

Above and Beyond:
Revisiting and Understanding the Rise of China through the Interplay
of its Internal and External Dynamics

by

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ABSTRACT

Above and Beyond: Revisiting and Understanding the Rise of China through the Interplay of its Internal and External Dynamics

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This research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the People's Republic of China's rise to its current position in the global political and economic scene through understanding its foreign affairs and its internal policy dynamics. The question of 'how do we conceptualize the rise of China?' provides the theoretical framework under the scope of the Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST) and its contemporary readings. I utilize the process-tracing method to conduct thorough policy analysis on China's rise and a case study of China's bilateral relations with Turkey through a qualitative framework. Thus, this thesis is based on, but not limited to; answering the questions of how this rise took place, what kinds of dependencies were created along the way, why such volume and acceleration created in the recent decade and what does China's new and improved role in the global scene mean in today's context? Findings on the usage of geo-economic tools that gained more importance in the post-2013 period of the Xi Jinping era provide supporting evidence for the growing influence of China as a major global power with clear hegemonic tendencies. This study is an analysis of the recent phase of an ongoing, yet ever-changing phenomenon called *the rise of China* in its timeline of progress.

ÖZETÇE

Beklenenin Üzerinde: İç ve Dış Dinamiklerinin Etkileşimi ile Çin'in Yükselişini

Yeniden Anlamak

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Bu araştırma Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'nin dış ve iç politika unsurlarını anlayarak küresel siyasi ve ekonomik sahadaki mevcut konumuna yükselişi üzerine kapsamlı bir analiz sunmayı hedefler. “Çin'in yükselişini nasıl kavramsallaştırırız?” sorusu Hegemonik İstikrar Teorisi (HİT) ve teorinin modern okumaları altında tezin teorik yapısını oluşturur. Detaylı bir politika analizi gerçekleştirmek ve Çin-Türk ikili ilişkileri üzerine bir vaka analizini nitel bir çerçevede ele almak için süreç izleme yönteminden yararlanmaktayım. Böylece bu tez, bunlarla sınırlı olmamakla beraber; Çin'in bu yükselişi nasıl meydana geldi; süreç içerisinde ne gibi bağlılıklar yaratıldı; neden son on yılda bu kadar hacim ve ivme oluşturuldu ve Çin'in küresel sahnedeki yeni ve gelişmiş rolü günümüz bağlamında ne anlama gelmektedir sorularını cevaplamayı temel alır. 2013 sonrası Xi Jinping döneminde daha da önem kazanan jeo-ekonomik araçların kullanımı hakkında elde edilen bulgular, Çin'in önemli bir küresel güç olarak belirgin hegemonik eğilimlerle artan etkisi yönünde destekleyici kanıt sağlar. Bu çalışma *Çin'in yükselişi* olarak adlandırılan, süregelen ancak durmadan değişen bu fenomenin zaman çizelgesinde ilerleyişinin günümüz aşamasındaki analizidir.

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Beste Boğa, 11 August 2020



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List of Abbreviations:

ABC — Australian Broadcasting Corporation
AIIB — Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
AKP — Justice and Development Party
AL — Arab League
APEC — Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN — The Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI — Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS — Formation of Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
CASCFC — China-Arab States Cooperation Forum
CCP — Chinese Communist Party
CDS — Coastal Development Strategy
CIIE — China International Import Expo
DEIK — Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey
EEC — European Economic Community
ES — Economic Statecraft
EU — European Union
FDI — Foreign Direct Investment
GDP — Gross Domestic Product
GNP — Gross National Product
GPN — Global Production Network
HDP — Peoples' Democratic Party
HRW — Human Rights Watch
HST — Hegemonic Stability Theory
IMF — International Monetary Fund
IO — International Organization
IR — International Relations
IT — Information Technologies
LAPOP — Latin American Public Opinion Project
MFA — Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MHP — Nationalist Movement Party
MNC — Multinational Corporation
MoFA — Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoU — Memorandum of Understanding
NATO — The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO — Nongovernmental Organization
OFDI — Outward Foreign Direct Investment
OPEC — The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PBC — People's Bank of China
PPP — Purchasing Power Parity

PR — Public Relations
PRC — People's Republic of China
PTA — Preferential Trade Agreement
RMB — Renminbi (Chinese currency)
SCE — Socialist Commodity Economy
SME — Socialist Market Economy
SOE — State-Owned Enterprises
TUSIAD — Turkish Industry and Business Association
UN — United Nations
UNGA — United Nations General Assembly
UNHRC — United Nations Human Rights Council
UNSC — United Nations Security Council
US — United States
USA — United States of America
USSR — Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WB — World Bank
WDS — Western Development Strategy
WHO — World Health Organization
WTO — World Trade Organization
XUAR — Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

I. Introduction

As an old Chinese saying goes, “A wise man changes his way as circumstances change; a knowledgeable person alters his means as times evolve.” As for publicity and theoretical work today, we should pay close attention to innovation in the fields of ideas, methodologies and grassroots work, and move forward with new ideas to tackle difficulties, with emphasis on work in local communities. We should step up cultural reforms, push forward the culture industry, and build China into a country with a strong socialist culture.

(Xi, 2013)

In 2010, Chinese president Xi Jinping made the following statement about the progress of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) against the eyes of the global community, which seemed cautious yet intriguing by the country’s continuum of development and influence over the past decades: “There are some bored foreigners, with full stomachs, who have nothing better to do than point fingers at us... First, China doesn’t export Revolution; second, China doesn’t export hunger and poverty; third, China doesn’t come and cause you headaches, what more is there to be said?” (International Business Times, 18 October 2010). In just a few years’ time, it turned out that there was still so much more to be said and so much more to come for China’s evolving foreign policy under the guise of a mega-strategy.

This thesis is based on an analysis of the rise of the People’s Republic of China by looking at its progress into its current position in global context, while also paying much needed attention to the hegemonic arguments made to explain this phenomenon called the ‘China thesis’. The different examinations of the rise of China have been a recurring theme for many scholars of political science, international relations (IR), international political economy, Sinology and more. This research also aims to provide a comprehensive analysis on China’s emergence and rise to its current position in the global political and economic scene through understanding its foreign affairs as well as its internal policy dynamics. The question of “how do we conceptualize the rise of China?” sets the initial tone of the theoretical framework as the research utilizes the legacy of hegemonic stability theory to provide a purposive linkage between the theory and empirical evidence. The relevance of the hegemonic stability theory and how it can be adapted to answer the changing world order of

the recent decade will also be further investigated within the context of a dynamic China that heavily engages in global initiatives that seemingly have hegemonic intentions on the surface.

In order to provide this purposive linkage between the theory and China's position in the global system, this thesis explains and analyses the steps, initiatives, policies that have been engineered and led by the Chinese state in the recent decade. The research does not include a binary hegemonic analysis of the world system, meaning that it neither wishes to explain what the United States has been doing as a 'hegemonic power' nor provides a possible blueprint in the events of the decline of the US hegemony; it instead focuses on China's part to emphasize and understand sequences of events, conjectures and policies in terms of China's global rise within the existing international system and their overall impact on China's internal quandaries as well as on the countries who engage in such initiatives as secondary participants. This research uses empirical evidence to analyze the existing theory by conducting a case-study as well as a literature-assessing thesis that summarizes and evaluates existing theoretical and empirical literature on a subject. It asks whether existing theories are valuable and existing tests are persuasive and complete (Evera, 1997:90).

In order to build on this theme, this thesis is divided into the following chapters that each answer one part of the bigger puzzle, research question at hand. This chapter presents the research question and hypothesis, the aims and objectives, the methodology as well as the strengths and limitations of the thesis. The next chapter focuses on the theoretical discussions and questions raised for the hegemonic stability and power-transition theory. Is the theory of hegemonic stability still relevant? How can we adapt this to the changing world order of the recent decade? Are we still in a Western system or are we moving towards a post-Western world? Is there a hegemonic contestation between US-China? If so, should we consider this a 'co-hegemonic' order? How did China fit into this post-Western world?

In Chapter III, the thesis focuses on China's empirical evolution into its current position by answering questions such as how did the China thesis come to life? How did China become

what it is today from starting off as the world's factory? Is this sustainable? What is China using to keep this position today? What are the challenges that China is facing to maintain such a positive outlook about its development? Following the challenges of sustainability, the chapter further dives into the discussion of Chinese economic statecraft and the dependencies created via such outward investment-oriented policies. What are some major Chinese economic statecraft policies? Have they been successful?

In Chapter IV, I look at the overall reactions of the rest of the world for China's increasing involvement and influence that was realized thanks to such policies that are mentioned in the previous chapter. The skepticism and critique to increasing dependencies via Chinese engineered policies will be discussed in a deductive manner. What kinds of dependencies does the Chinese economic statecraft policies bring on other countries? Is it a two-way street? Is China, in fact, becoming more 'imperialistic'? How others perceive the dependencies that are created?

Finally, Chapter V provides an in-depth case study on the bilateral relations of the Republic of Turkey and The People's Republic of China to ground the previous discussions on the dependencies and influence coming from China's part and how it is reflected on a participant country like Turkey.

The conclusion chapter wraps up my discussion on the rise of China and attempts at asking further research questions for the future of the PRC in the lights of unfolding events. The continuing nature of the changing dynamics of global political system leaves a question mark in a world of accelerated rivalry and uncertainties perhaps unlike never seen before.

1.1. Research Question & Hypothesis

The main research question of this thesis is as follows: In what ways has China attempted to achieve hegemonic status in the global system over the last decade? The possible existence of a hegemonic contestation between China and the US is another point that this research wants to question in terms of whether such contestation has really been occurring. As an alternative,

the final point of the theoretical framework of the research attempts to question the possible existence of a co-hegemonic hybrid order as a reaction to the dichotomous contestation argument between the US and China made by various scholars (Hang, 2017; Jones, 2007; Wang, 2007; Yang, 2013; Brooks and Wohlforth, 2016; Fumagalli, 2018).

My hypothesis argues that China's position coming from a place as "the world's factory" has been evolving and changing drastically in a vertical path. The People's Republic of China has been engineering initiatives and projects that are ultimately designed for having a larger role in the regional and global order that allows influence and leadership. This thesis argues that China has already placed itself in the global order as a cooperative and competitive second hand that will no longer be considered as a developing manufacturer country or a strong contender within a hybrid or co-hegemonic post-Western world order. What this thesis does not claim, however, is a possible unipolar world system that has China as its sole leader. In the event of a hegemonic contestation, this thesis argues that the international system will accommodate and evolve towards a hybrid-system that has a place for both of the major powers of the modern times, i.e., the US and China.

1.2. Research Aims and Objectives

In order to proceed with a deductive analysis, there are sub-questions that this thesis needs to answer. How China fits into this possible co-hegemonic order brings further questions into the picture. The research aims to engage in a study of the progress of the Chinese development and a literature survey to pinpoint how the 'China thesis' came to life in detail. The issue of sustainability is another area of concern for this research to engage in a discussion of whether the assumption that China is leading towards a hegemonic position can have further credibility. What are the challenges that can hinder the 'rise of China' and what kind of tools does the Chinese state use for keeping its position? These two questions will be further investigated.

For the empirical part of the study, outward foreign direct investments of China under its economic statecraft policies will be thoroughly and critically assessed. Mega Chinese projects, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), are also analyzed as part of a broader discussion on the Chinese economic statecraft and whether it is a novel and unique apparatus for a new and improved China. The scope, the skepticism raised and the already visible results of the BRI are taken into consideration to establish an operational criteria for identifying the nature of the dependency created through such Chinese initiatives. This assessment will be followed by a case study on the evolution of Sino-Turkish bilateral relations to ground the analysis in hopes to dive into a more in-depth evaluation of China's shift in its current global position, and to reveal how the participant second parties react to such intense involvement. The role of geopolitics and identity-based issues are highlighted to get a grasp of how China utilizes its impact to influence some of the most pressing and on-going issues, in this case the Xinjiang Uyghur issue between China and Turkey.

The case study will lead the discussion towards the issue of legitimacy and the national image making via Chinese economic statecraft to evaluate internal policy fragmentations and rhetoric making within the borders of the PRC. The issues that the Chinese state and the Communist Party are facing to maintain their position over the young and evolving population will be identified. The overly stated 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' rhetoric is what this study wishes to highlight to make a connection to the external aims and goals of the Chinese state. The research examines whether the alleged hegemonic stance of China on global issues are solely based on creating a strong image of the country to establish an answer to China's internal insecurities and sustainability issues, and if not, what are the possible other factors behind such assertive foreign policy that has escalated in the recent decade.

The relevance of this study stems from a set of policies that has been going on for years, but recently started getting labelled in ways that attracts global attention and advertised as something that could be possibly hegemonic. China's involvement and influence in the region and even beyond the borders of its region have been causing a great deal of concern for many years to its regional neighbors as well as for the continuation of the global

structure. However, what appears to be different is the way China is now owning up to its global legacy, pushing the decision-making mechanisms on international levels for its own advantage and creating connections that appear to be in ways that China had not been previously interested in its earlier stages of development and opening up its economy. The narrative of the Chinese leader, Xi Jinping, is also another factor that receives global attention, while the assertiveness of the Chinese foreign policy is creating much anxiety in such a global order that has not been pushed for a change ever since the end of the Cold War.

In the light of such a dynamic theme, the main research question of this thesis provides an answer on how we have been perceiving the global order, the world system and China's position in the context of all these established structures. Leaving the dichotomous hegemonic framework of the Cold War behind, this study establishes a new outlook on the global order and how a country like China, which lacks in many areas as compared to the post-industrial Western democracies, can have its fair share of international influence without necessarily fulfilling those lacking objectives.

1.3. Methodology

I take on board a combination of qualitative methods including process-tracing, case-study method and semi-structured expert and elite interviews providing supporting evidence for my arguments in this thesis. It is a deductive study as it develops on already-existing theory. Harrison (2001) argues that qualitative research has more 'personable' qualities and it enables the researcher to explain the question of 'how' rather than just 'what' (2001:78-79). In addition, by conducting a complete qualitative research we often have a case at hand that we want to dive in, while not being so concerned about generalizability (Harrison, 2001:79).

In this thesis, the case of concern is China and its development and growth in the existing international system. At the same time, this research utilizes observational methods to enrich its data by recording the events and policies as they happened over a period of ten years in the context of China's rise. Harrison (2001) explains that using observation as a research

tool can help us to consider the importance of context, to understand the ways in which decisions are made as well as the process and practice (2001:81). This study highlights those observable policies and decisions made by the Chinese state over the recent decade under the leadership of Xi Jinping to build that stronger sense of context and process, which then provides a case study of the Sino-Turkish relations.

The research question of this thesis will be guided by the materials available under a case-study approach. Yin (2003) states that case studies have made a name for themselves for taking too long or being unreadable, but this perception is due to the confusion between a case study and other kinds of specific methods for data collection such as ethnography (Yin, 2003:11). Therefore, case studies are seen as empirical analyses that study a phenomenon within its real-life context and for research strategies, they constitute a holistic method that allows various data collection and data analysis techniques (Yin, 2003:13-14). Therefore, this research will be using qualitative content analysis and longitudinal designs in analyzing its case study (Yin, 2003:109; Bryman, 2016:563; Gerring, 2006). The units of analysis in this case study will be the state at the broadest level, the US, the Chinese state and the Turkish state. For empirical parts of the study, although a primary quantitative data will not be collected, official government sources such as the Statistical Bulletin of China's Outward FDI are utilized.

By utilizing the case-study method, unlike the critique that could be made against single case studies for its data being non-randomized and making correlations being nearly impossible, the case conditions are often uniformed and we can make a number of observations both on independent and dependent variables (Evera, 1997:52). In addition, case studies enable to test predictions about discourse and decisions of policy actors and confirmations of the predictions then contributes to test theory (1997:54). Inferring and testing possible explanations on the question of 'how' are also made easier by conducting a single case study rather than utilizing large-*n* methods that are used in social sciences (1997:54). As Evera (1997) neatly explains: "how does the theory work? The Tracing process can tell us. Congruence procedures can also illuminate explanations" (p.54). Even single case-studies, as Evera suggests, can provide us with clear answers about the validity

of a theory, which in this case is the hegemonic stability theory. Overall, case studies can serve for five different yet important purposes for the methodology of research. These are: testing theories, creating theories, pinpointing the antecedent conditions as well as testing the importance of such antecedent conditions and finally, explaining cases of authentic significance (Evera, 1997; George and Bennett, 2005). It is also important to point out that there is no uniform answer to the question of ultimate superiority of a single method in research (1997:55). According to Evera, case studies offer us with three distinct ways or formats for testing theories which are categorized under “controlled comparison, congruence procedures, and process tracing” (1997:56). This thesis utilizes the last one under the case-study method.

As mentioned above, this research engages also in process-tracing as part of its main methodological tool. Process tracing, although having its origin in cognitive psychology, refers to the careful analysis of “intermediate steps in a process to make inferences about hypotheses on how that process took place and whether and how it generated the outcome of interest” (Bennett and Checkel, 2015:6). Moreover, process tracing is a method of research that enables the research to analyze the sequences, conjunctures of events within a case in an inductive manner to produce hypotheses that could shed light on a case that could also lead to further development of testable suggestions for other future cases (2015:8). Process tracing also differs from time-series cross sectional analysis. That being said, it is possible to argue that the explanations which are built on utilizing the process-tracing method can have an infinite number of steps and points to cover on different levels. Bennett and Checkel (2015) answer this dilemma by reminding us that there cannot be a completely faultless way of deciding which point to start from for process-tracing, although the researcher can make justifications about the point in time of their analysis. Questions of when and where to begin as well as when to stop can be defended based on the research and the plausibility of the mechanism that was explained (pp.11-12).

There is also the question of generalizability by conducting a process-tracing method as it is done via case-studies or as far as this study concerns, done via a single case. On this issue, Bennett and Checkel (2015) argues that an explanation that is derived from a case does not

need to be tested against another case to have confidence in that explanation (p.13). The actuality of conducting process tracing is argued to have multiple inductive as well as deductive ways all combined depending on the already accumulated knowledge and theorizing about the phenomenon at hand and the selected case for the research (2015:18). For this thesis, the phenomenon that is studied has already been complimented with theories and other case studies to offer potential explanations. The rise of China, the China thesis has been discussed and offered explanations in the literature. Such theories will be discussed more in detail in the next section, however, the point of importance here is that the research wishes to offer a deductive process-tracing by aiming to “develop case-specific observable implications of the theories in question” (Bakke 2013 as cited in Bennett and Checkel, 2015:18).

Hence, this thesis will utilize the smoking-gun test to provide unique evidence that can be collected through the case analysis of Sino-Turkish diplomatic and business relations over the recent period, mainly focusing on the post-2013 era. The reason behind the selection of such a case is due to its dynamic and changing nature over the years that can be parallel to China’s global initiatives and policies, which are on the surface designed to increase its influence on participant countries. There are two ways that the study looks at Turkish-Chinese interactions. Firstly, by looking at the progress of the economic initiatives, Chinese influential tools and policies are emphasized. Secondly, by observing such progress and discussing the pre and post-2013 statements and views of the Turkish officials, there is a higher chance to show Turkey’s point of view and perception of China as a “partner” country.

In order to collect the supporting evidence needed to do the *smoking-gun test*, this qualitative study engaged in semi-structured expert and elite interviews. Qualitative interviews are important for their ability to extract information which cannot be found in a recorded document or in fact, they help the researcher to develop their own personal interpretation of the existing documents or related events (Harrison, 2001:90). Deciding on conducting what types of interviews, whether it is standardized, semi-standardized or unstandardized, depends on the data we require. Harrison (2001) suggests that “depending upon whether we require

quantitative or qualitative data, we shall ask precise or general questions and choose which material it is most important to record” (p.91). For the sake of collecting the unique evidence for the smoking-gun test of the process-tracing, this thesis conducted what is categorized as ‘non standardized’ interviews.

Unstandardized interviews are those that are informal, focused, unstructured or free interviews. These interviews can take the form of a ‘free-flowing conversation’ while being subtly guided by the interviewer in cases of moving away from the research topic at hand (Harrison, 2001:92). The aim at such interviews is to collect qualitative and detailed data while the structure brings more flexibility and the discovery of information (92). Elite interviews are conducted as well as expert interviews with academics who spent all their professional research on the issue of China’s development, China’s foreign policy and in related topics.

Consequently, the case study on Sino-Turkish relations is supported by the evidence after conducting in-depth expert and elite interviews to collect novel information and data with current or retired officials of the foreign service as well as those who are engaged in business diplomacy at the moment via Turkey’s agencies such as the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEİK), Turkish Industry and Business Association (TUSIAD), The Central Bank of Turkey in addition to few individuals who have worked professionally in China for years in the fields of academia and press. The elite interviewees included former ambassador for the Turkish Embassy in Beijing, the head of department for East Asia under the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the president of the business council for Turkey and China, members of the Turkey-China business network under TUSIAD and other members of the business circle and a senior economist of the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey.

Each interview took approximately an hour and they were conducted on a voluntary basis after acquiring a verbal consent for the usage of their names and the recording of the

interviews for transcription purposes only. Some of the interviews were done face-to-face in the provided office space of the individuals, while others were done via videoconference.

1.4. *Strengths and Limitations of the Research*

By conducting a thorough qualitative analysis, this study aims to help identify what conditions present in the case. One of the strengths of this research is actually embedded in what may be pertaining to a weakness. The case study that this research focuses on is one that considers the Turkish-Chinese relations solely for seeing the bilateral involvement of the two countries and highlighting the impact of the Chinese influence over a partner country. The fact that this thesis has only one case study underneath its observational tracing of Chinese influence can be identified as a weakness. Having said that, by looking at the Turkish side of the Chinese influence and not on a more significantly interacting country like India or Vietnam, this study qualitatively shows the smaller and more intricate nature of interacting with China. As a country who is a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member and geopolitically in a unique position in terms of its relations with ‘the West’ and ‘the East’, the case study in fact provides a clearer image of how China utilizes some of its trading and economic tools to interact with those who are not ideologically closer to itself but strategically important.

