of a new theory with his works. He taught at York University for many years and passed away in 2018.

Robert W. Cox's methodology has developed around two basic concepts: one is historicism (Leysens 2008, 41-45), to understand the balance between material formations and universal ideologies, and second is hegemony, to understand power and its sociology (Okur 2015). Cox criticized positivism due to its claim to reach objectivity by relying on empirical data, which may bring a kind of emancipation from the elements between causes and effects, and a missing perception of the context. According to Cox, the origin of theories is interaction between the external world and thoughts. These constitute a circle to follow each other, and this process covers the "objectivity of history" that refers to what is happening in the world and forms interlocked power relations, and "subjectivity of cognition" that refers how to conceive those power relations in history (Cox and Schechter 2002).

According to Cox's historicism understanding, "the historicist-dialectical approach leads the analyst to focus on events such as a change in 'the balance of social forces within the state', as well as change 'in the nature of the state' (…) [and asks the question of] how are societies linked to a specific world order" (Leysens 2008, 23).

Thus, the concept of historical structures takes a big place. To him, the formation of historical structures is a long and laborious process. In a historical structure, there are three different forces that are interacting with each other and he focuses on the change in these three: (i) material capabilities, (ii) ideas and (iii) institutions. In his approach, there is a reciprocal relation between these three as in the Figure 3.2.1.1 below:

Figure 3.2.1.1: Cox's three categories of forces (Cox 1981, 136).



According to him, "The question of which way the lines of force run is always an historical question to be answered by a study of the particular case" (Cox 1981, 136). In the cases of this research, China and Central Asia, material conditions are no sure the starting point for China's attempted hegemony. China has achieved a big progress regarding the economic relations towards the region which will be elaborated in the following chapter. (i) Material capabilities aspect of forces in a historical structure comes with its constructive and destructive nature through technological opportunities or efficient usage of natural resources or organizational capabilities. (ii) Ideas, on the other hand, have two different types. One type refers to the "intersubjective" nature of social relations that are the mixture of the common experiences and shared and expected behaviors of states. This type of ideas points out dominant and common perception of the societies or the common answers of them to ontological conditions (Okur 2015, 136). Cox gives concrete examples from the inter-state relations and adduces especially the diplomatic relations. The states contact each other through diplomacy. They meet minds on their common interests. Although they contradict at some points, the outcomes of all clashes are expected to be an agreement or disagreement or even war. This predictability, in fact, comes from historical conditioning. This intersubjective meaning of ideas set – with Cox's words, "the common ground of social discourse" (Cox 1981, 136). Besides, the

second type of ideas, according to Cox, refers to "collective images" of the society and the order as well represented by a variety of people. This type of ideas propounded by different groups of people is diversified and displays an opposition to each other, in contrast to a familiar and common feature of intersubjective meaning. Any potential clash between collective images brings a possibility for development and actually reveals the fact of establishing a new historical structure. (iii) The third one is institutions which Cox evaluates as mechanisms for a sustainable order. Observing institutions may be a good way to understand power relations. Moreover, institutions are important in a social order to balance opposite collective images with the power relations; that is why Cox likens institutions to "amalgams" between material capabilities and ideas (Cox 1981, 135-137). This classification of Cox is similar with Gramsci's three levels of consciousness for creation of a historical bloc. Cox's material capabilities take its basis from Gramsci's "economico-corporative" concept. Second, what Gramsci mentions on "solidarity or class consciousness", Cox developed this to ideas and classified it into two by examining more in detail. Lastly, Gramsci took "hegemonic" as the third level for foundation of historical blocs while Cox points out the institutions. It is possible to say that the latter concepts play a mediator role in the classification of the first two. Thus, Cox and Gramsci have similar understanding of historical formation. Cox developed the concept, which Gramsci called "historical bloc", and mostly preferred to use it as "historical structure". According to his own definition, "the historic[al] bloc is the term applied to the particular configuration of social classes and ideology that gives content to a historical state" (Cox 1987, 409). A historical structure, thus, have structure and superstructure in which their relations are reciprocal. "Superstructures of ideology and political organisation shape the development of both aspects of production… [as well as] are shaped by them" (Cox 1983, 168)". The both aspects of production here cover the production of social relations and the physical means of production.

The third concept that Gramsci took as "hegemonic" was developed by Cox as "institutions" (Cox 1981, 136). This is a remarkable point that supports the main arguments of this thesis. If Gramsci's hegemonic concept is remembered, it is the structure that provides the balance between the two conditions in the formation of a historical bloc, brings together the interests of the superstructures and the

substructures, and doing this by providing a small satisfaction to those have a higher position in the substructure (the elites of substructure). Similar to the hegemonic in Gramsci's usage, institutions have also a role as Cox likens them amalgams, which are mingled well harmoniously. Just as hegemony is necessary for the establishment of a historical bloc (Gramsci), institutions are as important and vital for the establishment of a historical structure at the international level (Cox). The institutions here are the mechanisms for spreading the hegemonic patterns, which will be elaborated in the following paragraphs.

Apart from Cox's historicism understanding, his hegemony understanding is mostly commented for the post-World War II period, with the US leadership to the world order. "Hegemony 'is based on a coherent conjunction or fit between a configuration of material power, the prevalent collective image of world order…and a set of institutions which administer the order with a certain semblance of universality'" (Cox 1981, 139 reached by Bieler and Morton 2001, 20). It is possible to define his understanding of global hegemony through two main elements: One is the need for the consent of the governed, and the other is the inclusive nature of the state that is involved with social relations and many complex dynamics instead of a shallow and strict understanding of the state defined by its unchanging features. The specific point of hegemony in the Coxian perspective to make it distinctive from other dominance types that have been seen throughout history is the "consent" acquired by the common interests. When a state is empowered and the citizens of the other states have a trust for their observance of interests, that state may be the global hegemon (Okur 2015, 144). Here, gaining trust has a big role, because the people have consciousness and free will, even though they are confined by the frames of the historical bloc. Thus, the hegemony cannot be limited to mere hard power and it includes the consent of the governed (Gill 1993, 43).

In his article, which is considered to be one of the founding articles of the theory, Cox (1983) mentioned different usages of the terms related to hegemony in the literature. He preferred to use the word "dominance" to refer to the existing conceptions of hegemony and separated them from Gramsci's hegemony understanding. When he applies the hegemony concept to the world order, he

underlines the importance of clarifying the starting and ending points of the periods historically. Regarding this, he classifies it into four different periods of history in the context of hegemony. The first period covers from 1845 to 1875, and Britain was the hegemonic power of the world. The power of Britain was based on hard power that the coercive land power was at the center. The second period covers from 1875 to 1945, and the other states challenged the British hegemony, and Cox titled this period non-hegemonic. The third period covers from 1945 to 1965, after World War II, the US became the new hegemon and established a new world order. The sources of the US were not only the hard power but also institutions and laws at international level were raising its hegemony. The fourth period, according to Cox, started in the 1960s or 1970s and still goes on. The advancements showed that the US-led system does not adequately work. Cox gave examples of the foundation of the Trilateral Commission in 1973 and mentions any possible counter-hegemonic movements from the third-world countries for this fourth – non-hegemonic period (Cox 1983, 170-171).

Becoming a hegemon in the international system is in line with establishing a world order, ensuring its continuity and aligning with the interests of other states, rather than an order in which one state is exploiting the others. Being a hegemon is not only about regulating intergovernmental relations, but also about creating an internationally common civil society. With reference to history, hegemonies in the world order are usually established by countries which faced a strong revolution in the past. The revolution in question not only changes the internal dynamics of the country but also revises the role of the country in global policy. According to Cox, this understanding of hegemony can actually be expressed as the outward expansion of the inner hegemonic existence. The social, economic and political values in which the hegemon country establishes its hegemony eventually become internationally accepted patterns that other countries will emulate. According to Cox, such emulation would lead to passive revolution in other peripheral countries (1983, 171). At this point, peripheral countries have shown socio-political and economic developments quite different from those of the hegemonic country, and they try to apply these patterns without changing their old political structures. This is why peripheral countries have difficulties especially in adopting the hegemonic political

pattern, although they can align with other aspects. In a hegemonic world order, hegemonic states are more stable and the patterns are inherent to those states, while inconsistency prevails in peripheral countries. Cox underlines that since the hegemonic world order cannot be reduced to interstate relations only, it is a complex order in which a dominant world economic system that suppresses all existing economic production relations and the social structures of different states at different levels coexist: "World hegemony is describable as a social structure, an economic structure, and a political structure; and it cannot be simply one of these things but must be all three" (Cox 1983, 171-172). Also he states that the hegemony is "based on a coherent conjunction or fit between a configuration of material power, the prevalent collective image of world order (including certain norms) and a set of institutions which administer the order with a certain semblance of universality" (Cox 1981, 139).

Cox puts forward international organizations as the mechanism of world hegemony since they spread the hegemonic system by providing the expansion of the hegemonic patterns (Cox 1983, 172). To him, international organizations have five specific features. First, they contain the norms for expanding the hegemonic world order. Second, the institutions are actually the outcomes of this hegemonic world order. Third, they legitimize those norms ideologically. Fourth, they influence and cooperate with the elites of the other peripheral states. Fifth and last, the institutions prevent formation of counter-hegemonic movements. When the roles of international institutions are considered, the financial and monetary system regulation role of them has a particular importance, since they are the providers for economic growth. Moreover, in general, the international institutions are mostly initiated by the hegemonic states or the hegemonic states must support them. Reminding Cox's historical classification as hegemonic and non-hegemonic, he evaluated the third period as the US hegemony. He also explains international organizations as mechanisms of hegemony. In this regard, it is possible to take the Bretton Woods system as the most important tool in providing economic hegemony, which has a privileged place in the context of hegemonic world order. In addition to these, international organizations also have ideological roles. By legitimizing certain social

and economic norms in favor of hegemonic powers, they ensure international acceptance and its spread to the national level (Cox 1983, 172).

3.2.2. Stephen Gill and His Contributions

One of Stephen Gill's greatest contributions to the neo-Gramscian perspective is the concept of "global political economy", which he suggested with David Law. This term has been put forward to express the intertwined structures that develop in parallel with the globalizing world. Beyond the interconnectedness of independent economies of independent nations, as in "international" political economy, there is today's much more complex and globally integrated system and put forward "global" political economy. With today's changing conditions, he frequently criticized existing IR studies and made the necessary updates.

In his book chapter titled "Gramsci and Global Politics: Towards a Post-hegemonic Research Agenda" in the book he edited *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*, Gill discusses the place of a Gramscian understanding in the discipline of International Relations (Gill et al. 1993, 1-20). He considers the penetration of Gramsci's views into the study areas of International Relations and International Political Economy as rather slow and recent. He mentioned that academics such as Cox and Van der Pijl were put to work in the 1980s because of this insufficient place of Gramsci in IR and IPE. In the globalized world order, the concept of hegemony has become one of the important discussions. Gill underlines that in the discussions of hegemony in the post-war world order a triple crisis has occurred, which consists of three interrelated levels: economic, political and socio-cultural. The material-level crisis encompasses the restructuring of production and finance relations at the global level and the reorganization of economic organizations. In the second – the political, crisis issues such as the change and development of institutional structures in states, the increase of internationalization and trans-nationalization is discussed. Finally, socio-cultural paradigms, structures and ideas that transform with economic and political changes are included in the scope of social and cultural crisis. These three levels of crisis are the same in different countries of the world with different impact levels and they were suggested

by Gill as “primitive abstractions” to be used when discussing the crisis of world order.

In another chapter in the same book, Gill (et al. 1993, 21-48) compares the Gramscian and positivist understanding of IR and IPE. That kind of a comparison is quite important for a better understanding of Gramsci in IR disciplines. It is possible to interpret Gramsci’s perspective as an epistemological and ontological critique of existing IR and IPE theories. His understanding of historicism, unlike the understanding of structuralism put forward by Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, points to historical structures, or historical blocs, that individuals and groups create with consciousness.

Gill refers to Esteve Morera’s classification while describing Gramsci’s thinking of historicism. According to him, Gramsci’s understanding of historicism has three basic contents. The first is “transience”, which finds history unrepeatable because it is unique to the moment in which it happened, and attributes it to eternal. Second, the “historical necessity” that mentions limits. With this concept, he says that social interactions, political or economic changes take place within the boundaries of certain paradigms, but maintain their dynamic and variable structure. The third is the Gramscian way of “philosophical realism”, which covers the ideas about how he evaluates the intellectual process. For him, the intellectual process is creative, participatory and dialectical; with this feature, it is a part of historicity. In order to better express intellectual processes, he mentioned the concept of “organic intellectual” by drawing attention to its dialectical connection with historical processes and changes.

The main difference of his interpretation of Gramsci from Robert Cox is the relation between an historical bloc and hegemony. According to Cox, “the construction of an historical bloc cannot exist without a hegemonic social class and, moreover, that the national context remains the only place where an historical bloc can be founded” (Bieler and Morton 2001, 20). That kind of a hegemonic class formation must first happen domestically, this is the reason why Robert Cox highlights the revolutionary past of the hegemonic states. He believes that facing a strong revolution is the

provider to become a hegemon. However, Stephen Gill does not evaluate these two concepts together, distinguishing them. According to Gill, a historical bloc may have the potential to be hegemonic but at the same time may not have. Also he argues that a historical bloc does not have to emerge at the national level, may emerge transnationally as well (Bieler and Morton 2001, 20).

As a result, the conceptualizations of Cox and Gill and how they understood Gramsci are provided to assist in understanding the core of the theory. Since the thesis attempts to adopt the neo-Gramscian school to the Central Asian regional level, it would be useful to mention first the place of neo-Gramscian theory in regional studies.

3.3. Neo-Gramscian Theory in Regional Studies

The common definition of a region is more or less similar to T. V. Paul's interpretation, a "cluster of states that are proximate to each other and are interconnected in spatial, cultural and ideational terms in a significant and distinguishable manner" (2012, 4). Historically, the origin of regions is based on the definition of the continents. The divisions occurred from the world, the whole, to the pieces, so the continents. Continental divisions are directly related with drawing maps in history. The process of cartography has always been from known to unknown, so from center to periphery. Here, the definition of center makes sense. There are mainly two perspectives in this respect: Western and Eastern. Both took themselves to the center and drew the world map, then separated into continents according to the idea of known and unknown. In the Western perspective, Europe has become the continent that is taken to the center, and the question of whether the world consists of two continents with Asia or three continents with Africa was discussed in ancient times. With the discovery of America – in other words the "new world", the continental debates were shaped around these four main continents. It is possible to see the similar center-periphery relationship in Eastern perspective, so the Chinese geographers and historiographers. In the Chinese example, the Middle Kingdom – *Zhongguo,* has always been in the middle of the map. It is also claimed by Chinese sources that America was first discovered by the Chinese traveler admiral Zheng He, not by Columbus (Godehardt 2014, 12-14). Within these two opposing

perspectives, only one has gained international recognition: Europe. European superiority dominated the world with the Enlightenment Era that took place at the end of the eighteenth century. The Eurocentric understanding gradually spread with expansionary policies of the Europeans, penetrated all areas as a sign of strength and was accepted as almost universal. Hence, it is worth emphasizing that drawing maps and historiography were always done by someone for some political purposes.

Although the perception of the region has developed with the clarification of the continental definitions in the past, it is quite new that it has become an academic sub-discipline. Leading scholars who contributed to the development of the discipline and their works are Peter Katzenstein (2005), David Lake and Patrick Morgan (2010), Louise L'Estrange Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell (1995) and Hurrell (2007), Fredrik Söderbaum and Tim Shaw (2003), Shaun Breslin, Christopher W. Hughes, Nicola Phillips and Ben Rosamond (2002), Amitav Acharya and Alastair Iain Johnston (2007), Rik Fawn (2009). Regional studies in their current form developed especially in the post-Cold War period. The US Ethnogeographic Board, which was established during World War II, can be taken as the pioneer institution to define the regions of the world. The regional definitions determined by the Board are mostly an output of strategic and military decisions with an inevitable effect of the war. The boundaries of the regions, thus, were certain and static (Farish 2005). Before and during the Cold War, it was possible to make a regional definition as the subsystems of the bipolar super-system. In this conceptualization, the political, economic and socio-cultural practices of the bipolar super-system were strongly permeating those subsystems. After the Cold War, regional definitions became more dynamic and flexible (Godehardt 2014).[5]

The classical definition of regions is made with a basis of common cultural, social, economic, religious and political features. However, the recent studies in the literature emphasize on the socially constructed nature of the regions. The book T. V. Paul edited is a comprehensive work to examine regions through different perspectives in International Relations (2012): realist perspectives, liberal

[5] Further reading can be held following the concepts "old regionalism" and "new regionalism".

perspectives, constructivist perspectives and eclectic perspectives. The constructivist perspective is now common within the critical approaches to regional studies. The main view of this constructivist thinking to the regions is the idea that regions are built by some political actors and factors. Acharya discussed the regionalism types in his chapter called "Regionalism Beyond EU-centrism" in the book *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism* (ch6 in Börzel and Bisse 2016). He claims that regionalism is limited with the EU-centric theories, and thus it is not diversified enough. By highlighting the differences between the EU-centric and non-Western regionalism, he deepened the regionalism theories as well as the Asian style regionalism in the literature. Also, Acharya says the common features (political, economic etc.) are no longer enough for any "regionness". Behavioral approaches, in which positivist methods are dominant, are insufficient to examine all aspects of regions at all (2007, 634). Besides Acharya, Mohammed Ayoob – a professor at Michigan State University, also studies how thoughts, norms and institutions establish a regional order (1999). Supporting their argument, Godehardt, a sinologist and a senior associate in German Institute for International and Security Affairs, in her book *The Chinese Constitution in Central Asia* (2014, 69-71) argues that regions cannot be taken of as natural entities, and they are historically and politically constructed by certain actors of the world. Instead of considering the regions as static entities, she underlines that they are in a constant process of re-formation.

Following the critical regional perspective, the questions of how the regions are related to the system and what is the place of regions in the levels of analysis in IR have been tried to be answered. Buzan and Waever analyzes in their book *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* that "the regionalist approach features a *distinct* level of analysis located *between* the global and the local" (2003, 27). Regions and states are the parts of the whole, the system. In this regard, "the concept of regions has never been truly de-linked from the idea of a global world order" (Godehardt 2014, 13). Spiegel and Cantori, who are of the pioneering scholars of comparative regional studies, complain in their book *The International Politics of Regions : A Comparative Approach* that (1970, 1-7) regions have stuck always under the politics of great powers and that the expression of regions is treated as only a geographical unit – with their words, "the problem of delineation". However, regions

also carry political, cultural and even economic identities. They consider the levels of analysis in International Relations as three interconnected systems: "the dominant, the subordinate and the internal". Regions are somewhere between the subordinate and the dominant, but in both ways, they are dependent units under the control mechanism of another authority, the system. Referring to this connection, Spiegel and Cantori also demonstrate in their studies that the center-periphery relationship, which exists at the system level, exists also at the regional level. As a result, considering the effects of the global level on the regions, it is very likely to analyze a system-level examination into the regional level.

On the other hand, neo-Gramscian perspective has started to be seen more frequently in the literature, especially with the developments in the 21st century. In particular, China's assertion of itself as an active actor in the international arena brought along the hegemony discussions in the world. The current leader of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping has fully opened China's foreign policy to the world. One of the main changes in Chinese foreign policy during the Xi era has been the assertive rhetoric about regional and even world leadership with a strong economy. Since he became the President of China in 2013, Xi has started many initiatives by attracting attention with an emphasis on strong China. He came up with the idea of a Chinese Dream as a reminder to the idea of prosperity in the American Dream in the 1930s, which includes development goals of China up to 2049, the centennial of the republic. Under the China Dream, the ultimate goal is for China to become "affluent, strong, civilized and harmonious socialist modern country" (Poh and Li 2017, 85). President Xi has compiled the components of strong China in his three-volume book titled *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China I, II and III* (2014; 2017; 2020). Rising China's multi-faceted development has increased the country's interest in the Central Asian region, especially in the last decades. It is possible to come across articles that handle the rise of China from a neo-Gramscian perspective within the scope of world order and global governance studies (Yılmaz 2014; Rucki 2011; Peng 2018; B. Laanen 2016). However, this research attempts to analyze the neo-Gramscian theory at the regional level, which is not very common, and combine with China's active engagement to Central Asia.

To do this, the idea in Cantori and Spiegel's work (1970), in which they stated that the center-periphery relationship at the system level occurs also at the regional level, is used as a supporting argument. Another supporting idea comes from Andrew Hurrell, a political scientist at Oxford University. He comments that a regional level of analysis is not sufficiently taken into account in the discipline of International Relations and its immaturity is as follows: "(…) we should take the standard range of general theories of International Relations and deploy them at the regional level" (2007, 133). On the other hand, Owen Worth states the potential change of the interpretation of regional formations:

> One popular way of using a neo-Gramscian approach to international politics has been in understanding regional institutions as bodies that serve to facilitate forms of neoliberal hegemony. This has largely been used within the EU to deal with questions of the Union's development and enlargement. (...) As well as these, China has emerged as a key regional leader in Asia, which has led to the potential of a larger form of regional unity in Asia that might in time clash with developed entities such as the EU (Worth 2015, 132).

Worth pointed to a potential difference in interpretation that would come to regional formations with the rise of China. Also the fact that Robert W. Cox himself had done a similar study was one of the sources of inspiration for this thesis. In his book chapter entitled "Structural Issues of Global Governance: Implications for Europe", he implemented Gramscian thoughts in the European example:

> We can think of the historic bloc, as Gramsci did, at the level of a particular country. We can also think of it at the level of Europe, and at the world in so far as there is evidence of the existence of a global social structure and global processes of structural change (ch10 in Gill et al. 1993, 259).