In addition, by being able to look at Turkey’s case with China’s rise in a study that is done in Turkey, the supporting evidence is collected through elite and expert interviews with individuals who are involved in the progress of Sino-Turkish relations on a first-hand basis. On the other hand, I add that the breadth and boundedness of such a case study can be limited, but the Turkish case can give insights on other broader research for analyzing a global trend of China’s rise and thus, can be a starting point for future research. It is widely accepted in methodology literature that case studies have major advantages based on providing clearer imaging of the addressing qualitative variables, individual actors, decision-making processes, historical and social contexts and more (George and Bennett, 2005; Harrison, 2001; Gerring, 2006; Yin, 2003; Evera, 1997). Finally, as the research continues, timing of this thesis will be both a positive addition and also a possible limitation simply due to the dynamic nature of foreign issues and bilateral relations. Providing the case study and

moving from a global to bilateral level approach establishes the quality for this thesis to provide unique observations and data underneath a broad and overly discussed phenomenon.



II. Theoretical Framework & Literature Review

The United States and China owe it to their people and to global well-being to make the attempt. Each is too big to be dominated by the other. Therefore neither is capable of defining terms for victory in a war or in a Cold War type of conflict. They need to ask themselves the question apparently never formally posed at the time of the Crowe Memorandum: Where will a conflict take us? Was there a lack of vision on all sides, which turned the operation of the equilibrium into a mechanical process, without assessing where the world would be if the maneuvering colossi missed a maneuver and collided? Which of the leaders who operated the international system that led to the First World War would not have recoiled had he known what the world would look like at its end?

(Kissinger, 2011)

2.1. Hegemonic Stability Theory

There are several theoretical assumptions revolving around the hegemonic state and the hegemonic order - stability. For many scholars, hegemons are pre-eminent powers who can take on a leadership role in the international system and establish a global order that would serve their own interests (see Nexon and Neumann, 2017). In most interpretations of hegemonic stability theory (HST), the order that was established by the hegemon state will not be disrupted unless the system experiences a power transition (Nexon and Neumann, 2017: 663). Such power transition can occur if the hegemonic dominant power cannot successfully accommodate the rising powers and thus, the system would then go through a “power-transition war” (2017:663). Emerging powers that are not content with the status quo rules and parameters of the system, either due to wanting greater status, more territory or different set of rules for the game, can insist on revisionist agendas (2017:664).

In a historical perspective, economic historian Immanuel Wallerstein identified three occasions of hegemonic power regiment in modern world history. These were by the United Provinces in the mid-17th century, then by Great Britain in the 19th century, followed by the United States in the 20th century. In all of these periods in time, the alleged hegemon had clear majority and dominance over all others in terms of economic capabilities, albeit not limited to. In addition, in all of these hegemon-led periods, the hegemony was achieved and

sustained through a thirty-year war. At the end of each of these periods then came a hegemonic decline that destroyed the system of alliance which the hegemon had once created (Wallerstein, 1984 as cited in Strange, 1987:558).

Hegemony and stability are often discussed along a dichotomous cooperation-dominion axis of the global order in the literature of international relations and inherently in international political economy. As the aim of this thesis is to achieve a thorough analysis of the steps and policies that the People's Republic of China took over the recent decade to its current position, it was not in the interest of the research to pay attention to related subfields of the theories of hegemony such as power-transition theory. In order to provide an objective process-tracing, while aiming to place the phenomenon of the rise of China in a theoretical framework, hegemonic stability theory and the parts of the theory that fall short in explaining such phenomenon was taken into account. As it has been discussed in the earlier chapter, the goal of this thesis is not explaining the rise of China in a binary US-China context, it is rather about understanding the rise of China in the global political-economic system, and to make use of existing theory that is most suitable to explain and analyze the phenomenon in regards to hegemony and cooperation. The thesis will also not engage in an ideological discussion on the notion of hegemony itself as it can be found in Gramscian terms. Most of the emphasis and focus will be given to the international political economy variants and readings of hegemonic stability and order, under the broader umbrella of international relations theories.

2.1.1. Hegemonic Stability Theory and Global Order

In the earliest or the purest version of the hegemonic stability theory, scholars like Charles P. Kindleberger (1973, 1986) took the first steps in explaining a world in economic disarray with the tendencies of a major power, the US, experiencing disinterest in an overall influence over the international economic and political system in a period of instability of the previous hegemon, the Great Britain. In his description of the aftermath of the 1929 Depression, which is crucial to understand his reasons or 'an explanation' for this particular period of time in modern history because of the visible definition of how stability and hegemony are ought to be connected, Kindleberger (1986) entertained the idea that the reason why the

depression was so damaging and long-lasting was because of the international economic system being unstable “by British inability and U.S. unwillingness to assume responsibility for stabilizing it...” (1986:289). Kindleberger (1986) laid out the functions that needed to be regulated and fixed in the international economic system by “...a single country that assumes responsibility for the system” (289). This single country which ought to assume responsibility does not get a label as ‘hegemon’ in Kindleberger’s own words. However, in the 1986 version of his seminal book *The World in Depression*, we see a footnote from Kindleberger himself discussing how the political scientists refer to such single country leadership as ‘hegemony’ and the existence of the debates on prerequisites of maintaining international peace and global economic stability through such hegemony (289). Nevertheless, he does not refrain from suggesting the latent instability of the international system and the absence of a needed stabilizer (1986:290). It is no secret that Kindleberger was in fact advocating a single country hegemony as a solution to the discrepancies of the global economic system by emphasizing many times on Britain’s and the US’ lack of competence over the system. Not being able to maintain a stable market and “with no major country providing a market for distress goods or willing to tolerate appreciation...” the Depression period continued, and deflation persisted (1986:292).

On the issue of ‘lender of last resort’, Kindleberger (1986) once again points out that such a lender was missing in the international dimension. He argued that in 1931, the world saw that British leadership was not a viable option since it did not have the means to capacitate it (295). On the issue of a possible transition to the US leadership, Kindleberger does not seem to be agreeing with the historians of 1920s and 30s and refuses to claim any leadership on the US part for the international economic system (296). He neatly wrote that “The United States was uncertain in its international role” (1986:297). On the issue of cooperation, he questions the existence of a special form of cooperation that would ideally be an Anglo-American leadership over the economic global affairs of its time and an equivalent of a ‘troika’ of Germany, Japan and the US when fast-forwarded to the 1980s (298). These types of alliances or allegedly hybrid leadership models were also mentioned by Kindleberger at the time of his writing on global leadership and indirectly for hegemony. He even went as far as to argue the following on the unknown future of global economic system: “with a duumvirate, a troika, or slightly wider forms of collective responsibility such as the Summit of Seven or the Group of

Ten, the buck has no place to stop” (Kindleberger, 1986:298). “That buck” which Kindleberger mentioned in 1986, appeared to bring many further discussions on how ‘the buck’ would look like in the realpolitik realm and under which conditions ‘the buck’ would change or in which direction “the buck” would follow towards. Kindleberger, as one of the most prominent founding fathers on the literature of hegemonic stability and global order, rightfully discusses the notion of leadership and its negative connotations in the world of the 1980s where “participation in decision making is regarded as more aesthetic” (1986:304). Having said that, Kindleberger paints his position on the existence of a leader over the global economic affairs very neatly by stating that “it may one day be possible to pool sovereignties to limit the capacity of separate countries to work against the general interest...in this area..., however, leadership is necessary in the absence of delegated authority” (1986:304).

Moving towards a more concrete discussion on hegemony and global order, most hegemonic stability theorists, in its contemporary forms, agree in one way or another that leading powers use their capabilities as a means for shaping international politics. For those who focused on its traditional versions, the main point of the hegemonic stability was that the distribution of power between states is what determines the character of the international economic system (see Webb and Krasner, 1989). In other words, it translated into a hegemonic accumulation of power that a single state had over all the other states and thus became the most capable state to create a stable and open international economic system. As a result, historically in the late 19th century, Britain was the hegemon of its time that provided stability in the international system, which also led to an increase in trade and liberalization of the international economic system. Meanwhile, the United States was in fact the second most similar contender next to Britain and in fact, after the Second World War, it started acting like Britain (1989:183). Britain then lost its ability to serve as a hegemon, while it was argued by hegemonic stability scholars of the mid-70s that the US had neither the initiative nor the willingness to act as one (Gilpin, 1975 as cited in Webb and Krasner, 1989). Although this view then greatly changed towards the late 1980s, scholars like Krasner and Webb (1989) focused on a different bipolar conflict, this time under the shadows of the Cold War between the US and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). They indicated that the international economic system in the Cold War period was dependent on a security

system that was established by the leadership of the US to serve the interests of itself only (1989: 196-7).

This emphasis on the dichotomous reading of the global system that is stemmed from a realist military power stance is heavily embedded in the earlier assumptions of the hegemonic stability theory. It is suggested under the HST that a hegemonic state ought to hold enough military power to be able to protect the international political economic order when faced with irruptions from any hostile competitors. Although it appears as the concerns of the hegemon is purely realpolitik, economic concerns are historically the ones that lead to military-security issues in international affairs. We can see this by rethinking the incentives of the US military operations in the Middle East and its infamous attachment to the access of oil in the region during after World War II (Keohane, 1984; Khanna, 2019). According to Keohane's 1984 work on hegemony and cooperation in the global economic system, hegemonic power does not have to be the militarily superior power worldwide (1984:40).

Furthermore, in tackling stability in the international system through the existence of hegemony, the economy plays a much bigger role than security as it was discovered and supported by the different hegemony theory scholars of the 1970s and 80s. On that economic note, there are a couple of assumptions which the hegemonic stability theory entails for the qualities and conditions of the hegemonic power. A country must have the attainment to crucial raw materials, a systematic control over the main sources of capital, it also must keep a large market for its imports while having comparative advantages in those goods that have high value added in order to lead to higher wages and profits (Keohane, 1984:33-34).

In terms of possible scenarios of the hegemonic stability visionaries, going back to the origins with the countries who seemed to present all or some of these qualities in the mid-1980s, Kindleberger (1986) highlights six possible endings as to where 'the buck's journey may end. Out of these six scenarios, three of them are stable and the other three are considered unstable. Among the stable cases and outcomes, there is the continuation or the revival of the US leadership, a new assertion of responsibility and leadership in the world

system by 'Europe, Japan, or some unsuspected third country such as Brazil', or the yielding of the economic sovereignty completely to the international financial institutions through a world central bank, a world capital market and so on (1986:304).

One issue with this futuristic third outcome is that Kindleberger does not give us a mechanism which would stop one country to dominate the rules and the norms of such global institutions if the economic sovereignty would be left on to them. In addition, in regard to the unstable outcomes, he analyzes the possible contestation for leadership between the US and Japan and the European Economic Community (EEC) and how it was problematic. The problem was either they were unable to lead or were not interested in leading, and each of these mentioned actors held veto powers that would freeze the programs of economic stability and functioning of the system (1986:305). Kindleberger's scenarios for the relevance of the hegemonic stability for the future of the global economic system draws a picture that is somewhat relatable yet distant when considered the inconsistencies and the attention given towards the emerging powers of the time as well as their domestic political and economic developments. In the following section, the limitations and the contemporary critique of these base arguments of the HST will be discussed due to its lacking and rather simplistic logic. Polarization in the global system or cooperation without the existence of what Kindleberger addresses as 'leadership' but what political science calls 'hegemony' will be further analyzed.

Finally, before moving forward, it is beneficial at this point to emphasize the broad scope of hegemony studies and the different schools underneath it. In this thesis, the theoretical framework was decided on hegemonic stability theory and its immediate relevant subfields as opposed to power-transition theory. This was a conscious decision in an attempt to avoid the dichotomous cyclical transition approach to understand hegemonic rise and focus on the individual qualities, characteristics and decisions of a given hegemon. In addition, this thesis agrees with Nexon and Ikenberry's argument on differences between the two major theories of hegemony studies. They argue that:

The major differences between hegemonic-stability and power transition theory ultimately proved methodological in character. Hegemonic-stability theory was rooted in qualitative approaches, power-transition theory in statistical analysis. Over

time, the two approaches basically converged on the same principles, problems, and understandings of international politics.

(Ikenberry and Nexon, 2019:403)

What were the issues with the hegemonic stability theory that deemed insufficient at times for us to understand the global order better? This is a question that I will tackle in the following section by following the literature that is more open and flexible to the unpredictability of global politics.

2.1.2. *Its Limitations*

The existence of cooperation after a hegemon or under the absence of a hegemon in the world political economy has been generally wished to be answered by the prominent scholars of the hegemonic stability literature. Keohane in his 1984 seminal work *After Hegemony* attempts to address the said puzzles and adds the question of “how?” for possible cooperation in a world without hegemony (Keohane, 1984:9). Keohane makes his argument clear from the very start by stating that “hegemonic leadership is unlikely to be revived in this century for the United States or any other country” (1984:9). The decline of the American hegemony in the post-war period did not translate into the collapse of regimes, and cooperation in the world system persisted and even improved on certain issues according to Keohane (1984). Before diving into a critique and an analysis of the hegemonic stability itself, he focuses on the complementarity of wealth and power to understand the linkage between economic consequences and political influence of the American leadership during its reign (1984:22-23).

The tradeoffs are such focal points that Keohane drives our attention to the linkage of economic interests and long-term policy goals for a major power, which is the US in this case. In the 1980s, Keohane specified that such trade-off was not between the power and wealth, but rather “between the long-term power/wealth interests of the state and the partial interests of individual merchants, workers, or manufacturers... or the short term interests of the society” (1984:23). Such discrepancy between short-term and long-term goals stem from the consumption and savings/investments of a state. Keohane (1984) notes that a state would invest in power resources when it aligns itself to or builds an international regime in which it could hold a central position (1984:24). However, in the case of the US in the early 1980s,

‘power disinvestment’ was visible by maintaining low levels of consumption and borrowing from abroad to compensate for low levels of savings inside, which had negative effects on the US influence in the long run (24). Going back to fundamental arguments of the hegemonic stability theory, the world order is created by a single state which has dominant power and the maintenance of the international order solely depends on the continuation of such hegemony (Keohane, 1984:31).

Keohane (1984) agrees with the earlier or the ‘modest’ version of the theory to a certain extent, but argues that deterministic assumptions of the theory, which stems from the realist readings of IR on power and interests, remains incorrect (31). In his quest on cooperation without hegemony in the world system, the HST assumption that only hegemony can lead to cooperation remains a vague argument. In Keohane’s understanding of world political economy, cooperation can exist without a hegemonic leader and post-hegemonic cooperation is possible (32).

There are several points in which scholars like Keohane hold a state accountable for its economic power and influence over the global economic system. Extension of ‘informal influence’ is linked to the importance of controlling resources such as raw materials, guaranteed access to capital or the size of a market one state holds for its imports as well as a state’s willingness to open up one’s market to exporters in hopes to gain concessions (Keohane, 1984:32-33). The informal influence which is ultimately parallel to ‘economic preponderance’ has another final dimension which solely depends on a state’s competitive superiority in the production of goods. However, Keohane makes the important argument that such competitive advantage does not translate into ultimate economic superiority and, vice versa, meaning having the predominant economic status does not translate into having a trade surplus on all goods. He gives the example of the US in the 1960s with a trade deficit on textile and apparel goods while still not losing its economic status in the global scene. To put it differently, Keohane (1984) emphasizes that comparative advantage does not suggest that the leading economy would produce and export everything, on the contrary it should export only the goods that are most profitable that can lead to the production of more advanced goods and services in the long run based on the country’s technological superiority (34).

Hence, the basic idea that when a single country dominates the world economy based on trade and controls the access to market, cooperation will be higher for the overall interstate relations leads to unidimensional predictions of the global order.

Keohane does not forego a more inclusive model of the hegemonic stability theory, such a model does not take a linkage between power and leadership granted and hence, hegemony is understood as a broader “situation” in which “one state is powerful enough to maintain the essential rules of governing interstate relations, and willing to do so” (Keohane & Nye, 1977:44 as cited in Keohane, 1984:35). This version of the theory does not equate strength with an incentive to “project one’s power abroad” but in fact, takes the domestic qualities, attitudes, political structures and decision-making processes into account. Decisions are important to emphasize due to the argument that a state with economic superiority in the global system is not automatically enjoying a hegemonic status even with preponderant resources, unless it has the necessary commitment to the tasks of leadership (1984:35). Power capabilities and its outcomes do not hold a causal relationship without the decisions to exercise leadership of a major power. On that issue, as much as the realization of this discrepancy is highly crucial, it appears that the hegemonic stability theory still does not have an answer as to why an economically superior power would decide not to use its resources to activate such leadership. In order to answer such a question of referral from exercising hegemonic leadership, we have to know a great deal about that particular state’s internal characteristics and political conditions as Keohane also neatly puts forward (1984:35).

There had been examples of economically superior powers like Britain not necessarily always enforcing their preferred rules in history despite its material strength. After World War II, the United States was much more successful in making and applying its own rules to the global political economy. Keohane places much of his attention on the differences of the British and American hegemony in the history of global political economy by stating the contrasting nature of both periods. For instance, Britain never had the upper hand in global productivity, yet the US was never dependent on foreign trade and investment as much as Britain had been (Keohane, 1984:36-37). Similarly, when looked at the allies with which these traditionally hegemonic powers were interacting, partners of the US were both its

economic and military allies at the same time, whereas Britain's top trading partners were actually its military/political competitors (1984:37). The fact that hegemonic leadership does not hold a 'one size fits all' kind of blueprint and having only two historical case study examples ultimately leaves the theory to be limited to explaining few instances of modern history rather than providing us with a recipe to predict the global order.

The limitations of the hegemonic stability theory stems from its suggestive yet non-descriptive nature. As Keohane states "the crude theory of hegemonic stability establishes a useful, if somewhat simplistic, starting-point for an analysis of changes in international cooperation and discord" (Keohane, 1984:39). Even with its refined or more contemporary versions, the criticism on the theory is based on its inability to provide an explanatory systemic theory, though the theory does provide a series of questions to tackle some eras of history. Thus, the hegemonic stability theory is in fact pushing us to think about the global order in alternative ways rather than simply questioning the existence of a single power's leadership in the global political system. The concept of hegemony can in fact guide us to think about the possible scenarios of power, results of power and the incentives facing any potential hegemon.

Not only those incentives but also the concern for the neglected incentives of a hegemon, and the ways other countries that are experiencing neglected incentives in the system respond are points of curiosity, which do not necessarily get an answer through hegemonic stability theory. What sorts of calculations does the 'hegemon' engage to challenge or relieve the next-in-line major power? Similarly, what sorts of strategies and goals do the secondary powers have through the process of engaging or contesting against an already existing superpower? As Keohane suggests "theories of hegemony should seek not only to analyze dominant powers' decisions to engage in rule-making and rule-enforcement, but also to explore why secondary states defer to the leadership of the hegemon" (1984:39).

According to other scholars, such as Duncan Snidal (1985), the hegemonic stability theory is also limited to "very special conditions". Snidal challenges the wide applicability of the

theory (see Snidal, 1985) and re-analyzes the allusive presumption of the theory that collective action of any sort is impossible without a dominant state guiding the international system (1985:579). He argues that one of the main claims of the theory, which is the dominant state providing a stable global order for its own benefit, is not something novel or new. He adds that it would be novel to assume that when the hegemonic system serves for all states, then there would be support for the dominant state as opposed to when only that one state benefits the system; the minor states would hold grievances against the hegemon (Snidal, 1985). Thus, the idea is that one of the benefits of the theory is its emphasis on leadership rather than a coercive or exploitative hegemon state in a time of writing that experienced the decline of the US hegemony. He argues that the question is about whether there has really been a decline in order as opposed to the decline in American control over the order (1985:613). He concludes that for the collective action to take place in the international system, although the dominance of a single actor may not be a prerequisite, there has to be some degree of asymmetry which can be useful for reducing the number of states whose participation is necessary for such cooperation to exist (1985:613). However; in this case a 'hegemonic cooperation', he adds, would not necessarily be an answer to all problems because such collective leadership would have particular interests of its own kind and thus, whether such hegemonic cooperation would serve the public rather than the private interests remains inconclusive (1985:614). Hence, he highlights that whether power asymmetry is beneficial and to whom and under what circumstances is an area of research that needs to be further developed and should lead us to a better understanding of the bases for international cooperation (1985:615).

Power asymmetry may or may not be beneficial for the global system in certain areas, and although the notion of hegemony that this thesis wants to discuss is not a Marxian ideological one, it is worth mentioning here that hegemony does in fact rest on those that are subjected to it. In Keohane's own words "hegemony rests on the subjective awareness by elites in secondary states that they are benefiting, as well as on the willingness of the hegemon itself to sacrifice tangible short-term benefits for intangible long-term gains" (Keohane, 1984:45). This Marxist reading of hegemony is beneficial and does give insights on its operationalization in the global system, however, the sole focus on a single power leading an entire set of sovereign states without considering the common interests fall short

to explain a complex set of uncertainties in the current global system. Keohane's goal to strictly emphasize the symbiotic relationship between cooperation and hegemony is more insightful for analyzing today's major powers and their take on the system than the dichotomous discussions on the emergence of China in a period of the US' declined and lost hegemony.

2.1.3. Its Insufficiencies for Understanding the New Global Order

The theory of hegemonic stability holds the assumption that there is an invisible linkage between cooperation and a successfully running global economy, which can be achieved under a special type of international arrangement in which one state is dominating the political structure. However, after certain periods in history those dominant states, which are known as the hegemons, lose their ability and/or will to continue such dominion and experience a hegemonic decline according to the theory of hegemonic stability. Although the theory has been placed on a pedestal for so many years, especially during the late 1980s due to its broader scope and generality, there comes a time in recent modern history that one questions the applicability of the theory in its simplest form to make sense of the power relations of the international system today.

One of the authors who took on the path to question such applicability back in 1987 was Susan Strange in her work 'The Persistent Myth of Lost Hegemony', and following her in 1990 was Isabelle Grunberg in her article 'Exploring the 'myth' of Hegemonic Stability'. Strange (1987) identifies that the anxieties and the repeated discussions on the decline of American hegemony as well as the HST's own argument of instability in the global economy without a hegemon are flawed equally in their own ways. She starts with a very reasonable question on how one recognizes a hegemon and how hegemons use their power in the real world. The indicators that were used to identify a hegemon in the literature are usually based on the monetary reserves, the proportion the country has in overall global trade and also trade as a proportion of its GNP, its share of the world GNP, production of raw materials and so on (Strange, 1987:554). These quantitative variables account for measuring 'the power base' while measuring the state's control over outcomes can not necessarily be understood from such variables but only through, as Strange (1987) argues, historical evidence (1987:554).

Hegemonic stability theory mostly aims at explaining certain points in history through these quantitative variables, while providing the historical evidence is much more of a difficult task to accomplish. As discussed previously in this chapter, HST can be understood in two versions: the rather strict and fundamental way for arguing that only a hegemon can bring peace and stability globally, and a looser or more contemporary way of suggesting that hegemonic leadership is needed albeit not always a sufficient prerequisite for order and stability (1987:555). Because of this intuitive contrast in the theory's applicability and relevance, Strange (1987) notes that "...the presence or absence of a hegemon only partially answers why order and stability have prevailed at some times in the international economic system and disorder and instability at others" (1987:555).

Yet another intriguing intuitive point of the theory, which also makes its relevance questionable, is the assumption that hegemonic powers are liberal, in the politico-economic sense, by natural tendencies and that the system was beneficial because they spread such liberalism onto others. This is problematic in the historical sense as both Britain and the US had their fair share of protectionist policies in their time of hegemonic reign (Strange, 1987:559-560). It is also problematic and rather questionable when we think of the rise of China today, which that will be covered in-depth in the following section. The important point here is that, as Strange also neatly states: "it would seem that history, both under British and American leadership, has been rather more complicated than Gilpin, Keohane or even Kindleberger suspected" (1987:563). According to Strange (1987), another issue on why the theory can not necessarily be implemented in its purest form to make sense of the political realities of more recent times, stems from underrepresenting the differences of the international system and world economy between each of the periods under hegemonic leadership of the US or Britain (564). Moreover, as the economic environment changes it brings political changes within in the sense that the sovereign states do not fight for land or territory anymore, but the competition is now about getting a bigger piece from the world market shares as a means to greater economic security (564). Military security to a certain extent is still necessary for economic security, however, for achieving meaningful economic prosperity and wealth, countries are aware of the need to move beyond their national

markets. In this sense, Susan Strange's vision in 1987 is perhaps now more relatable than ever.

Strange (1987) argues the anxieties created around the US' declining hegemony at the time of her writing do not have solid grounds and she does not forget to add the importance of knowledge and knowledge structure in regards to domination and hegemony. She writes "knowledge is power, and whoever is able to develop or acquire a kind of knowledge that is sought by others, and whoever can control the channels by which it is communicated and the access to stores of knowledge, is able to dominate" (Strange, 1987:569-570). This short yet strong indication on the importance of structural and soft power of a state sheds light on what hegemonic stability theory often excludes from its generalized perspective, which are the domestic qualities of major powers and the differences in their ability and ways to impact the international political and economic regime of their time.

It is also plausible to agree with the following statement by Grunberg on what hegemonic stability theory takes as granted: "[hegemonic stability theory] can be said to have a hierarchical perception of world order and a cyclical vision of time" (Grunberg, 1990:434). She asks what makes the sharp distinction between a hegemon and a non-hegemon, and further attempts at answering how we can utilize a descriptive and static description of hegemony and move away from its functional definition. In her description and critique of the theory, she makes two points on the problematic parts of theory's assumptions. Firstly, hegemon's promotion of free trade is in the interest of the system in the long run and hence, of its members. Secondly, the hegemon will ultimately be undermined by the very own functions of the regime that it guards and promotes (1990:438-439). This leads us to question how hegemony can undermine its position in the long run if hegemons are also more farseeing than their inferior subjects in the system. Why is it that they do not see the results of their actions, which could potentially hurt them or why do major powers ever engage in 'quasi-suicidal' behavior as Grunberg asks (1990:440)? Traditional hegemony theorists answer these by suggesting that great powers do pursue hegemony because although opening up their trade policies are done with self-seeking motives, it is also beneficial to all others

because it promotes growth. This notion of ‘benevolent hegemon’ is embedded in the understanding that “if the pie gets bigger, everyone will profit” (1990:440).

In other words, the hegemon, as described in hegemonic stability theory, is labelled as benevolent because it is either portrayed as a self-exhausting sovereign state, which is undermined by the system itself, or it is the provider of public goods to all members of the system (Grunberg, 1990:443). Thus, when we try to adapt this sort of vision to explain the global order, as Grunberg notes, we indirectly ignore that the benevolent hegemon’s attempts at promoting growth can eventually lead to rather smaller states challenging its hegemony if they develop faster and the major powers can be at a disadvantage in terms of free trade based on the comparative advantages of the middle powers (Grunberg, 1990:440-441). This mainstream benevolent hegemon that is embedded in hegemonic stability theory is one of its unfortunate insufficiencies to be applicable to all periods and all examples of dominant states in the global economic system.

Despite the fact that the hegemonic stability theory takes certain characteristics of the international system granted, there is still the appeal of the theory for explaining a system with a dominant benign actor in charge. Grunberg (1990) identifies three phenomena that contribute to this benevolent hegemon notion of the theory based on Kindleberger’s work in relation to its ultimate connection to ethnocentric appeal by referring to hegemony as leadership. Three phenomena that are allegedly tied to such appeal are: a) power creates “greatness” and great powers are caught off-guard with such greatness; b) such greatness is only granted for selected countries that could either be dangerous (in forms of hegemony) or benevolent (in the case of leadership); c) finally, the rewards that goes to the hegemon (or the leader in Kindleberger’s words) are immaterial at the end (1990:446). Leadership brings prestige and power while it has economic costs rather than benefits, so the benevolent leader/hegemon, avoids the temptations of corruption but welcomes the self-sacrifice it makes for the sake of global order. This particular image of hegemony is how the theory successfully portrayed the US dominance over the system, while keeping its position as a good method to analyze the global order in times of hegemony or declined or non-existent hegemony.

In the same fashion, the countries that are not economically efficient are free riders in the system, whereas those with efficient and big economies are “spoilers” to the system since they can challenge the hegemon and cause disruption in the order. There are also those identified as “supporters” as a middle category in this analogy, which are those both unable and unwilling to lead the international economic system (Grunberg, 1990:446). When “the willingness” is added to the formula of becoming a hegemon and leading the system, it is as though the position is solely based on a moral decision on bearing the costs and burden and not on capabilities. Hence, what makes a “supporter” different from a “hegemon” is its moral decency or mediocrity (446). In this analysis, Grunberg provokes our thoughts on how we perceive a hegemon in the eyes of historical realities as opposed to theoretical imagery that can be found in the literature. It is no coincidence to question the ethnocentric bias of the theory before even jumping to an analysis of how much of a “supporter” or in fact, a “spoiler” the People’s Republic of China has been in the shadows of the disappeared ‘benevolent’ hegemony of the US and look at the literature for this alleged cyclical shift. Ultimately throughout this thesis, we will be looking at China’s position and agenda to spot such benevolent willingness or free riding throughout the recent decade to also question the theory’s ability to provide an objective blueprint for hegemonic stability. However, before that there is a need to follow up with the most contemporary vision and constructive critique of the theory itself.

If we were to recap what we have conducted in both of most evident periods of what literature collectively deems as hegemonic periods, Britain’s exercise of economic hegemony in the 19th century was mostly attached to the globalization of markets, the openness of international trade, the rise of multinational corporations (MNCs) and the overall stability of economic and political system in its time in Europe to say the least (Milner, 1998:114). In the phase of the end of British hegemony, which was triggered by the elevated protectionism, formation of regional blocs and decreased capital mobility after the devastating impact of World War I, the world experienced economic instability followed by the Great Depression. These events led to the almost inevitable US hegemony, albeit not automatically. The infamous Smoot-Hawley tax, which the US imposed on its imports almost completely shut its markets to all foreign goods and led the depression in the global economy to its worst levels (1998:114). In the

traditional HST fashion, the US had the capacity, but not the moral quality to take charge and bear the burdens at the time until the lessons of isolationism were learnt harshly after the end of World War II. According to this literature, this was an irresponsibility of the American policymakers, but they quickly took charge and with initiatives like the Marshall Plan, the US saved the day until the late 1970s when anxieties about its hegemony took center stage again. Commonly the devastating effects of the American foreign policy decisions like the Vietnam War are taken as the causes of the lost US hegemony.

The decisions that take place within the country's domestic politics appear to have an impact on both its willingness as well as its capacity of becoming a hegemon. In regard to that, it is once again important to emphasize the value of considering the unique political dynamics of a country before taking the international economic and political system as static, with same sovereign members and only different economic capacities. On that issue, Milner (1998) states that "the institutional structure of the state and its imperviousness to societal pressures shape the policy preferences of political actors and their capacity to implement these preferences" (1998:118). It is fair to argue that the hegemonic stability literature and hegemony studies in general needed an upgrade that did not work within the static parameters of the powerful and the powerless. More variety of conditions and variables must be taken into account if one wishes to successfully use the term 'hegemony' in today's global environment.

As we have reached the peak of globalization and countries like China experienced rapid economic development, which was at the levels of surprise and anxiety for many, the questions on hegemony studies and the hegemonic order as a subject of analysis had to be revisited. Especially in Trump's America, the talks on how much of the US dominance prevailed to recent times and how much the US had to pay for its position without getting compensated enough in the liberal international order have to be taken into consideration for any valuable research on hegemonic order today. The dichotomous nature of the hegemon and the newcomer/challenger has always been at the center of the hegemony studies so much that the expected norm has always been the cyclical transition of global leadership. This thesis does not include power-transition theory into its agenda; however, it is important to

keep in mind that hegemons are seen as those powers which are in charge until the next challenger emerges. The Cold War and its aftermath are yet another indication of this dual rivalry. In other words, when there was Britain there was the US, and when there was the US there was Japan, EEC or later on the USSR. And now that there is China, it is ultimately placed against the US. I argue, however in the following section, that this dichotomy lacks depth to portray a realistic image of the recent global changes.

At the end of the Cold War, there were discussions of a ‘unipolar moment’ based on the sole dominance of the US hegemony. Jesse et al. (2012) argue that the post-Cold War period, as it was experienced in the international system, is one that the US’ power capabilities, whether its economic, military or technological, surpassed any other state. In the field of international relations this paved the way to “second-wave” hegemony studies. This new wave of contemporary studies emphasized how the US continued to strengthen its dominance and the absence of balancing against it in a path to a ‘unipolar system’ from a ‘unipolar moment’ (2012:4). If we remember the capacity vs. willingness assumptions of the hegemonic stability theory, the second wave of hegemony scholars engaged in a discussion on the US motivation to continue being the leader of the system. Jesse et al. (2012) wrap up this second wave of hegemony studies to come up with a comprehensive definition of what hegemony is or has been identified as despite some contradictions. They suggest that a hegemon is:

(a) significantly stronger than other states in the system on both economic and military dimensions; (b) aware of its power preponderance and willing to use it to shape its international environment according to its interests and values; and (c) active in the building, developing, and sustaining of various international institutions, which reflect the negotiation and renegotiation of hegemonic bargains with other states in the system (comprising varying trade-offs between provision of public goods and private goods for the followers and the hegemon). Thus, while unipolarity refers more narrowly to the nature of systemic power distribution, hegemony by definition implies a type of *relationship* between states.

(Jesse et al., 2012:7)

Throughout this thesis, this definition will be regarded the closest while analyzing China’s process of hegemonic rise to its current position. The reason is that despite the multitude of definitions and operationalizations of the term hegemony and hegemonic power/leadership, I find the above-given definition providing more of a list with boxes to check in an attempt to see the ways of a major power utilizes to achieve a hegemonic status, if any. Specifically,

the emphasis on hegemony being a type of relationship rather than a static situation or hierarchical juxtaposition is valuable for the next steps of this research on its analysis of bilateral relations.

Having stated that, it would not be a comprehensive literature review without including the most recent agenda on the study of hegemony and hegemonic stability. Hence, in an even further attempt at revamping the hegemony scholarship, John Ikenberry and Daniel Nexon (2019) also took such changes into consideration in their most recent work 'Hegemony Studies 3.0: The Dynamics of Hegemonic Orders'. They also point out that "...much of the explanatory and theoretical focus of traditional theories of interstate hegemony rests on a relatively narrow subset of issues" (Ikenberry & Nexon, 2019:397). These narrow issues most commonly are the connection between the preeminent power and the distribution of international public goods, open trade, generalized security as well as the relationship between power transitions and international conflict. By doing so, Ikenberry & Nexon (2019) point out that the discussions on hegemonic order are driving around on the general factors that can only be useful for the stability of hegemonic systems and infamous attractiveness of hegemonic order (397). They state the following: "this tends to sideline not only analysis of the full range of strategies that actors use to contest or uphold international order but also how variation within and between hegemonic orders might shape power politics—at least beyond the durability and stability of hegemonic system" (Ikenberry & Nexon, 2019:397).

Specifically, considering these variables that are left on the outside are now more important than before. In their comprehensive analysis of this reconfiguration in the literature of hegemony studies, which they call the 'hegemonic-order theory', they claim this theory to be different from hegemonic-stability theory, power-transition theory and other subfields of hegemony studies. They raise provoking questions about the sufficiency and relevance of the traditional theories of hegemony, which ultimately also questions the same aspirations of the hegemonic stability theory. They neatly argue that "older approaches saw successful power transitions as involving system-wide wars that 'cleaned the decks' of international order, but,..., the new hierarchy studies suggest a more complicated relationship among and across different dimensions of super- and subordination in world politics" (Ikenberry & Nexon,

2019:420). In addition, how do hegemonic orders bring opportunities as well as constraints on weaker actors and thus, lead to different sorts of counterorder and counter-hegemonic strategies?

They also further advise and point out the need to correct the anomalies of the hegemonic stability theory by taking seriously the “...more complex understanding of the internal architecture of roles, authority relations, and bargains that make up hegemonic systems” (Ikenberry & Nexon, 2019:421). The need to focus strategic qualities and conditions under which we identify hegemons and rise of possible contestants is important to make use of the hegemonic stability theory and its potential to be able sufficiently explain current global order. In light of the vision that “...the meaning of hegemony is often in the eyes of the beholder”, this thesis engages in an analysis of the rise of China in an autonomous direction away from the unipolar order and its literature that is led by the US in the following chapters. (Jesse et al., 2012:7). However, before engaging in such analysis, we will take a brief look at the US-China dichotomous axis and HST’s application in the IR-IPE literature in light of the most recent events.

2.2. Rivalry or Cohabitation: The US-China Dilemma

Although there will be a comprehensive step-by-step analysis of the ‘rise of China’ phenomenon in the past decade, it is important to note here how the literature builds on the anxieties of declining American hegemony in relation to the international influence of the People’s Republic of China. In a way, this will be the only time throughout this research that we will look at a hegemonic rise of China via the literature of hegemony studies that places the phenomenon in a dichotomous axis across from the United States.

To begin with, when we look at the recent power asymmetries and the overall question of the rise of China in this hegemonic contestation for the international order, many scholars developed their own arguments about the ways in which China exuded such interests over the recent years. A little more than a decade ago, John Ikenberry wrote “the rise of China will

undoubtedly be one of the great dramas of the twenty-first century” (Ikenberry, 2008:23). In his conclusion, he advised the United States, within its leadership of the international system, to be inclusive and set up the rules of the game via the institutions in such an expansive way that China would be left with no choice but to become a full member of it. He added that the US cannot stop China’s rise but what it can do is to ensure that China follows the rules and institutions that both the US and its partners created over the last century for protecting all states’ interests (2008:37). Ikenberry (2008) finally wraps up his argument by suggesting that the “United States’ global position may be weakening, but the international system the United States leads can remain the dominant order of the twenty-first century” (2008:37).

On the issue of the rise of the Chinese economy and success, William Overholt (1994) emphasized the Chinese efforts for construction of market institutions, private enterprises, stock and bond markets, workable price mechanisms, modern banks, and perhaps one of the most important aspects: investment systems (Overholt, 1994: 34). Such economic success has been closely followed by the Western literature and led to concerns. Many studies on how the US should engage with China and what should be the actual focus point about China’s rise were produced one after another (Wang 2007; Jones, 2007). Wang (2007) suggested that the problem could in fact stem from misunderstanding and misrepresenting China’s economic progress and the failure of the US to maintain a traditional international system as opposed to regional alternatives that could lead to a far more unstable world than in a power-sharing arrangement between the US and China (Wang, 2007: 59). Moving forward towards more contemporary studies on China’s rise, its global image and economic success, Lippit et al. (2011) in their review study highlight some concerns about the sustainability of China’s rise in global political economy; a journey that was started all the way back in 1978. Some of these issues are regarding China’s floating population and internal migration China had experienced in the initial stages of such an economic journey (Lippit et al., 2011: 49). Unequal income distribution, its heavy dependence on exports and investment throughout the development process, the trade imbalances, the lack of domestic consumption and higher saving ratios of the Chinese people are all causes for concern to maintain a positive outlook on China’s rise under the ‘China Thesis’ (Lippit et al., 2011). As a response to these visual concerns, Khong (2014) argues that China’s best shot for dislodging the US is in fact to “continue growing at 6 to 8 percent annually for another

quarter century” (2014:172). He reads the Chinese leaders’ statements on continuing to focus on internal economic development as a sign of China being hesitant to take on a hegemonic role against the US. This is very much in-line with Deng XiaoPing’s legacy about “hiding your strength and biding your time” and as Khong (2014) concludes: China can be at a position to play the American role of post-WWII period in the international system only after another twenty-five years of strong economic growth (2011:173).

In the age of rising China, others like Ding (2011) attempts to analyze the process on China’s part and how it handles this overflowing China thesis via national image management. Some even look at how the Chinese school, although not widely accepted, an attempt to make sense of its current state by focusing on historical imperatives going all the way back to pre-Qin classical texts or looking at Maoism as an ideology (Cunningham-Cross, 2012). Modernizing and developing in a Western-dominated system, while being scrutinized by the democratic regimes of the West, China managed to maintain an open-door policy and transformed itself into a key player in the Asia-Pacific region (Ding, 2011: 304). According to the author, China has to focus more heavily on maintaining a favorable national image in this rapid information era via a strong commitment to cultural diplomacy, adapting methods for international broadcasting and the global linkage of its great diasporic communities (2011:304). In addition, Ding (2011) adds that “[...]China has to adopt more creative and carefully designed public diplomacy and make serious efforts to implement real political reform and improve its political credibility” (2011:305). Some studies go as far as to suggest that China will be pursuing its personal gains in hegemonic terms as it materially grows and it becomes more ‘status-conscious’ (Peou, 2012). A further radical advice even indicates that China has to become a liberal democracy if it wishes to provide stability into its region and beyond (Peou, 2012: 131).

One study that focuses on internal dynamics of China to make sense of the phenomenon is Mulvad (2018) and his recent work of Xiism based on understanding Xi Jinping’s vision on a quest for an emergent hegemonic project. As opposed to the historical manifestations of Maoism and Dengism, Xiism corresponds to the most recent period of the rise of China, which is the period after 2012. Mulvad (2018) focuses on the economic accumulation strategy of Xi, which is built around the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the overall aims on reshaping global trade and production patterns that should initially benefit the state-

owned enterprises as well as the CPC's economic base (Mulvad, 2018). However, even then the literature falls short on addressing hegemonic tendencies or the outcomes of such mega projects. In all fairness, the Belt and Road Initiative literature is a new yet dynamic part of the scholarly work on the rise of China and the conjunction of hegemonic tendencies of the Chinese state. Although painted with skepticism, the Western literature often points out the similarities between the BRI and the Marshall Plan of the US because of its heavy investment-oriented nature, meaning great amount of debt the participants shall have as a burden for a long period of time as well as the BRI being an overall state-backed campaign for global dominance of China (Kuo & Kommenda, 2018). The BRI believed to yield ways for China to implement some political agendas relating to security and military as well in the region by using the economic ties and dependencies it already has and will be creating (Ploberger, 2017:301-2). In geopolitical terms, by being a 'hybrid power' China has issues concerning both the sea and the land (Clarke, 2018:86). One common argument is that the BRI is a way of pressuring countries into giving political concessions in favor of the Chinese government. The resemblance of the BRI to the Marshall Plan once again tells the story of even when the focal point is China's rise through understanding China, it really is not. It is in fact, trying to place China in the static ways of American hegemony while trying to catch resemblance.