There are other scholars who have developed the Gramscian approach on the European example. The book *Social Forces in the Making of the New Europe: The Restructuring of European Social Relations in the Global Political Economy* is edited by Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton (2001) evaluates the enlargement and revival of Europe that had begun since the mid-1980s from a neo-Gramscian perspective. They mention the worldwide increase on the financial offshore markets, regulations in national markets, and rise on the foreign direct investments, a growth of multi-national corporations; so to speak, the changes came with globalization and

its effects to European integration and expansion. They believe that this structural changes occur in Europe needs to be reexamined, and they offer a neo-Gramscian approach as an alternative analysis to the existed European integration studies. The book is surrounding around those institutions, namely the European Central Bank, Economic and Monetary Union, European Round Table of Industrialists etc. which are in fact the sub-institutions of the European Union, as well as the labor and trade unions to create a European integration. It is hard to mention about ambitious companies or advanced institutions, or the labor and trade unions when the case is Central Asia and China, where political participation and civil society is relatively low. In Central Asia, there are family networks, economy barons and regional power centers, instead, to directly affect the regional politics. These and the attempt of China to establish economy-based initiatives towards Central Asia will be evaluated in the Chapter 4.

By inspiring all their methods of thinking with references to the pioneer theorists and their valuable conceptualizations, it is claimed in this thesis that the hegemony understanding of the neo-Gramscian school can be examined also at the regional level, with the example of China and Central Asia.

CHAPTER 4

CHINA'S ATTEMPTED REGIONAL HEGEMONY

This chapter consists of the empirical part of the thesis and aims to apply the theory to the case of China and Central Asia, by examining the mutual balances and the social forces for a potential regional structure and seeks the attempts of China to become the regional hegemon in Central Asia. After mentioning China's interests in the region briefly, this chapter questions the existence of a historical structure that covers the Central Asian region and China, the existence of a Chinese hegemony with the consent of the regional states, and whether the Chinese-led organizations in the region can be used as a mechanism for regional hegemony.

China has given an important place to Central Asia in its foreign policy priorities. The region is of critical importance due to three main reasons: the region's socio-cultural affinity with the Uyghurs in the eastern part of China; the region's potential to meet China's energy needs; and the region's geographical value as it has the role of a bridge to Europe from China. Central Asia is the second richest region in the world in terms of the quantity and quality of the energy resources. It is possible to observe that China has become economically stronger as it has set aside its isolated policies and instead, targeted expansionary and progressive policies. Today, China has become the second largest economy in the world after the US. With its economic growth, the country's need for energy resources has dramatically increased and it has sought new markets. Central Asia is the closest region and one of the richest regions for oil and gas, so Central Asia is the best option for being energy supply for China. In 1997, the state owned Chinese National Petroleum Company signed an agreement with Kazakhstan on exploration of oil. The same company finished the construction

of a new pipeline to transport Kazakh oil to Xinjiang region in China in 2005. Then in 2009, a new pipeline route between Turkmenistan and China opened for natural gas transportation (Omelicheva 2018, 11). This pipeline was the longest gas pipeline of the world, approximately 7 thousand km, when it was constructed (Włodkowska-Bagan 2012, 11). Because of these energy demands, China developed energy diplomacy with the Central Asian nations. These economic ties also might be the facilitator for the security of Xinjiang region. With those motivations, trade volume between China and the five Central Asian countries rose from $527 million in 1992 to $1 billion in 2000 (Zimmerman 2015, 7), to $40 billion in 2011 (Fazilov and Chen 2013, 39) and to $50 billion in 2013 (Omonkulov and Baba 2019, 13). From 1992 to 2013, the trade volume of them increased more than 90 times. China has increased its investments in the region with various projects cover building roads and railways, constructing pipelines etc.

4.1. A Potential Historical Structure

In Cox's understanding, the historical structure is formed by the interplay of socio-political forces at different levels in the world system (Cox 1981, 135-136). As a result of this dialectical relationship, hegemony arises. Therefore, this section will provide an overview of the mutual relationship between China and the Central Asian region.

First of all, it is important to take China's relationship with the Central Asian region through definitions. Today's wider regional definitions point to the holistic nature of China and Central Asia. There is a broader definition of Central Asia that has been used recently and is often preferred by the Chinese sources. Thus, it is useful to discuss the definition of Central Asia as a region and where China is located in these regional descriptions. The Central Asian region comes up with different contested definitions in the literature. It is possible to mention two main perspectives here and definitions related to them. Firstly, the most used border definition is the one that covers the five post-Soviet republics, namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. The approximate lands where these five countries are located today were named as Middle (*Srednaia*) Asia by the Russians in the middle of the 19th century. This Russian terminology was accepted by most of the world,

and the region was associated with the lands under Russian control rather than their internal features (Starr 2008, 4). Most scholars evaluate those five nations compatible with each other. Their Turkic-origin language (except of the Persian-origin language of Tajikistan), their religion of Islam, their socio-cultural and economic ties (for example bazaars) as well as their political history based on clan politics are the reasons to take them under the same regional boundaries. Also, the five states are connected to each other with a single electricity line which was constructed in the Soviet times (ch6 in Börzel and Bisse 2016). Secondly, some scholars make a broader definition of Central Asia, which is mostly associated with the subject of this research. In a working paper published by the World Bank, a "wider Central Asia" concept is mentioned, which covers those five additional to Afghanistan, parts of Iran, Pakistan and Russia and such neighboring nations/areas as China, India and Middle East (Byrd and Raiser 2006). One of the scholars that came up with this larger definition, is Frederick Starr – is the founder and chairman of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute. He introduced the concept of "Greater Central Asia" (Starr 2005; 2008):

> (...) it is an attempt to break out of the narrow geographical definition of the region propounded by the USSR. It accepts the reality that for two millennia both Xinjiang and Afghanistan have been integral components of the cultural zone of which the five former Soviet republics are a part. It also accepts the possibility of a yet wider definition, one that includes at least the Khorasan province of Iran, the northern part of Pakistan, Mongolia, such Russian areas as Tatarstan, and even that part of northern India extending from Rajastan to Agra (2008, 6).

In addition, Godehardt gives a place to varied interviews with the Chinese experts and reviews about the Chinese literature on Central Asia in her book and concludes her findings that the most of Chinese take Afghanistan and the Xinjiang region within one regional neighborhood (2014, 11), even some take Mongolia to its scope by referring to this concept of the "Greater Central Asian region" (2014, 176). This wider regional definition of Central Asia, covering the Xinjiang region and Afghanistan as well, developed especially after the 2000s, now has become a research subject by the scholars who study on political history of Central Asia (Kerr 2010; Swanström 2011). The inclusion of western parts of China in this broader Central Asia and the fact of this definition is the preferred one by the Chinese

sources is significant. The fact that China, which is mostly regarded as an East Asian country, has taken its place partly in this broader definition that has seen in the literature with the 2000s, is an argument that strengthens the idea of a new regional structure for China and its Western neighbors.

The rise of China and its increasingly active role in Central Asia play an important role added a different dimension to the hegemony debates in the region. Together with the question of whether China has full inclusion in the region's borders, the fact of its active engagement in the region as a Great Power and neighboring country cannot be ignored. When considering China as an active actor with potential to become a regional hegemon in the region, I would like to refer to the following passage from Cantori and Spiegel:

> Every nation-state (no matter how strong or weak) is a member of only one subordinate system. There are two exceptions to this generalization: the most powerful states are also active in other subordinate systems besides their own; and there are a few states which exist on the borderline between two subordinate systems and may be considered to belong to both (1970, 5).

According to this, China is within the scope of the first of these two exceptions. China today is one of the most powerful states, with its second biggest economy in the world, and it is becoming more and more dominant in Central Asia. At the same time, regions are dynamic, and their borders are suitable for both expansion and contraction, and they are in a continuous process of formation and re-formation today. In this respect, China, according to Godehardt, is in a "regional territoriality dilemma", which makes itself a part of the region and at the same time separates itself from the region (2014, 127). Also, the Chinese scholars mention Central Asia (post-Soviet Central Asia + Xinjiang region + Afghanistan) as "others" while talking about China as "us" (Godehardt 2014, 173). This ambivalent situation can be evaluated as a dilemma as well as a strategic discourse. By expressing this, the country also legitimizes its existence in the region within the same regional structure while securing its own national security. On the other hand, Zhao Huasheng – is a professor at Fudan University, evaluates China and Central Asia "naturally bonded" due to the western border of China while likening the Xinjiang region a bridge between them. Thus, he says, the "Chinese presence is natural, not arbitrary; no

matter what happens, China cannot withdraw from the region [Central Asia]" (Rumer, Trenin, and Zhao 2007, 161). The scope of these regional definitions is very important. The inclusion of the Xinjiang region and Afghanistan in the definitions of the Central Asian region by the Chinese, and emphasizing the holistic bond between China and the region, is one of the arguments for establishing a historical bloc.

After mentioning the regional definitions, the historical ties between the two are necessary to understand the origin of today's relations, since the historical ties lay the groundwork for today's discourses. China is one of the oldest countries to have relations with Central Asia, which dates back to the Han Dynasty. They have been in a relationship for more than two thousand years (Rossabi 1975, 9). Thus, the socio-cultural proximity of western China to the Central Asian region has an importance because this proximity coming from the past is often referred to today. Zhao Huasheng takes attention to the geographical ties between China and Central Asia and claims that no country, including Russia, is closer to Central Asia than China. Russia borders only with Kazakhstan, and the north of Kazakhstan is not historically included in the Central Asian region, he says. Other neighbors of Central Asia are Iran and Afghanistan, but both countries have weaker international influence compared to China (ch3 in Rumer, Trenin, and Zhao 2007, 163). Parallel to this, President Xi mentions Central Asia with these words: "A neighbor is better than a distant relative" (2014, 312). Xi's emphasis on this is proof that Chinese see Central Asians as more valuable and closer to themselves than even Chinese citizens on the other side of the world. Hence, historically and geographically, emphasis on these ties by the Chinese strengthens the idea of their will for establishing a historical structure in the region.

On the mention of history, it is necessary to discuss the Xinjiang region, which connects Central Asia with China. The Xinjiang region of China is neighboring to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and there is a significant Uyghur population living in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. In the late 1980s, the Uyghur people in Central Asia mobilized and moved for greater autonomy for Xinjiang province of China for the first time. Later on, political organizations founded to represent the Uyghurs within those states. Thus, the "Uyghur issue" we call today gained a greater

dimension and became a "Uyghur mobilization" first in the Central Asian nations, not in Xinjiang (Ergun 2021, 28). Today, the separatist movements have increased, and there are a variety of Uyghurs-based organizational structures in Central Asian states (Atay 2010, 70-71). Also it is known that the Uyghur diaspora is quite strong in the region (Peyrouse 2016, 16). The fact of the historical Turkestan region[6] also points to a historical, so a socio-cultural and even ethnic, linkage between the Uyghurs and Central Asia. Apart from this bond between the Central Asians and the Uyghurs, the Xinjiang region was joined to the territories of China during the Qing dynasty in the 18th century. According to the White Paper of the People's Republic of China in 2003, the Xinjiang region is an "inseparable part of the unitary multi-ethnic Chinese nation since the Han Dynasty" (Clarke 2009, 2). Here we see that China is trying to "construct" a legitimate bond with the region. Although the Xinjiang region joined the Chinese territories during the Qing period, the White Paper emphasizes that their "inseparable" ties date back to the Han dynasty, which is the same period to start mutual relations with Central Asia. While talking about regional definitions above, it was emphasized that most Chinese experts and Chinese sources considered Xinjiang as Central Asia. When all these are considered together, it is possible to infer that China does not separate Xinjiang from itself and also from Central Asia. China's evaluation of the Central Asian region very closely and holistically to itself with this connection strengthens the idea of the historical structure in Coxian understanding.

On the other hand, Afghanistan under the Taliban government, like other Central Asian countries, has significance for China by having religious ties with the Uyghurs. Being a radical Sunni Muslim organization, the Taliban is an important actor for the security of the Xinjiang region where the majority population is Sunni Muslim. Moreover, China experienced the biggest Uyghur riot in its history in 2009, when the former Taliban was effective in Afghanistan (Zhao 2016, 3). It is very critical for China's internal security that the Uyghurs in Xinjiang are not affected by the power of the Taliban. China accepts almost whole Uyghurs-related attempts at

[6] Turkestan is the name given to the historical region between the Gobi Desert and the Caspian Sea, expanding from the Central Asian geography extending to Siberia to today's Tibet, India, Afghanistan and even Iran.

autonomy as acts of terrorism. For Chinese foreign policy one of the pillars is to promote territorial unity; anything against it is seen as a security threat by China. The more China has a say in the Central Asian region, the more it will be able to manage the Uyghur issue in its favor. For this reason, China has a moderate approach to the new Afghan Taliban government in 2021. Hua Chunying – a spokeswoman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, expressed in a conference: "Some repeatedly stress distrust of the Taliban, but what I want to say is nothing in the world can stand still. I prefer to look at things dialectically, to see its past and present, and its words as well as actions" (Ergun 2021, 30). Considering that the people of Central Asia (including Afghanistan) have such ties with the Uyghurs testify China's will and potential to construct a historical bloc in the region is strengthened.

When Robert W. Cox talks about the construction of a historical structure, he mentions the common interests and common concerns that bring states closer together, through diplomatic agents (Cox 1981, 136). In this regard, it is worth saying that intense diplomacy and interstate meetings take place in the relations between China and Central Asian states. The collapse of the Soviet Union forms the basis of China's contemporary relations with the Central Asian states; their first diplomatic relations started with border-related topics. China directly recognized the independence of the regional nations just after their declaration of independence in 1992 and became the second country after the US (Thornton 2020, 2), and the commercial relations immediately began between the two. China expanded its bilateral relations under the name of "strategic partnership". In this context, the most strategic relations were with Kazakhstan. Also, it has a "partnership of friendly co-operation" with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan while having a "partnership of friendly co-operation directed towards the 21st century" with Tajikistan and Turkmenistan (Niquet 2006). China has openly supported the regional states in the international arena regarding the legitimacy and stability of the newly established regimes and their independence against superpowers such as Russia and the US. In the first years of independence, China consistently defended the efforts of the new regimes to become a nation-state within their new borders (Global Times 2022). In addition, Susan Thornton – a former American diplomat, claims that China as much as it can tries to keep the sovereignty problems of the regional countries on the agenda by

reminding the Russian effect: the "Chinese interests also serve to keep threats to sovereignty front and center in the minds of Central Asians" (Thornton 2020, 2). In other words, there are even allegations that China aims to move the regional states away from Russia and bring them closer to itself. According to Cox, all these relations between the two since the independence of regional states create the "common ground" for a historical structure.

More recently, the concept of "the community for common destiny (命 运共同体)" put forward by President Xi is an important argument for establishing of a historical structure. This concept was introduced together with the China Dream during the 18th Party Congress in 2012 (Poh and Li 2017, 85). By constructing a community with shared norms and identity, "China is striving for developing a shared regional vision and trying to persuade other countries that their own peace and prosperity will best be secured by being more intertwined with that of China" (Peng 2018, 66). This concept points to a Sino-centric historical structure with all its economic, political and social elements. It is possible to mention a model that China, with a Confucian thought, is located at the center with orbits around it. The community for common destiny "can be envisioned as a series of concentric circles that places Central Asia in its first ring" (Wilson 2021, 78). Also Kemel Toktomushev – a political scientist at University of Central Asia, also interpreted this rhetoric by having a direct relation with Central Asia (2017). These are clear signs for China's will for establishing a historical structure in the region. As a supporting argument, it is possible to encounter this discourse in the President's speeches. For example, Xi wrote an article in a Kazakhstan newspaper on June 7, 2017. There, he strongly emphasized this discourse: "During this quarter century, China-Kazakhstan relations have withstood the test of time and international turmoil. From building good neighborly relations and constructing a comprehensive strategic partnership, to building "a community of interests" and "a community of shared future", China-Kazakhstan relations have achieved a leapfrog development and reached the best relations ever" (taken from Zeng 2020, 122). A similar example of Xi's rhetoric was encountered in June 22, 2016 for Uzbekistan: "Uzbekistan is a big country in Central Asia. China has always viewed China-Uzbekistan relations from a strategic and long-term perspective, and has made a "community of interests" and "community of shared future for China and

Uzbekistan" that creates equality, mutual benefit and win-win cooperation one of the diplomatic priorities" (taken from Zeng 2020, 122). As a recent development, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China published the remarks of Xi Jinping at the Virtual Summit to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between China and Central Asian Countries with the title of "Joining Hands for Shared Future" (FMPRC 2022a). There, Xi emphasized what steps they have taken under this motto for 30 years and how there will be developments between the two from now on. These quotations of President Xi and the purpose of the discourse clearly point to China's desire to establish a historical structure in the region.

The potentials as well as the will of China to establish a historical structure on the Central Asian region were discussed and will discuss further through the SCO, BRI and the AIIB. With historical references, it is possible to deduce that China did not clearly separate the region from itself and included the Xinjiang region – which is currently within its borders, and Afghanistan while defining the region. The existence of the Xinjiang region in particular directly connects China to the region. On the other hand, the fact that China has consistently maintained its diplomatic relations with the regional states since their independence, and China promotes the slogan the "community for common destiny" indicates an attempt of China to contruct a potential historical structure in the region.

4.2. Hegemony of China and the Consent of Central Asia?

The concept of hegemony is examined as a result of mutual interactions in the formation of a historical structure. This section examines whether there is a hegemony and consent relationship in this potential historical structure. In the following, the case of China and Central Asia through the conceptualizations of Robert W. Cox and his classification for the features of a hegemonic historical structure is discussed.

According to Cox, one of the factors that make it easier for a state to be hegemon is the experience of a powerful revolution in its history. Because powerful revolutions are not limited to the state borders, they expand outwards. That kind of a revolution

results in a new national hegemony. Supra-state hegemony is established in time, only by the expansion of this national hegemonic class from within the state to outside. The economic, social and political institutions, norms and the system established by that national hegemony within the state then become the patterns of the supra-state hegemonic order (Cox 1983, 171). The founding of the present-day People's Republic of China in 1949 was a result of the Chinese Communist Revolution. The Chinese Revolution marks the end of a process that includes the Sino-Japanese War, World War II, and the civil war in China between nationalists and communists. These wars, in which millions of people lost their lives, can also be titled as the Revolutionary Wars. The experience of a revolution is a facilitating factor in becoming hegemon. In the case of China, there is a revolution in the nature of the establishment of the state itself, so it is possible to say that China has enough of this feature and has a hegemonic potential.

China's potential aside, is it possible to talk about a hegemonic structure that already exists in the Central Asian region? There is no doubt that there is a hegemonic structure in the region by the Russian influence. The fact that fifteen different states after the dissolution of the USSR can still be evaluated under a single "post-Soviet space" title indicates that the Russian effects are still present in the region. The Central Asian region, on the other hand, was under Russian rule from the 19th century until 1991, first under Tsarist Russia and then under the Soviet Union. Therefore, all socio-cultural, political and economic structures of the regional states were Russified[7]. Within the scope of Russification policies under the Soviets, it was aimed to build a common and integrated "Soviet Man" model by cultural and language policies. These cultural policies were summed up as "teaching the people of the Kirghiz steppe, the small Uzbek cotton grower, and the Turkmen gardener the ideals of the Leningrad worker" (Ahmad, Hussan, and Shah 2017, 75). On the other hand, the campaigns aimed at spreading the Russian language were also strictly implemented. The launch of the literacy campaign was not accidental, immediately after the declaration of the language of education as Russian. With the spread of the Russian language, the local languages dictionary was standardized and Russian

[7] "Russification was a policy designed to strengthen the position of the Russian language and nationality in the borderlands of the empire" (Ahmad, Hussan, and Shah 2017, 74).

terminologies were used throughout the country. The ethnic Central Asians had to learn Russian, in addition to their own local languages (Ahmad, Hussan, and Shah 2017, 75-76). With the influence of these policies, the Russian language is still very common in Central Asia. All these policies implemented to Russify the ethnic minorities are evidence of an existing hegemonic historical bloc created by the Russians in the Central Asian region.

Following the Russian hegemony in the region, the concept of counter-hegemony is needed to be discussed. Counter-hegemony can be explained as the construction of a new hegemonic project that will challenge the current dominant order. This term was in fact a product of Leninist thought rather than Gramsci's. For counter-hegemony to happen, Worth outlines a number of features:

> However, if we are to understand what (and how successful) a potential counter-hegemonic movement might be, we can assess it by looking at whether it has (a) a clear ideological alternative to the current status quo; (b) support from civil society that can be mobilized at different levels; and (c) a popular appeal which can challenge the overriding common sense of a specific order (Worth 2015, 150).

Can we talk about that kind of a resistance in Central Asia in favor of China? (a) The ideological difference between Russia and China was first clearly emerged in 1950s as it is known the Sino-Soviet split[8], when the Soviet was following coherent policies with capitalism (it is also known as de-Stalinization policies), China was following pure communist policies under Mao's presidency; this ideological split declined after Mao's death. Ideologically, the main difference between the two is that while Soviet communism is destroyed, Chinese communism somehow continues. Today, China has achieved considerable success by implementing a system known as "market socialism", while Russia is still trying to transition to a mixed market system after the Soviet Union. China clearly distinguishes itself from any other nation in the world ideologically and presents its own development to the world as a model (will be discussed further in the following). Xi Jinping often uses expressions such as

[8] The Sino-Soviet split that occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s was a dispute resulting from the different interpretation of traditional Marxist teaching between China and the Soviets. Following this, an undeclared armed Sino-Soviet conflict happened in the late 1960s.

"Chinese characteristics" and "Chinese way" in his books (2014; 2017; 2020) when he mentions the "Chinese perspective". As a result, it is possible to infer that China has a strong alternative ideology that is different from the existing one. (b) In the countries of Central Asia, civil society is known to be not very strong. It is thus difficult to reach public opinion due to both the authoritarian regimes and the inadequacy of non-profit organizations. It is known that Chinese institutions organize various scientific researches, workshops and conferences in cooperation with local institutions in the region (Serikkaliyeva 2019, 77). Though it is difficult to come across a pro-Chinese local organized civil society structure in the region, it is possible to say that there is an elite level of Chinese sympathy. The elite interest groups, the company owners see China as an opportunity, which will be elaborated in the following paragraphs. (c) China has varied instruments in the region to create a popular culture with a good image. It is known that China's radio and television channels are followed with interest in the region, and China provides visa convenience to the regional states in terms of tourism and travel (Dadparvar and Azizi 2019). Moreover, Chinese institutions allocate a substantial budget to organize concerts, exhibitions and cultural days etc., especially for young Central Asians (Serikkaliyeva 2019, 77). However, at the local level, it is possible to encounter some anti-Chinese protests in the region recently. The increase in neo-nationalist tendencies in the region and the fact that the society is now overwhelmed by the policies produced by their authoritarian regimes are interpreted as a sign of a new consciousness that has begun to rise in the region. With this awareness, the people, who occasionally revolt against their governments, also tend to oppose Chinese influence. For example, a group of activists protested China's increasing influence in their country in Kazakhstan in March 27, 2021 (RFERL's Kazakh Service 2021) and another protest happened in Kyrgyzstan against the uncontrollable inflow of Chinese laborers in January 17, 2019 (Eurasianet 2019). In both, protestors were also complaining about the detention of their citizens in Xinjiang. These protests can be considered as challenges that China must overcome to become the hegemon in the region. In addition to these three indicators, it is also a strong argument that the Russian influence is sought to be broken by de-Russification policies by the hands of the regional states themselves, as will be detailed in the following paragraphs. To summarize the presence of counter-hegemony in the region, it is possible to conclude

that there is a possibility of that kind of a movement in favor of China; and actually China is trying to do so to happen. However, it would not be correct to ignore that there are also local-level reactions that China has to face and overcome.

Why is there consent in a hegemonic historical structure? It is not possible to talk about an absolute coercion, because neo-Gramscian theory assumes that every nation-state is an agency and has its own decision-making mechanisms. The reason why states consent to a hegemonic structure today is the "hope of development" for Coxian understanding (1987, 393-394) and the belief of the good for everyone. Being displeased with the existing order and the hope of development lead the states into new searches. "An option for change rather than preservation of the status quo is dictated more by dissatisfaction with the prevailing order and hope for improvement than by any blueprint for an alternative society" (Cox 1987, 393). Central Asian states are middle powers. The desire of a stronger economy and prosperity has put them in a position open to sympathize with an alternative alliance, which is also clearly expressed many times from the regional states' leaders. This is the main reason why the leaders of Central Asian states are consenting to cooperate with China. This will be substantiating with the contented quotes from the regional leaders in the following paragraphs.

In Gramscian understanding, it is underlined that the consent is provided mostly by the elites of the substructure. The calls of the leaders to further increase the relations with China can be considered as the "tacit consent" of the Central Asian societies as a whole. The ruling class and elite interest groups, who can be called Central Asian oligarchs as well, seem to be satisfied and consented with China's presence in the region by claiming that partnership with China provides "opportunities for all". In May 2019, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, Abdulaziz Kamilov, in his meeting with his Chinese counterpart, made it clear that Uzbekistan adheres strictly to the one-China policy and that their necessary institutions are "ready to jointly build" the Belt and Road Initiative (MFA Hong Kong-China 2019). Moreover, Gulnara Karimov – the eldest daughter of the former president of Uzbekistan (Islam Karimov), was a prominent figure in metal sales to China before her trade networks collapsed (Peyrouse 2016, 17). A similar example is from Kazakhstan: In January

2022 (at the similar times of mass anti-government protests in Kazakhstan), the President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev openly "praised" their relations with China, describing it as an "unprecedented dynamism" and "a high level of trust" (Satubaldina 2022). In addition, the former Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, Karim Masimov, of Uyghur descent, was educated in China and fluent in Chinese. He was even known as the representative of the Chinese lobby in the region (Peyrouse 2016, 18). Apart from the ruling class, leading companies in metallurgy in Kazakhstan are also pleased with the Nur-Sultan-Beijing rapprochement. Alexander Mashkevich's Eurasian Group (Eurasian National Resources Corporation), which controls one-third of the country's economy and Vladimir Kim's Kazakhmys – the country's largest copper producer can be examples of it (Peyrouse 2016, 18). On the other hand, with the March 2022 elections of Turkmenistan, the new president has become Serdar Berdimuhamedov. Calling the new president on the phone, after the election results to congratulate, Xi Jinping first spoke with the former president Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. The former president "thanked" Xi Jinping for his "great contribution" to Turkmen-Chinese cooperation. Then, in his speech with the new president, President Serdar stated that they are "ready for building a multi-dimensional strategic partnership" with China and "deepening relations further", following the policies of the former leader (Nebit-Gaz 2022). Even in Kyrgyzstan, which is known to be an active country in terms of Sinophobic movements, the statements of the leader are still in favor of China. The President Sadyr Japarov said in January 2022:

> Development and strengthening of ties led our states to establishment of relations in 2013 on a completely 'new level'. The joint declaration signed in 2019 on 'further deepening' the comprehensive strategic partnership testifies to the absence of any issues between the Kyrgyz Republic and the PRC that impede good neighborliness and friendship between our peoples. Since Kyrgyzstan gained independence, China has been providing comprehensive support and assistance to our republic (apostrophes are added, 24.KG 2022).

In addition, the Salymbekov family, which possess the largest market (Dordoi market) in Bishkek and can control the Naryn region, where trade products from China pass through and the family come from, are also very warm to relations with China (Peyrouse 2016, 18). Another similar example can be given from Tajikistan.

The President Emomali Rahmon said in February 2022 that "Further deepening the friendly and cooperative relation between Tajikistan and China was, is, and will be Tajikistan's top diplomatic priority" and added:

> Tajikistan is 'willing to actively participate' in the Belt and Road cooperation and promote cooperation in economy, trade, industry, energy, infrastructure and other fields under this framework. 'China is welcomed' to expand investment in Tajikistan, import more agricultural products from Tajikistan, and deepen people-to-people, cultural and educational exchanges and cooperation, among others. 'Tajikistan hopes' to strengthen communication and coordination with China in international and regional affairs and jointly safeguard regional security and stability (apostrophes are added, FMPRC 2022b).

One of the sons-in-law of President Rahmon, Hassan Saidullaev, is also the head of Ismaili Somoni XXI Century holding companies, contributing to the establishment of close relations with China (Peyrouse 2016, 17). In addition to these all, it is known that there are "the service secrets, which control the shadow turn- over of money at the custom borders" (Peyrouse 2016, 18) of the regional states are quite open for business with China. And the fact that some criminal organizations specializing in trade with China are having close relations with the Central Asian governments strengthens the hand of pro-Chinese tendencies in the region, as F.Starr calls them "magnates or barons" (Starr 2006, 8).

As it is understood, the consent of the elites is coming mostly from the strong family networks, kinship ties and some economic barons. Despite all these strong arguments, "there are no lobbies financed by China that have developed independently of political power, and none that could contradict high-level decisions" in the region, but it is a fact that "historically Beijing has always fostered Sinophile circles in neighboring countries" with its economic advantage (Peyrouse 2016, 18). As seen, all Central Asian elites are positive about their perfect relations with China. Quotations from varied up-to-date speeches by the ruling elites and the big companies' positive posture all have one in common: satisfaction with China's interest to them, their belief in China's contribution to their national interests and to their people, and thus their "consent" for growing Chinese influence.

Aside from the ruling elites of the substructure, the consent and reaction of the local people should also be evaluated, as they constitute the majority. Regarding this, Marlene Laurelle is a political scientist on Eurasia, and Sebastien Peyrouse is the author of several books on Central Asia, put forth the concept of "the Chinese question" in Central Asia and searching on that. The most well-known work of them is the book titled *Chinese Question in Central Asia: Domestic Order, Social Change, and The Chinese Factor* (2012). In this book, they only take the examples of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to research Sinophilia and Sinophobia, and do not mention about the other nations in the region because of the lack of a pluralistic debate regarding China in 2012. However, after four years, Peyrouse was able to examine that kind of tendency in all regional states in one of his articles (2016). There, he summarizes the Chinese factor as having a positive image for geopolitics and economy related issues while having a negative image for the issues on identity and culture. In particular, in the weaker countries of the region, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the people welcome China's stabilizing role in security-related matters in the region (Peyrouse 2016, 19). In terms of economy as well, China offers numerous export opportunities to the region, which is welcomed by the Central Asian experts and the public. It is also a fact that Chinese companies offer more advantageous contracts than their Western or Russian counterparts. However, there is a dominant Chinese suspicion in Central Asia, a growing concern especially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the perception of a "Chinese threat" regarding culture and demography. There is an atmosphere of a suspicion about China's possible "'hidden' objectives" (Peyrouse 2016, 19) for the Central Asian region. This distrust is fueled by legal uncertainties such as the fact that none of China's territorial agreements with the regional states have been published and how many years the agreements will pursue (Peyrouse 2016, 19). There is a similar concern about energy. Experts and the public are concerned that their country will become dependent on China and a potential national and demographic threat in the long term. The expression "Chinese expansion" has come up frequently in Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Tajik newspapers which portray China as an anti-nomadic, anti-Turkish, and imperialist enemy in history. In some sociological surveys, there are public opinions that Chinese migrants will increase in the near future in Central Asia and this will negatively affect the labor market (Peyrouse 2016, 21). The society complains that Chinese firms exclude the

local industry and employ Chinese citizens in their firms, not the locals (McGlinchey 2019). In addition, the local people attribute the increase in crime rates in some parts of their country to ghettoization in Chinese neighborhoods. The public is worried that the rise of the Chinese diaspora will create a political influence in their country.

> (…) many Central Asian specialists are persuaded that Beijing is trying to transform the economies of Central Asia to suit its own interests, to weaken their potential for autonomy and further to establish their status as Chinese protectorates dependent on China for technological know-how (Peyrouse 2016, 21).

The imperialism suspicion and the fear of Sinicization policies underlie those Sinophobic thoughts. And today, some anti-Chinese protests have occurred, especially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, as given above. However, China is effectively using all kinds of soft power in the region to combat those Sinophobic movements, through education programs, concerts, festivals etc. In addition to those who evaluate the attitude of Central Asians towards China from the perspective of phobia, there are also those who evaluate this as Sino-agnostic (McGlinchey 2019). To sum up, it would not be fair to say that China has achieved absolute hegemony at the local level in the region. Public opinion towards China is quite diverse, so it is possible to conclude that there is uncertainty for the public's consent of China's increasing role in the region while there is the concent of elites. These uncertainties and dissatisfaction at the local level is perhaps one of the biggest obstacles to China's possible hegemony in the region.

After discussing the potential hegemony of China in the five Central Asian countries, what about the consent of Afghanistan? As it is known, the Taliban managed to form an Afghan Taliban government in Afghanistan, after about ten years, on August 15 in 2021. China and Taliban relations started before the Taliban announced that they had formed a new government. At the meeting in July, where Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi hosted the Taliban in Tianjin, one of the representatives of the Taliban – Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, invited China to "be more involved in Afghanistan's peace and reconciliation process and play a bigger role in future reconstruction and economic development" (reached from Ergun 2021) by signaling the new Taliban government to be established. Then, the mutual relations gained

momentum after the capture of the capital Kabul. After August 15, Suhail Shaheen – a spokesperson for the Taliban, openly invited China to support the newly established Afghan Taliban government on a China-based television channel by these words: "China is a big country with a huge economy and capacity – I think they can play a very big role in the rebuilding, rehabilitation, reconstruction of Afghanistan" (Ergun 2021, 30). These meetings were followed by positive statements from the Chinese authorities. The emphasis on words like "reconstruction" and "rebuilding" and the argument that China will assume a founding role in Afghanistan feeds the idea that China's potential to build a hegemonic historical structure over the region. The fact that the new Afghan rulers are so inviting to China for these roles is a clear sign of consent.

There are indispensable prerequisites according to Cox for the establishment of a hegemonic historical structure in the world; he underlines the necessity of three social forces: material capabilities, ideas and institutions. He says that if one of the three is missing, the world hegemony cannot be established (Cox 1983, 172). Regarding this, there are two questions to be answered: Do indicators that hint a regional hegemon in Central Asia? And does China meet Cox's prerequisites for economic, social and political hegemony in Central Asia? These two will be answered together in the following paragraphs.

The first force is the "material capabilities". Since China is the second largest economy in the world, it can naturally be concluded that it has a stronger economy than any other nation in the greater region. Also, we have seen that the Central Asian states are experiencing a "change" on their economic relations over the years. In order to make it clearer, a couple of tables based on economic relations between China and Central Asia are shared. The Table 4.2.1 and the Table 4.2.2 below are prepared to show trade relations of the six Central Asian states with Russia and China comparatively in 2000 and 2018. There is a reason these two years are chosen. China has become a member of the World Trade Organization in 2001, so the beginning of the 21st century, the year 2000 is chosen. In order to make a comparison, the year 2018 is preferred instead of 2019 which is the most up-to-date

data available.[9] The year choices aside, the reason to compare China to Russia is because of the existing Russian hegemony in the region. It is possible to prove from Table 4.2.1 and Table 4.2.2 that in the last two decades, China has replaced the existing Russian economic dominance in the Central Asian region. Afghanistan constitutes an exception here, because of the instability of the country as well as the US intervention between these years. Thus, its trade relations were mostly developed with the US and neighboring countries such as Pakistan and India, both in 2000 and 2018.

[9] Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the foreign investments and foreign trade volumes of the countries worldwide decreased. In order to make a healthier inference while creating the data, the year 2018 – just before the pandemic is found more appropriate.

Table 4.2.1: Comparison of Central Asian states' imports with China and Russia in 2000 and 2018, compiled by the author from the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC-World).

Imports in 2000						
	China			**Russia**		
	Ranking as a trading partner	**Trade volume (~US$ billion)**	**Share in the country's total imports**	**Ranking as a trading partner**	**Trade volume (~US$ billion)**	**Share in the country's total imports**
Afghanistan	7	0.02	4.73%	9	0.01	2.66%
Kazakhstan	2	0.6	12.4%	1	2.2	45.7%
Kyrgyzstan	1	0.115	18%	2	0,111	17.4%
Tajikistan	11	0.006	2.1%	2	0,056	17.3%
Turkmenistan	14	0.021	1.37%	2	0.157	10.3%
Uzbekistan	12	0.039	2.34%	1	0.271	16.1%
Imports in 2018						
	China			**Russia**		
	Ranking as a trading partner	**Trade volume (~US$ billion)**	**Share in the country's total imports**	**Ranking as a trading partner**	**Trade volume (~US$ billion)**	**Share in the country's total imports**
Afghanistan	5	0.97	7.33%	11	0,001	1,25%
Kazakhstan	2	8.75	23.3%	1	13	34.5%
Kyrgyzstan	1	4.65	52.9%	2	1.68	19.1%
Tajikistan	1	1.43	38.4%	2	0.850	22.9%
Turkmenistan	3	0.31	11.4%	4	0.288	10.3%
Uzbekistan	1	3.78	20.7%	2	3.33	18.3%

The Table 4.2.1 consists of the imports of each Central Asian state with a comparison of China and Russia in 2000 and 2018. Russia was an obvious import partner of the regional states in 2000, since it occupies the first or the second top import partner with a big amount of share in the countries' total imports. However, in 2018, the situation seems to be reversed. Except Kazakhstan, China has become a more important trading partner than Russia. When China is compared to itself, from 2000 to 2018, its development is really striking. In particular, the fact that China accounts for more than fifty percent of the import volume of Kyrgyzstan is a very serious achievement for it. Although the rank of trading partners has not changed, China seems to have increased its imports to Kyrgyzstan four times compared to Russia. Another striking point is the increase in the percentage of imports of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. China, which could not have even a 3% share in the total imports of the regional countries in 2000, is in front of us with high rates such as 38%, 11% and 21% in 2018. In addition to these, it is likely to see an

expansion in Russia's place in the import volumes of the regional states. However, China has developed its exports so much to Central Asia that Russia's exports lagged behind China's.

Import data from the perspective of the countries in the region are important, because the increase in the import rate (considering the sectors) carries a "dependency" potential. Also, it is appropriate to talk about the existence of core and periphery states in a hegemonic order. The products imported by middle powered Central Asian countries are generally high-tech and relatively more expensive compared to what they export. To give a concrete example, the most imported products by the regional nations from China in 2018 are harvesting machinery, video display, stone processing machines, light pure woven cotton, broadcasting equipment etc. (OEC-World). While regional states export energy and mineral resources to China, they import light industrial products and machinery from China. Regarding this, it might be proper to talk about the dependence of the peripheral regional states on China, which has a potential to be the core state. Reporting the 2019 data, China Briefing says: Although Central Asia's importance in China's trade is not huge – it only accounts for %1 of the total volume of exports and imports, China is one of the most important trading partners for Central Asia (China Briefing Team 2021). Thus, it can be deduced that while the peripheral states constitute a very small part of the economy of the possible core country, the possible core nation China constitutes a very important position for the economies of the regional nations of Central Asia.

Table 4.2.2: Comparison of Central Asian states' exports with China and Russia in 2000 and 2018, compiled by the author from the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC-World)

Exports in 2000						
	China			**Russia**		
	Ranking as a trading partner	**Trade volume (~US$ billion)**	**Share in the country's total exports**	**Ranking as a trading partner**	**Trade volume (~US$ billion)**	**Share in the country's total exports**
Afghanistan	6	0,005	4.79%	7	0,005	4.55%
Kazakhstan	4	0.821	8.28%	1	1.97	19.9%
Kyrgyzstan	4	0.046	8.76%	3	0.067	12.9%
Tajikistan	4	0.01	2.49%	1	0.226	56%
Turkmenistan	22	0.006	0.24%	1	1.04	37%
Uzbekistan	28	0.011	0,55%	1	0.636	31,4%
Exports in 2018						
	China			**Russia**		
	Ranking as a trading partner	**Trade volume (~US$ billion)**	**Share in the country's total exports**	**Ranking as a trading partner**	**Trade volume (~US$ billion)**	**Share in the country's total exports**
Afghanistan	5	0.02	1.9%	14	0.004	0.32%
Kazakhstan	2	6.4	10%	4	5.27	8.25%
Kyrgyzstan	6	0.06	2.43%	2	0.387	14.3%
Tajikistan	6	0.07	6.34%	7	0.042	3.61%
Turkmenistan	1	7.14	80.1%	6	0.15	1.68%
Uzbekistan	2	2.24	21%	3	1.64	15.3%

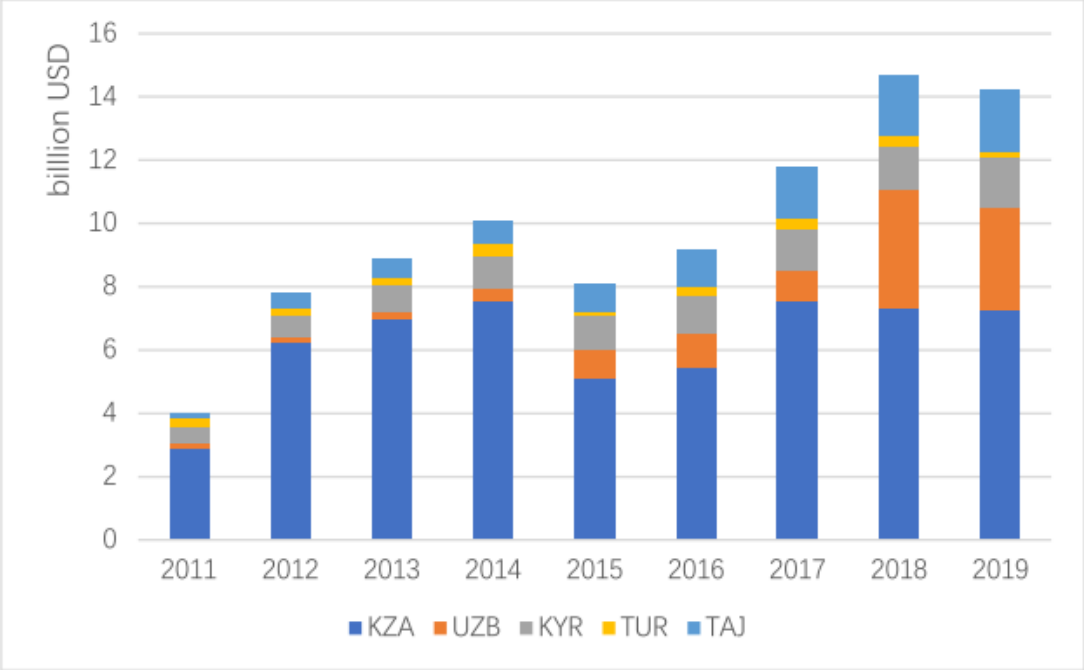
Table 4.2.2 consists of the exports of each Central Asian state with a comparison of China and Russia in 2000 and 2018. Similar to the import table of the regional countries, we can state that Russia led in exports in 2000. Russia was the first trading partner for exports of all post-Soviet countries except Kyrgyzstan. On the other hand, in the same year, China was a really weak export partner, especially in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, with the 22nd and the 28th ranking. Shockingly, in 2018, China has become Turkmenistan's 1st export trading partner and occupies the 80% share in the country's total export, and the 2nd export trading partner of Uzbekistan, which are dramatic rises for China. Russia, on the other hand, seems to have lost its former economic dominance in 2018.

The change in the import and export volumes of the countries of the region with China in 2000 and 2018 was analyzed by comparing it with Russia. As an argument

against these data, some questions may arise: Is not the increase in the trade volumes of China, a country that has risen to the second largest economy in the world, quite normal? Is not this increase also valid for other countries outside the Central Asian region? Let me try to explain these questions by acknowledging the fact that China's foreign trade volume is increasing by diversification in general. It is not a coincidence that China has increased its interest in the regional states in the last eighteen years. Its benefits have directed China to the region and its interest does not contain one or two nations, it covers all the states in the region. Hence, it can be said that Central Asia has witnessed a big "change" over the years. It can be deduced that the Russian hegemonic structure that existed in the Central Asian region over the years has begun to wane and be potentially replaced by China economically. It is possible to observe the trade-based change in the economic relations of Central Asian states from the data in Tables 4.2.1 and 4.2.2. It is possible to infer that Russia is losing its unrivaled economic dominance in the region, to China.