From the perspective of the Western literature and global order, the rise of China can be said to be a double-edged sword in the sense that when the discussion is about US hegemony, it has been interrupted by the rise of China. Consequently, when the topic is about China's own development and emergence in the international system, it is interrupted by the attempts of placing its efforts in a similarity test of the US policies. This could be the historical build-up of what Giovanni Arrighi (2007) calls the 'China syndrome' that has its roots in the Bush era when the US became a country of debt due to all the wars it engaged in after 9/11. It is argued that the American debt to foreign countries did not seem to be an immediate problem due to implicit loyalty of the Asian states to the US. However, when China became an evident alternative for investments and export in East Asia, it also became the lender of loans to the US (2007:203). This was a totally different picture of China from what the earlier traditional IR scholars envisioned, which deemed China as economically incapable of

establishing hegemony which potentially gave the US plenty of time to slow down China's rise (Mearsheimer, 2001 as cited in Arrighi, 2007).

Although the US was still the biggest trading partner in Asia, in 2003 and onwards, China was quick to catch on. From then on, there have been changes in the perceptions on China's status in a benevolent way. Arrighi (2007) points out the radical changes that occurred in 2006 over the geopolitical situation in East Asia and how Asian states all tried to strengthen their relations with China. This ultimately led to a relative increase Chinese soft power in the region through not only economic but also cultural exchanges (Arrighi, 2007:214). 2001 was also a year of importance for this process called the 'China syndrome' due to China's World Trade Organization (WTO) membership, which was followed by China leading a discussion on the double standards of the Global North over the international trade in 2003. Following such events, Arrighi's analysis highlights once again how 'the Chinese Century' came to headlines in the literature over the results of the Iraq War that disrupted the central position of the US in global political economy and further strengthened China's position as an alternative leader (2007:217). As we can understand, although very insightful, Arrighi's take on the rise of China is on a very dual juxtaposition from the US hegemony and its particular historical problems. He even takes it as further as to raise to question whether China is doing what the US once did to Britain (2007:316).

In this regard, Arrighi (2007) suggests that China has been letting the US to spend all its financial and military capabilities during its "war against terror"; giving credits and loans to the US; using its own broad domestic market to create a China-centric world order while gaining allies (and not in the realpolitik military sense) (2007:316). In addition, Arrighi (2007) also points out how the US does not have a "China strategy" at the time of his writing. In a broader reference to the hegemony and leadership, Arrighi takes a different position and proposes that the shift in the US hegemony has been towards what he claims as "domination without hegemony" after periods of the US' imperialist vision, also known as the first American century, and the new American Century during Bush era (2007:184-5). The dissolution of such imperialistic foreign policy resulted in the US' "dominance without

hegemony” while the center of the global economy shifted towards East Asia, more specifically, China (2007:186).

First thing to question is whether the US now has a fully functioning China strategy and whether this alleged dichotomous center transition of the global economic system is now balanced in a dilemma of dependence and cooperation. John Ikenberry (2014) argues that America’s foreign policy in East Asia and ultimately with China has been consistent and it shaped the terms of China’s rise (2014:41). Having said that, he agrees that with the rise of China, the US is no longer the only major great power in the region which has been in a transition to a new type of order with its organizing forces being unclear (42). He suggests that future decades will see further increase in the Chinese power and influence over the global system and in fact he claims this period to be “...a power transition with far-reaching implications for America’s strategic interests and global position” (42). He asks if China and the United States can find a way to live together in East Asia and as an answer argues that the American goal is not to prevent or restrict China’s growth but in fact to protect the region from turning into a “closed, illiberal Chinese sphere of influence” (2014:44). Ikenberry (2014) further claims that the geopolitical rivalry in the region will continue in a struggle to be the leading state in the region while “American efforts to contain China and China’s efforts to push the United States out of the region will both be self-defeating strategies” (44). It is also said that the US has established a “partial hegemony” through bilateral security agreements and trade-oriented economies and provided East Asia with security, open markets, and working political relations with its partners in the region in return of affiliations with the US, smoother trade, alliance and political partnerships (2014:49).

In true hegemonic fashion, Ikenberry (2014) argues that the US has sought to shape East Asia in a way that would “...undercut the rise of a hostile hegemonic challenger” but this old US-led regional system is “...now giving way to something new” and it “...is being driven by the rise of China and the global power transitions currently underway” (2014:51). The dilemma of placing China on a challenger position across from the US makes us question whether China is shaping the US presence, or the US is undercutting China’s position. It can be a dilemma to identify whether the US-China axis is an axis of contestation and rivalry or

in fact a balancing cooperative one. On that issue even Ikenberry himself identifies a “double shift”. This double shift is firstly due to the great power politics returning to the region to balance and reduce the American presence by the Chinese presence, while secondly, there is an expansion on the field for geopolitical contestations and great power politics (52).

Ikenberry’s analysis is on the East Asian region only, and he concludes that as long as the countries of the region would continue to tie themselves to the US for security protection, then the region would not shift into a classic multipolar order (2014:54). Nevertheless, he identifies that there are two rising hierarchies in the region which is an economic hierarchy that is led by China, and a security hierarchy led by the United States in a highly unusual order that has never been seen before in any other region (57). On the immediate implications of such dual order, Ikenberry suggests that the US will have to strategically be more rigid and restrained, while also considering the fact that the US-allies in the region will not want to choose between Beijing or Washington, hence, if the US is too harsh, others can move away from such alliance. On the contrary, if China’s foreign policy gets more assertive, this can generate backlash and increased worry in the region by its partners (58).

Just by picturing all the scenarios and issues played out by Ikenberry for East Asia in 2014, one can easily ask these above-given questions for the global order today. Hence, the dilemma that is placed on being two major great powers with multitude of issues tying them together and in fact, each possible strategy to allegedly defeat the other would cause hardships for themselves, pushes us to rethink and reconsider whether the need and obsession to spot a ‘power-transition’ in a hegemonic manner. The very recent trade wars between the two countries proved not to be an efficient solution to either one of them while the diplomatic talks essentially started after a period of increased tariffs and sanctions. The different nature of each countries’ way of exercising power in the global system is different and although there has been much talk on the US side, the literature does not analyze much of China in an independent manner separated from the US. In the following and final section of this chapter, a discussion will take place on a possible post-Western hegemonic order with an understanding of co-dependent hybrid hegemony.

2.3. A Post-Western Hegemonic Order & A Hybrid System

So far, this literary analysis has provided us with consensus on certain aspects of a hegemon, hegemony and hegemonic order. Despite the limitations and insufficiencies, there are still pragmatic reasons to consider the notion of hegemony to understand global order. However, in order to provide a useful and relevant analysis of the global economic and political system, it is no enigma to figure the need to revise the applications of the hegemonic stability theory and its assumptions on the notion of hegemony. There are certain aspects of the hegemonic stability theory and its literature that this research will take on to reach further into its re-investigation of the Chinese rise in the global system and there are certain notions and assumptions that will be avoided or put aside.

Firstly, this research considers hegemony as a certain type of relationships between states following the definition stated in this chapter earlier. This notion of relationships will be complemented by traditional ‘capabilities vs. willingness’ parameters for a hegemon to assert its position on the global political and economic system. This will make it possible for the consideration of the unique structure of a rising non-Western power like China and its process of climbing up indeed in a hierarchical order of multitude of powers and not simply in a dual rivalry perception as often can be found in the literature. Secondly, the concept of hegemonic order and stability is also considered in terms of economic ties, the overall economic structure and levels of trade and sustainability of such levels. There is also going to be a discussion on whether what China has been doing indeed damages the global order in an attempt to destroy or revolutionize the already-established global system. Hence, capabilities, willingness and bilateral ties of a newcomer potential hegemon will be considered through the fundamental parameters of the traditional as well as the second wave hegemonic stability theory.

In a revisionist agenda with an aim to successfully use the teachings of the hegemonic stability theory, there are certain things that are avoided in this thesis. Firstly, any distinctions that ultimately places China on a dichotomous position to make sense of its strategies in a

hegemonic attempt solely across from the United States are not considered as part of the research unlike the repeated obsession to make sense of a rising power by ‘measuring’ its rivalry against the infamous hegemon. It is believed in this research that such placements do not hold much qualitative value and in fact gather statistical data, thus, ultimately bring further limitations to the applicability of the hegemonic stability theory.

Secondly, as the research does not make use of the power-transition theory, the understanding of a hegemonic cyclical shift from the United States to an emerging major power, which in this case China, is not considered under the analysis of this research. The focus of hegemonic stability theory can be utilized better when we consider its quality to describe an order and a situation in the perspective of the rising power and not on the transition from an alleged “No. 1” to a second-best “No. 2”. Instead, we can take a look at what the newcomer has been doing, while considering the unique internal political dynamics and nature of such major power and not taking all actors of the global system as static sovereign, homogenous entities underneath the “No. 1”.

Thirdly, considering the fact that China does not have a liberal democratic system, this thesis does not make presumptions about its impact on the destiny of world’s current democracies through the discussions on the nature of hegemony. Although describing the tendencies of a given hegemonic power, placing adjectives do not seem to objectify the process-tracing and increase the quality of the research, this is not to argue that the perceptions of those countries who engage in the processes of interaction and cooperation with China will not be considered or discussed. In other words, this thesis will not declare the hegemonic tendencies of China as benevolent or malevolent for implications on authoritarian regime appeal. It rather discusses the steps taken and the relative impact of such strategies on the global economic system as well as its relations on bilateral levels. This is simply to keep focus on the stages of China's rise and not lose sight within other literatures on democracy fatigue, the decline of liberal democracy or the rise of populism.

Finally, keeping the abovementioned arguments in its theoretical framework, the global order we consider in this thesis is not one that forgoes the existence of the United States or its influence. This thesis advocates the need of a new outlook on accepting the mutual existence of both major great powers in a hybrid and co-dependent nature that has impact and influence over the global system in their own unique ways based on their internal dynamics writ large on their external policymaking. This thesis leaves behind the unipolarity or the mutually exclusive bipolarity prescriptions of the global order and wishes to move beyond the dichotomous vision that stems from the beginning of modern history but was also heavily influenced by the Cold War era readings of international relations. What this means is that the developments of Chinese foreign policy and internal political narrative is analyzed in its own unique historical and politico-cultural readings and not necessarily in Western or ethno-centric type of categorizations. Not only the analysis but the global order is also considered to be one that is post-Western in light of recent events and developments.

A post-Western order and future is one of those discussions that is now becoming popular more in the literature as well. It is now argued by some authors such as Parag Khanna (2019) that we are now in a post-Western order and the understanding of the Western scholarship on China has been flawed due to the same rigid traditional view of hegemony and dominance. In order to simply give a brief example from the history, Khanna points out how China lost the Battle of Talas in 18th century; had to submit to Mongols in the 13th century; went under the Japanese control in the 20th century and experienced partial European colonization in the 19th century and yet never aimed at being sole superpower just for the sake of being a hegemon throughout its history (2019:77). The lesson China learnt from the overall Asian history is that Asian tensions had not been between civilizations, but rather between the modern nations on issues of demarcating and shared territories and not on ideologies or hegemony (77). In addition, considering the lessons of colonialism in the region and its humiliating experience provided a common ground for the wish to build on a post-Western order and ultimately a post-Western future (2019:74-75).

In other words, by taking the existing hegemony descriptions as the base, we can consider the dual existence of the heterogeneous bilateral interdependence between the US and China

as a hybrid hegemonic stand where one compliments the other on certain areas. I suggest the global order being a post-Western one in the sense that it no longer has the Western ordeals as the replicable template for all. Each country, whether it is a major power like China or a middle power like Turkey, utilizes certain strategic advantages for their own national goals. Appeasing the West, that was rather popular in the post-Cold war period, is replaced by making the most of the circumstances in a pragmatic manner via multilateral foreign policymaking. We have entered into an era that is questioning the existence of a hegemon or hegemonic stages of a new superpower is now more interesting and perhaps harder than before. The lines are no longer clear-cut as the West vs. East. Regional arrangements, whether it is the ASEAN or the EU, do not necessarily translate into a unipolar system anymore. Hence, I wish to argue that hegemonic stability theory as we know it, can be used as a means to understand a new global order that was not there before. In this post-Western order where different powers connect on strategic goals such as the BRICS formation persists, it is not viable to stick to the old ways of analyzing the IR.

In addition to being a post-Western era, as China continues to rise and increase its influence, it becomes a very powerful actor to challenge the old ways of realizing who is capable and who is a hegemon. For the time-being, China remains as a very capable and willing superpower to openly write its name in the history of hegemonic powers. Even if China will not become the sole hegemon in the near future, the stages and policies it follows brought itself to a position of a major power who has the ability to affect global order. The important point here is that we should not downgrade its rise to power in dichotomous categorizations. For instance, we should move beyond the simplifications such as Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB) as the Chinese replica of the World Bank; seeing the Silk Road Fund as a replica of an IMF-setting or Belt Road Initiative (BRI) as the Chinese Marshall Plan. These types of comparisons give a general sense of the nature of these policies and institutions but do not provide in-depth coverage on their functionality, usage or repercussions for the global system.

It is beneficial to question what kind of a power-related arrangement the global system will experience in the light of the hegemonic policymaking of China. I suggest that we will be

seeing more of a power-sharing order as we have been seeing the glimpses of it in the past decade in terms of the US-China relations. As there are areas that China is now superior or has the “upper-hand” via its economic volume and capability, there are also areas that it lacks and falls behind. In terms of control of information, we see China utilizing “sharp power”, which is discussed in Chapter III in detail, whereas the US still has a certain soft power dominion. In terms of military capabilities, although there are attempts at bettering it, China falls short still compared to the US. These are not necessarily comparisons on descriptive terms but indications on how we can see a global order in a hybrid hegemonic leadership. In other words, the US decreased concern and willingness to engage in global issues in the Trump era and its protectionist new agenda further allows room for maneuver for China. In such duality, I suggest that what we experience and further see in the near future is a hybrid co-hegemonic order in a Post-Western period.

As the Chinese culture still has issues of lack of attraction in terms of its soft power paradigm, and the US still leads the cultural heritage of the “American Dream”, it is not reasonable to ever suggest that it has left the global picture nor is it going in the foreseeable future. However, what I suggest with this research is that China has entered the picture and the way we look at the picture has to change. The picture is no longer black or white, but it is grey, and it now has an economic superpower like China right beside the US. In this regard, the existing hegemonic stability theory legacy only tells so much of the story for this new picture at hand. In terms of military and culture we still see the Americans at the center stage, but if it continues to ignore its international responsibilities, the place for China to stand on will continue to expand. This new era is different from the previous ones in the sense that China’s rise and hegemonic attempts increase in each new conjunction despite its domestic issues and limitations. This research wishes to adapt the hegemonic stability theory in this sense that it can be used to read this new era.

China may never reach the capacity to push the US out of the picture, and nor it wishes to do so, as it seems for now. However, through this current hybrid hegemonic existence period, China may increase its stance even further and affect the global order even more. Based on its policies in the recent decade, the view of China attempting at hegemonic goals became

more solid. Hence, beyond a mechanical hegemonic stability reading, HST should be adapted for this particular balance of new superpowers into the present international context, which is more complex than before. This thesis emphasizes the disappearance of the US influence, but it focuses on re-appearance of the Chinese influence in the 21st century. This is done in the sense that for a middle power such as Turkey, there are choices to be made alongside this duality. Despite the dichotomous point of view of hegemony, as I show in Chapter V in detail, countries such as Turkey do not turn their back on China to engage with the US or vice versa. Multilateral and pragmatic policies are followed, which ultimately complements my view of the hybrid, co-hegemonic global order we have entered.

It is argued that if China wishes to attain a complete leadership of the international system, it should resort to “humane authority, influencing other states through moral example and attracting supporters through providing benefits...” (Larson, 2020:1). As long as China does not fulfill this gap in its soft power dimension in international relations, there can be more considerations for the limit of its economic capacity. On the other hand, we see that due to the post-Cold War setting in the region of East Asia, China is not ought to provide other states with security guarantees as the US presence is evident on that matter. However, none of these alleged stop signs really hindered China’s growing influence and creation of dependencies so far. This further complement the dual hegemonic argument I provide here. China’s growth leads to a bipolar structure with the absence of conditions for a cold war (Larson, 2020). For the particular reasons of becoming a “humane-benign” hegemon, China would avoid a war with the USA. There can and have been division of labor for the status “rivalry” as we have seen with the Trade Wars. Both states should be acknowledging each other’s pre-eminence in different areas, as it is evident that they also are dependent on each other economically.

To sum up, we have moved away from a unipolar hegemonic culture and order towards a post-Western pluralistic order in the global political and economic system, as a result of the emerging powers and regional power balances. Out of all such new emerging powers, one of the greatest examples of acceleration and influence has been the People’s Republic of China. Hence, re-understanding and re-examining the rise of China is a phenomenon that is also

useful for understanding the hegemonic stability theory as well as the new global order. These developmental implications in mind, the following chapter engages in a detailed analysis of the rise of China in a step-by-step process-tracing of its development in the past decade, considering its own internal evolution, changes in foreign policy and domestic political rhetoric. The Chinese political leadership styles, its economic development, its grand strategies and policies, the legitimacy issues of the Communist Party of China and the Chinese state, its engagements on international arrangements such as the BRICS, its economic statecraft are all laid out to engage in a detail-oriented analysis to understand the rise of China phenomenon in a new post-Western order towards a new hybrid hegemony.



III. Stages, Success and Sustainability: China's Rise and Beyond

To realize the Chinese Dream, we must pursue peaceful development. We will always follow the path of peaceful development and pursue an opening-up strategy that brings mutual benefits. We will concentrate both on China's development and on our responsibilities and contributions to the world as a whole. We will bring benefits to both the Chinese people and the people of the rest of the world. The realization of the Chinese Dream will bring the world peace, not turmoil, opportunities, not threats.

Xi Jinping (May, 2013)

The previous chapter was a combination of the literature that has been discussed on the issue of hegemonic leadership of the global system and the theoretical framework on which this thesis builds its arguments on. I argued the post-Western order that we are currently shifting in today creates a duality that ensembles China's rise and the US' declining sphere of influence. In this chapter, I take the discussion further and solely focus on the steps the People's Republic of China has taken over the recent decade, more specifically after 2013, on its path to global leadership. Issues of economic statecraft, historical amplifications of the Chinese rise, leadership based policymaking and mega-strategy of the Chinese government are analyzed here to strengthen the arguments made for this thesis.

This chapter also dives into a more elaborate and evidence-based analysis of the progress of the "Rise of China" phenomenon. As part of the title of my thesis, there is an emphasis on the internal and external dynamics of its development in the global sphere. This chapter lists and discusses all the crucial internalities that we can observe throughout the historical and policy-based development of the PRC. It argues that the pragmatic policymaking for Chinese foreign policy and mass-diplomacy elements have rendered China's hegemonic economic superpower possible.

3.1. The Evolution of the China Thesis

I discuss here that there has been a change in the perception of China on the global sphere, but this has been a gradual progress that was often misread by the West. This change was not only on the perception of China outside but inside as well. Chinese rhetoric changed over the last thirty years by the narrative of the Chinese leaders themselves. I argue that the rhetoric around China went from the developing country/ world's factory arguments to a country that exudes anxieties for the global system according to the West, though China never officially admitted accusations made on its part for wanting to change the system.

The change came around the first decade of the twenty-first century, as China's economic resurgence confirmed the anxieties of the West about what was to come on China's inevitable rise. The phenomenon itself can be solely based on a leadership transition and economic emergence spectrum in the world scene. The perception of China shifted alongside an economic narrative throughout its emergence as a superpower... It is necessary to identify a starting point and recap on how things had progressed before focusing on the more recent policies and steps taken by the Chinese state. For this purpose, the following section summarizes how the story came about until the Xi era.

The Chinese Progress

In 1971, the PRC became a member of the United Nations (UN). After the death of Mao in 1976, the modernization period took place that had a major impact on the economy. In 1978, Peoples' Bank of China (PBC) was reinstated and the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party marked the historical turning point of PRC adapting the open-door policy. The same Third Plenum made an oath that China would diligently expand "economic cooperation with other countries and strive to adopt the world's advanced technology and equipment" (Tzeng, 1991:270). In 1981, a policy called the "Household Responsibility System" was implemented nationwide. This system brought accountability on local managers for their own profits and losses (Ghosh, 2019). Following this policy was a series of economic policy implementation that led to the "Socialist Market Economy (SME)" which was previously fixated on "Socialist Commodity Economy (SCE)". In 1988, the Coastal Development Strategy (CDS) was adapted which gave considerable

autonomy to the coastal areas with the ultimate goal of expanding China's exports and efficiently start competing in the global economic system. The CDS tried to link the coastal regions of the country with the global market while focusing on promoting an export-oriented economic development via the linkages to domestic parts of China (Tzeng, 271).

During the early 1990s, the aim to incorporate China into the global trade and economic system continued to represent itself with steps of opening Shanghai Stock Exchange and Shenzhen Stock Exchange. In 1994, the very first PRC-run enterprise called "Shandong Huaneng" entered the list of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) (Ghosh, 2019). Around the same time, China achieved a great-scale reduction in its poverty between 1981 to 2002, from \$490 million to \$88 million. The year of 1998 brought China's gross national product (GNP) per capita to a total of \$750 which was the closest China had ever gotten by then to the World Bank's minimum level for "lower-middle-income countries" set in 1997 (World Bank, 1997:214 as cited in Lai, 2002:435). In 1999, the efforts were accelerated by Jiang Zemin's "Western Development Strategy" (WDS). The strategy was focused on the conditions of development of the central and Western regions of the country, which was not parallel to the eastern coastal region that was improved recently thanks to the efforts like the CDS (Lai, 2002:436). The widening gap between the coastal and inland regions has always been an issue which the Chinese government and the CCP wished to tackle and fix, and it is plausible to say that, this issue has continued as long as the Chinese economic development existed. This process of making sure the country was opening the global markets and economic linkages externally, while the domestic concerns of development were being dealt with, creates the foundation of the rise of China phenomenon.