As a supporting argument to the economic capabilities, the following paragraphs give a place to the Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs). For the evaluation of FDIs, the thesis refers to the recently published article of Zhang Lingzhi from Tashkent State University of Economics. In his empirical study (2021), the fact of China's foreign investments in the Central Asian region grew with a high momentum especially after 2011 is proved with the Figure 4.2.3 below. The amount of China's foreign investments in the region was US$ 4.033 billion in 2011 and reached US$ 14.223 billion in 2019, growing 3.5 times.

Figure 4.2.1: China's FDI to Central Asian countries from 2011 to 2019 (Lingzhi 2021, 10).



The Figure 4.2.1 shows a year-on-year increase in China's FDIs in the region, as well as a disproportionate distribution of investments by country. China seems to have directed its investments to Kazakhstan with a clear margin to other countries, which corresponds to approximately 50% of China's investments in the region; because Kazakhstan is more important than other Central Asian countries with its wider border to the Xinjiang region (connected with the unstable situation of the Uyghurs) and its bigger energy potential. 2019 was the year when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out, so serious decreases were observed in the FDI figures worldwide between 2019 and 2021. The states spent the national budget on tackling their own domestic problems regarding combat against the Covid-19. Despite the pandemic crisis at the beginning of 2019, China did not reduce its FDIs in Central Asia, only about half a billion.

A similar comparison between China and Russia in terms of trade volumes has been made in the Table 4.2.3 for foreign direct investments.

Table 4.2.3.: Chinese and Russian FDIs in Central Asia, total in between 2007 and 2019 (Wilson 2021, 61).

(US$ billion)	**Russia**	**China**
Kazakhstan	6.4	29.17
Kyrgyzstan	592,000	4.73
Tajikistan	193,000	1.45
Turkmenistan	165,000	6.8
Uzbekistan	1.09	5.79

The margin between the amount of the FDIs made by Russia to the regional states between 2007 and 2019 and that of China is obvious. While China has not invested less than USD1.45 billion in any country in the region, Russia's investments, except for Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, have not reached even one million. With an economic evaluation being made on the regional states, China is the leading country without exception today. The economic dominance of Russia in the past has been replaced by China. According to Nadege Rolland – the senior fellow at The National Bureau of Asian Research, "in the long run, Russia will have become a toothless former superpower surrendering the stage for Beijing to fully assert its own influence over Eurasia" (2019, 8). This quote actually is valid for the economic aspect of the relations today. China has now a material capacity by a wide margin over the regional nations than any other nation has. However, it is necessary to elaborate other aspects as well, following the Coxian conceptualization.

The second force according to Cox for a hegemonic historical structure is the "ideas". In the following, the concept of Chinese model is discussed first, and then the reactions on China from the Central Asian elites and locals and the role of Confucius Institutes are covered. The Chinese model (中国模式) is a concept that covers all political and economic policies of China, which was initiated by Deng

Xiaoping in 1976 (in some sources it is called the Beijing Consensus). For today's contemporary world, the concept is commonly used for China's promotion of alternative global norms and standards by taking the Confucian ideals to its core. There is disagreement as to what the main components of the Chinese model are and what exactly it encompasses economically. It is even possible to define it as the whole of various economic policies followed in different provinces of China. While the small-scale private industry dominates Zhejiang, more mercantile economies dominate Chongqing and Shanxi (Breslin 2011, 1328). Even in the areas that are quite similar to each other in terms of industrial background and natural capacity, it is possible to see totally different development policies in Chinese mainland. However, the most common theme in this diversity within the scope of the Chinese model is "what Yao Yang called the 'pragmatism' (wushi zhuyi) pursued by a 'neutral' or 'disinterested' government (zhongxing zhengfu) that is simply concerned with doing what works in the long term and is not driven by any plan, blueprint, ideological commitment or societal bias" (Breslin 2011, 1328). On the other hand, Zhao Suisheng – a political scientist, defines the "The China model (…) is often in a shorthand way described as a combination of economic freedom and political oppression" (Zhao 2010, 422). The other principles of China model can be determined as "the Chinese experience to be characterized by 'gradualism' (jianjinxing) alongside 'autonomy' (zizhuxing) and strong government (qiangzhengfu)" (Breslin 2011, 1329). Another features of China model are a "managed globalization process", a "non-ideologic" stance, the emphasis on the "localized" and "national", and the focus on "harmonization" and "stability" which the last stability one frequently encountered in Chinese literature (Breslin 2011). The fact that the Chinese model is so local and unique is explained by the empirical experience brought by the long political history and state tradition. Then, can such a unique model be transferred? It is really difficult to imagine this for the other states what China has done so far. However, in model transfers, the attempt to copy a model exactly is not possible anyway, for example the German and Japanese capitalism models are quite different. The basic principles in the Chinese model are continuous as long as they are localized (Breslin 2011, 1337/39). In fact, China showed the world that it is possible to draw its own national development model, perhaps this is the most basic feature of what we call the Chinese model. Besides,

there are some opinions on the China model to point its being alternative to the existed models. When making assessments on the crises, *The Economist* highlighted at an online meeting that "The global financial crisis exposed critical weaknesses in western economies. China, by contrast, suffered only a brief slowdown in its fast-paced growth before surging back into double-digit expansion" (reached from Breslin 2011, 1327). On the other hand, David A. Bell – a political scientist in Shandong University, evaluates China model as an alternative to the Western-style democracy and call it as Chinese-style political meritocracy. Also some take the China model as an alternative to the Washington Consensus (part1 in Paus, Prime, and Western 2009).

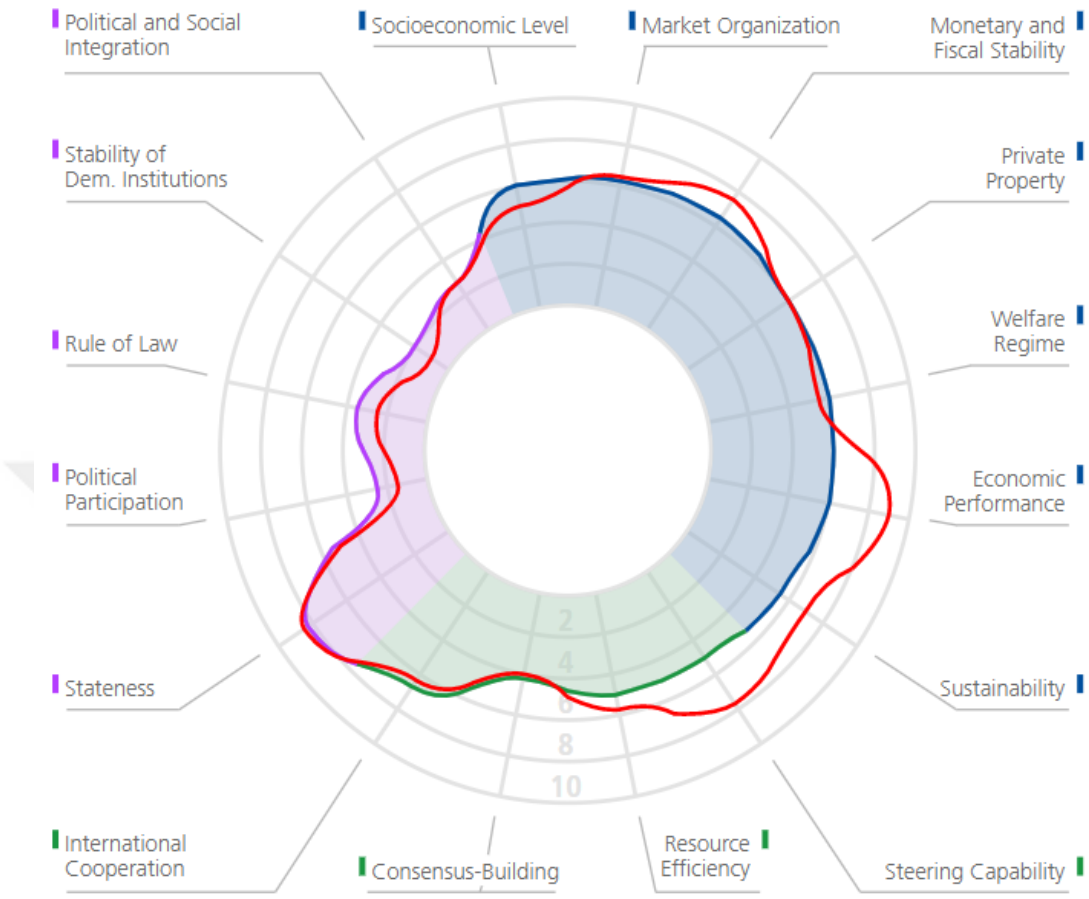
It is impressive that in recent years, China has built a sensible, consistent and gradual development of a trust over the Central Asian region and the other regions as well. Having authoritarian regimes, the respect of their national interests, and the emphasis on the stability in the China model makes the Central Asians closer to China. In accordance with the principle of "non-interference" in internal affairs, which is one of the pillars of China's foreign policy, it did not "dictate" anything as the US does (Aleksandra and Strachota 2013). For instance, in the Andijan massacre in 2005 – which broke relations between the US and Uzbekistan, China was the first country to accept and defend Uzbekistan's president Islam Karimov while the US demanded an international investigation on him. Another example is the economic and political assistance provided by China to Turkmenistan, which was subjected to heavy Russian pressure during the Russian-Turkmen gas crisis in 2009 (Aleksandra and Strachota 2013, 24-28). China has taken a moderate stance towards all domestic issues that take place in every state in the region. China's skepticism towards Western conceptions of democracy and the rule of law etc. has been warmly welcomed by the governments of the regional nations, mostly led by authoritarian leaders. These supports by China without demanding an interest have increased the confidence and consent of the Central Asian states towards China. By taking this trust, China offers a model that development is possible with an authoritarian government and a market economy rather than the market economy with democratic principles. Since the Central Asian states followed different development models in their transition era just after the independence, it is hard to conclude all regional

states under one clear development model. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan followed the shock therapy-likened liberal policies while Uzbekistan followed gradualism model of development and Turkmenistan is still barely transitting from planned economy (Ahrens and Hoen in ed. Neuman 2019, 87). However, after 30 years from independence, they now see China as a role model for state capitalism. Joachim Ahrens and Herman W. Hoen – both are professors on political economy; clearly express the effect of Chinese model on Central Asian states:

> mode of institutional design in Central Asia fits in the debate about the emergence of state capitalism, for which notably China stands as a successful example (Ahrens and Hoen in ed. Neuman 2019, 88). (…) State capitalism Central Asian style is an example of a dual economy based on East Asian experiences. China and other so-called East Asian developmental states have recently become role models for rulers, especially in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, due to their economic success and because they have shown that sustained economic growth, social coherence, and political stability could be achieved within authoritarian regimes that protected ruling elites' privileges. It is beyond any doubt that China is far ahead of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, or Uzbekistan in economic liberalization and in private incentives, but in terms of the state-driven sector it serves as a role model to these countries (Ahrens and Hoen in ed. Neuman 2019, 92).

As evidence, the resemblance between Kazakhstan, which is the biggest state in Central Asia, and China is striking by the data provided from the Bertelsmann Transformation Index in 2022, in the following Figure 4.2.2.

Figure 4.2.2: Transformation Index of China (red line) compared with Kazakhstan in 2022 (Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022).



Kazakhstan's tendencies on such 16 principles (political and social integration, rule of law, resource efficiency, sustainability, welfare regime...) are quite similar with China which is represented with the red line. In terms of politics (the purple themes) and of international cooperation and consensus-building, China and Kazakhstan have almost in the same ratio. The differences are mostly seen in terms of economic performance, which should be considered normal because China is the second biggest economy in the world today.

After the China model discussions, just after the independence, all the newly independent states perceived their similarities as security threats to themselves and followed policies that would make them different from each other in their nation-building process. This process was also aimed to distinguish themselves from the Russian Federation. For this reason, the regional states started to build a de-Russified

national identity in every field. In this context, the countries of the region have started the primary step of breaking the Russian influence with their own hands under the policies of de-Russification. For example, they changed the Soviet names of the streets, cities and neighborhoods etc., instead they put the names of the figures that are coming from their nomadic past. Today, all of the post-Soviet Central Asian states Latinized their official language in order to break the Russian effect. Central Asian elites used to prefer Russian institutions for their young population's education, but now they encourage the young people to go to China, the US, or Europe to gain a broader horizons (Blank 2019). In addition, Russia is a country that poses an internal threat in the eyes of the regional states (Aleksandra and Strachota 2013). It is not well remembered by the regional leaders for its "intervention" in internal problems such as the civil war that broke out in Tajikistan between 1992 and 1997 and the overthrow of Kyrgyzstan's President Kurmanbek Bakiyev in 2010. Besides, the Russian role is constantly talked about in the election times in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan while making evaluations on the potential successors (Aleksandra and Strachota 2013, 26). Some observers even claim that, as Pradhan emphasizes, the Central Asian Republics are concerned because of Russia's "support" for the Color Revolutions and its determined policies to protect ethnic Russians abroad (Pradhan 2018, 16). Also, it is known that there has been a dramatic decline in the image of Russia globally. Russia's international image, only 34% consider Russia "favorable" according to the Pew Research data that covers the views of 25 countries from different continents in 2018. In the same research, it was revealed that 63% of respondents said they have "no confidence" in Russia (Letterman 2018). Although there is no such research from the perspective of Central Asian countries, it can be assumed that the countries in the region are affected by the general declining image of Russia. As a recent development, Russia's declaration of war on Ukraine further hampered its prestige. In April 2022, the United Nations General Assembly votes to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council, the 93 among the votes are in favor of the decision (UN News 2022). The Central Asian republics could not take a clear stand on this issue at the beginning of the war. Nor they did not side with Russia neither they were not in a clear opposition. One of the main reasons for this has been interpreted by some Russian elites as implying that Central Asia will be the next after Ukraine (Stronski 2022). Despite this, by the

increasing death toll in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan allowed anti-war protests in their countries, and allowed non-governmental organizations to collect humanitarian aid, and also openly expressed their commitment to Ukraine's territorial integrity (Stronski 2022).

Unlike Russia, perception of China is more moderate from the view of the regional nations. China has never been conceived as a real threat, or as a leader or guarantor of any domestic political issues in Central Asia. Also, China is able to establish coherent relations with every regional country. Besides, among the regional states, Kyrgyzstan has experienced the most instability after Afghanistan. The country experienced two great uprisings (one is Tulip Revolution) in its post-independence history, in 2005 and 2010. Despite these government changes in Kyrgyzstan, China has always succeeded in improving its relations with the country by increasing it in a positive way. Being the alternative by ignoring the domestic models and non-interfering, makes China attractive from the regional states and differentiating it from the US and Russia, which are prone to "dictate" (Aleksandra and Strachota 2013, 26) their own value judgments – one is the Western the other is the Soviet legacy ideas. Besides all this, there are Sinophile circles within Russia that are more openly established than in Central Asia. These developments in Russia may also positively affect the image of China in the Central Asian republics, according to Peyrouse (2016, 18).

On the other hand, one of the most important factors affecting positively the image of China in the region is the Confucius Institutes (CIs). The Confucius Institutes are established to introduce the Chinese culture and language and promote them worldwide. In the Table 4.2.4 below, it is possible to reach the numbers, names and the foundation years of the CIs in Central Asia.

Table 4.2.4: Compiled by the author on the Confucius Institutes in Central Asia (Ergun and Kaya 2021)

Country	Number	Names	Foundation years
Afghanistan	1	Kabul University's CI	First contract in 2008, construction in 2013
Kazakhstan	5	- CI at L. N. Gunilyov Eurasian National University - CI at Kazakh National University - CI at K. Zhubanov Aktobe Regional State University - CI at Karaganda State Technical University - CI at Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages	2006 2007 2010 2010 2016
Kyrgyzstan	4	- CI at Bishkek State University - CI at Kyrgyz National University - CI at Osh State University - CI at Jalal-Abad State University	2007 2007 2013 2016
Tajikistan	2	- CI at Tajik National University - CI at Mining- metallurgical Institute of Tajikistan	2008 2014
Turkmenistan	-	-	-
Uzbekistan	2	- CI in Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies - CI at Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages	2004 2013

The first country where the Confucius Institute was established in the region is Uzbekistan, because Chinese language education started in 1957 when it was still in the Uzbek SSR, and Tashkent was the only center of Sinology during the Soviet period (Nogayeva 2015, 14). Today, the activities of the CI to spread Chinese culture and language are quite diversified covering Chinese Mandarin language courses, Chinese cultural and food days, Chinese cinema days… In Kyrgyzstan, there are more than 7,000 students studying at the Institutes and want to learn Chinese. Every year, about 40 students of the CIs are taken as an employee in the Chinese companies

in Kazakhstan. The Kazakh Ministry of Education announced that there are 7,500 students that are studying Mandarin in 2015 (Gurbanmyradova 2015). Afghanistan celebrated the Confucius Institute in Kabul marks 10 years of service in 2019, even though the instabilities in the country. The CIs are one of the main tools of Chinese soft power and are used actively in Central Asia.

In the light of all this information, it is possible to conclude that China's attempted hegemony has made positive progress on the second force put forward by Cox, the ideas. However, it cannot be said that China has replaced Russia as clearly as in the primary material prerequisite, because the Russian language is still widely spoken in the regional states though the official changes regarding the language, and language means mindset basically. In the context of ideas, the willingness of the leaders and elites of the regional nations to decrease the Russian influence is quite in favor of China's potential hegemony and also is a hint for their consent.

Just to mention the third force, it is necessary to state the organizational integration in the region as an argument to strengthen the formation of hegemonic structure. The regional nations of Central Asia have not been able to create a regional organization. Regional integration studies are quite common for Central Asia.[10] However, it is seen that the regional nations tried to organize on their own many times before, but they could not succeed since independence. For example, the Central Asian Union in 1994, the Central Asian Economic Union in 1998, the Central Asian Cooperation Organization in 2001 and 2002, the New Central Asian Union in 2007 and 2008 are all failed attempts. The members of those organizations are specified in the Table 4.2.5.

[10] There is a comprehensive and recent literature review in Omonkulov and Baba's article (2019) on this topic.

Table 4.2.5: Timeline of Central Asian regional attempts (Godehardt 2014, 109).

("X" shows the membership)	Central Asian Union in 1994	Central Asian Economic Union in 1998	Central Asian Cooperation Organization in 2001-02	New Central Asian Union in 2007	New Central Asian Union in 2008
Kazakhstan	X	X	X	X	X
Kyrgyzstan	X	X	X		
Tajikistan		X	X		
Turkmenistan					
Uzbekistan	X	X	X		X

The reason why the regional states cannot integrate within themselves is that they have competing interests with each other, and they prioritize stability in their internal affairs more than the idea of regionalism (Godehardt 2014). Also, all Central Asians may not have been gathered under one roof due to the regional power centers shaped by the unique social life forms in the region. As Frederick Starr mentions:

> [There] are the regional networks that exist in every country. Based on close economic and political ties and accent (in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan also on language), these regional networks are extremely powerful, reflecting the diverse emirates and local power centers of earlier centuries. The largest of these, acting alone (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan) or in alliance with another regional power center (Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan), have long dominated the politics of each country (Starr 2006, 7).

For this reason or another, it is often seen in integration initiatives launched by another actor in the region. In other words, they needed to have a core state to organize the regional integration and set a common ground. This study takes the China-led regional initiatives as potential mechanisms for the regional hegemony of China in Central Asia. In this regard, a kind of core-periphery relationship here strengthens the claims for "regional hegemony" with superstructure-structure relations. After the regional countries gained their independence, the preliminary agreements of the Collective Security Treaty Organization were pioneered by Russia

in 1992, but it was only in 2002 that a full intergovernmental organization structure was adopted. On the other hand, although the SCO's preliminary agreements were made in 1996, the organization gained its legal structure in 2001 and became the first intergovernmental organization in the region. In addition, China has many initiatives apart from the SCO, where it will spread its own strong discourse and ideology as well as strengthen its economic ties in order to establish a hegemonic order.

The third force is the "international institutions". It has been mentioned that Cox took institutions as an "amalgam" between material conditions and ideas for hegemony. This third precondition had been conceptualized by Gramsci as "hegemonic". Then Cox carried the concept to the international system and put "institutions" to this place and mentioned them as the "mechanisms of hegemony" (Cox 1983, 172). Institutions are of vital importance for hegemony, as they provide the balance between the first two conditions in a hegemonic historical structure and provide the transnational order construction. Due to their important place in a hegemonic order, the thesis give a special focus on these regional formations led by China.

4.3. China's Potential Mechanisms of Regional Hegemony in Central Asia

Intergovernmental collaborations, initiatives or organizations are the mechanisms that provide hegemony in neo-Gramscian thought. The economic and social dominance that has begun to be created can only spread to surroundings through institutions by creating a common ground, and set a hegemonic structure. In other words, the norms, systems, modes of production and values established by the hegemon state as an outcome of the mutual inter-relations can only be trans-nationalized with these institutions. For this reason, in this thesis, which discusses the attempted hegemony of China over Central Asia, the China-led regional formations were found worth examining in detail. Also, initiating those kinds of regional formations makes it easier to establish a regional hegemonic structure, especially where regionalization is an obvious problem.

One of the challenges to study leadership in intergovernmental organizations is its contradiction with the nature of the multilateral entities. Intergovernmental

organizations are established by adopting the principle of multilateralism giving all parties a voice. Most of them are unanimous in the decision-making mechanism, while others use the principle of majority of votes. Hence, leadership in intergovernmental formations is mostly dealt with by who initiates the organization and who provides the most financial support. This makes naturally one or a few states stand out more than the others.

In Central Asia, China has diversified and developed its bilateral and multilateral relations, especially since the 2000s. As the General Liu Yazhou of China's People's Liberation Army admitted: "Central Asia is the thickest piece of cake given to the modern Chinese by the heavens" (Pantucci and Petersen 2012). Parallel to this, China has taken the region among the priorities in its foreign policy and focused on strengthening relations with the regional countries. Certain economic and diplomatic bilateral relations between the region and China were mentioned in previous sections. This section focuses on China's multilateral relations towards the region. Both inter-governmental organizations and multinational projects led by China will be studied. In her book, Godehardt analyzes re-construction of regions by giving a big place to the organizations and considers regional institutions such as the SCO, MERCOSUR and ASEAN as structures that give political forms and certain definitions to the regions (Godehardt 2014). In line with this, the thesis examines China-led organizations and multilateral agreements on the Central Asian region in the context of strengthening China's attempted hegemony in the region.

4.3.1. Shanghai Cooperation Organization

In 1996, Jiang Zemin – the President of the People's Republic of China from 1993 to 2003, put the "Shanghai Spirit" into practice (the concept will be elaborated in the following paragraphs). China formed a group called Shanghai Five, bringing together three countries from the region – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, with Russia. The main reasons for the establishment of the Shanghai Five were the border issues, the instability in the region and common security concerns such as terrorism, which has a potential to affect the entire region. Afghanistan, which was in turmoil at that time, also had a large share in the security concerns of the regional states. In 2001, with the participation of Uzbekistan, the group gained an organizational

structure and took the name Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In 2017, India and Pakistan also joined the organization, so the SCO has eight members today. Among the goals of the organization are to strengthen neighborly relations and increase mutual trust, as well as to increase commercial and political ties. This purpose, which is based on building mutual trust between member states, is named Shanghai Spirit. One of the biggest goals of the SCO today is to strengthen the Shanghai Spirit. Moreover, it is known that various sub-organizations are also launched by the SCO to increase economic growth. The SCO Business Council, the SCO Interbank Consortium and the SCO Forum are some of them (Godehardt 2014, 102).

All four states in the Shanghai Five are neighboring China. The main reason why the five came together in 1996 was the border problems of the regional states with China. The five gathered, so the border problems were discussed and they were resolved in a short time. They signed the Shanghai Agreement on Deepening Military Trust in the Border Regions in 1996, and then in the next year, the Agreement on the Mutual Reduction of Military Forces in the Border Areas was signed (Godehardt 2014, 136). The documents signed in the first two years of the Shanghai Five were always about border issues. With the signing of the agreements, the problems were mutually resolved. In other words, China had achieved its main goal. However, as can be seen, the Shanghai Five gained an organizational structure in 2001 with the participation of one more country from the region. It is an important point here why China carries the "Shanghai Spirit" forward instead of retreating after getting what it wants. China seemed to not want to reduce its contact with the region; on the contrary it always followed the policies to strengthen its relations by generating a roof concept called "Shanghai Spirit".

The Shanghai Spirit is the concept in the foundation of the SCO and covers the principles such as the "solidarity" between member states, "mutual trust", "disarmament of the border region", "equality", "consultation", "pursuit of common development", "respect for cultural diversity" and "regional cooperation". Then, what is the importance of Shanghai Spirit for this research? The principles under the Shanghai Spirit are pointing the "good for all members" which fits what neo-

Gramscian understanding highlightes the certain semblance of universality. We will see a similar "Silk Road Spirit" for the BRI. As Han Lu – a research fellow at China Institute of International Studies mentions:

> The 'Shanghai Spirit' will not only strengthen 'regional identity' and enhance 'construction of a harmonious region', but will also contribute to the pursuit of the BRI's five major goals of policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds (apostrophes are added Lu 2019, 83).

Even though regionalism is weak, a Central Asian regional identity much exists among the ruling elites (Buranelli 2020, 1011). We can say that Chinese are aware of this and eager to strengthen this by taking a part. According to Godehardt's findings, the Chinese experts stated that the SCO was neither the first nor the last venture in Chinese Central Asia (2014, 176). For China, the SCO is a constituent element for establishing a hegemonic structure in the region which will be covered in more detail in the following. The SCO is a regional organization "with the largest population, the largest territory, and great potential for economic cooperation" (Lu 2019, 82) and "In real economic terms, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization accounts for almost one-fourth of the global GDP" (Akram 2020). On the other hand, the response from the regional states is mostly optimistic regarding the establishment of SCO. "The overall opinion of it is actually positive: it is the one main organizations to which four of the five Central Asian states belong, one of the most focused on by the international media, as well as one of the only organizations that is not limited to the post-Soviet space" (Peyrouse 2016, 20). Hence, the regional states were pleased to be involved in the SCO. Being able to get out of the post-Soviet space with a strong partner like China is a motivating development for Central Asian countries.

The inclusion of Russia in the organization, on the other hand, has significance. Russia and China are the two countries that came back from the brink of a war at the end of the 1960s, known as the Sino-Soviet conflict. Years later, the meeting of these two in a cooperation-based organization attracted attention when the SCO was first established. If it is remembered that the Central Asian region is within the post-Soviet borders, the fact that the Central Asian Republics joined an organization led by China along with Russia indicates that Russia is aware of China's current power

and potential. The SCO also commented on the cooperation between China and Russia against the US influence in the region, especially after the 9/11 attacks (Contessi 2013, 235). As evidence, the presidents of the two states, decided to integrate the Silk Road Economic Belt (under the BRI) with the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) by using the SCO as a common ground in 2015 (Zimmerman 2015; Wilson 2017). And in June 2016, China signed an agreement with EEU to start the economic cooperation (Wilson 2017, 15).

Nowadays, it has been arguing that one of China's future goals is to establish a free trade zone in the region, which is an important argument for this research. In one of his articles, Richard Weitz underlines the importance of the SCO summit in Beijing in 2012 and says that the divergence between Russia and China's views on the region became clear at this summit. In this meeting, the proposal of China to establish a development bank of the SCO was vetoed by Russia. Previously, China had offered a proposal to establish a free trade area including SCO member states, but this proposal was also rejected by Russia (Weitz 2012). There are even those who say that China's disappointment in 2012 pushed the BRI initiative to launch in 2013 (Wilson 2017, 14). It has been ten years after this veto, and we see that Chinese side is still insisted to create a free trade zone and a development bank under the SCO. In 2018, the Premier Li Keqiang called the member states to conduct feasibility research for the establishment of the SCO free trade zone (The State Council of the PRC 2018). Again in a meeting in December 2020, the SCO authorities announced their willingness to establiah a SCO Development Bank and a SCO Development Fund by expressing that the consultations continue (Huaxia 2020). And in June 3, 2021, the experts, member state representatives and finance ministers held a video conference under the chairmanship of Tajikistan on the establishment of these two institutions (SCO 2021). It is widely believed that these two institutions are the steps towards the SCO free trade area. This aim makes very close the SCO to be the mechanism of regional hegemony. Creation of a SCO free trade zone would be a clear sign for a regional bloc, as happened in the neo-Gramscian studies on the European example. While this may be counted as one of the shortcomings of China's regional hegemony, there are concrete steps regarding this.

It is known that China is the biggest financier for the allocation of the SCO's budget; Beijing mostly provides the capital for economic growth of the members. According to Zhao, China was the only financer of the SCO until 2013 and provided loans to the member states (2013, 448). Also, it is claimed that the SCO could not be created without China (Godehardt 2014, 173). Hence, China has a vital role within the organization, which gives an opportunity to guide the organization in favor of itself. China's interests within the SCO have been the subject of scrutiny since China is one of the founding members and the initiator of the organization. The SCO has also given China an advantage in terms of its energy needs. China seems to be quite assertive about various energy treaties and perhaps joint energy extraction under the umbrella of SCO. By enhancing energy cooperation, some argue that Central Asia has become the "economic backyard of China" (Omonkulov and Baba 2019, 13). Alexander Cooley also evaluates the SCO as "China's primary instrument of regional influence and engagement on security and economic issues" (Cooley 2012, 75-82; reached by Contessi 2013).

In the 1990s, various uprisings occurred in the Xinjiang region of China under the influence of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, in which dozens of Uyghurs lost their lives (Rogers 2007, 97). For China, who has a fear of any extremist support that may come to Xinjiang from Central Asia, it is an understandable move to establish an organization that takes the Central Asian countries to its side. For this purpose, China held joint anti-terrorist military exercises with the SCO member countries, especially in the first years of the organization's establishment (Rogers 2007, 98). Hence, the SCO has a goal to fight against what the Chinese sources says the three evils – international terrorism, ethnic separatism and religious extremism (Serikkaliyeva 2019, 69). In addition, as Ksenia Muratshina – a researcher at Ural Federal University, referred in her paper, "As a leading Russian SCO expert Lousianin notes, SCO, due to China's efforts, emphasized Central Asia from the very beginning and can be regarded as an important part of Beijing's long-term Central Asian strategy" (2017, 91). In other words, it is possible to see that the SCO has parallels with China's national concerns in the region.

China’s generalization of its set of principles (anti-three evils, for example), the Shanghai Spirit, the idea of a free trade area and interests within the framework of the SCO makes it a potential mechanism for hegemony. Godehardt takes the SCO as the main mechanism to reconstruct Central Asia politically, with references to the current Chinese academic literature as well as the interviews she made. As a result, she explains in detail what Chinese Central Asian experts believe and claim, regarding China’s constitution of Central Asia through the SCO (2014), can be seen in the Table 4.3.1.1 below.

Table 4.3.1.1: Godehardt's compressions of the claims of the Chinese Central Asian experts regarding the SCO (2014, 130-146).

Evidence 1	"A country is essentially (geographically, culturally, religiously, and so on) linked to a region. Thus, these factors naturally promote the country's entry into the region in question" (Zhao Huasheng's argument in Godehardt 2014, 134).
Evidence 2	"Geography is destiny and, thus, a country cannot choose her neighbours. The political meaning of neighbourhood defines a country's regional allocation" (Zhao Huasheng's argument in Godehardt 2014, 136).
Evidence 3	"The successful solution of border questions between two neighbouring parties A (one or more states) and B (one or more states) facilitates them in getting to know each other and to possibly institutionalizing their relations" (Zhao Huasheng's argument in Godehardt 2014, 137).
Evidence 4	"Only the establishment of a regional multilateral organization gives a country the opportunity to fully participate in a region" (Zhao Huasheng's argument in Godehardt 2014, 138).
Evidence 5	"Successful and fruitful regional cooperation relies on the solution of territorial questions, good neighbourly relations and common goals" (Xing Guangcheng and Sun Zhuangzhi's argument in Godehardt 2014, 140).
Evidence 6	"Regional cooperation initially starts from a policy field A. If the respective questions and problems are solved successfully, cooperation might spill over to other policy fields. However, in order to be realized comprehensive cooperation needs an effective cooperation mechanism" (Yu Jianhua's argument in Godehardt 2014, 141).
Evidence 7	"A country's interests in a region are only covered to a certain extent in a (multilateral) regional organization" (Zhao Huasheng's argument in Godehardt 2014, 142).
Evidence 8	"Any organization needs countries that have the interest and power to set the agenda of the respective organization – in other words, put forward development plans, facilitate the founding of different programmes, give loans to the other member countries, and so on. Without such countries the establishment of regional organizations is simply not possible" (Zhao Huasheng's argument in Godehardt 2014, 143).
Evidence 9	"Being a member of a regional organization makes a country a regional actor within the respective region." (Zhao Huasheng's argument in Godehardt 2014, 145).
Evidence 10	"Members of a regional organization do not necessarily determine the political scope of the respective region. Regional allocations can change, depending on political decisions and on the respective countries' perspectives." (Zhao Huasheng's argument in Godehardt 2014, 146).

The arguments in Table 4.3.1.1 illustrate the Chinese perspective and greatly strengthen the claims of the thesis. It is interesting that China's "entry" with the SCO in Central Asia is justified by the "natural" ties between the two. Zhao emphasizes that "the SCO has established China's presence and image in Central Asia" and those natural relations gained a political dimension thanks to the SCO (Zhao 2007, 150). In particular, the belief that the political value of neighborhood in Evidence 2 defines a country's regional distribution strongly feeds the Chinese will to form a historical bloc with the SCO over Central Asia. It is possible to conclude that China wants to construct a new regional definition outside the post-Soviet space with the SCO. When this argument is considered together with the arguments in Evidence 8 as well as the SCO's parallels with China's national interests, we can say that China has designed itself as a hegemonic power in this new regional structure. After the emphasis that the border issues between the two have been resolved, the claim in Evidence 4 is quite striking; the idea that a country's full participation in a region can only be achieved through an intergovernmental organization is supporting Cox's perspective in world politics. "Institutions are particular amalgams of ideas and material power which in turn influence the development of ideas and material capacities. There is a close connection between institutionalization and what Gramsci called hegemony" (Cox 1981, 137). In Evidence 7, it is acknowledged that the SCO has satisfied China's national interests to some extent. And finally, as stated in the Evidence 10, regional political decisions are mutually determined by the member states, with which the role of consent is implied. In addition to those compressions, President Xi Jinping remarked in his speech at a SCO meeting in 2018:

> The Shanghai Spirit is our 'shared asset', and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is our 'shared home'. We should, guided by the Shanghai Spirit, work closely to build 'a community of shared for Shanghai Cooperation Organization', move toward a new type of international relations, and build an open, inclusive, clean and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity (apostrophes are added Zeng 2020, 120).

It is significant that President Xi emphasized the "community for common destiny" for the SCO. The fact that he clearly stated to build a common future with the regional states with a set of common values under the SCO umbrella feeds the argument that he wants to build a historical structure in the region. Also, the emergence of definitions of the wider Central Asian region, the increase in China's activities in the region with the rise of China coincides with the similar years in which the SCO is established. Regarding this, the KISI former expert, Murat Laumulin's expression is stunning: He evaluates the SCO as the instrument for "China's soft hegemonism" by pointing to the geopolitical influence and economic investments of China in the region (Peyrouse 2016, 20). To sum up, it is not known whether SCO will express a regional identity like ASEAN in the future. However, there is no doubt that China eagers to establish a new regional structure through the SCO and this makes the SCO as a potential mechanism for its attempted hegemony in Central Asia.

4.3.2. Belt and Road Initiative

The Belt and Road Initiative is a multilateral initiative led by China although it is not a regional organization, but directly affects the Central Asian region. There are 66 different multilateral institutions, mechanisms, think tanks, government agencies or platforms contributing to this initiative (Belt and Road Initiative 2021). The place where the BRI's one part, the Silk Road Economic Belt, was first announced is significant; President Xi announced the BRI to the world during his visit in Kazakhstan in 2013 (Shen 2015; Omonkulov and Baba 2019). And in the same year, he announced the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road in Indonesia. In the following year, 2014, the Chinese officials announced the establishment of the Silk Road Fund with a $40 billion budget (Aoyama 2016, 5). Within this $40 billion budget, at least $16 billion is committed for Central Asia (Zimmerman 2015, 8). The BRI is planned as a multilateral world-wide project to improve economy and investments, and offers alternative trade routes to the states with a reference to the golden times of China with the ancient Silk Road. The BRI has two main route types, land and maritime. Under these, there are six economic corridors costing more than $890 million (Aoyama 2016, 5). Central Asia is crucial for the land route of the BRI. There are three main goals of China to launch the BRI: to create opportunities for the Chinese

companies for infrastructure investments in order to increase the country's outward foreign direct investments, to grow the Chinese economy by importing raw materials and exporting manufactured products, and try to spread the win-win relation type in international relations (Laanen 2016, 16-17). In 2017, the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China was held. There the "new era" emphasis was made, and China's more active role in international relations and its willingness for global leadership were stressed. One day after the Congress, the Foreign Minister of China gave a summary and said "the BRI has become the largest international cooperation platform in the world (…) and China is the most dynamic and active force in the process of global governance" (Swaine 2018, 55). After the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the BRI was added to the party charter (Anwar 2020, 161-162).

Since 2015, the SCO member states all openly clarified their support for the BRI in every SCO meetings, and they all believe that the BRI should construct together (Lu 2019, 85). In this regard, there are two main trade routes for Central Asia under the BRI. The first is the New Eurasian Land Bridge or the Second Eurasian Continental Bridge, which is in fact a railway from the port city of China Lianyungang to Kazakhstan. China's railways have long been linked to the Trans-Siberian railway. Within the scope of the BRI, China has added a new one to this link and called it New Eurasian Land Bridge. This railway also connects with other Central Asian states as well as Middle Eastern states and reaches the cities of Belgium and the Netherlands in Europe via the Marmaray project in Turkey. Apart from this line, many more railway lines have been added under the New Eurasia Land Bridge. For example, the railway from Yiwu, China, to Madrid is the longest uninterrupted railway in the world (Serikkaliyeva 2019, 75). The second main trade route is the Economic Corridor China - Central Asia - Western Asia, which is reminiscent of the old Silk Road route, covering a fairly large region that includes China and the Arabian Peninsula. This route, which covers all the states of the Central Asian region, passes through 17 countries in total (Serikkaliyeva 2019, 75). Xi Jinping promises mutual economic development to the regional countries of Central Asia with the BRI. He states that China will do its best for regional cooperation based on a win-win relationship (Xi 2014, 314/397).

Kazakhstan has a great importance for projects within the scope of BRI just as these projects have a vital position for Kazakhstan. Lianyungang Port, mentioned within the scope of the New Eurasian Land Bridge, is the first port and the shortest route to reach Kazakhstan to the Pacific region. Hence, the improvements of the trade routes have an impact for Kazakhstan's exports and imports. It is possible to see that China-Kazakhstan economic relations have developed a lot after the BRI. According to *The Astana Times*, China is one of the largest trade partners of Kazakhstan with a 15,7 percentage of the total trade (Altynsarina 2019). Thanks to the projects within the scope of the BRI, the costs of Kazakhstan's trade with East Asia have been significantly reduced, saving an average of 72 million dollars per year (Serikkaliyeva 2019, 76). Chinese elites and scholars regard Lianyungang as a hub connecting mainland China to the maritime branch of BRI. And this is why Azhar Serikkaliyeva – a research fellow at Eurasian Research Institute, claims that Lianyungang will become "the center of geo-economic gravity" of the BRI in the future (2019, 77).

In the book of Xi Jinping, he highlights the importance of Central Asian countries for the BRI by referring to the ancient Silk Road in the past:

> More than 2,100 years ago during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), a Chinese envoy named Zhang Qian was twice sent to Central Asia on missions of peace and friendship. His journeys opened the door to friendly contacts between China and Central Asian countries, and started the Silk Road linking the East and West, Asia and Europe (Xi 2014, 311).

It is significant that Xi Jinping makes a reference to the ancient Silk Road, because he has taken strength from history as a legitimate and strong rhetoric to construct today's bonds. The President reminds China's past strong relations with Central Asia, in which the Silk Road was a vivid route for inter-relations of culture besides the economic incomes. In line with this, Serikkaliyeva takes the expansion of China's cultural presence in Central Asia as one of the aims of the BRI (2019, 68). By his reminder of the old glorious times of ancient China, it is possible to feel the emphasis of hegemony as a subtext. At the same time he promises his addressee the prosperity of those times. In addition to these arguments:

> Chinese policy makers describe OBOR as a mechanism to promote peace and stability in the region (what President Xi has referred to as the "Community of Common Destiny") by strengthening China's bilateral relations with its neighbors and developing international organizations that are not dominated by Western powers (Zimmerman 2015, 6).

It is significant that the BRI initiative is also mentioned together with this "community for common destiny" discourse, which is used as a clear clue for China's will to establish a historical structure in the region. Also, the BRI is evaluated as a means for China to fulfill its "China Dream 'destiny'" (Hayes 2020, 32). And, "The BRI upholds the 'Silk Road Spirit' characterized by peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit" (Lu 2019, 82-83). Hence, the BRI in fact is seen by the Chinese as a potential tool for building a common historical structure, as it includes a physical transportation and cultural network and develops the region economically. The initiative with the promise of a win-win benefit was enthusiastically welcomed by the countries of the region. They approved all BRI-related initiatives with the wish for development.

4.3.3. Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) was announced by China in 2013, which is the same year as the announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China. The Bank was founded on December 25, 2015, and then opened for business on January 16, 2016. It is known that the Bank is one of the biggest financiers of the BRI. The AIIB was established as a multilateral development bank with the purpose of building "Infrastructure for Tomorrow (I4T)". The Bank is investing for sustainable and green infrastructure most in Asia and outside the region as well. The main goal is to increase wealth in Asia and serve its people through social, technological and physical investments. Thus, the Bank contributes to sustainability at local, regional and global level. The AIIB was founded with a $100 billion budget (Zimmerman 2015, 8). All Central Asian states but Turkmenistan (because of its neutrality foreign policy principle) is the founding members of the AIIB. The Bank has 103 members from all over the world; those are 46 regional, 39 non-regional and

18 prospective members. China has 26.58% voting power and is the leading member of the Bank. The second biggest percentage of voting power belongs to India with 7.61%. Then they were followed by Russia with 5.98%, Germany with 4.16%, South Korea with 3.50% and then France with 3.18 (AIIB 2021a). China has more than a quarter of the voting power of the Bank, so it is possible to say that China is the dominant country for the Bank's decisions. At the beginning of its establishment, the Bank was conceived as to be a rival to the US and Japan dominated Asian Development Bank (Shen 2015). However, even though it is just a 5-year-old institution, the Bank has reached 103 members from all regions of the world. Russia initially preferred to ignore the Chinise initiatives, so rejected the invitation of China to participate to the AIIB's establishment. However, Kremlin realized that there are limited options and there is not another realistic choice for Russia; then, eventually became one of the founding members (Wilson 2017, 14-15).