In 2001 with the entry of China to the World Trade Organization (WTO), this opening-up policy had found its milestone and from then onwards, China has experienced a continuum of growth in its gross domestic product (GDP) that continued until very recently (World Bank, 2020). In 2002, yet another external step was taken by the PRC which was "The Qualified Foreign Institutional Investor" (QFII) Program. This program allowed foreign capital to be invested in the domestic security market (Ghosh, 2019). In 2006, as part of the earlier commitment to technological advancement, the national targets for gross research and development expenses fixated to no lower than 2.5 percent of its overall GDP by 2020 (PRC

State Council, 2006). This was also part of a “Medium-term Plan for Scientific Development” that was implemented in the same year. The policies were put on a show during the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics and the test drive seemed to go well as China continued to increase its GDP when the purchasing power parity (PPP) is taken into an account. This is crucial for the outlook and understanding of the rise of China when we consider that the world was struggling with the 2007-2009 Global Financial Crisis at the time. The internal concerns had always dealt with, or at least tried to, in accordance with externalities of ambitions and aims in the eyes of the CCP and the PRC. An expert on the PRC, Dr. Kadir Temiz had the following assessment on the issue:

...If we continue this narrative, China's rise is something that took place thanks to China's own will. I think, more importantly than the external factors, the mobility, dynamism within China and China's political and economic curve's wish to integrate into the world are the byproducts of establishing an independent economic system as well as the efforts for building a model without fighting with the rest of the world.

(K. Temiz, personal communication, February 5, 2020).

When try to be categorized based on a timeline, experts usually have different visions on the phenomenon. Some, such as Temiz, considers the period between 1991 and 2001 to be a separate one in which China shows a cautious growth performance which is also known as the "double-digit" period. This period can also be considered as China's institutional integration on external terms after its completion on domestic institutionalization (K. Temiz, personal communication, February 7, 2020).

In terms of the US-China axiom, the same period is considered a process of US seeing the potential in China and throughout 1990s, it has been systematically integrating China into the global system. The key point of 2001 being China's World Trade Organization (WTO) membership, the same year is seen as China's complete focus on integration and the official start of the "Rise of China" phenomenon. According to Temiz, China has always been out there with its United Nations Security Council (UNSC) membership. China with its strength in its population size was considered as a power alongside with USSR during the Cold War period. In other words, as Temiz stated: "...Therefore, we should not look at this as changes

that happened over the last ten to fifteen years but I think China, which has experienced economic transformation, became a global power in this period" (K. Temiz, personal communication, January 7, 2020).

The anxieties started increasing following the lights of the second half of the reform period, which is deemed as the timeline between 1993-2007, with capital deepening and a great sum of importation of foreign technology accelerating the productivity growth (Lippit et al., 2011). The China thesis in a way, was shaped by the fact that during this period, before and during the 2008 global financial crisis, Chinese government maintained its growth and infrastructure spending. The difference of the Chinese government turning to “market-supplanting policies” instead of the Western economies’ emphasis on pro-market policies at the time not only allowed China to maintain its rapid economic growth, but also get the attention of the worried eyes of the West. This rhetoric contributed the rise of China thesis while adding to the narrative of what is called the “China bashing”. As Ergenç noted: “There is clear increase of what is called the “China bashing”: It has historical references to early Cold War years when China was in a position between the US-USSR. After the socialist revolution, US in a way lost China (C. Ergenç, personal communication, Dec 17, 2019).

Others considered the anxieties to be evident based on the reactions of the West and it is argued that there is clear awareness of China's rise in global community. Mehmet Öğütçü provided the following assessment:

The US has changed a lot to intercept with China's development and it has been working long-term on it. Europe's perception is a bit different as it has more of an understanding of cooperation, but it also sees China's ultimate goal for becoming the "number one power" in all areas. China's rise causes anxieties in that sense while also is seen as an opportunity because it is an evident power that cannot be pushed aside.

(M. Öğütçü, personal communication, March 12, 2020).

On top of such economic milestones such as becoming the world’s largest exporter in 2009 and the second largest economy of the world in 2010, the PRC led a path on turning this material resurgence into a diplomatic strategy to give out a “helping hand” to those in need of the Global South. This “...has led analysts and policy officials within the region and beyond

to recognize Beijing as a great power, a designation that entails a responsibility to manage relations in its own region if not beyond that geographical space” (Bukovansky et al. 2012 cited in Foot, 2019:3). As Ergenç suggests:

If you look at the early stages of China’s rise, let us say in late 90s or 2000s, first stages of China’s global engagement, you would see that China engages with the developing countries, the Global South in general, on a one-to-one bilateral basis, it (China) is against multilateral formal institutionalizations like the EU because these kind of institutions undermine state sovereignty.

(C. Ergenç, personal communication, Dec 17, 2019).

The process for engaging and opening up did not start with the Xi era and once again it is important to note here that the China’s involvement in different regions as a helping hand was evident. This incorporated into the rising anxieties regarding China’s rise:

So, China is used to engaging with individual developing countries in Africa, Southeast Asian on a one-to-one basis, and through financial or infrastructural aid. Back then (Jiang Zemin - Hu Jintao era), there was a huge debate on China’s involvement in the global south because China’s individual infrastructural aid undermines the World Bank and IMF conditional loans... So, back then, talking about use of various tools, China was using economic-financial and infrastructural aid as a way of garnering support, influence, and legitimacy in the global South.

(C. Ergenç, personal communication, Dec 17, 2019).

This engagement process was also always consolidated with its unique internal policymaking and the advantages that the engaging countries would get by doing business with China. Businessmen who engaged with the PRC on a direct person-to-person basis got the experience and the glimpse of the rise of China phenomenon during that period. It is often noted that a decade ago the income levels of the middle class was not high. China has been developing slowly as opposed to its current position as one of the two major superpowers. As for the reasons how, the world started interacting with China stems from its comparative advantages at the time. As businessman Ömer Buğer also discusses the reasons why the business circles were attracted to China, he states:

Why were we working with the Chinese and why did we lay a foundation 10-12 years ago? Because its labor power costs were so low in that period. Due to costs being so low, their business offers were so attractive compared to their European and American competitors in addition to the commitments for completing the job in very short amount of time...Compared to the European and American firms, the quality was lower for the Chinese firms, however, it was almost impossible not to accept the Chinese offers as they were giving such competitive offers based on price and time.

(Ö. Buğer, personal communication, December 24, 2019).

At the same time, the comparative advantages came after a time when China struggled for so long. Its share of world's gross national product (GNP) was below 3 percent and just in a short period of forty years, it managed to build it up to 15 percent. This fact is considered a major success by the experts themselves as well. As senior economist Yüksel Görmez neatly puts it: "It is not so often to see such power shift in the history of humankind, thus, we have to remember that it is incomparable" (Y. Görmez, personal communication, December 25, 2019).

This shift is also considered as one that is irreversible, and perhaps this is why it has been holding such importance and anxiety for the US. The repercussions of China's rise for the US, whether translated into the recent trade wars of 2020, is argued to continue until to the point when the US internalizes the phenomenon. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, hegemonic repercussions should not be reflected on a dichotomous axis. The two superpowers are ought to continue the path in a co-dependent manner. This is even discussed as a theory for the creation of a G2 which is "...a dual maximization of economic interests between the US and China whereas the third party remains as the rest of the world" (Y. Görmez, December 25, 2019).

The improvements on China's development are dispersed on a large umbrella of areas and economics being the most important. China was able to meet its growth goals very fast with an annual GNP that reached 14 percent at times. From being considered a closeted "third-world country", it reached such an immense position in such a short period of time that was never seen before in such scale. The overall GNP when calculated with the purchasing power parity (PPP), China has already surpassed the US. It is the biggest economic power in the

world if "greater China" is calculated with the addition of Taiwan and Hong Kong. On top of it, when we add those countries that has China's influence over their economies the most such as Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, the scope of economy that is controlled by China is at unreachable levels (M. Ögütçü, personal communication, March 12, 2020).

These efforts and improvements on China's part have reached a global and mega-degree, which was taken further by Xi Jinping and his leadership that started in 2013.

For the question of which areas does China stand out: BRI, "Made in China", "China Standards" and Chinese mass diplomacy are those areas in which it stands out. At the base of all these lies the BRI; and BRI is a revisionist understanding in China's foreign policy and its global leadership which is based on changing an order that is not in favor of China in international institutions.

(S. Bardakçı, personal communication, May 21, 2020).

Before diving into the detailed analysis on the recent policies and progress of the PRC, the repercussions of the Deng era reform period are key to understand the phenomenon in a wholesome manner.

3.2. Start of it all? Legacy of the Deng Xiaoping Era

Deng era gave the green light and the foundation for China's rise in many ways, and although the tone and rhetoric were different and weighed less aggressive, the policies implemented were crucial for both internal legitimization of the CCP and PRC as well as the international outlook of the country. I argue in this section that the legacy of the reformist Deng era is crucial in understanding the ambitious Xi Era and thus, the global economic and political rise of the PRC.

The Deng Xiaoping era of China is known as one of the key milestones in the country's modernization, economic and institutional reformation process. Under his leadership, the

opening-up policy of China was the starting point for the upcoming decades of its rapid economic development. This period was also going to benefit from rising trade, foreign direct investment (FDI), the process of globalization and technological advancements (Zu, 2011). It was believed that the pragmatism of the Deng Xiaoping reforms had in fact served the demise of ideology and was even considered as the “end of ideology” era of China. This was in line with the period of “end of history” discussions regarding the collapse of the Soviet Union and hence, the end of the Cold War. In the final years of the Deng era, he also came to the realization of how little emphasis the regime had put on ideology especially after the Tiananmen Massacre of 1989 (Holbig and Gilley, 2010:405). After Tiananmen, the CCP and the Deng regime placed tight control of the political and economic apparatus in the country and the policies were aimed at addressing and fixing the social instabilities but still heavily fixated on economic growth without stopping at the expense of nothing (Zu, 2011:7). Policy decisions were followed by a cautious consensus that the change within the party was ought to be slow and staggered.

Another important feature of the Deng era is that Deng Xiaoping was the last revolutionary leader of the country. For Deng, the legitimacy of the regime came from heavy reliance on economic growth whereas maintaining such growth was left to the hands of the future successors, who were also technocrats like Xi Jinping (Zu, 2011:28). The contradictions between political authoritarianism and the ideals of economic liberalism in a country such as China had dealt in three strategic areas by both leaders and their policies. These can be listed as constant economic growth, institutionalization, and procedural democracy (Zu, 2011; Cheek, 2006). For Deng, economic openness and reform had to come about without political liberalization, therefore, he chose to establish a more rigid party foundation and strict bureaucratic system for the party rule in the country (Cheek, 2006:55). During the early stages of Deng’s rule, the party was fragmented between the reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution, which meant that the elite was divided between radicals, moderates, and technocrats (2006:57). Deng’s first job was to eliminate this division within the party to further pursue its reformist agenda. Thus, once he achieved its ultimate control after the suspension of the pro-cultural revolutionaries, he proceeded to his policy measurements. The new and improved party elite under Deng focused fully on eliminating “chaos” (*luan* in Chinese) in the society, which had its roots in economic development and the existence of the poverty-line in the country at the time (2006:57-58).

...Especially after Mao's death, the reform period which started with Deng in the late 90s and early 2000s, there was something so fundamental that they tried to oversee; the existence of a collective leadership, no one being able to come forward as an individual figure and create an "individual cult".

(E. Demir, personal communication, February 14, 2020).

Regarding policy steps and institutionalization, almost all of Mao's policies were reversed by Deng (Cheek, 2006:59). Firstly, Deng replaced the image of the Chairman and the "Supreme Leader" positions in the country to strengthen his leadership credentials that was followed by a careful process of "de-Maoification" of the country as Mao was the most blunt image of the CCP being an unelected party in Deng's vision and it meant that the legitimacy of the party and regime was not secured (2006:60). Deng also paid much needed attention to China's global image and international connections, which is one of the first steps taken in the country's history and that could ultimately be tied to Xi Jinping's ultimately assertive internal rule and foreign policy. Inside, Deng was determined to modernize China's economy and begin to open the planned economy of the country (2006:62).

As the opening-up China era began, institutions were also being reformed as Deng had to deal with the issue of democracy as an authoritarian regime-based country, which was opening up towards the Global North and its Western democracies (Cheek, 2006:63). In 1978, the image of China made headlines as to whether it was finally becoming more democratic based on policies of the "Democracy Wall" movement in China, which was a relative liberalization campaign created via press and publications at the time (2006:65). However, towards the end of the 1980s, the economic success was not at the desired levels and furthermore, there were already visible disparities in terms of transitioning to a market-oriented economy in rural areas compared to cities (2006:65-66). The unintended consequences of the institutional reforms, i.e., high inflation and official corruption, first led to criticisms, which then paved the way to the abovementioned Tiananmen protests, and consequently the party was losing control over the society and inherently its legitimacy in the country (2006:68). It is then possible to suggest that the economic and administrative rapid reforms did not bring the envisioned legitimacy that Deng and the CCP was trying to achieve

for the sake of regime survival and sustainability. However, it did pave the way to create an economic growth story, which the successors built on.

Even during the years of the Cold War, China was struggling to utilize the Communist “ideology” while being left out and alienated from the global economic system and international trade, on top of feeling the military threat of the USSR right beside its thin borders. Failing to use ideology to consolidate its power both at the domestic and international levels, the Chinese state made the pragmatic choice of structurally shaping its market (Arrighi, 2007:373). Pragmatism started showing its efficient face for China’s rise during Deng’s reform period. Although it brought certain issues of sustainability, it is highly plausible that the reformist and pragmatic agenda Deng has brought to government reached its peak under Xi Jinping’s leadership.

Having said that, I argue neither an exact replica nor a perfect continuation of Deng’s leadership by Xi in China. In fact, what it is suggested here is that Xi Jinping carefully picked what was working for China and tried to find remedies for the issues such as the legitimacy of the party and the state. Xi focused on fixing institutional constraints on his way to complete control of the Chinese agenda. The first institutional constraint was in fact the term limitations and the retirement age restrictions on the leaders after the implementation of the 1982 Constitution in Deng Xiaoping era (Svolik, 2012:92). Both rules were tools that were used to regulate power-sharing under a strict single-party dictatorship like China in its institutionalized forms. If not institutionalized, such regulations could have been left out as informal expectations with vague and uncertain limitations that could have ultimately led to regime instability (Svolik, 2012:94). As I discuss in the following section, Xi took notice of all these problems and built a stronger and more assertive path for his leadership as well as for his ambitious China that is ought to change its narrative, leadership and global vision on the outside.

3.3. Ambitions and The New Agenda: Xi Jinping Era

In this section, I argue that the clearest vision of hegemonic China has been during Xi's assertive leadership over the country, starting from its journey in 2013. I make use of Xi's very own speeches and anecdotes as well as other archival material to bring the undertones of Xi's China forward. I show the linkage between the narrative of "Rejuvenation of the Great Chinese Nation" and the mass-diplomacy tools of Chinese pragmatism in its road to hegemonic success. The uniqueness of the current Chinese policies for diplomacy in the Xi era is different than what the literature is used to analyze for hegemonic power. I also show here that Xi's China is attaching a positive "voluntary-based" label on its ambitious projects, which is also what makes the Chinese path to hegemony so different and blurry compared to the previous examples in world history. We do not have to see the critical conjuncture or the breaking point of China's visible assertiveness in 2013, but in fact, it has become clearer that China was ready to take center stage from a mere developing country in 2016 in terms of the leader's narrative. Post-2016 period highlighted an era of assertive Xi Jinping that has become bolder and more restrictive in China's bilateral affairs. Not only there are major contrasting points between the reformist Deng period as opposed to assertive Xi period, but there is also a distinctive increase in such narrative within a heterogeneous Xi era which I discuss in detail.

There is no place for sheer optimism in Xi's China, but only the wishes and hopes for a better future for the Chinese people and the rest of the world that could be achieved by hard work and cooperation. The aims are benign, the steps are pragmatic, and the plan is far-fetched, or at least that is how the Chinese government wants the outside world to see it for a period until 2016. There is no rush for an end game, but there are deadlines that must be met eventually. Xi Jinping's very own "*sige chuanmian*" axiom also known as the "Four Comprehensives" or the "Four-pronged Comprehensive Strategy" first made its appearance in 2014 on Chinese media. It consists of the following four principles: "Comprehensively build a moderately prosperous society; comprehensively deepen reform; comprehensively govern the country according to law; and comprehensively tighten party discipline" (Lam, 2016:409). One of the most notable characteristics of Xi's leadership is known as his image building of himself as the equals of Deng and Mao in the sense that "he will not rest until he has arrogated to himself powers over areas ranging from party affairs and foreign policy to finance and cyberspace" (2016:410). In 2017, the CCP elevated his status to the same as the founding

father Mao's by writing his name and ideas into the party constitution which was seen as a way trying to "project his historic stature" (Buckley, 2017).

During the 2012 Conference of the party, when Xi was elected as the new general secretary, his first media appearance was different than all his predecessors: Xi was using a clear Beijing accent and the correct Chinese language. He apologized to the reporters for a half-hour delay—unusual behavior for a Chinese official-- and repeated the word 'people' nineteen times in his speech, which was twice the amount he used the word 'party'. The speech also did not mention the previous leaders, which was interpreted as a "disengagement from the previous phase and opening a new page to a new era" (Shahrour, 2013).

In addition, one of the most fundamental aspects of Xi's statecraft and policy agenda has been strengthening and maintaining the CCP's status and legitimacy as the "perennial ruling party" (Lam, 2016:411). As discussed in the previous section, Xi is not shying away from providing all that is needed to cover up the issues of legitimacy for the party and state. I suggest here that the necessary means to providing the full-fledged legitimacy campaign inside is harder than ever in the PRC's history and thus, the initiated policies also had to be greater than ever before. In his own words: "In [the] face of the mighty trend of the times and earnest expectations of the people for a better life, we cannot have the slightest complacency, or get the slightest slack at work..." (Xi, 2013, March 16).

This is one of the reasons why Xi's external assertiveness is visible today in the post-2016 period, three years into its time in office, and as the ambitions of the projects and initiatives increase, the room for critique and anxieties decreases in the most basic terms. In other words, Xi now advocates that strong leadership is needed for all ambitious "top-level design" reforms to take place without issues and as the reforms take place, the approval for Xi's dominance also stays unbothered by the people. Hence, on the global scale, if Xi can assert global leadership, albeit with the co-habitation of the US, this could be the ultimate legitimacy tool for his own leadership status in a regime that does not have the traditional "ballot-box legitimacy", and for the CCP. This could answer to the question of "why China

decided to go for global hegemony very recently when it has been doing the same things for the past thirty years or so?”. However, this thesis focuses on the question of “how?” and the answer to that goes through the themes of pragmatism, image making, mass-diplomacy all tangled up in Xi’s increased assertiveness that was visible before. The Chinese pragmatism is the main theme for China’s progress into global leadership and it is the base for all its sub-policies underneath its mega strategy:

China does not have this pre-planned roadmap that is executing one step at a time. It is very similar to how it unfolds the domestic reforms. You would remember what Deng Xiaoping said: “crossing the river by feeling the stones” so the major theme of China’s own domestic reform and opening up is policy pragmatism: What they do is “trial and error” so they do something if it works, they continue...So, I think what I am suggesting here is that China’s foreign policy, China’s presence in the global system is also defined by policy pragmatism. They try, they, figuratively speaking, when they are stable on one stone on the river, they jump onto the next one...

(C. Ergenç, personal communication, December 17, 2019).

The same pragmatism is evident in China's business ties and economic interactions as Murat Kolbaşı states:

China is a country that looks at the events from a big picture and within that big picture, I think, it plans where it can make a move very well... China does not show itself before feeling comfortable and achieving its goals in terms of markets and products. Therefore, it is not so right to suggest that it covers up its tracks, but it is true to suggest that China does not act hastily.

(M. Kolbaşı, personal communication, Dec 18, 2019).

Pragmatism is one issue that all my expert interviewees seem to agree on. Xi’s emphasis on producing a new and shiny Chinese image is also one of the most important policy steps throughout the rise of China as we observe it in the last seven years. After coming into office in 2012, Xi first pushed for an agenda to fix politicians image by utilizing Washington-like public relations (PR) strategy. The PR campaign was to change the image of officials in the age of social media, which helped in boosting Xi’s image and the CCP (Wan, 2013).

Internationally, Xi called for a new security concept for Asia with the words: “No country should attempt to dominate or infringe upon the rights and interests of other countries” (Feng, 2014). This was two years after he came to office and as he spoke of conciliation, it was not certain why an allegedly developing country like China was talking about regional orders and norms of interaction. This confusion was replaced easily when Xi continued to push for China’s rise in global sphere. The New York Times in 2017 wrote: “No part of the world seems too small, too near or too far for China’s globe-trotting president, Xi Jinping” and a professor of international relations at China’s very own Renmin University, Shi Yinhong, complemented the headline by stating: “Xi’s aggressive diplomacy largely comes from his own aspirations, beliefs and strategic requirements” (Perlez, 2017). It is also crucial to suggest that although there are apparent similarities between Xi period and Deng’s legacy, the two periods are also extremely different. The difference stems from the post-2016 period for Xi and its ambitious agenda that was not seen with Deng. Therefore, it would be flawed to suggest that there is a linear continuation between Deng and Xi’s China. Dr. Rafet Akgünay, a former ambassador of the Turkish foreign service, who is currently a faculty member of the Political science and International Relations Department of Middle East Technical University, evaluates the situation as follows:

When we look at the current situation, China entered a new phase after the 2011-2012 period... They had an understanding that was based on not coming forward and suggesting that "we are a developing country and thus, we improve our foreign policy with a low profile". They were completely focused on economic reconstruction, however, when they became a member to WTO, they reached a stage of coming out of its shell. After Xi's leadership in 2012, the evolution of China moved away from this policy to the efforts for development and a global vision in accordance with its "Great Rejuvenation" policy.

(R. Akgünay, personal communication, December 19, 2019).

Another main key policy or narrative of Xi is the famous Chinese Dream, also known as the “Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation”. Starting from 2013, Xi made this narrative the center piece in all his policies and the theme for all his speeches. In 2013, Xi confidently stated:

In this new historical period, the essence of the Chinese Dream is to make our country prosperous and strong, revitalize the nation and make the people live better lives. Our objectives are to double the 2010 GDP and per capita income of urban and rural residents and complete the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects

by 2020. By mid-century, we aim to build China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious, and realize the Chinese Dream of the great renewal of the Chinese nation.

(Xi, 2013).

The essence of the Chinese dream and the great rejuvenation of the nation features patriotism, prosperity, economic development, innovation, and technology. Although a far-fetched and ambitious agenda, it is not surprising for Xi to have this rhetoric as his key narrative when we look at the future projects he took on. Xi added:

... China's history stretches over thousands of years, and patriotism has always been a stirring theme and a powerful force inspiring the Chinese of all ethnic groups to carry on and excel. No matter how long the shadow it may cast, the tree strikes deep roots in soil forever... This spirit unites the people and pools their strength, and it is the source for rejuvenating and strengthening the country. Patriotism has always been the inner force that binds the Chinese nation together...

(Xi, 2013).

As Xi put forward his agenda on the path to success, his leadership started turning into more of a single-man leadership rather than the collective leadership style the PRC had experienced in earlier stages. His assertiveness was officially recognized by the CCP on October 27, 2016 when he was granted with the “core leader” title. As Emre Demir, a journalist who focuses on the PRC's policies and resides in the country, suggests:

The period that I have been living in China, post-2012, with the 5th generation leaders, a process of heavy centralized leadership begins... There has been a shift from collective leadership towards a centralized leadership that has the leader at its core. You can measure this via media related issues as well as economic issues... I think the decade that I have been here has been a decade of heightened central leadership that is based on not even a cadre of leaders but a single leader-oriented consolidation of power.

(E. Demir, personal communication, February 14, 2020).

Xi, himself, signaled how he was planning on leading the country in 2013 during a joint interview by the press of the BRICS countries, by emphasizing the individuality of his title and workload single-handedly:

As the people have given me this job, I must always keep them in the highest place in my heart, bearing in mind their deep trust and the heavy responsibilities they have placed on me. In such a big, populous and complicated country as ours, we the leaders must have an in-depth knowledge of the national conditions and learn what the people think and what they want. We must act self-consciously and with the utmost care “as if we were treading on thin ice and standing on the edge of an abyss.

(Xi, 2013).

His commitment to reforms and technological advancement is also a policy point one should not ignore. Xi basically actively encourages the continuation of what known as “indigenous innovation” which was initiated by Jiang Zemin, and Deng’s continuous emphasis on technology in his reforms. Xi showed his opinion on the issue clearly by stating: “Only if core technologies are in our own hands can we truly hold the initiative in competition and development, ...only then can we fundamentally ensure our national economic security, defense security and other aspects of security. We cannot always dress up other people’s yesterdays as our own tomorrows” (Xi, 2014 as cited in Buckley, 2014). The efforts continued in 2018, as Xi stated that “as China strives for prosperity and rejuvenation, it needs to devote great energy to promoting science and technology to be a major world center for science and innovation” (Xinhua News Agency, 2018, May 28).

Economic efforts hold up the largest part of Xi’s hegemonic agenda, which is why the economic statecraft and policies are dealt in separate sections under this chapter. However, Xi’s vision on economic development has always been clear-cut since he came to power. Recently he stated that “Efforts should be made to leverage China's potential and role as the world's largest market, clarify the strategic direction of supply-side structural reform, and consolidate the basic trend of steady economic growth with a sound momentum in the long term” (Xinhua, 2020, May 23). In other words, as experienced by the business elites, in the

recent decade China's economic efforts and success are based on the significant rise of income for the middle class causes its domestic consumption to also rise. China has also been on path to buy out famous brands in Europe and other countries. China has moved away from its image that was "reverse-engineering" to a country who buys the brands of the products it has been assembling. It has been expanding its economy via these purchases as it has added them to its capital. This is how China has expanded its capital to such high levels and specifically for its investment capital. As Buğer adds "...a significant amount of money is currently in their "safe" and they are in constant search of investments based on a state of "now knowing what to do with such volume of money" (Ö. Buğer, personal communication, December 24, 2019).

The economic efforts are more crucial to understand China's rise than its military capacity. This is also why following an already-established path to analyze a hegemonic stance within the Chinese policies and decision-making needs new perspectives on hegemony itself. Unlike the war-oriented transitions, China's rhetoric of peaceful rise and economic development everywhere pushes us to shift our focus on the realpolitik agenda to the economic dimension. Specifically, before Xi, President Hu Jintao and the Premier Wen Jiabao were more devoted on military spending for a while there. In 2013, the leaders at the time made a pledge to increase military spending by 10.7 percent even during the weakest projections for China's economic growth (Wan, 2013). Xi's handling of the military power is quite different. Higher military spending is once again a tool for Xi to consolidate his own legitimacy and power by strengthening personal ties with China's generals. Similarly, in 2015, the military parade was a demonstration of his rigid position both to domestic and foreign audiences (Lam, 2016:414). As this example reveals, unlike traditional hegemonic examples of modern history, China and its leader Xi does not follow a realist agenda. Having a military that is ready to fight the world is not in Xi's agenda but having an economy and a web of dependence to employ in times of political concessions is what Xi has been building. In many ways, China's economy is Xi's very own army and he is the "core leader" of such power officially since 2016 (Buckley, 2016).

The heterogeneous progress of Xi's increased strength and emphasis on a globally assertive China became evident in post-2016 period, as stated earlier in this chapter. At the end of his first five-year term in 2017, Xi said that "he would put China on a sounder economic footing by containing financial risks, encouraging innovation and increasing consumer spending" and in the same speech he described China as a "great power" or a "strong power" twenty-six times, which the New York Times depicted as a "clear departure from the days when leaders in Beijing depicted their country as a poor, modest player abroad" (Buckley and Bradsher, 2017). Xi also said that the country "had entered a new era under his stewardship" (Buckley & Bradsher, 2017).

I discuss here that Xi's pragmatic, ambitious and brand-making oriented domestic vision writ large is China's global outlook. What Deng advocated years ago by feeling the stones while crossing a river, Xi has been not only feeling the stones himself, but also watching how others in global order have been crossing the river and improvising accordingly. In other words, knowing what could go wrong and taking necessary precautions according to the changing times, the ability to adapt are all that make Xi's leadership different from his predecessors. On April 7, 2013, as a keynote speaker at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference, Xi outlined his vision for the global outlook and order:

... Nothing in the world remains constant, and, as a Chinese saying goes, "A wise man changes his way as circumstances change; a knowledgeable person alters his means as times evolve." We should abandon our outdated mindsets, break away from the old confines that fetter development, and unleash all potentials for development. We should redouble our efforts to shift the growth model and adjust the economic structure, raise the quality of development and improve the quality of life. We should steadily reform the international economic and financial systems, improve global governance mechanisms, and ensure sound and stable global economic growth.

(Xi, 2013).

In addition to show how the feeling stones translate to Xi's pragmatism, he mentions "the nail analogy" in a speech at the second meeting of the Second Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee in 2013:

We have already got in our hands a good blueprint. What we should do is to follow it through to the end and make it a success. In this regard, we need to have a “nail” spirit. When we use a hammer to drive in a nail, a single knock often may not be enough; we must keep knocking until it is well in place. Then we can proceed to knock the next one and continue driving in nails till the job is completely done. If we knock here and there without focusing on the nail, we may end up squandering our efforts altogether...

(Xi, 2013).

It was important to have an in-depth analysis of Xi’s style of leadership and vision, considering the personalistic style of one-man leaderships in many parts of the world today, which has an impact on the global order and decision-making mechanisms. As suggested, Xi’s emphasis on image, reputation and effective economic development give much of the needed insights on the rise of China. Considering Xi’s ambitions over the course of seven years, I argue the “mega-strategy” which China implements today on all of its global affairs is its main gateway to its hegemonic standpoint.

3.4. *China under BRICS - or over?*

In this section, I show the readiness and willingness of the PRC to take the global hegemonic stance. In other words, I argue that in the institutions of global governance, China once again follows a hegemonic approach based on its economic and financial capacities and usage of a responsible narrative to the global community, especially in times of a declining US presence. I claim that the BRICS’ formation has been a rite of passage for China to develop its South-South connections, while the real focus should be on its over-ruling of the formation itself, and by doing so how it gained a jump-start on its global governance vision. I will also show the official narrative of China, its “new diplomacy”, which depicts itself as the leader of peaceful and inclusive development as well as win-win cooperation all over the world.

It was back in 2009 when the previously identified “BRIC” countries met in Russia for their first formal meeting. In 2010, the second meeting was held in Brazil and in the same year the G20 meeting in Seoul, South Africa asked to join the formation officially. The BRICS

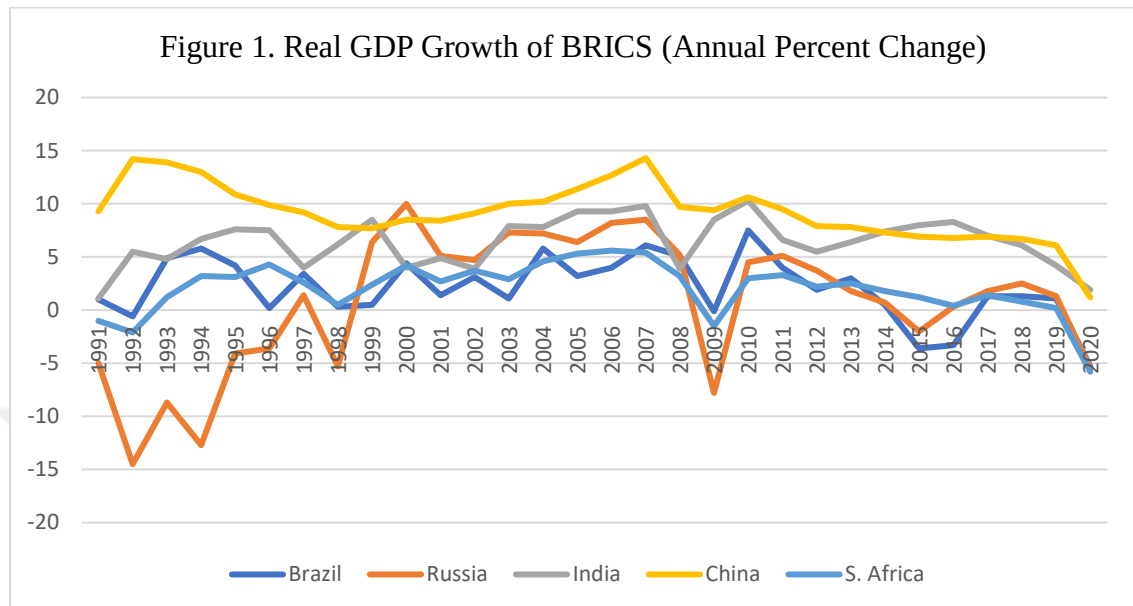
formation was one of the alliances that caught the world's attention with much curiosity on the future of the developing Global South (Cui, 2013). In 2011, the five countries issued the "*Sanya Declaration*" to announce the world that the countries had full consensus on consolidating on-going cooperation projects in addition to launching new ones while creating an action plan for the near future (2013:52). The sixth BRICS Summit in 2013 held a greater importance, when the theme was establishing and strengthening ties with African countries. More outstandingly, BRICS leaders decided to establish the BRICS Development Bank during the same meeting, which came with greater promises to revolutionize global development finance of the Global South (Cui, 2013; Andreoni, 2019). Six years after its establishment, things have not been working the way the BRICS countries had promised or envisioned. It is important to understand the underlying forces within BRICS briefly before coming to the conclusion that the China-led BRICS did not achieve the goals it envisioned because of the simple fact that China delivered the promises on an individual level through its global governance efforts.

The starting point of the BRICS mechanism can be attributed to the economic strength of each of the five countries and how their similar status in the international system at the time of its establishment. They had similar opinions about the Global North and the development of economic globalization as each of these countries heavily benefited from it. When we look at their weight of the global economy, BRICS countries jumped from accounting for 6 percent of the global economy in the 1970s to accounting 18 percent in 2010 (Cai, 2013:53). The story is similar for the percentile of BRICS' international trade between 2000 and 2010. Brazil's agriculture and mining, China's manufacturing industry, India's software industry, Russia's energy industry, and the South Africa's mining industry can be considered as the key industries for all five of these newly industrialized countries (2013:53). The five countries all had common interests in international affairs by promoting the UN Millennium Development Goals, fighting against global poverty and opposing trade protectionism while having interests in reforming global economic governance via its institutions (Cai, 2013). If there was consensus on the big ambitions and willingness to contribute, then why does the formation not hold a much larger role on multilateralism? I argue that the answer is hidden in the Chinese dominance.

China, as the largest economy and the rising power within the establishment, has been the largest supporter of the BRICS mechanism. Chinese leaders have always attentively participated in the summits and with Xi's own agenda of the global win-win cooperation, BRICS has been a useful tool to actualize the goals of the Xi's new diplomacy. As Cai (2013) rightfully puts it: "China has its ideal of building a harmonious world; the comments show that strengthening partnerships with other BRICs countries, and jointly promoting lasting peace and common prosperity will help China realize such a dream" (Cai, 2013:55). It does not help BRICS but China to realize its own dreams of peaceful development, even though all five countries held the same ideals and visions. In other words, BRICS is the means, not an end for China: a mechanism that allows to get a better sense of the other major rising powers of the global system, while strengthening and creating further ties of dependencies. BRICS is the translation of the new Chinese diplomatic stance that had its roots in the post-Cold War era for a revision of the international system for moving away from a unipolar world, towards establishment of a new world order.

In the last seven years, mainly with Xi's China, BRICS as a mechanism has been a good source of outlook for changing the traditional global order in a broad-minded fashion that serves the diplomatic interests of China. China's contemporary vision is not to revolutionize the global governance but to reform it and thus, BRICS mechanism works in favor of strengthening multilateral cooperation with emerging regional powers, with China being the leader by its economic capabilities and the willingness for shouldering international responsibilities. For instance, it was China who proposed the establishment of the BRICS Development Bank with an increase of \$20 billion in foreign aid in 2013 (Cai, 2013:57). The Silk Road Fund and the AIIB were established only after two years of the promise of the BRICS Development Bank for initially aiming the same thing but with the difference of China's sole leadership. The major difference within BRICS is due to that fact that the only country amongst the five who wishes to have a global leadership status with a hegemonic agenda is China. Not only the willingness but also having the capabilities to forge such an agenda inevitably puts China in a leadership position within BRICS and brings a hierarchy to the establishment. It is fair to suggest that even when we only consider the economic

initiatives taken by China in the last five years or the differences in the GDP, China is ought to dominate the BRICS and further use it for its own global agenda.



Data Source: IMF, 2020.

Although it appears to be slight contestation with India's growth rates due to slowing down to single-digit percentages of China in recent years, as part of the mega-strategy projects like the BRI, China exudes more potential than the other BRICS countries. In other understand this potential further, it is essential to discuss the global governance-oriented policies and vision of Xi's China:

“So, I guess that is how I see China's rise in the global order: not like a monolithic push for an alternative order but a process with its continuities and changes and variations” (C. Ergenç, personal communication, December 17, 2019). It is fair to suggest that changes and variations are also what Xi considers throughout its making of his global vision. In international institutions such as the UN, WTO, G20 and during its interactions under the BRICS formation, there are evidence that shows China's ambitious global agenda. One thing to note here is that China and Xi do not wish to reform the existing neo-liberal institutions but they have been carefully maneuvering their way around them in ways to accommodate the Chinese dream on global sphere. Ergenç gives a very concrete example:

One thing that is interesting in this possessive understanding of China's rise is recently China's takeover, and of course I am using this word "takeover" very loosely, of the UNHRC and we are at the beginning of a long process so if China insists on doing that it might actually be able to change the formal liberal institutionalist international or transnational normative regime of human rights...So, China now in the last ten years or so has been trying successfully to play a larger role in IOs and since the US, especially in the Trump era, withdraws from these IOs in terms of its financial contributions.

(C. Ergenç, personal communication, December 17, 2019).

Xi Jinping also told the UN that China would pledge \$2 billion as an initial investment for development aid to the world's poorest countries. He added that China would increase its funding to \$12 billion over the next 15 years to "help the UN reach a goal of eliminating extreme poverty by 2030" (Perlez, 2015). In addition, he mentioned that China would grant "relief of debts" owed by the least developed countries, even though he did not give a figure for the debt at the time (Perlez, 2015).

In 2016, China offered a warm welcome to the UN's newly elected Secretary-General Guterres and made it clear that it wanted a greater role in the UN at a time when Donald Trump was elected to the White House. The New York Times at the time wrote: "China supported Mr. Guterres in his campaign for secretary general, and President Xi Jinping, who met with him in Beijing on Monday, hailed the United Nations' work and noted China's support for the Paris Agreement on climate change. Mr. Trump has suggested that he will withdraw the United States from the accord" (Perlez, 2016). Xi also showed China's fondness of the UN by calling it "the most universal, representative and authoritative intergovernmental international organization" (Perlez, 2016).

It is also worth noting that China has donated \$14 million in humanitarian aid for solving the civil unrest in Syria. This raises questions as the amount donated by China is only 0.1 percent of the \$14 billion donated by countries and organizations around the world. On that note, China yield the issue of migrant crisis to the hands of the EU and the UN due to ideological differences. According to Chinese scholars of international relations, in the countries who

faced the migrant crisis and civil unrest, the main reason were a) the threat to stable authoritarian rule and b) the aim of the US and Europe to carry out regime change. On official terms, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs made the following statement on the issue in 2015: “Appropriately settling the immigration issue is related to the economic development, social stability, and integration process in Europe...Striking a blow against illegal immigration activities and resolving humanitarian crises is the common wish of international society” (Tatlow, 2015). This was read as China’s disinterest in the issues that do not serve its direct interests. However, one can easily turn this argument around by suggesting that the China might have not engaged with the migrant crisis, but the investments made to the European countries through BRI served as a bigger tool of engagement with the region. In Xi’s analogy, if China saw “the nail” was lose on one side, it simply found another part to hammer while not damaging “the wood” itself.

Moving onto the financial institutions, when we analyze what has been said throughout the G20 Summit Meetings, Xi did not refrain from putting forward his agenda to guide the world’s economies towards Chinese way of handling business. In 2013 during the St. Petersburg meeting he strongly advised:

G20 members have a minimum duty of keeping their own house in order and also need to build a closer partnership to shore up the world economy. G20 members should jointly maintain and promote the openness of the world economy and oppose all forms of trade protectionism. G20 members should bolster a free, open and non-discriminatory multilateral trade system and try to improve global investment rules.

(Xinhua, 2018).

In 2015, he once again emphasized the importance of openness and free trade and the rejection of protectionism:

G20 economies should innovate their economic development patterns. More vitality should be brought into the economy through structural reforms in finance, investment, trade and other fields. G20 members should build an open global economy and make concerted efforts in resisting trade and investment protectionism and safeguarding multilateral trade systems. G20 members should improve global economic governance to strive for a fair, just, inclusive, and orderly international financial system.

(Xinhua, 2018)

In 2016 when the Summit was held in Hangzhou, China, the message was the same:

G20 members should innovate their growth patterns and explore new growth engines. G20 members should improve global economic governance and mechanism guarantee as well. G20 members should build an open world economy and continue to promote the liberalization and facilitation of trade and investment.

(Xinhua, 2018).

In 2017, the tone shifted from “should” to “must” by the following statement made by Xi: “As the world's major economies, we should and must lead the way, support the multilateral trading system, observe the jointly established rules and, through consultation, seek all-win solutions to common challenges we face” (Xinhua, 2018). On the 13th Summit of the Group of G20 in 2018, Xi had many insightful remarks on solutions to openness and multilateralism in the global economy and governance by also noting how China was able to lift millions out of poverty by embracing the concept of an open economy and free trade (Yuanlei, Jun & Shemirani, 2018). Xi’s keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the first China International Import Expo (CIIE) in 2018 also showed the country’s commitment to further opening. The experts assessed his speech as “China is committed to further opening-up, increasing areas for foreign investment and providing the world's largest market for exporters over the world. On the other end, China's economy is not like a lake or pond, where local storms can disturb it, but like an ocean, too vast to be affected,” (Xie, 2018).

Similarly, in the 2018 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting, “Xi expressed his confidence in China's economy by recalling the achievements China had made in the 40 years of reform and opening-up, adding that China would take a more responsible approach, be more open and inclusive, and strive to achieve higher quality of growth” (Xia, 2018). The constant reminders for a better global governance and economic cooperation also pushed China to search for its own novel ways of global interaction and institutionalization (F. Oktay, personal communication, May 13, 2020).