There are 16 projects in Central Asia operated by the AIIB until December 2021. Out of those 16 projects, 6 of them are operated stand-alone while 10 of them are co-financed. Among the co-financed projects, 3 of them are with the Asian Development Bank, 4 of them are with the World Bank, two are with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and one is with the Eurasian Development Bank. Borrowers are all the related governments or related ministers or special purpose institutions under those governments. Within those 16 projects, two are in Kazakhstan, only one in Kyrgyzstan, ten are in Uzbekistan and three are in Tajikistan (AIIB 2021b). When these projects in Central Asia are examined from a sectoral perspective, it is possible to conclude that the most projects are made for the transportation sector with a ratio of more than 30%. Transportation links are a requirement of China to transport energy, to increase import and export etc. This rate obtained from the official website actually provides evidence that the AIIB is a parallel initiative with the BRI and prioritizes meeting its needs.

There are few articles about the linkage between the AIIB and Central Asia. The authors mostly prefer to study the AIIB under their BRI or global governance related works. In this respect, the work of Ksenia Muratshina (2017) stands out because it fills the gap in the literature. She evaluates the AIIB as a new tool that serves China's

interests in the region by claiming that it is in China's favor to use the AIIB for its investments in Central Asia. Every investment comes with risk. For this reason, investing in a country by a multilateral organization is safer than investing alone. Because in a multilateral organization, the burden for the possible negative results are also distributed (as dramatically happened in the Structural Adjustment Programs led by the IMF and WB in Africa); however at the bilateral level, the country that provides the investment would become the only responsible (Ergun 2019, 72).

All the Central Asian states that are members of AIIB made very positive statements during the establishment of the Bank, and state officials openly stated that they welcome the investments that will come from AIIB. Kazakhstan hosted a preliminary summit of the AIIB coordinated by the Ministry of Economy. Likewise, the Kyrgyz authorities openly stated that they allow AIIB to develop the infrastructure in their country and bring rapid and stable economic benefits, expressing that they have full confidence in the Bank. Similar statements were made also from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Thus, it is possible to say that the regional states have great expectations from the AIIB (Muratshina 2017, 89-90). This hope for development strengthens the hegemony-consent relations between China and the region.

The legitimacy and legal structure brought by institutions is increasing mutual trust and cooperation. The collective mentality motivates states to participate in these kinds of initiatives. States receive support from the presence of each other and do not feel alone. Such initiatives in effect bring mutual benefits when implemented correctly. From a rational perspective, participating in these initiatives is more profitable than not taking part at all. However, it is necessary to pay attention to the share ratio of the yield between the states (who is more profitable for) and to be foresighted about the long-term negative results potentially may happen in the long run. The biggest concern in Central Asian countries regarding the AIIB is heavy debt risk at state and corporate level. Although some of the project budgets are paid from the joint budget of the institution, some of them are covered with the credit system to the state or the companies of the relevant country. Muratshina takes this situation one step further and says that a well-planned credit policy can become an incentive for the debtor country to make decisions in China's favor and even cause interference in

the debtor country's economic system (2017, 92). This situation may be caused by regional states even having an obligation to consent to China's potential hegemony in the future.

According to Coxian understanding, production and reproduction of hegemonic patterns in the other states happens through those kinds of inter-governmental organizations, institutions or initiatives etc. As indicated, the world-economy model "consists of transnational production organizations whose component elements are located in different territorial jurisdictions (Cox 1987, 244)." With such an organizational structure, there is the production and transnational transport of the economic, ideological and political models. Thus, it can be argued that those three formations are facilitators of China's ttempt to create a regional structure in Central Asia as well as to promote its models. In addition, Cox mentions regions in his book chapter (ch10 in Gill et al. 1993, 262). He talks about two different levels of regionalism inherent in the current international economic system, one is greater than the state levels and the other is smaller than the state levels, and he calls them macro-regionalism and micro-regionalism. He takes one macro-region in Europe and another one is in eastern Asia which is Japan led. Those macro-regional economies are competing with the US dominated world economy. In parallel with the weakening of state-level autonomy with the increase of globalization and macro-regionalism, the possibilities of more autonomy and expansion of economic areas of micro-regions within the states have been stretched. To Cox, the regions of Catalonia (in Spain) and Lombardy (in Italy) are the examples for what he calls micro-regions. Regarding his conceptualization, it is possible to raise two questions in the case of China and Central Asia: Can the Xinjiang region in China be counted as a micro-region regarding the aforementioned uprisings? Can we talk about a Chinese led macro-region in Central Asia; even if this is not accurate for today, but can we say that this is the possible ultimate target? This study answered these three linked questions as emphasizing China's potential and attempt to construct a regional structure through these organizations. To sum up, the three regional formations are the organizations in which the regional states are officially consented. Considering the problem of regionalization of Central Asia, their failure in this regard resulted in strengthening their dependence on their powerful neighbors, especially on those that

the regional states have an open invitation. In recent years, we have seen an attempt by China to construct such a consensual regional hegemonic structure in Central Asia.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis criticized the New Great Game literature by identifying the gaps of it; then, it proposed a neo-Gramscian theory to analyze today's relationship dynamics of the Greater Central Asian region. The research sought answers for the question of whether China has an attempt to become the regional hegemon in Central Asia from a neo-Gramscian perspective. Evaluating China's current relations with the region, this study makes a conclusion that there is an attempted but not yet achieved hegemony of China in Central Asia.

The New Great Game narrative especially became more popular with the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2022. This discourse, which emerged as a result of the vacuum occurred in the region in the post-Soviet period, is still frequently preferred after 30 years of independence due to its realistic aspect that is covering geopolitical, security and economic concerns. The lack of clarity about the framework, method and theory of this discourse makes it more open to evolve to a wide variety. For this reason, it has become a term used for a wide variety of themes, actors and cases; so much so that it is possible to encounter in some studies that even diverging considerably from its main argument. The New Great Game narrative that takes its main argument from the Great Powers and their conflicts of interest has been the target of criticisms of this research, in which focuses mostly on the aspect of making little reference to the will of the Central Asian states.

Neo-Gramscian theory, on the other hand, highlights the consent as well as the change in social forces in a hegemonic project. The Chinese wholistic interpretation

of the Central Asian region, the centuries-old dialogue between the two and the presence of the Xinjiang region and the Uyghur population connect the region with China. Historical ties have turned into a discourse today by Xi Jinping, with an emphasis on the community of a shared destiny. Thus, the idea of a historical bloc fostered. The region meets most of the counter-hegemony arguments and the region is witnessing a change in favor of China indicates that this regional structure is likely hegemonic. In particular, there is a dramatic change in the aspect of economy. According to the Coxian perspective, however, the social change is a more comprehensive concept than having economic and materialist dominance. Having physical and economic power is the biggest step in any hegemonic structure but not enough. Regarding this, today, China does not only have economic efforts in Central Asia, but also continues its initiatives in social and political aspects. The Russian hegemony has weakened in the region, and there is a promotion of China model, and the active roles of the CIs are discussed in detail. In addition, it is known that the regional institutions are the mechanisms for a hegemonic structure, so it can be inferred that China is aware of this with its recent initiatives and potential new formations for the future. The introduction of concepts such as the Shanghai Spirit, Silk Road spirit, the principle of anti-three evil, the repeated emphasis on the common destiny society for these institutions, the announcement of a free trade zone target, and the positive reactions as well as great expectations from the regional states make these institutions worth considering as a mechanism for China to become a regional hegemon.

It was mentioned that China is an attempt to hegemony in the region that has not yet succeeded. In order for China to strengthen its hegemonic tendency towards the region, it is essential to obtain the consent of regional society. It would be appropriate to talk about a social consciousness that has started to gain strength in Central Asia. Recently, the awareness of Central Asians is much louder than it was before. The fact that a non-profit organization called Central Asia Barometer[11] has been able to conduct extensive research and surveys in the region since 2017 even indicates a rising public opinion and changing dynamics in the region. Local people in the region can now revolt with common sense without the need for an institutional

[11] For more information: https://ca-barometer.org/en

organization, just like it has been interpreted by the experts for the uprisings in Kazakhstan in early 2022. These movements are not only a reaction of the Central Asians against their authoritarian governments and local elites, but also against the increase in foreign influence to their country with a neo-nationalist vein.

For the uprisings that are against Chinese influence, the Sinophobia is something serious that China must deal with and resolve. Most probably this is the biggest challenge for China's attempted hegemony in the region. Local people are disturbed by the rise of Chinese factories in their country, the illegal Chinese resettlement and the arrest of their own citizens in Xinjiang. The perception of the locals is shaped by the fear that the rumors of assimilation, discussed in the case of the Uyghurs socio-culturally, will happen to them and that China is trying to expand into their countries. In order to destroy these perceptions, it would be beneficial for China to increase its sensitivity on the Uyghur issue and to review its policies towards the region. In fact, China efforts to reduce this negative image through its soft power instruments, but how much it achieves this, the time will show. Another big challenge or, it would be more appropriate to call it a shortcoming, for China's attempted hegemony is the lack of a SCO financial institution. There is already some progress to found a development bank and this is evaluated as a concrete step for the establishment of such a free trade zone. This seems like an easier difficulty for China. Russia, the most powerful actor in the SCO after China, has been exposed to criticism and sanctions since it declared war on Ukraine in 2022, and has been weakening economically. For this reason, the idea of a development bank and then a free trade zone will attract the attention of Russia and other regional countries due to its potential win-win return. It seems likely that a SCO Development Bank will be established soon; there are frequent meetings on that. However, it is difficult to predict the answer to the question of when a free trade zone can be realized. Nevertheless, it can be said that even the existence of this idea of free trade zone is promising for China's hegemony attempt in Central Asia.

On the other hand, for those uprisings that are against their own ruling elite brings a counter-argument to the thesis. Considering that consent is mostly provided by the regional elites in Central Asia, is the "good for all" potential which the regional elites see in their partner China is actually the "good for the minority elites"? This is a very

difficult question to answer, because we can never know the intention of the ruling elites. Of course, the fact that the anti-government riots brought such suspicion cannot be ignored. However, neo-Gramscian theory could be studied in more authoritarian states as well, where such uprisings may never occur. In these cases, the physical lack of uprisings can be misinterpreted as a total vested consent. Thus, considering that the reading of intent cannot be achieved in politics, it is useful to accept this as a potential misleading in hegemony discussions.

Central Asia is a difficult region to study, especially in terms of the definition of the social classes. Aside from the difficulty of defining elites, there are also discussions about an elite class that has been in a transformation process in recent years. For example, some of the regional states have experienced a leadership change for the first time after independence by the elections held in recent years. Apart from this, it is possible to mention that another transformation has started with the increasing neo-nationalist tendency and consciousness among the locals of the region. Also, the differences between the Uzbek elites with the Kazakh elites or with the Tajik one, and the lack of a clear Central Asian elites brings a difficulty to define social classes. All these plus the resource scarcity on these internal dynamics limits this thesis.

Studying the neo-Gramscian theory at a regional level is itself a big challenge. There is only European example in this regard, to have a metodological idea from the scholars. However, the European case and experiences are quite different from China and Central Asia. It is not possible to see a developed political participation, or advanced economic and social institutions or huge companies in Central Asia, as in the example of European countries. In Central Asia, instead, there are family networks, economic barons and regional power centers and mostly these three have somehow kinship ties and affect the politics. At the same time, the hegemonic patterns and tools in the European model (which has adopted liberal policies) and the hegemonic patterns and tools in the authoritarian Chinese model (which has adopted state capitalism) are completely different. This research believes that a possible structural change takes place in Cox's three social forces with consent makes that specific case closer to be analyzed through the neo-Gramscian approach. Adopting

the main thought of the theory, this thesis attempted to make a neo-Gramscian examination for China's recently increasing attention to Central Asia.

Neo-Gramscian theory was put forward in the 1980s, and then evaluated through the European example in the late 1990s in order to examine the structural changes brought about by globalization. While all the states and regions of the world have been affected by more or less the same globalization experience, why is it still not examined on other regions, even though it has been thirty years since the European review, today in 2022? Cannot the neo-Gramscian considerations be made on a Latin American, an Indian, a Middle Eastern and an East Asian case, or on the ASEAN case, or on a Mexican and even a Turkish case? The critical side of this thesis argues that the disciplines of International Relations and Political Science should be able to go beyond Europe. The case application of a theory is valuable in terms of its incompatibility as much as its compatibility with that case, and ultimately gives an idea. Hence, the case studies should be increased and diversified, since the world is in a constant changing process. For all that, the scarcity of similar research on this subject makes this thesis limited.

In conclusion, with this study, it has been revealed that China has an attempt to be the hegemon in the Central Asian region. However, this study is not that assertive, does not claim that China is the new regional hegemon and even criticizes the New Great Game because of its announcement of China as the winner of the game. This research instead explored only the potential and attempt of China. As Cox puts forward that the "critical understanding focuses on the process of change rather than on its ends. (…) The consequences of action aiming at change are unpredictable" (Cox 1987, 393). Based on this expression, the thesis tried to give a discussion whether that kind of a hegemonic change could happen in Central Asia, so there is no clear answer for the result. For the Central Asian region, this discussion is just a starter and it has emerged through this thesis as a subject opens to diversification and development in the literature.

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APPENDICES

A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

İçinde bulunduğumuz yüzyılın en önemli gelişmelerinden biri Çin'in yükselişi olarak kabul ediliyor. Çin'in küresel düzeydeki artan aktif rolü bölge çalışmalarını da etkilemiştir ve bu durum Avrasya Çalışmalarında yeni bir eğilime yol açmıştır. Avrasya Çalışmaları bilindiği gibi çoğunlukla odağını Sovyet sonrası ülkeler olarak alır ve dolayısıyla araştırma konuları Rusya çerçevesine paralel gelişmiştir. Ancak son yıllarda Çin lehine gelişen bir bakış açısı ortaya çıkmıştır. Özellikle Orta Asya bölgesi, Çin'e coğrafi yakınlığı ve komşu ülkeleri barındırması nedeniyle Avrasya Çalışmaları'nda bu bakış açısını en çok ele alan alt bölge haline gelmiştir. Bu tez, Orta Asya Çalışmaları alt disiplininde yeni gelişen bu bakış açısına var olan analizlerden bir yenisini ekleyerek katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çin'in bölgeye artan ilgisi göz önüne alındığında, bu çalışma Orta Asya'da Çin'in bölgesel hegemon olma girişimi olup olmadığını araştırmaktadır.

Orta Asya Çalışmaları kapsamında son yıllarda en çok tartışılan konular enerji ve su politikaları, jeopolitik, güvenlik çalışmaları, bölgesel entegrasyon ve büyük güç politikaları tarafından şekillenmiştir. Özellikle Orta Asya'daki büyük güç siyasetini incelerken yazarların hem makalelerinde hem de analizlerinde kullanmayı sevdiği bir tabirle sık sık karşılaşılır: Yeni Büyük Oyun. Bu terim bilim adamları, araştırmacılar ve uzmanlar tarafından muhtemelen kulağa sansasyonel geldiği için sıklıkla kullanılmış ve sevilmiştir. Akılda kalıcı bir terim olduğu için üzerine birçok yazı yazılmıştır ve günümüzde Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler literatürlerinde kavram ile ilgili hem İngilizce hem de Türkçe birçok makaleye ulaşmak mümkündür. Kavram sıklıkla kullanılsa da Yeni Büyük Oyun'un tam olarak ne olduğu, neleri içerdiği ve neleri içermediği, terimin akademik olarak ne kadar tatmin edici olduğu ve Orta Asya'daki mevcut Çin faktörünün nasıl incelendiği soruları tam olarak

yanıtlanamamıştır. Bu nedenle tez, bu soruları sormakla başlar ve ardından güncel ve daha eleştirel cevaplar arar. Bölgede son zamanlarda artan Çin rolü göz önüne alınarak tezin araştırma sorusu şu şekilde oluşturulmuştur: "Çin, neo-Gramscian bir bakış açısıyla Orta Asya'da bölgesel hegemon olma girişiminde bulunuyor mu?" Tezin temel argümanı bu soru etrafında şekillenmekte ve Çin'in Batılı komşularına yönelik hegemonik bir bölgesel yapı oluşturma girişiminde bulunduğu iddia edilmektedir. Bu iddia, Robert Cox'un üç sosyal güç sınıflandırması altında Çin'in çeşitli girişimleri ve bölge devletlerinden gelen tepkilerle doğrulandı. "Hegemonya girişimi (*attempted hegemony*)" kavramı, siyaset bilimci Guy Ben-Porat'ın (2016) makalelerinden birinden esinlenmiştir. Kavramdan şu şekilde bahseder: "bir grup zorlamayı ikna ile birleştirerek siyasi gündemi değiştirmeyi amaçladığında hegemonya girişimi [var olur]" (Ben-Porat 2016, 329). Bu araştırma, Çin'in Orta Asya'da hegemonik bir bölgesel yapı inşa etme istekliliğini hegemonya girişimine örnek olarak alıyor.

Yeni Büyük Oyun kavramı Sovyetler Birliğ''nin dağılmasından sonra Orta Asya üzerindeki büyük güçlerin iktidar mücadelesinin betimlenmesiyle oluşan bir söylemdir. Odağını büyük güçler ve onların çıkar çatışmalarından alan Yeni Büyük Oyun, 19.yüzyıl sonlarında Orta Asya bölgesi üzerinde Rusya ve Britanya'nın kolonyal çatışmasını ifade eden Büyük Oyun teriminden türemiştir. Yeni Büyük Oyun literatürü çoğunlukla jeopolitik, güvenlik ve enerji kaynakları ve ekonomi perspektifleri üzerinden realist bir değerlendirme olarak karşımıza çıkar. Bu tez, kavramın Uluslararası İlişkiler disiplinindeki yerine yönelik bazı eleştirilerde bulunmuş ve Yeni Büyük Oyun'un mevcut gelişmelerin yalnızca kısmen ve tek yönlü bir değerlendirmesi olduğunu savunarak akademik olarak bazı boşluklarına değinmiştir.

Yeni Büyük Oyun, literatürde Büyük Oyun'un devamı olarak sayılmıştır ve bölgedeki oynanan oyunun günümüz evresi olarak nitelendirilmiştir. Emperyalizm, fetih ve sömürü anlayışına dayandırılan Büyük Oyun kavramı, tek taraflı kazanımların olduğu bir ilişkiyi anlatmakta ve artık tarihi bir olayın adı haline gelmiştir. Yeni Büyük Oyun ise Sovyet sonrası dönemde Orta Asya'da oluşan boşluktan dolayı bölgedeki büyük güç mücadelesini ifade eder ve aradan 30 yıl

geçmesine rağmen halen sıklıkla kullanılmaktadır. Bu, Yeni Büyük Oyun kavramının sürekli genişlemesine ve kapsam, aktör ve konum olarak şekil değiştirmesine neden olur. Sonuç olarak geçmişte bir ilişki biçimini ifade etmek için kullanılan terimin (Büyük Oyun), şimdiki uzantısı olan Sovyet sonrası dönemi ifade eden bir kullanıma dönüştüğü görülmektedir. Bu bağlamda, Yeni Büyük Oyun literatürünün kapsamının genişletilerek ve onu yeniden üreterek sürekli olarak yeniden incelenmesi epistemolojik olarak ne kadar doğrudur? Terimlerin tarihsel olması nedeniyle sürekli bir yeniden üretime tabi tutulmaları epistemolojik açıdan bilimsel şüpheleri de beraberinde getirmektedir.

Öte yandan, Yeni Büyük Oyun literatürünün kendi içindeki eksikliklerine değinmekte fayda var. Büyük Oyun'u emperyalizm altında incelemek yaygın olmakla birlikte Yeni Büyük Oyun için neo-emperyalizm merceğinden inceleyen herhangi bir tartışma yürütülmemiştir. Büyük Oyun'un yeni versiyonu Yeni Büyük Oyun ve emperyalizmin yeni yorumlaması neo-emperyalizm sayılıyor ise Yeni Büyük Oyun'un neo-emperyal bir değerlendirmesinin olmaması literatürün kendi içindeki büyük bir eksikliğidir ki kavram neo-emperyalizmin argümanları ile uyumludur. Literatürün bir diğer eksikliği ise "Orta Asya'nın büyük güçler arasında herhangi bir şekilde bölünmesinden söz edilebilir mi?" sorusunda gizlidir. Büyük Oyun için cevap, sömürge rekabeti nedeniyle evet olacaktır. Özellikle 1907 İngiliz-Rus Sözleşmesinden sonra Afganistan resmen İngiltere'ye, Orta Asya ise Rusya'ya verildi. Ancak Yeni Büyük Oyun için bu bölünmenin modern bir yorumlaması yok gibi görünüyor; pekala büyük güçlerin bölgedeki baskın oldukları sektörlere (savunma, enerji vb.) ilişkin bir paylaşım analizi yapılabilirdi, ancak literatürde bunun Büyük Oyun'daki örneğine atıfla yapılmadığını görüyoruz.

Jeopolitik açıdan, Yeni Büyük Oyun üzerinde çalışanlar, jeopolitik teorisyenlerin ortaya koyduklarını ayrıntılı bir şekilde araştırmadan ve bunu uygun teorik arka planda dile getirmeden ya da jeopolitiğin hangi yönüne tam olarak işaret ettiklerini açıklamadan bu terimini kullanırlar. Mackinder'ı temele alan jeopolitik perspektif, ne Mackinder'in bahsettiği bölgeyi bire bir kapsar ne de terimin akademik kullanımı disiplinin hakkını verebilmiştir (Edwards 2003, 96).