One of the most important evidence on the is the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2015. At the time The New York Times published the headline of “China Creates a World Bank of Its Own, and the U.S. Balks”. The US reaction at the time to AIIB was full of anxieties that “China will use the bank to set the global economic agenda on

its own terms” (Perlez, 2015). However, the anxieties did not translate to the demise of the bank but in fact, in the same year the US’ ally countries including Britain, Germany, Australia and South Korea altogether 57 countries have joined it (Perlez, 2015). A general evaluation of the China’s process is summarized by Kolbaşı as follows: “In China's general standpoint, it is not only a country that is trying to be powerful in particular areas. China is a country that wishes to become stronger and have a say in all areas. Especially after 2012, it hints this with its most prominent example: Belt and Road Initiative” (M. Kolbaşı, personal communication, December 18, 2019).

Not only through BRI, but China has been showing its willingness to lead the way in global governance and economy. Mehmet Özgün Arman from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs assessed China’s rise in the following way: “China, in my opinion, was looked like a serious regional power between the years of 2000 and 2010. After 2014-2015, within the BRICS formation as well as beyond, with its increasing infrastructure investments and capital investments all over the world became a global power as of today” (M.Ö. Arman, personal communication, January 7, 2020).

In another interview conducted with the Turkey – Asia Pacific Business Council Coordinator under the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEİK), Selma Bardakçı also emphasized the ways China have performed its goals through the international organizations

China is a power that challenges the existing system. It is not a power that bows down to the system, but it tries to revise it... How does China do it? First, through the international institutions...as China has never been a country that was completely isolated, protectionist or closed bordered but on the contrary, a country that made use of globalization the most. However, it wanted a China-centered globalization process. It draws a vision while trying to achieve such process...It is active in international institutions (WTO, WHO, UN) as it wishes to take over budget and staff control... Second, China has been creating its own institutions such as AIIB, Silk Road Fund...It increases its role in international institutions such as IMF while also establishing its own institutions.

(S. Bardakçı, personal communication, May 21, 2020).

What all these have in common is the aspect of economy and economic development. I have emphasized the place of economy for Chinese policies both on domestic dimensions as well

as global policymaking multiple times throughout this thesis so far, that is why in the next section I lay down the major initiatives and policies under China's economic statecraft.

3.5. *Chinese Economic Statecraft*

I will show here the tools and the unique usage of economic statecraft by China to implement its hegemonic agenda via economic foreign policy. I cover the State-Owned Enterprises' (SOEs) importance in relation to the unique structure of Chinese authorities and its business elite. The usage of outward foreign direct investments and the utilization of the lending are what make the Chinese way of doing business so effective and that is why it is important to pay attention to Chinese economic statecraft's characteristics. For this purpose, this section analyzes the Belt and Road Initiative in exclusive detail and length as I consider the BRI to be one of, if not the most, prominent evidence of Chinese hegemonic efforts in the global system.

Chinese economic statecraft first came by the need of internationalizing China and its economy. China's economic integration, moving from a planned economy to a market-oriented one, had a significant impact on world economy as we can see by looking at where it stands today. The process of China's internationalization has started in the late 1970s with Deng Xiaoping, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Deng opened the country to the rest of the world and the interactions with the West came with the improvement of China engaging with the global economy more through external and internal changes. Theoretically, the process has explained by looking the inward changes or the external influences of the globalization coming towards the 1990s. Zweig (2002) is one of the authors who suggested that the process of China's opening up to the outside world was a combination of both external opportunities as well as internal policy initiatives (2002:17). His hypothesis is built upon "the role of external forces, bureaucratic agents, domestic structure, and a feedback loop based on the distributional consequences of internationalization" (Zweig, 2002:18). Global markets are seen as the main forces to knock down barriers of regulatory protectionist policies in countries like China, and Zweig (2002) sees the collision of the international economic forces with the interests of the internal bureaucratic elite and agents as the main reason for China's

internationalization. There have been many examples of such observations as it was discussed by the examples given in the previous section.

On the international part, which is the focal point, the relative cheap value of China's labor led to internationalization in its countryside and opened rural China to exports and FDI, while the universities overseas started getting Chinese students and scholars with fellowships and programs (Zweig, 2002:261). In addition, China's increased dependence on exports and FDI in the 90s ultimately gave way to its internationalization while its wish to enter the World Trade Organization came with a series of deregulatory policy implementations and investment liberalization which China needed at the time (2002:262). The externalities were not enough to explain since on the inside, "central elites, state bureaucrats, and societal interests (often categorized as domestic structures) had to play a clear role in determining the process of deregulation and the pace, depth, and geographic spread of China's internationalization" (Zweig, 2002:263).

The story has changed greatly with Xi's assertive one-man leadership: as he weeds out all the bureaucratic obstacles of collective leadership, China spends most of its capital for outward foreign direct investment (OFDI), lending to developing countries in need as well as creating economic ties with the advanced economies of the Global North. This is read as a clear sign of the kind of economic power China exudes today by the business elites themselves:

...Right now, a project of a group or a country that wishes to make investments usually is funded China. China today became a country that makes projects with its own money or credits in those strategic countries, this can be a country like Turkey, and in those strategic sectors. This shows the power it holds in world trade. China can pave the way for any project it wants and makes any strategic decision it wishes in those countries. They are really after having a say in serious ways. Thus, it looks like the position China has today is the highest peak in world trade.

(Ö. Buğer, personal communication, December 24, 2019).

This also does not go unnoticed by the officials of the foreign service departments:

Let me put it this way; there is already existing observation by all experts, academics or anyone who works in the field of economy for a rise. Generally, we are talking about a

country who is growing economically and militarily in its major industrial zones, such as Shanghai, Hong Kong or relatively Guangzhou, holding a major part of world trade, and exporting by very large numbers. To sum up, we are talking about a country who is going to become the number one major power.

(M.Ö. Arman, personal communication, January 7, 2020).

Another focal point to grasp the Chinese economic statecraft and its efficiency for the global economic ties is the unique relationship between the State and the financial actors. As China mostly utilizes its state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to create its global financial ties, Chinese economic statecraft is unique as compared to the traditional Western notion of economic statecraft. The Chinese economic statecraft connects the economy directly to the foreign policy goals. In order to understand the Chinese economic statecraft, William Norris (2016) highlights the need to look at how the state controls and manipulates economic interaction or in other words, how the state controls the commercial actors in such way that through their economic interaction between one another the state achieves its strategic foreign policy goals in the international system. Business-government dynamics are looked through a model which involves five independent variables consisting of market structure, balance of relative resources, nature of the reporting relationship, intrinsic goal compatibility (between economic actors and state), and the unity of state. Last one is the only state-related variable in Norris' model as he places most of his focus on either the economic actors or the relational variables (2016:28).

By utilizing this model, Norris (2016) offers an analytical blueprint for studying the Chinese economic statecraft by suggesting two crucial concepts as the lesson learnt from all the cases of the Chinese business-government interactions. Firstly, economic statecraft should be understood in security externalities in the sense that the commercial actors can engage in certain economic activities that can lead to strategically important consequences for state security. Thus, the state can actively manipulate the interaction for the sake of its security. In this way, even when considering security issues, if the state tries to control the commercial sphere, it then exercises economic statecraft according to Norris (2016). Secondly, for effective economic statecraft, Norris (2016) argues that states must deal with multiple

challenges relations to business-government cooperation. The challenges depend on the independent variables mentioned earlier. The five factors then shape whether the state will successfully utilize control over the business and hence, achieve efficient economic statecraft internationally (2016:30).

Thus, it can be understood that what makes Chinese economic statecraft different from the traditional economic sanction-oriented Western economic statecraft is its unitary form and the control it has over the country's commercial actors. In addition to that, the new Chinese economic statecraft ideologically places more emphasis on the traditional Marxist ideology to support the Party legitimacy, while being flexible enough to incorporate mercantilist, liberal policies to keep its international attachment intact (Xiaotong & Keith, 2017). In addition to that, the party and state pragmatism both create a unique way for China to incorporate into the global system further despite ideological nuances this process may contain. The control over the firms and the creation of state-led or state-run enterprises in China can be considered as its tool to learn more about the global economic system over the year. As Görmez suggests: "Party's pragmatism is one that is legendary. In terms of globalization, if it [the CCP] uses the knowledge it has accumulated about global governance through the Chinese firms in a pragmatic way for creating capacities, then there can be a chance there" (Y. Görmez, personal communication, December 25, 2019).

The importance of state-control over the economy and commerce, is emphasized by the experts not only on its uniqueness on pragmatism but also how it works as a safety belt for the Chinese SOEs. As much as the lending provides a serious leverage for China on global sphere, it also brings risks via this ambitious economic statecraft. "...Banks are in trouble due to unpaid loans; however, they continue to keep up as long as the state interferes and saves them" (M. Ögütçü, personal communication, March 12, 2020).

At the end of the day, the Chinese state is willing to provide as much needed assistance as possible to keep these SOEs alive and running. They are a web of Chinese influence all around the globe and the last thing China wants is to lose them. In such fashion, it shows

great effort as Bardakçı neatly analyzes these efforts as follows: “...China completely bases its foreign policy philosophy and vision on geo-economics. Thus, it improves its political foreign policy perspective based on the economic relations it has built with other countries rather than solely improving its political ties” (S. Bardakçı, personal communication, May 21, 2020).

Another aspect that holds some degree of importance as part of its economic statecraft is the question of the internationalization of the Chinese currency Renminbi (RMB). As much as there has been accusations against China for artificially devaluating its currency over the years of its development, what is important for a hegemonic standpoint is the level of internationalization (Bradsher, 2015). China has not been necessarily successful in achieving that compared to the US Dollar, until very recently through the BRI. It is necessary to focus on the internationalization of the Chinese currency through the BRI context since the most recent and important developments on the RMB has started to take place after 2016. The Chinese RMB was added to the list of IMF’s ‘Special Drawing Rights’ currencies, which historically involved the US Dollar, Euro, the British Pound and the Japanese Yen (Fung, Aminian, Fu & Kornhohen, 2018:2). This was a sign of how the Chinese currency started gaining an official international value.

Aside from promoting the RMB’s role as a settlement currency China has, since December 2008, signed six currency swap agreements worth a total of 650 billion yuan (\$95 billion) with Indonesia, South Korea, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Belarus, and Argentina. Prior to this—more specifically by the end of 2008—China had concluded \$230 billion currency swap arrangements with diverse ASEAN member states.

(Blanchard, 2011:45).

Even though there has been significant progress on the usage of the RMB in international trade, Fung et al. (2018), argues that there are still problems and complications about the internationalization of the currency. First issue is related to the decreasing capital due to outflows between 2014 and 2016, which were stemming from the second problem that is the slow economic growth and the artificial depreciation or the pressure to devalue the RMB. Finally, the recent trade wars between China and the US seems to be seen as the third

problem, which can potentially alter the pace of the internationalization of the RMB today and in the near future (Fung et al., 2018:3). Even so, it is important to keep in mind that China currently has more than \$3 trillion in its foreign exchange reserves in addition to a substantial and growing GDP despite the recent slowdown. Its inflation levels have been low in recent years also (Reuters, 2020; Dobson and Masson, 2009).

Dobson and Masson finalized their assessment of the possibility of RMB becoming a global currency in 2009 as follows:

Given the RMB's starting point, even if the major reforms listed above were accomplished, decades will likely pass before the currency assumes the multifaceted role of an international currency that includes widespread use in trade invoicing, an important place in other countries' foreign exchange reserves, and use as major vehicle for foreign exchange transactions. And geopolitical influences should not be ignored: limiting the attractiveness of the RMB as a store of value internationally (e.g., in foreign exchange reserves) would be the fact that China was a one-party state with the economy under the control of the Communist Party. Doubts as to whether China's political regime can ever be viewed as completely market-friendly are likely to dampen prospects for the RMB...

(Dobson and Masson, 2009:134).

This argument highlights the political hinderances as the reason why the RMB is not likely to become a global currency. On the other hand, a decade has passed, and China now successfully utilizes a style of economic statecraft to pass through the ideological differences with its partner countries. Meaning, the issues that could dampen the prospects of the RMB are no longer valid. Two main tools for this reality are analyzed in the following two sections.

3.5.1. A Never-Ending Tale: Chinese Foreign Direct Investment

China has been offering medium and long-term loans as well as investment through outward foreign direct investment (FDI or OFDI) since its Ministry of Finance provided a special fund for subsidies to support the State Owned Enterprises (SOEs)' overseas investments for the first time in 2005 (Dobson and Masson, 2009:128). The investments vary from regions to sectors, and only in 2006 the stock of the Chinese FDI assets abroad amounted to

approximately \$80 billion and securities and other investments abroad each totaled more than \$200 billion (2009:128). Investment has been the main driver of China's robust growth for many years and such transnational investments are seen as the main tool for its active bargaining on agenda-specific priorities and policy needs (Öniş & Kutlay, 2019:3; OECD Report Overview, 2019:18).

In 2018, China announced that it was setting up a new agency for international development and coordination for integrating responsibilities of its ministries of Commerce and Foreign Affairs under the BRI's efforts to increase Chinese lending for infrastructure development around the world (Denyer, 2018, para. 1). Listing all Chinese loans, if empirically possible, is beyond the scope of this thesis, but regionally speaking, China has been focusing on providing commercial and infrastructure lending mainly to African, Gulf and other developing Asian countries and also recently to Europe and East Mediterranean through the BRI.

As one of the most evident cases, when we consider the OFDI to Africa, China sent more than \$14 billion between the years of 2010 and 2012 only under foreign aid, which remains lacking as compared to the U.S. official development assistance between 2000 and 2014 that reached \$366 billion. However, China closed that gap with a flow of \$216 billion through its commercial and non-concessional lending, which is what makes the Chinese OFDI vital to understand in this context (Denyer, 2018). China's OFDI has been spreading across more than 138 countries, and studies show that these investments have a significant impact on host countries' economies via massive job creation, ample capital through the entry into the Chinese market; they also proved to be boosting exports with medium or low levels of technological content (Shahriar, Kea & Qian, 2019).

When looked through the statistics from the *Statistical Bulletin of China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment*, exports of the foreign Chinese enterprises increased rapidly and the flow of non-financial OFDI amounted to 47.8\$ billion in 2015 (MOFCOM, 2015 as cited in Wang, Liu and Su, 2017). It is discussed that the Chinese OFDI has three key reasons for such

emphasis and volume through the years of its development. These are grouped under seeking resources and strategic purchase of assets such as advanced technology, going after established brand names and advanced distribution networks (Wang, 2012:149). Similarly, another reason is the pursuit of lower production costs in other less developed countries as the labor is no longer that cheap in China either (2012:150).

On the issue of where the Chinese OFDI is going, Wang (2012) finds in the official data provided by Chinese authorities that between 2003 and 2009, “78.26 per cent of the country’s ODI flow went to Hong Kong, the Cayman Islands and the British Virgin Islands. The largest category of investment during the same period, accounting for 32.26 per cent, was commercial services” (156). In addition, before the announcement of the BRI (previously known as OBOR), the impact of the Chinese FDI has already been discussed by many scholars, but not necessarily considered as a “Chinese” exceptionality in its primitive stages.

In its earliest stages, the Chinese FDI was seen primarily for seeking new markets, natural resources, technology, management skills, know-how and capital (Chen and Lin, 2018:9). First group of analyses showed that Chinese OFDI is usually involved in countries that have a larger market and richer resources and close cultural proximity to China. In addition, it is recently argued that a country’s inward FDI stock within China is positively linked with China’s OFDI to that country. Overall, the Chinese OFDI looks for similar features as other investor countries when conducting business, which are under two major aims: finding larger markets and richer resource areas. However, one crucial difference that is observed over the years on the Chinese OFDI is that Chinese firms (mainly SOEs) are more willing to invest in risky environments, including places with relative political instability (i.e. Iran, African countries and so on). Investing abroad allows the Chinese firms to be more productive and also grow faster, according to the 2018 World Bank Report (Chen and Lin, 2018:10).

There is a solid consensus on OFDIs being a tool of the Chinese mega-strategy and the numbers have accelerated faster after the BRI. One thought-provoking finding that came out of the interviews conducted for this thesis was the emphasis on China’s “not-so-formal” way

of providing these investments. It became evident that China has been engaging with other parties on a positive, benign, complementary basis. In other words, the official Chinese stance on the OFDIs and other paths of economic engagements follow semi-institutionalized, less pervasive, and “loose” terms. Dr. Kadir Temiz comments on the distinctiveness of the Chinese OFDI and other outer financial investment tools as follows:

They created AIIB, Silk Road Fund...they have started embodying these more and more, but they haven't institutionalized them in an interesting way...Why does China usually sign "memorandum of understanding" and not institutionalize these? It goes and verbally records these by bilateral relations and agreements...I guess we can consider this to be a strategy of China.

(K. Temiz, personal communication, February 7, 2020).

Similarly, Selma Bardakçı provided us with an outlook by emphasizing the ways in which China responds to the needs of developing nations and perhaps grant these investments as well as its loans as an alternative to the Western financial institutions' rigid conditionality:

China does not have law-based principles on its commercial relations, and it has been criticized because of it but no one calls for China in based on coercive measures. So, people have needs and China answers to those needs. China puts forward a statement of its own willpower and says: "in global leadership, I am the strongest actor after the US and I currently surpassed the US in multiple areas.

(S. Bardakçı, personal communication, May 21, 2020).

Discussions on the Chinese investments almost always lead to the lending and infrastructure building in other countries and third parties. Hence, the weight of the Belt and Road Initiative has to be tackled in order to get a step closer of the hegemonic investigation into the question: “how does China do it?”

3.5.2. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

It has already been seven years since the announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative (previously known as One Belt, One Road), the mega strategy of Xi Jinping, and ever since the initial announcement back in Kazakhstan, the mega-project has become one of the hot topics of global political discussions. Since its announcement, the literature tried to make sense out of this immensely ambitious chain of policies and strategies, while some started looking at particular parts or cases (Fung et al., 2018; Guo & Fidan, 2018; Hillman, 2018; Pop, 2016; He, 2018; Yu, 2018; Umbach, 2018...) while others tried to achieve a holistic approach by focusing on the new Chinese economic statecraft through the BRI (Aoyama, 2016; Ferdinand, 2016; Kuo & Kommenda, 2018; Ploberger, 2017; Clarke, 2018...).

There has been mostly emphasis on the areas of objectives, aims, strengths and challenges of the BRI, geopolitical implications for different regions or countries as well as the skeptics in the Western literature questioning the realpolitik goals behind this mega-project of China (Clarke, 2018; Hillman, 2018; Ploberger, 2017). Another issue is that most of the time, the literature on the BRI has pointed out the international goals and objectives of China while paying not much attention to internal processes on how the BRI came to life nor how it is legitimized insight for a such grand-scale project. Even when the skeptics highlight the debt-trap and the similarity of the initiative to the US Marshall Plan, there is often a common emphasis on the global or external goals of China aiming at global and/or regional leadership. Let us take a closer look at how China utilized BRI and under which goals and aims it wished to put the project into action:

Its Scope & Aims

BRI, in my opinion, is the China's Western domestic development plan that went abroad basically, but again, having said that, once BRI is out of the china's borders then it has, of course, certain homogenizing affects like when China signs its bilateral agreements with the BRI countries of course it comes with certain expectations and regulations... So, it (BRI) is not a formal regionalization but even this network of bilateral agreements with China as the hub, ..., creates homogenization through policy diffusion and communizing of investment and development patterns.

(Dr. Ergenç, personal communication, December 17, 2019).

As a matter of fact, this explanation summarizes the BRI story, but diving into the scope of the BRI has multiple dimensions. There are multiple ways one can explain the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) based on numbers, statistics, theoretical discussions on Chinese economic statecraft as well as from different perspectives due to the fact that BRI has received immense attention in the recent literature ranging from Sinologists to IPE scholars. The Initiative involves mainly the revitalization of the Ancient Silk Road and its maritime extension. Silk Road and Economic Belt links China to Central and South Asia and onward to Europe, while the Maritime Silk Road links China to Southeast Asia, the Gulf Countries, North Africa and again onto Europe (The World Bank, 2018). Overall, it has six major routes on the land with a maritime adjacent (Aoyama, 2016). However, as the project started expanding and new partners involved, the stops of the belt and the road seems to be not so precise to map out at this point. It is no longer perceived as a project of roads and maps but in fact, a global vision the PRC implementing what it has been doing for years under an umbrella.

One important point that can be said about the route and different stops of the project is its geopolitical implications. For instance, as the route goes through the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the already-ongoing issue of the Muslim Uyghur Turks in the region has been escalated by the Party Secretary Chen Quanguo and his brand new “Strike Hard Campaign” to increase the security of the region due to its connection as a crucial part of the BRI (Wang, 2018). In another example for geopolitical issues, the six corridors involve both the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the BCIM (Bangladesh - China - India - Myanmar) Economic Corridor which eventually goes through the highly political sensitive region of Kashmir* (Pop, 2016; Clarke, 2018). Despite these and other issues, the initiative did not stop its ambitious agenda and in fact Xi Jinping himself has been increasing its scope day by day.

The overall strategy behind the initiative entails development of infrastructure along the Belt, creation of a large economic market by strengthening relations between China and the rest of the world that has or has not felt the Chinese influence. The BRI includes trade deals, transportation agreements and other soft power efforts such as education or cultural exchanges (Hillman, 2018). It is possible to say the BRI does not seem to have any physical

limitations, by looking at the point where we are at today: more than 70 countries have already joined and the project is expected to stretch from East Asia to East Africa as well as Central Europe, and to be completed by 2049 (Hillman, 2018). It is necessary to engage in the following discussion on the different views of the objectives and aims of the initiative as it is explained by the Beijing authorities vs. the English-language literature to get a more comprehensive outlook.