Yeni Büyük Oyun'un realist yönü, devletleri baş aktörler ve onların Orta Asya'daki çıkarlarını politikalarının ana kaynağı olarak alır. Bölge devletlerinin iradesine (*agency*) önem vermemesi bu literatüre gelecek en büyük eleştiriyi hak etmektedir. Yeni Büyük Oyun satranca benzetilir. Yani "oyun" aslında özünü "oyuncularından" alıyor. Oyuncular ise büyük güçlerdir ve oyun onların arasında döner. Peki oyunun kaderini belirleyen oyuncular arasında neden Orta Asya ülkeleri yok? Orta Asya devletleri günümüzün orta güçleri arasında yer almakta olup siyasi sistemleri ve egemenlikleri BM güvencesi altındadır. Yeni Büyük Oyun tarafından çoğunlukla göz ardı edilen iradeleri günümüzde bölge siyasetini doğrudan etkiliyor. Yeni Büyük Oyun literatürü altında çok az çalışma bölge devletlerinin kendisinden bahseder, çoğunluğu bölge devletlerinin iradesini yok sayar. Öte yandan, günümüzün giderek küreselleşen dünyası göz önüne alındığında çok oyunculu bir düzenden bahsetmek mümkündür. Bugün bölgede devlet dışı organlar ve devlet üstü aktörler de yer almaktadır. Hükümetlerarası kuruluşlar, sivil toplum kuruluşları, çok taraflı projeler, şirketler ve hatta terör örgütleri dahi artık bölge siyasetinde belirleyici roller üstlenmekte ve dengeleri aktif olarak etkilemektedir. Bu tür hükümetler arası veya devlet üstü oluşumlar, Yeni Büyük Oyun'un özüne tam olarak uymamaktadır, çünkü bu kavram "devlet" rekabetine dayalı bir analizdir ve devlet dışı ya da devlet üstü yapıları kapsamakta yetersizdir. Bu tür devlet üstü ya da devlet dışı organlar Yeni Büyük Oyun kapsamında incelenseler bile sadece devletlerin çıkarlarına hizmet eden araçlar olarak küçümsendikleri için devletçiliğin yeniden üretilmesine neden olacaklardır. Yeni Büyük Oyun'un bu tür kurumları devletçiliğin araçları olarak yorumlamasına karşılık, neo-Gramscian düşünce tarzı, kurumlardan "hegemonya mekanizmaları" ve "belli bir evrensellik görünümü" sağlayıcısı olarak bahseder.

21. yüzyılın en önemli gelişmelerinden biri de Çin'in yükselişi ve bölgedeki artan rolüdür. Yeni Büyük Oyun literatüründe çoğunlukla Çin oyunun galibi olarak bahsediliyor ki bu söylem bu çalışma için oldukça iddialı ve aynı zamanda bir eleştiri kaynağı. Yeni Büyük Oyun benzetmesi Çin'in yükselişini oyunun galibi yani aynı zamanda sonu olarak açıklıyor, dolayısıyla bu çalışmada iddia edildiği üzere bölgesel hegemonyanın bölge devletlerinin rızasıyla Çin lehine "başladığını" ancak henüz tam olarak "sağlanmadığı" gerçekliğini açıklamakta yetersiz kalıyor. Onun yerine bu tez, Orta Asya devletlerinin de iradesini önemseyen, günümüz gelişmelerini daha iyi

anlamlandıran ve aynı zamanda bölge çalışmalarındaki teorik eksikliğin giderilmesine katkı sunacak olan neo-Gramşici bir analiz öneriyor.

Gramşi'nin kavramsallaştırmalarını ve neo-Gramşici perspektifi, kurucu teorisyeni sayılan Robert Cox'un bakış açısını, bu Türkçe özet kısmında detaylandırmayacağım. Tezin ampirik kısmındaki temel argümanlarla devam edeceğim. Çin, dış politika önceliklerinde Orta Asya'ya önemli bir yer vermiştir. Bölge, üç ana nedenden dolayı kritik öneme sahiptir: bölgenin Çin'in doğusundaki Uygurlarla sosyo-kültürel yakınlığı; bölgenin Çin'in enerji ihtiyaçlarını karşılama potansiyeli ve Çin'den Avrupa'ya köprü görevi üstlendiği için bölgenin coğrafi değeri. Bu üç temel motivasyon Çin'in bölgeye duyduğu ilgiyi artırıma sebepleri olarak sayılabilir. Bu tezde Çin'in artan ilgisi bölgede hegemonik bir yapı kurma istekliliği olarak değerlendiriliyor, çünkü buna dair ipuçları mevcut.

Öncelikle Çin'in Orta Asya bölgesi ile olan ilişkisini tanımlar üzerinden ele almak önemlidir. Günümüzün daha geniş bölgesel tanımları, Çin ve Orta Asya'nın bütünsel doğasına işaret etmektedir. Son zamanlarda kullanılan ve Çin kaynaklarının sıklıkla tercih ettiği daha geniş bir Orta Asya tanımı vardır. Orta Asya bölgesi literatürde farklı tartışmalı tanımlarla karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Burada iki ana bakış açısı ve tanımdan bahsetmek mümkündür. Birincisi, en çok kullanılan sınır tanımı, Sovyet sonrası beş cumhuriyeti, yani Kazakistan, Kırgızistan, Özbekistan, Türkmenistan ve Tacikistan'ı kapsayan tanımdır. Bugün bu beş ülkenin bulunduğu yaklaşık topraklar, 19. yüzyılın ortalarında Ruslar tarafından Orta (*Srednaia*) Asya olarak adlandırılmıştır. Bu Rus terminolojisi dünyanın çoğu tarafından kabul edilmiş ve bölge, iç özelliklerinden ziyade Rus kontrolündeki topraklarla ilişkilendirilmiştir (Starr 2008, 4). İkinci olarak bazı bilim adamları, bu araştırmanın konusu ile de ilişkili olan Orta Asya'nın daha geniş bir tanımını yaparlar. Dünya Bankası tarafından yayınlanan bir çalışma belgesinde Afganistan, İran, Pakistan ve Rusya'nın bazı bölümleri ile Çin, Hindistan ve Orta Doğu gibi komşu ülkeleri/bölgeleri kapsayan "daha geniş bir Orta Asya" kavramından bahsedilmektedir (Byrd and Raiser 2006). Buna ek olarak Nadine Godehardt, kitabında Çinli uzmanlarla yaptığı çeşitli röportajlara ve Orta Asya üzerine Çince literatür taramasına yer veriyor ve Çinlilerin çoğunun Afganistan ve Sincan bölgesini tek bir bölgesel mahalle içinde

aldığına dair bulgularını sonuçlandırıyor (2014, 11) ve hatta bazıları Moğolistan'ı dahi bu "Geniş Orta Asya bölgesi" kavramı kapsamına alıyor (2014, 176). Özellikle 2000'li yıllardan sonra geliştirilen Orta Asya'nın Sincan bölgesini ve Afganistan'ı da içine alan bu daha geniş bölgesel tanımı, Orta Asya siyasi tarihi üzerine çalışan bilim adamlarının da araştırma konusu haline gelmiştir (Kerr 2010; Swanström 2011). Bu geniş Orta Asya'ya Çin'in batı bölgelerinin dahil edilmesi ve bu tanımın Çin kaynakları tarafından tercih edildiği gerçeği önemlidir. Daha çok bir Doğu Asya ülkesi olarak kabul edilen Çin'in 2000'li yıllarla birlikte literatürde görülen bu geniş tanımda kısmen de olsa yerini almış olması, Çin'in batılı komşularına doğru yeni bir bölgesel yapı oluşturma fikrini destekler niteliktedir. Öte yandan siyaset bilimi profesörü olan Zhao Huasheng, Çin ve Orta Asya'yı Çin'in batı sınırı nedeniyle "doğal olarak bağlı" olarak değerlendirirken Sincan bölgesini aralarında bir köprü olarak nitelendiriyor. Bu nedenle, diyor ki, "Çin varlığı keyfi değil, doğaldır; ne olursa olsun Çin bölgeden çekilemez" (Rumer, Trenin ve Zhao 2007, 161). Bu bölgesel tanımların kapsamı çok önemlidir. Çinlilerin Orta Asya bölgesi tanımlarına Sincan bölgesi ve Afganistan'ı dahil etmesi ve Çin ile bölge arasındaki bütünsel bağa vurgu yapması tarihi bir blok oluşturma fikrini kuvvetlendiren argümanlardan biridir.

Bölgesel tanımlamalara değindikten sonra, günümüz ilişkilerinin kökenini anlamak için ikisi arasındaki tarihsel bağları araştırmak gereklidir, çünkü tarihsel bağların günümüz söylemlerine zemin hazırladığını görüyoruz. Çin, geçmişi Han Hanedanlığı dönemine kadar uzanan Orta Asya ile ilişkileri olan en eski ülkelerden biridir; iki bin yıldan fazla bir süredir bir ilişki içindeler (Rossabi 1975, 9). Dolayısıyla Batı Çin'in Orta Asya bölgesine sosyo-kültürel yakınlığı bir önem taşımaktadır çünkü geçmişten gelen bu yakınlık günümüzde sıklıkla anılmaktadır. Örneğin, Zhao Huasheng, Çin ile Orta Asya arasındaki coğrafi bağlara dikkat çekiyor ve Rusya dahil hiçbir ülkenin Orta Asya'ya Çin'den daha yakın olmadığını iddia ediyor (ch3, Rumer, Trenin ve Zhao 2007, 163). Buna paralel olarak Başkan Xi, Orta Asya'dan şu sözlerle bahseder: "Yakın komşu uzak akrabadan iyidir" (2014, 312). Xi'nin bu vurgusu, Çinlilerin Orta Asyalıları dünyanın diğer ucundaki Çinli vatandaşlardan bile daha değerli ve kendilerine daha yakın gördüklerinin kanıtıdır. Dolayısıyla Çinlilerin bu bağlara tarihsel ve coğrafi olarak vurgu yapmaları, bölgede tarihi bir yapı kurma iradelerini güçlendirmektedir. Aynı zamanda bölge devletleri bağımsızlıklarını ilan

ettiklerinden itibaren Çin'in onları tanıyan ikinci ülke olması ve her koşulda Çin tarafından diplomatik destek görmeleri de ikiliyi birbirine yakınlaştıran ortak zemini oluşturarak yapı fikrini kuvvetlendiriyor.

Yakın zamanlarda, Başkan Xi'nin ortaya koyduğu "ortak kader topluluğu" kavramı, tarihi bir yapının kurulması için önemli bir diğer argümandır. Bu kavram, 2012 yılında 18. Parti Kongresi sırasında "Çin Rüyası" ile birlikte tanıtıldı (Poh ve Li 2017, 85). Bu kavram, ortak normlara ve kimliğe sahip bir topluluk inşa ederek tüm ekonomik, siyasi ve sosyal unsurlarıyla Çin merkezli bir tarihi yapıya işaret etmektedir. Konfüçyüsçü bir düşünceyle Çin'in merkezde yer aldığı ve etrafında yörüngeler döndüğü bir modelden bahsetmek mümkün. Ortak kader topluluğu "Orta Asya'yı ilk halkasına yerleştiren bir dizi eşmerkezli daire olarak tasavvur edilebilir" (Wilson 2021, 78). Ayrıca Orta Asya Üniversitesi'nde siyaset bilimci olan Kemel Toktomushev de bu retoriği Orta Asya ile doğrudan ilişki kurarak yorumlamıştır (2017). Bunlar, Çin'in bölgede tarihi bir yapı kurma iradesinin açık işaretleridir. Destekleyici argümanlar olarak Xi Jinping'in ortak kader toplumu vurgusunu Orta Asya üzerine yaptığı çeşitli konuşmalarından kesitler ilgili bölümde verilmiştir.

Tarihsel yapı fikri bir yana, bu yapının hegemonik unsurlar içerip içermediğini araştırmak bu çalışma için elzemdir. Hegemonya kavramı, tarihsel bir yapının oluşumunda karşılıklı etkileşimler sonucunda rızanın varlığı üzerinden incelenir. Öncelikle Cox'a göre bir devletin hegemonyasını kolaylaştıran etkenlerden biri tarihindeki güçlü bir devrim deneyimidir. Bu tür bir devrim, yeni bir ulusal hegemonya ile sonuçlanır. Güçlü devrimler devlet sınırlarıyla sınırlı olmadığı için dışa doğru genişleme eğilimdedir. Devlet-üstü hegemonya, zaman içinde, ancak bu ulusal hegemonik sınıfın devlet içinden dışarıya doğru yayılmasıyla kurulur. Devlet içindeki bu ulusal hegemonyanın kurduğu ekonomik, sosyal ve politik kurumlar, normlar ve sistem, daha sonra devletler üstü hegemonik düzenin kalıpları haline gelir (Cox 1983, 171). Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'nin 1949'daki kuruluşu, Çin Komünist Devrimi'nin bir sonucuydu. Çin örneğinde devletin bizzat kuruluşunun mahiyetinde bir devrim söz konusudur, dolayısıyla Çin'in bu özelliğe yeterince sahip olduğunu ve hegemonik bir potansiyele sahip olduğunu söylemek mümkündür.

Çin'in potansiyeli bir yana, bölgede hali hazırda bir Rusya hegemonyasının var olduğuna şüphe yoktur, detaylar için tezin ilgili bölümü okunabilir. Peki buna karşılık bölgede Çin lehine bir karşı-hegemonyadan bahsedilebilir mi? Bunu Owen Worth'un karşı hegemonya için sıraladığı üç özellik ile açıklamak mümkün: "(a) mevcut statükoya açık bir ideolojik alternatif; (b) farklı düzeylerde harekete geçirilebilecek sivil toplum desteği ve (c) belirli bir düzenin baskın sağduyusuna meydan okuyabilecek popüler bir çağrı" (Worth 2015, 150). Çin ve Rusya arasındaki ideolojik farklılık 1950'lerde Sino-Soviet ayrılması olarak da bilinen sonrasında iki ülkeyi savaşın eşiğine dahi getiren sert bir ayrışma olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Öte yandan Orta Asya ülkelerinde sivil toplumun çok güçlü olmadığı bilinmektedir. Dolayısıyla hem otoriter rejimler hem de kâr amacı gütmeyen kuruluşların yetersizliği nedeniyle kamuoyuna ulaşmak zordur. Çin kurumlarının bölgedeki yerel kurumlarla işbirliği içinde çeşitli bilimsel araştırmalar, çalıştaylar ve konferanslar düzenlediği bilinmektedir (Serikkaliyeva 2019, 77). Bölgede Çin yanlısı yerel örgütlü bir sivil toplum yapısına rastlamak zor olsa da elit düzeyde bir Çin sempatisinin olduğunu söylemek mümkün. Seçkin çıkar grupları, şirket sahipleri Çin'i bir fırsat olarak görüyor. Son olarak Çin, bölgede iyi bir imaja sahip popüler bir kültür yaratmak için çeşitli araçlara sahiptir. Bölgede Çin'in radyo ve televizyon kanallarının ilgiyle takip edildiği, Çin'in bölge devletlerine turizm ve seyahat açısından vize kolaylığı sağladığı bilinmektedir (Dadparvar ve Azizi 2019). Ayrıca Çin kurumları özellikle genç Orta Asyalılar için konserler, sergiler ve kültürel günler vb. düzenlemek için önemli bir bütçe ayırmaktadır (Serikkaliyeva 2019, 77). Ancak yerel düzeyde son dönemde bölgede Çin karşıtı bazı protestolara da rastlamak mümkün. Bölgede neo-milliyetçi eğilimlerin artması ve toplumun artık otoriter rejimlerin ürettiği politikalar tarafından ezilmesi, bölgede yükselmeye başlayan yeni bir bilincin işareti olarak yorumlanıyor. Bu bilinçle zaman zaman hükümetlerine başkaldıran halk da Çin etkisine karşı çıkma eğilimindedir. Genel olarak Çin lehine bir karşı-hegemonya varlığından söz edilebilir ancak bunun ne kadar güçlü olduğu ilerleyen paragraflarda kısaca değinilecek.

Hegemonik bir tarihsel yapıda neden rıza vardır? Mutlak bir zorlamadan bahsetmek mümkün değildir, çünkü neo-Gramscian teori her ulus devletin bir ajans olduğunu ve kendi karar alma mekanizmalarına sahip olduğunu varsaymaktadır. Devletlerin

bugün hegemonik bir yapıya rıza göstermelerinin nedeni, Coxian anlayışta "gelişme/kalkınma umudu" (1987, 393-394) ve değişimin getirilerinin "evrensel iyi" olduğu inancıdır. Mevcut düzenden hoşnutsuzluk ve kalkınma umudu devletleri yeni arayışlara sürükler. "Statükoyu korumaktan ziyade bir değişim seçeneği, alternatif bir toplum için herhangi bir plandan çok, mevcut düzenden memnuniyetsizlik ve iyileştirme umuduyla belirlenir" (Cox 1987, 393). Orta Asya devletleri orta güçlerdir. Daha güçlü bir ekonomi ve refah arzusu, onları alternatif bir ittifaka sempati duymaya açık bir konuma getirdi ve bu durum bölge devletlerinin liderleri tarafından defalarca dile getirildi. Orta Asya devletlerinin liderlerinin Çin ile işbirliğine rıza göstermelerinin ana nedeni budur.

Gramscian anlayışta rızanın daha çok altyapının elitleri tarafından sağlandığının altı çizilir. Liderlerin Çin ile ilişkileri daha da artırma çağrıları, bir bütün olarak Orta Asya toplumlarının "zımni rızası" olarak değerlendirilir. Orta Asya oligarkları olarak da adlandırılabilecek yönetici sınıf ve elit çıkar grupları, Çin ile ortaklığın "herkes için fırsatlar" sağladığını iddia ederek Çin'in bölgedeki varlığından memnun ve razı görünüyor. Detaylar ve liderlerden direk alıntılar için ilgili bölümü okuyunuz. Oradan anlaşılacağı üzere, seçkinlerin rızası çoğunlukla güçlü aile ve akrabalık bağlarından ve bazı ekonomik baronlardan gelmektedir. Tüm bu güçlü argümanlara rağmen, bölgede "Çin tarafından finanse edilen ve siyasi güçten bağımsız olarak gelişen ve üst düzey kararlarla çelişebilecek hiçbir lobi yoktur", ancak "tarihsel olarak Pekin'in her zaman Sinofil çevreleri beslediği bilinen bir gerçektir" (Peyrouse 2016, 18). Görüldüğü gibi, tüm Orta Asya elitleri Çin ile olan iyi ilişkileri konusunda olumludur. Yönetici seçkinlerin ve büyük şirketlerin Çin'e karşı olumlu duruşlarının, onların güncel konuşmalarından yapılan alıntıların hepsinin ortak bir noktası var: Çin'in kendilerine olan ilgisinden memnun olmaları, Çin'in kendi ulusal çıkarlarına ve ülkelerine katkılarına olan inançları yani Çin etkisinin artması için gösterdikleri "rıza".

Alt yapının yönetici elitlerinin yanı sıra, çoğunluğu oluşturduğu için yerel halkın rıza ve tepkisi de değerlendirilmelidir. Peyrouse bir makalesinde (2016) tüm bölge devletlerinde Çin faktörünü, jeopolitik ve ekonomik konularda olumlu bir imaja sahipken kimlik ve kültür konularında olumsuz bir imaja sahip olarak özetliyor.

Ekonomik açıdan bölgeye çok sayıda ihracat fırsatı sunan Çin, Orta Asyalı uzmanlar ve kamuoyu tarafından memnuniyetle karşılanmaktadır. Çinli şirketlerin Batılı veya Rus emsallerine göre daha avantajlı sözleşmeler sunduğu da bir gerçek. Ancak Orta Asya'da baskın bir Çin şüphesi, özellikle Kazakistan ve Kırgızistan'da artan bir endişe, kültür ve demografi konusunda "Çin tehdidi" algısı var. Çin'in Orta Asya bölgesi için olası "gizli" hedeflerine (Peyrouse 2016, 19) ilişkin bir şüphe atmosferi var. Bu Sinofobik düşüncelerin temelinde emperyalizm şüphesi ve Çinleştirme politikaları korkusu yatmaktadır. Özetle Çin'in bölgede yerel düzeyde mutlak hegemonyaya ulaştığını söylemek doğru olmaz. Çin'e yönelik kamuoyu oldukça çeşitlidir, bu nedenle, elitlerin rızasının olduğu söylenebilirken Çin'in bölgedeki artan rolüne halkın rızası konusunda bir belirsizlik olduğu sonucuna varmak mümkündür. Yerel düzeydeki bu belirsizlikler ve memnuniyetsizlik, belki de Çin'in bölgedeki olası hegemonyasının önündeki en büyük engellerden biridir.

Çin'in beş Orta Asya ülkesindeki potansiyel hegemonyasını tartıştıktan sonra, Afganistan'ın rızasından bahsetmek gereklidir. Bilindiği gibi Taliban, yaklaşık on yıl sonra, 15 Ağustos 2021'de Afganistan'da yeniden bir Afgan Taliban hükümeti kurmayı başardı. Taliban sözcüsü Suhail Shaheen, Çin merkezli bir televizyon kanalında Çin'i yeni kurulan Afgan Taliban hükümetini desteklemeye davet etti: "Afganistan'ın yeniden inşasında, rehabilitasyonunda, yeniden inşasında çok büyük rol oynayabilirler" (Ergun 2021, 30). Bu görüşmeleri Çinli yetkililerden gelen olumlu açıklamalar takip etti. "Yeniden yapılanma" ve "yeniden inşa" gibi kelimelere yapılan vurgu ve Çin'in Afganistan'da kurucu bir rol üstleneceği iddiası, Çin'in bölge üzerinde hegemonik bir tarihi yapı inşa etme potansiyeli olduğu fikrini beslemektedir. Yeni Afgan yöneticilerin bu roller için Çin'e bu denli davetkar olmaları açık bir rıza göstergesidir.

Robert Cox hegemonik bir tarihsel yapı fikrini üç sosyal güçteki değişimle ilişkilendiriyor: materyal kapasite, fikirler ve kurumlar. Bu üç önkoşulu örnek olay üzerinden incelemekte fayda var. Birinci güç "maddi yetenekler"dir. Çin dünyanın en büyük ikinci ekonomisi olduğu için, doğal olarak bölgedeki diğer tüm ülkelerden daha güçlü bir ekonomiye sahiptir. Ayrıca Orta Asya devletlerinin ekonomik ilişkilerinde yıllar içinde bir "değişim" yaşadıklarını görüyoruz. Açıklığa

kavuşturmak için Çin ile Orta Asya arasındaki ekonomik ilişkilere dayalı birkaç veri paylaşıldı, ilgili bölümden ulaşabilirsiniz. Altı Orta Asya devletinin Rusya ve Çin ile olan ticari ilişkilerini 2000 ve 2018 yıllarında karşılaştırmalı olarak gösterildi. Veriden çıkarımla Orta Asya'nın yıllar içinde büyük bir "değişime" tanık olduğu söylenebilir. Rusya'nın bölgedeki rakipsiz ekonomik hakimiyetini Çin'e kaptırdığını söylemek mümkün. Ekonomik anlamda iddia, Doğrudan Dış Yatırım verileriyle de desteklenmiştir.

Cox'a göre hegemonik bir tarihsel yapı için ikinci güç "fikirler"dir. Çin modeli (中国模式), 1976 yılında Deng Xiaoping tarafından başlatılan (bazı kaynaklarda Pekin Mutabakatı olarak adlandırılmaktadır) Çin'in tüm siyasi ve ekonomik politikalarını kapsayan bir kavramdır. Günümüzün çağdaş dünyası için bu kavram, Çin'in Konfüçyüs ideallerini özüne alarak alternatif küresel normları ve standartları teşvik etmesini ifade için yaygın olarak kullanılmaktadır. Çin modelinin ana bileşenlerinin neler olduğu ve ekonomik olarak tam olarak neleri kapsadığı konusunda anlaşmazlık var. Hatta Çin'in farklı illerinde izlenen çeşitli ekonomik politikaların bütünü olarak da tanımlamak mümkündür. Zhao Suisheng modeli, "Çin modeli (…) genellikle kısa yoldan ekonomik özgürlük ve siyasi baskının bir bileşimi olarak tanımlanır" (Zhao 2010, 422) şeklinde ifade ediyor. Çin modelindeki temel ilkeler kısaca tarafsızlık, faydacılık, yerelleşme, milliyetçilik, stabilite gibi birtakım kavramlar etrafında şekillenir. Çin'in son yıllarda Orta Asya bölgesi ve diğer bölgeler üzerinde makul, tutarlı ve kademeli bir güven geliştirmesi etkileyicidir. Çin modelinde Çin'in de otoriter bir rejime sahip olması, ulusal çıkarlara saygı duyması ve istikrara vurgu yapması Orta Asyalıları Çin'e daha da yakınlaştırmaktadır. Çin dış politikasının temel direklerinden biri olan "içişlerine müdahale etmeme" ilkesi uyarınca ABD'nin yaptığı gibi hiçbir şeyi "dikte" etmemiştir (Aleksandra ve Strachota 2013). "Çin ve diğer sözde Doğu Asya kalkınmacı devletleri, ekonomik başarıları ve sürekli ekonomik büyümenin, sosyal uyumun ve siyasi istikrarın otoriter yönetim içinde sağlanabileceğini gösterdikleri için, özellikle Kazakistan ve Özbekistan'da, son zamanlarda yöneticiler için rol model haline geldiler" (Ahrens and Hoen in ed. Neuman 2019, 92). Kanıt olarak, Orta Asya'nın en büyük devleti olan Kazakistan ile Çin arasındaki politik eğilimlerdeki benzerlik Bertelsmann Dönüşüm Endeksi'nden sağlanan veride ilgili bölümde görünüyor.

Çin'in bir model olarak bölgedeki yükselişi, Rusya imajının son yıllarda dünya çapında kırılmasıyla besleniyor. Aynı zamanda bölge devletlerinin bağımsızlıklarını ilan ettikleri günden itibaren "*de-Russification*" ismiyle anılan Rus etkisini kırmaya yönelik politikaları da Çin lehinedir. Ve Çin kendi imajını pozitif anlamda artırmak için en büyük girişimlerinden olan Konfüçyus Enstitüleri ile bölgede aktif faaliyetler yürütüyor. Tüm bu bilgiler ışığında, Çin'in hegemonya girişiminin Cox'un öne sürdüğü ikinci güç olan fikirler üzerinde olumlu ilerleme kaydettiği sonucuna varmak mümkündür. Ancak, birincil maddi ön koşulda olduğu gibi Çin'in Rusya'nın yerini aldığı söylenemez.

Üçüncü sosyal güçten söz etmeden evvel bölge devletlerinin bu zamana kadar kendi başlarına bölgesel bir organizasyon oluşturamadıklarından bahsetmekte fayda var. Bölge milletleri daha önce birçok kez kendi başlarına örgütlenmeye çalıştıkları ancak bağımsızlıktan itibaren başarılı olamadıkları görülmektedir. Bölge devletlerinin entegrasyonu organize edecek ve ortak bir zemin oluşturacak bir çekirdek devlete ihtiyaçları olduğu çıkarımı yapmak mümkündür. Bu çalışma, Çin liderliğindeki bölgesel girişimleri, Çin'in Orta Asya'daki bölgesel hegemonyası için potansiyel mekanizmalar olarak ele almaktadır. Bu bağlamda, burada oluşan bir tür merkez-çevre ilişkisi, üst yapı-yapı ilişkisi de "bölgesel hegemonya" iddialarını güçlendirmektedir. Cox'un sınıflandırmasındaki üçüncü güç "uluslararası kurumlar"dır. Cox kurumları hegemonya için maddi koşullar ve fikirler arasında "amalgam" olarak değerlendirir ve onlardan "hegemonya mekanizmaları" olarak söz eder (Cox 1983, 172). Hegemonik bir tarihsel yapıda ilk iki koşul arasındaki dengeyi sağlamaları ve ulusötesi düzen inşasını sağlamaları nedeniyle kurumlar hegemonya için hayati önem taşımaktadır. Hegemonik bir düzendeki önemli yerleri nedeniyle bu tez, Çin'in önderlik ettiği bölgesel oluşumlara özel bir önem vermektedir.

Şangay İşbirliği Örgütü'nün amaçları arasında komşuluk ilişkilerini güçlendirmek ve karşılıklı güveni artırmak, ticari ve siyasi bağları artırmak yer alıyor. Üye ülkeler arasında karşılıklı güven inşasına dayanan bu amaca Şanghay Ruhu adı verilmektedir. ŞİÖ'nün bugün en büyük hedeflerinden biri Şanghay Ruhunu güçlendirmektir. Normalde sınır sorunlarını çözmek amacıyla kurulmuş bir organizasyon olmasına rağmen Çin, sınır sorunlarını çözdükten, tabiri caizse

istediğini elde ettikten sonra geri çekilmek yerine "Şangay Ruhu"nu ileri taşıyarak organizasyonu büyütmesi önemli bir noktadır. Çin bölge ile temasını azaltmaya yanaşmadı aksine Şangay Ruhu ismiyle bir çatı konsept üreterek bölgeyle ilişkilerini güçlendirmeye yönelik politikalar izlemiştir. Son zamanlarda Çin'in gelecekteki hedeflerinden birinin bölgede bir serbest ticaret bölgesi kurmak olduğu tartışılıyor ki bu araştırma için önemli bir argüman. Daha önce Çin birkaç defa bunu ŞİÖ gündemine taşıdı ancak Rus vetosuna maruz kaldı. Fakat yakında bir ŞİÖ Kalkınma Bankası kurulacağı öngörülüyor, bununla ilgili müzakereler başladı. Bunu ŞİÖ serbest ticaret alanına doğru atılan somut bir adım olarak değerlendiren yaygın bir görüş var. ŞİÖ kapsamında serbest ticaret bölgesi amacı, ŞİÖ'yü bölgesel hegemonya mekanizması olmaya çok yaklaştırmaktadır. Avrupa örneği üzerine neo-Gramşici çalışmalarda olduğu gibi, bir ŞİÖ serbest ticaret bölgesinin oluşturulması, bölgesel bir blok için açık bir işaret olacaktır. Bu, Çin'in bölgesel hegemonyasının eksikliklerinden biri olarak kabul edilebilirken, bununla ilgili somut adımların da olduğu göz ardı edilmemeli. Ayrıca ŞİÖ'nün hükümetler arası bir kurum olmasına rağmen Çin'in bazı milli çıkarlarına (üç kötülüğe karşı ilkesi (*anti-three evil*)) hizmet edildiğinden de ilgili bölümde bahsedildi. Tüm bunlar ŞİÖ'nü Çin'in potansiyel bir hegemonya mekanizması haline getiriyor. İlgili bölümde birtakım çarpıcı alıntılar paylaşıldı. Çinli Orta Asya uzmanlarının ŞİÖ'yü nasıl değerlendirdiklerine yönelik veriler bu tezin iddiasını kuvvetlendiriyor. Ek olarak Xi Jinping'in "Şanghay Ruhu 'ortak varlığımız' ve Şanghay İşbirliği Örgütü 'ortak evimiz'" vurgusu da Çin'in ŞİÖ ile bölgedeki hegemonik yapı kurma istekliliğini açıkça gösteriyor.

Benzer argümanlara Kuşak Yol Projesi ve Asya Altyapı Yatırım Bankası örneklerinde de ulaşıldı. İki oluşumun da ŞİÖ'de olduğu gibi Çin'in milli çıkarlarıyla paralellikler gösterdiği ve ikisinin birbirini tamamlayıcı nitelikte olduğu argümanlarla açıklandı. Kuşak Yol Projesi'nde Xi'nin sıklıkla geçmişteki İpek Yolu'na ve Çin'in görkemli zamanlarına vurgu yapması yine tarihsel yapı fikrini güçlendiren bir delil olarak verildi. Yine Kuşak Yol Projesi için yapılan ortak kader toplumu vurgusu ile Kuşak Yol Ruhu söyleminin yaygınlaştırılma çabasına da değinildi. Tabi bölge devletlerinin bu oluşumlardan büyük ekonomik beklentiler içerisinde olduğundan da bahsetmekte fayda var.

Toparlamak gerekirse bölgede Çin'in hegemonik bir yapı kurma girişimi olduğunu çıkarılmamak mümkündür ancak bu henüz gerçekleşmiş değildir. Neo-Gramşici teori, hegemonik bir projede toplumsal güçlerdeki değişimin yanı sıra rızanın altını çizer. Orta Asya bölgesini Çin'in bütüncül yorumu, ikisi arasındaki asırlık diyalog ve Sincan bölgesi ile Uygur nüfusunun varlığı bölgeyi Çin'e bağlamaktadır. Tarihsel bağlar bugün Xi Jinping tarafından ortak bir kader topluluğuna vurgu yaparak bir söyleme dönüştü. Böylece, tarihsel bir blok fikri güçlendi. Bölge, hegemonya karşıtı argümanların çoğunu karşılıyor ve bölgenin Çin lehine bir değişime tanık olması, bu bölgesel yapının muhtemel surette hegemonik olduğunu gösteriyor. Özellikle, ekonomi açısından bölge ülkelerinin tanık olduğu çarpıcı bir değişim var. Ancak Coxian bakış açısına göre toplumsal değişim, ekonomik ve materyalist egemenliğe sahip olmaktan daha kapsamlı bir kavramdır. Fiziki ve ekonomik güce sahip olmak, herhangi bir hegemonik yapının en büyük adımıdır ancak yeterli değildir. Bununla ilgili olarak bugün Çin, Orta Asya'da sadece ekonomik çabalara sahip olmakla kalmayıp sosyal ve siyasi açıdan da girişimlerini sürdürmektedir. Bölgede Rus hegemonyası zayıflıyor ve Çin modelinin tanıtımı yapılıyor ve Konfüçyus Enstitüleri aktif olarak çalışıyor. Ayrıca bölgesel kurumların hegemonik bir yapının mekanizmaları olduğu bilindiğinden, Çin'in son dönemdeki girişimleri ve geleceğe yönelik potansiyel yeni oluşumlarıyla bunun farkında olduğu söylenebilir. Şanghay Ruhu, İpek Yolu ruhu, üç kötülük karşıtı ilkesi gibi kavramların tanıtılması, bu kurumlar için ortak kader toplumunun tekrar tekrar vurgulanması, serbest ticaret bölgesi hedefinin ilan edilmesi ve bölgeden olumlu tepkilerin yanı sıra büyük beklentilerin olması, bu kurumları Çin'in bölgesel bir hegemon olabilmesi için birer mekanizma olarak çalışılmaya değer kılıyor.

Çin'in bölgede henüz erişilmemiş bir hegemonya girişimi olduğu belirtildi. Çin'in bölgeye yönelik hegemonik eğilimini güçlendirmesi için bölge toplumunun rızasını alması şarttır. Orta Asya'da güçlenmeye başlayan bir toplumsal bilinçten bahsetmek yerinde olacaktır. Son zamanlarda Orta Asyalıların farkındalığı eskisinden çok daha yüksek. 2022 başlarında Kazakistan'da çıkan ayaklanmalar için uzmanların yorumladığı gibi, bölgedeki yerel halk artık kurumsal bir örgütlenmeye ihtiyaç duymadan sağduyu ile isyan edebiliyor. Bu hareketler sadece Orta Asyalıların kendi otoriter hükümet ve yerel seçkinlerine karşı bir tepkisi değil, aynı zamanda neo-

milliyetçi bir damarla ülkelerine yabancı etkisinin artmasına da bir tepki niteliğindedir.

Çin etkisine karşı çıkan ayaklanmalar için Sinofobi, Çin'in uğraşması ve çözmesi gereken ciddi bir konu; hatta büyük olasılıkla bu, Çin'in bölgedeki hegemonya girişimi için en büyük zorluktur. Yerel halk, ülkelerindeki Çin fabrikalarının yükselişinden, Çin'in yasadışı yeniden yerleşiminden ve Sincan'da kendi vatandaşlarının tutuklanmasından rahatsız. Yerel halkın algısı, Uygurlar örneğinde sosyo-kültürel olarak tartışılan asimilasyon söylentilerinin başlarına geleceği ve Çin'in ülkelerine yayılmaya çalıştığı korkusuyla şekilleniyor. Bu algıları yıkmak için Çin'in Uygur meselesindeki hassasiyetini artırması ve bölgeye yönelik politikalarını gözden geçirmesi faydalı olacaktır. Aslında Çin, yumuşak güç araçlarıyla bu olumsuz imajı azaltmaya çalışıyor ama bunu ne kadar başardığını zaman gösterecek. Çin'in hegemonya girişimi için bir diğer büyük zorluk ya da buna eksiklik demek daha doğru olur, bir ŞİÖ finans kurumunun olmamasıdır. Halihazırda bir kalkınma bankası kurma yolunda ilerlemeler mevcut ve bu, bölgede serbest ticaret alanının kurulması için somut bir adım olarak değerlendiriliyor. Bu, Çin için daha kolay bir zorluk gibi görünüyor. Çünkü ŞİÖ içinde Çin'den sonra en güçlü aktör olan Rusya, 2022 yılında Ukrayna'ya savaş ilan etmesinden bu yana uluslararası eleştiri ve yaptırımlara maruz kalıyor ve ekonomik olarak zayıflıyor. Bu nedenle, bir kalkınma bankası ve ardından bir serbest ticaret bölgesi fikri, potansiyel kazan-kazan getirisi nedeniyle Rusya'nın ve diğer bölge ülkelerinin dikkatini çekecektir. Yakında bir ŞİÖ Kalkınma Bankası kurulacak gibi görünüyor ancak serbest ticaret bölgesinin ne zaman hayata geçirilebileceği sorusunun cevabını tahmin etmek zor. Yine de serbest ticaret bölgesi fikrinin varlığının dahi Çin'in Orta Asya'daki hegemonya girişimi için umut vericidir.

Öte yandan, bölgedeki yönetici seçkinlere karşı çıkan ayaklanmalar teze karşıt bir argüman doğuruyor. Rızanın daha çok Orta Asya'daki bölgesel seçkinler tarafından sağlandığı düşünülürse bölgesel seçkinlerin Çin'de gördükleri "herkes için iyi" potansiyel, aslında yalnızca "seçkinler için iyi" midir? Bu cevaplaması çok zor bir soru çünkü yönetici seçkinlerin niyetini asla bilemeyiz. Hükümet karşıtı ayaklanmaların bu tür şüpheleri beraberinde getirdiği gerçeği elbette göz ardı

edilemez. Bununla birlikte, neo-Gramşici teori, bu tür ayaklanmaların asla gerçekleşmeyebileceği daha otoriter devletlerde de incelenebilirdi. Bu durumlarda, ayaklanmaların fiziksel olarak yokluğu, tamamen kazanılmış bir rıza olarak yanlış yorumlanabilir. Dolayısıyla siyasette niyet okumasının sağlanamayacağı düşünüldüğünde, bunu hegemonya tartışmalarında potansiyel bir yanıltıcı ve yanlış yorumlama kaynağı olarak kabul etmekte fayda var.

Orta Asya, özellikle sosyal sınıfların tanımı açısından incelenmesi zor bir bölgedir. Seçkinleri tanımlamanın zorluğunun yanı sıra, son yıllarda dönüşüm sürecinde olan bir elit sınıfına ilişkin tartışmalar da mevcuttur. Örneğin, bazı bölge devletleri son yıllarda yapılan seçimlerle bağımsızlıktan sonra ilk kez liderlik değişikliği yaşadı. Bunun dışında bölge halkı arasında artan neo-milliyetçi eğilim ve bilinçle birlikte bir dönüşümün daha başladığını söylemek mümkündür. Ayrıca Özbek seçkinleri ile Kazak seçkinleri veya Tacik seçkinleri arasındaki farklılıklar ve net bir Orta Asya seçkinlerinin olmaması, sosyal sınıfların tanımlanmasını zorlaştırmaktadır. Bütün bunlar artı bu iç dinamiklerdeki kaynak kıtlığı bu tezi sınırlayan faktörlerdendir.

Neo-Gramşici teoriyi bölgesel düzeyde incelemek başlı başına büyük bir zorluktur. Bilim adamlarından metodolojik bir fikir edinmek için bu konuda sadece Avrupa örneği var. Ancak Avrupa örneği ve deneyimleri Çin ve Orta Asya'dan oldukça farklıdır. Orta Asya'da Avrupa ülkeleri örneğinde olduğu gibi gelişmiş bir siyasi katılım, köklü ekonomik ve sosyal kurumlar veya büyük şirketler görmek mümkün değildir. Orta Asya'da ise bunun yerine aile ağları, ekonomik baronlar ve bölgesel güç merkezleri ve çoğunlukla bu üçünün bir şekilde akrabalık bağları mevcut ve siyaseti bunlar etkiliyor. Aynı zamanda, liberal politikaları benimsemiş Avrupa modelindeki hegemonik kalıp ve araçlar ile devlet kapitalizmini benimsemiş otoriter Çin modelindeki hegemonik kalıp ve araçlar tamamen farklıdır. Bu araştırma, Cox'un üç toplumsal kuvvetinde rıza ile meydana gelebilecek olası bir yapısal değişimin var olduğu herhangi bir vaka çalışmasının neo-Gramşici yaklaşımla analiz edilebileceğine inanmaktadır. Bu tez teorinin bu ana düşüncesini benimsedi.

Neo-Gramşici teori, 1980'lerde ortaya atılmış ve daha sonra küreselleşmenin getirdiği yapısal değişiklikleri incelemek için 1990'ların sonunda Avrupa örneği

üzerinden değerlendirilmiştir. Dünyadaki tüm devletler ve bölgeler aşağı yukarı benzer küreselleşme deneyiminden etkilenirken bugün 2022'de kuramın Avrupa örneği üzerinden otuz yıl geçmesine rağmen kuram niçin hala diğer bölgeler üzerinde incelenmiyor? Neo-Gramşici değerlendirmeler bir Latin Amerika, bir Hint, bir Ortadoğu ve bir Doğu Asya vakası veya bir ASEAN vakası veya bir Meksika ve hatta bir Türkiye vakası üzerinde yapılamaz mı? Bu tezin eleştirel yanı, Uluslararası İlişkiler ve Siyaset Bilimi disiplinlerinin Avrupa'nın ötesine geçebilmesi gerektiğini savunuyor. Bir teorinin vaka uygulaması, o vaka ile uyumluluğu kadar uyumsuzluğu açısından da değerlidir ve sonuçta bir fikir verir. Bu nedenle, dünya sürekli bir değişim süreci içinde olduğu için vaka çalışmaları artırılmalı ve çeşitlendirilmelidir. Bununla birlikte, bu konuda benzer araştırmaların azlığı bu tezi sınırlı kılan bir diğer sebeptir.

Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma ile Çin'in Orta Asya bölgesinde hegemon olma girişiminde olduğu ortaya konmuştur. Ancak bu çalışma Çin'in yeni bölgesel hegemon olarak ifade edecek kadar iddialı değil, aksine Yeni Büyük Oyun'u Çin'in oyunun galibi ilan etmesi nedeniyle eleştiriyor. Bu araştırma bunun yerine sadece Çin'in potansiyelini ve girişimini araştırdı. Cox'un öne sürdüğü gibi, "eleştirel anlayış, değişimin sonuçlarından ziyade değişim sürecine odaklanır. (…) Değişimi hedefleyen eylemin sonuçları tahmin edilemez" (Cox 1987, 393). Bu ifadeden hareketle tez, Orta Asya'da böyle bir hegemonik değişimin gerçekleşip gerçekleşemeyeceğini tartışmaya çalışmıştır, dolayısıyla sonuç için net bir cevap yoktur. Orta Asya bölgesi için bu tartışma sadece bir başlangıçtır ve literatürde çeşitlenmeye ve gelişmeye açık bir konu olarak bu tez aracılığıyla ortaya çıkmıştır.

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Soyadı / Surname : Ergun
Adı / Name : Safiye
Bölümü / Department : Avrasya Çalışmaları / Eurasian Studies

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