The official Action Plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, which was published in 2015 by the State Council of PRC, entails a highly positive outlook on the initiative. According to the Plan, the initiative aims to promote free flow of economic goods, an overall integration of markets, to create an open, inclusive and more importantly balanced regional cooperation that would benefit all participants, while establishing and strengthening partnerships among countries along the Belt and Road. In addition to these, the initiative also emphasizes diverse sustainable development needs of each country along the process (The State Council of the PRC, 2015; Aoyama, 2016:5). There have been many different views on the BRI, but at the same time, the experts on the issue focus mostly on how China utilizes it for increasing its global position and maintaining it: “China is trying to dominate the world's most important markets: Europe, Africa, and Australia. As a production hub, it had provided products to these places and now it is creating a strategy for bringing and working its hubs closer to where the markets are. Therefore, BRI is a project that wishes to bring China closer to the market” (M. Kolbaşı, personal communication, December 18, 2019).

There are also the readings of the BRI that gives hints to China's willingness for a hegemonic positioning based on thinking of world's problems and not completely being China-advantage oriented. “...The biggest problems in the countries stem from income inequalities, the income being stuck in the upper class and not distributed within the other classes. I think China interprets this as well...in other words, a super-rich China in a super poor world does not make sense either” (M. Kolbaşı, personal communication, December 18, 2019).

BRI is a strategy that overall has more than a hundred countries involved and spreads to a very large geography in hopes to bring more creativity, strengthening the ties through infrastructure-based investments and development efforts according to China. It is considered more than just a project by experts and usually identified as "...a goal that is put forward on a largescale frame" (Arman, personal communication, Jan 7, 2020).

There are also reading on the BRI based on a grand strategy which China has been building directly linked to its survival. A question is often raised as to why China has been acting in such way? It is argued that China was compelled to create such a grand strategy due to its rapid growth and development. The nature of the BRI shows this reality. It is also discussed that all the investments and projects that are being done through BRI are stuff that China has been doing over the past decade. In other words, BRI is read as a "new packaging" to a series of policies that was already existent in China's global rise and development (Temiz, February 7, 2020).

Speaking of the investments and the linkage between BRI and the Chinese OFDI, The World Bank Report of 2018 "*Foreign Investment across the Belt and Road*" suggests that out of all BRI participant countries, East Asia and Pacific region is the main FDI recipient and the main driver of FDI outflows, while Europe and Central Asia comes in 2nd place with a substantial gap relative to the former region (Chen and Lin, 2018:12). When the countries separated by their income levels, high income and upper-middle income groups tend to receive higher levels of the FDI inflows and outflows, in other words, BRI countries with higher income receive more investment, while also investing more abroad (12).

It is also worth-mentioning, albeit straight-forward, the Chinese OFDI is found to increase significantly since 2013, which is the announcement year of the BRI. What is not so straight-forward is the finding that China's outward investment seems increase more rapidly than the volume of investment in BRI nations, which shows that "China's investment in developed countries has risen faster than its investment in the developing world" (Chen and Lin, 2018:12). Financial investments seem to play out that way, while most of Chinese economic

activities reflect as construction contracts in specific corridors like the China-Pakistan economic corridor (2018:13). This shows that a more comprehensive outlook needs to be considered to grasp all dimensions of the unique Chinese OFDI via BRI. Similarly, sector-wise, energy is the dominant sector for China's outward investment, while there is also a rise of such construction contracts in the transportation sector (14). To give an empirical sense of the volume and distribution of all the mentioned OFDI through BRI, I present the following table, which is based on the China Global Investment Tracker and prepared by the World Bank:

Figure 2. China's top 10 investment transactions in BRI countries since 2014					
Year - Month	Investor	Country	Sector	Subsector	Value (million US \$)
2014-12	Jiangsu Changjiang	Singapore	Tech		1660
2015-05	Shanghai International Port	Israel	Transport	Shipping	1990
2015-05	Zhongrun Resources	Mongolia	Metals	Steel	1940
2015-07	Southern Power and State Power Investment	Vietnam	Energy	Coal	1760
2015-11	China General Nuclear	Malaysia	Energy		5960
2016-03	China Railway Engineering	Malaysia	Transport	Rail	1970
2016-04	Zhuhai Zhenrong	Myanmar	Energy	Oil	2100
2016-08	Shanghai Giant-led Consortium	Israel	Entertainment		4400
2017-02	CNPC	UAE	Energy	Oil	1770
2017-04	China Railway Corporation, Engineering	Lao PDR	Transport	Rail	2560

Note. Reprinted from "Foreign Investment across the Belt and Road: Patterns, Determinants and Effects", by Chen M.X. and Lin, C., 2018, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 8607.

The BRI has many goals as stated by the Chinese officials, but perhaps one of the most pragmatic advantages of creating shortcuts and utilizing these routes is for cutting the

transportation costs both for flow of goods as well as flow of ideas and knowhow. Reduced transportations costs also play an important role on increasing the Chinese FDI. Finally, there is an understanding that is mostly attached to the Western perception of the project that compares the BRI to the US Marshall Plan as suggested before. However, the BRI is reported to have resources that are more than sixteen folds of what Marshall Plan had at the time. In addition, it is also said to be linked to China's 2049 vision, which will be the hundredth year of the PRC. (Ögütçü, personal communication, March 12, 2020).

BRI is still seen commonly as something bigger than a mere project and it is known today as the Chinese vision or a "game plan" that can be traced a century ahead. For China and for those who have an open vision on the BRI, it is a sign of China's point of view for its global affairs, and not only it creates a vision but also shapes the world according to what it sees through its ambitious lenses. Normatively, the BRI remains to be the biggest development project in the world that was ever initiated by any nation until this day (Bardakçı, personal communication, May 21, 2020).

Its Sceptics

To highlight distinct arguments on the BRI and its motives by the Chinese government as argued in the English-language literature, four items of agenda can be put forward. First one is that the project is mainly driven by China's overall collision of geopolitical, economic, and soft power goals. Second one is that BRI can be the tool needed to achieve the vision of President Xi's vision for a 'great national rejuvenation' (Clarke, 2018; Hillman, 2018; Ploberger, 2017). In this regard, the BRI is planned to not only help achieve internal security and development, but also it can elevate the process of becoming a 'moderately prosperous society' and also a 'prosperous, strong, and harmonious' country inside (Clarke, 2018:86). This internal argument will also be examined in the following parts in depth to see the processes and the initial domestic politics of the BRI. The domestic reasons that are discussed by the sceptics is this domestic need for a policy to strengthen the party regime. The argument is that China is solely devoting its capital and efforts to the BRI to cover up its domestic fragilities and not necessarily for a global all-inclusive agenda that would benefit the others. This view is deemed relatively weak today when the process has been going more steadily each year since the official plan was announced in 2015 and more countries have

been almost racing to get a sweet piece from the great Chinese capital accumulation. It remains lacking when we consider the BRI only through a lens of domestic legitimacy and development concerns.

Yet another key motive highlighted must be placed more in a broader economic context. The BRI can and does contribute to China's efforts to actually increase connectivity between regions such as, but not limited to, Xinjiang and Central Asia, South Asia as well as increasing connectivity between Mongolia and Russia's eastern ends (Clarke, 2018:90). It goes without saying that a fourth and final major aim of the BRI according to the literature is securing energy and the need to explore alternative routes to get resources for a country like China whose relative dependence on others on energy can cause a problem in its near future (Clarke, 2018). One repeating argument is the "debt trap" issue that China initially gets upset about. Political concessions are said to be achieved through the connections that the BRI is creating. As I discuss the nature of such dependencies in the next chapter in greater detail, the question marks about the real intentions of China are often questioned.

Internal Legitimization of the BRI

To start off the discussion on the internal politics inside of China and how the President Xi as well as the Party utilizes the BRI, it is important to understand Xi's vision. Xi has put forward a strict policy agenda to utilize a holistic project like the BRI, which involved industry, investments, foreign aid, trade, security as well as foreign policy (He, 2018:4). The theme of his policies has 'the Chinese Dream'. An individual level of analysis is needed on Xi's presidency and the power struggle, which was made easier through the existence of the BRI. As He (2018) also highlights, the BRI allowed President Xi to extend his time in office from a normal two-term limit to a unique 'President for life' status. The general perception behind this decision in the Party Congress was that longer projects and policy stability can be achieved through longer stable leadership, which is exactly what such a mega-project with open-ended objectives like the BRI would require (He, 2018). Becoming "core leader" of the country provided Xi to achieve full control and centrality of foreign policy decisions, while also legitimize his power inside. He (2018) argues that the importance of legitimacy for Chinese politics and emphasizes its place to be above of electoral democracy for China's political culture (He, 2018:4-5). Hence, the BRI is inevitably a top-down process where the

leader suggests, the Party and the State follows. Although the BRI is often argued to be a state-led strategy, in its core the Party is involved and gets the final say, which is what He (2018) argues to be “Xi’s party-centric approach to BRI” (2018:5).

Such legitimization comes to life through different paths both provincially and bureaucratically. Political processes in China for the BRI involves many ministerial tasks both from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce as well as the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC). There have been countless protocols, action plans separately in each ministry, department with other foreign institutions and respective ministries. Provincially, the BRI is important for balancing the economic development and growth in all of China’s provinces and to “consolidate China’s west and south-western provinces; the idea being to make them new engines of economic growth that could stimulate the next phase of Chinese development” (He, 2018:7). Not only there is a wish of the Beijing authorities to bring up those provinces, who were left behind during the earlier stages of the development process, the provinces and cities also compete for the large sums of funding coming from the BRI budget. Such rivalry leads to policies for justifying the BRI-related projects locally and further spread the word and legitimacy of the initiative throughout China (2018:8).

Having said that, it is not all roses when such mobilization occurs on a nationwide scale. There is criticism and discontent at times, but how the Party and the State deal with such domestic issues is another important part of the legitimization process of the BRI internally. According to He (2018), discourse and how it is shaped comes to picture for the BRI by using tactics such as academic conferences or standardizing the terminology related to the BRI (2018:10). As He states the other methods include, but not limited to;

Advance screenings of international conference papers to ensure they toe the Party line; mandatory approval procedures required for international academic activities; “the Great Firewall’s” blocking of Google Scholar; the restrictive access to official Chinese investment, loan and aid data; and the propensity for delegated, rather than independently formulated BRI-related studies—generally in the form of policy papers instead of critical enquiry—are all examples of the constraints imposed on Chinese scholars by central and local authorities.

(He, 2018:10-11).

How one tells a story shapes the public opinion for any political scene, but in a country like China, which has experienced single-digit economic growth in recent years with a younger generation who is not impressed by ideological discussions of the Communist Party, it is important for Xi and the State to have full-control over how the narrative is passed through the country. The general external critique and discussions such as the BRI being a “debt-trap” which are often discussed in the Western literature, are managed to be left outside of the Chinese public eye. At the end of the day, state monopolization on the BRI’s narrative succeeds to control domestic dissent (2018:11).

Another issue which is stressing to tackle the internal politics of the BRI is the search for a new economic growth engine of the Chinese state. After all, curbing and blocking the critique and discontent do not yield satisfaction and support. On that note, the BRI is in fact part of China’s new economic reforms with a focus on market allocation of resources (Yu, 2018:225). The initiative also aims at consuming “the excessive industrial capacity triggered by governmental intervention and underperforming Chinese companies” (Yu, 2018:225). The BRI appears to be a distinct domestic policy and a line of rhetoric which connects the ambitious goals of Xi Jinping to the consolidation and legitimization of the Party’s rule and ideology in China in addition to its current global weight and acceleration. Centralization of the decision-making, controlling and standardizing of the BRI discourse allows the CCP to fully exert its authority over the public in hopes to give the sense of the long-awaited rejuvenation of the nation to arrive soon, while allowing China to eliminate the international concerns and to put ideological differences aside with the Global North.

3.6. Understanding China’s Power and Ambitions

In this section, I show China’s diplomacy and foreign policy narratives under the “China’s wisdom” as well as the Chinese Dream discussions. In this regard, this section dives deeper into the new Chinese diplomacy and its point of view towards global order. I show China’s reformist, but not revolutionist, ways of wishing to shape the international order through “benign” efforts of mass diplomacy in a hybrid system with the US being on the other side of

the equation. I ask whether China has been following a classical liberal approach in the IR sense or whether it exudes a unique type of power in its international affairs. I also make use of the recent literature of “sharp power” by Christopher Walker in the next sub-section to suggest a niche dimension to global Chinese influence.

At the end of 2017, the US released its “National Security Strategy”, and in a way framed China and Russia as its strategic competitors while claiming the two states to be “revisionist countries attempting to erode US security and prosperity and to challenge US power, influence and interests” (Ge, 2018:2). The strategy mentioned China overall 33 times and claimed the country to be expanding its power and seeks to replace the US as the hegemon in Asia (2018:2). Chinese publications and literature, that are mostly published by the state-owned publishing houses such as *World Affairs Press* and *Foreign Languages Press*, takes on the duty to explain, highlight and defeat the allegations of the US, as expected. In such publications, there is much prominence placed on the international power balance and a trend of the “rising East” as opposed to a “falling West” (Ge, 2018; Canrong, 2017; Guo, 2015; Junru, 2015). It even goes as far as to suggest that “as the center of gravity of international relations shifts from the Atlantic to the Pacific, loss and anxiety naturally dominate the mentality of Europe and the United States” (Ge, 2018:6). It adds: “the struggle between unilateralism and multilateralism will continue and even intensify” (2018:6).

In addition to this emphasis on multilateralism and revisionist view, it is clear to see that China does not hold from emphasizing the economic advantages it and the other emerging nations have. Although collectivity is emphasized, how the challenges of the international system is tackled by China remains heavier on the discussions in addition to a critique of the US and its ways of handling issues of development, conflict and its lack of global governance. There is a general argument that the US has been avoiding its responsibilities to the global community and the Global North have become more reluctant to reform the global governance system at the peak of rising populism all around the world (F. Oktay, personal communication, May 13, 2020). In other words, Chinese scholars do not refrain from suggesting that the developed countries of the West have “declining power and the lack of will for reform” while developing countries such as China are actively promoting globalization and consistently playing a constructive role (2018:7). International system is

seen as being in a historical process of “accelerated evolution” by the Chinese. It is argued that while one part of the world is coming together around their own limited strategic cooperation and policies, they oversee the strategic leadership of future development. Meanwhile, the others, the emerging powers led by China, maintain momentum of their economic growth while enhancing strength through unity (2018:8). In these times of turmoil and turbulence, China says that “people long for governance”. The most crucial part of the tone of the Chinese scholarship is that the advocacy for seeing the US as the sole superpower of the world despite its “upcoming decline” (2018:9).

The contradiction presented by both advocating the continuous rise of China and its impact on the changes of the international order as well as the US supremacy in its ranking bring once again the truth to the hybrid global order that we have entered. In terms of the US-China relations, China aims at cooperation as the correct choice while its diplomacy pursues “active innovation and expansion, achieving major breakthrough and development in a number of areas” (2018:10). China also does not hesitate to suggest that “China’s power significantly increased in agenda-setting, rule-making and in international discourse” (10). So, it is only plausible then to question what exactly this power is and where it constitutes itself from. The Chinese diplomacy paves way to answering these questions as best as it can. As discussed earlier, Xi’s vision is one major source for this increased power, but the new Chinese diplomacy is more complex than only the leader’s vision.

First thing to argue on China’s power is that it is ought to be benign and peaceful. It has its root in domestic goals of the party. China’s main aim is “connecting China’s dream of rejuvenation more closely with the world’s dream and adding powerful and lasting impetus to the building of a community of shared future of humankind” (Ge, 2018:12). There are always connotations on portraying the rise of China’s power as the betterment of the global community and the humankind in a positively correlated fashion. If China gets stronger, the world gets stronger. For instance, when discussing the BRI, China moves it from an “initiative” to “international consensus”; from a “plan” to “international action”; from “Chinese vision” to “global reality” (Guo, 2015; Ge, 2018:12). This domestic-international linkage narrative is, in fact, the clearest evidence of China trying to show its benign power to the world as part of the main theme of its new diplomacy. This new diplomacy is also

labelled as “the major power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics” (Ge, 2018:13). This can be seen through a simple green initiative of China as Dr. Ergenç suggests:

...The picture is also not black or white because there are two reasons why China is now emerging as the new green power. ...one is definitely that it is a very good discursive tool for China to position itself against the US who is withdrawing from all these normative regimes today...But, there is also the domestic concern of opening up new investment fields for the Chinese economy which is shrinking faster than what the current government would like to see...and green investments are a very lucrative field of investment for China both domestically and internationally.

(C. Ergenç, personal communication, December 17, 2019).

It can also be seen through its bilateral relations in greater detail. I have covered a part of its strategies through explaining China’s vision and role in global governance in the previous sections. The narrative and ideational aspect of China’s new diplomacy is what I will be looking at in this part. The reason of the addition of “new” for China’s diplomacy comes from the changes in its strategic objective of actively creating opportunities and shaping its external environment. On the issues of politics and security, China claims that it advocates for peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and avoidance of confrontation. In other words, China’s power does not coincide with the *realpolitik* hard power concept as we know in the realm of IR. In the economic field, China advocates for mutual help and win-win cooperation, inclusiveness, and interconnectivity (Ge, 2018:13). At the same time, China does not give concessions from its national sovereignty and security while actively contributes to its domestic opening-up and development and protects its overseas interests. In the Chinese fashion, its diplomacy has the key words of “mutual respect, fairness, justice, and win-win cooperation” for handling its bilateral relations (14). China’s development is seen as the biggest domestic opportunity while the restructuring and reforming the international structure is the external opportunity. The ribbon that ties these two opportunities or aims together is China’s “comprehensive power” and its growth since it enhances the capacity of China to shape the global order amid global governance and mass diplomacy.

There are five main aspects of the new Chinese diplomacy argued by the Chinese scholarship, which happen to contribute its ambitious global agenda and hegemonic

standpoint in recent years. First one is providing a blueprint for common participation to the BRI; second is its strong advocacy for economic globalization and anti-protectionist trade policies; third is its personal label as the “anchor for stable relations among the world’s major countries” (mainly the commitment for cooperation with the US); fourth is its regional leadership for establishing and maintaining stability and the “sound momentum” of regional cooperation; finally its leadership for cooperation amongst the BRICS countries (Yi, 2018:4-16).

Through this new diplomacy, the Chinese wisdom is allegedly being utilized for the successful rise of the country in global sphere. Another case and point are China’s “mission-embedded statecraft”, which was also discussed under China’s economic statecraft section. However, the mission-embedded statecraft is deemed useful in the sense that the development and “modernization is significantly improving China’s overall national strength which has laid a solid material foundation for China in its pursuit of a globally major country” (Canrong et al., 2017:67). Again, these economic efforts are connected to peaceful and inclusive bilateral foreign policymaking. It is argued by Chinese scholars that “unlike the rise of some great powers in modern times, China’s pursuit of the great renewal of the Chinese nations will not resort to the military means” (2017:71). It is also often argued that the China’s national character and its uniqueness of its culture pushes China to only a path of peaceful development. Major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics maintains the current global governance measures with an innovated and improved outlook to fit the new global political landscape. China is still very much committed to the UN Charter and utilizes the international institutions to its advantage.

Major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics is ought to combine “the common ground between philosophy of life, governance concept in Chinese culture and those of the contemporary times” and in this way China’s wisdom and power serves the global order and governance (2017:77). Through effective and intensive diplomatic visits, the global outlook is portrayed in bilateral relations as well. China adopts a policy called creating “global pivot partners” and categorizes the partner countries it interacts with in different pivot country positions. China sees that establishment of these pivot countries is “to serve a country’s strategic goals of economy, political, geographic politics and military security” (2017:159).

Within this policy, the strategic pivot countries change over time just like their function and status varies based on national realities and strength. For instance, some of these strategic pivot countries like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, Iran and Pakistan appear to have “powerful influence in religion and geographic politics” by linking the Islamic world to the non-Islamic world (159). Others like Germany have economic superiority, comparatively speaking. These strategic calculations on bilateral terms, allows China to execute its global vision while providing itself with political or domestic-need oriented solutions for issues such as energy security or geopolitical issues such as the Xinjiang Uyghur problem.

The uniqueness of the Chinese power comes from all these aspects and further divides the question of whether China exudes soft power, as it refuses to own hard power or militaristic confrontational goals. Perhaps, Chinese assertiveness can be explained by a combination of the traditional soft power, which it currently does not necessarily hold but nor really needs, and a new discussion of what is called the “sharp power” or perhaps a combination of both in its own Chinese uniqueness.

3.6.1. Soft Power, Sharp Power or Both?

In 2004 when Joseph Nye published his famous book “Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics” to enhance the definition of the term ‘soft power.’ Originally, the term is known for a country’s ability to attract and cooperate in global affairs and it involves the influence on shaping the preferences of other countries through appeal and desirability (Nye, 2004). Most certainly, what distinguishes soft power from IR’s realist hard power is the non-coercive elements that include culture, political values, and ideology as well as foreign policy. It also includes less visible elements like lobbying via political as well as non-political organizations, economic influence. Its biggest strength comes from a country’s popularity by utilizing the above-mentioned aspects to achieve a stage that increases a country’s influence without any doubts in the international system. In Nye’s words “the best propaganda is not propaganda” (Nye, 2012). In 1990, when the term was being constructed by Nye, soft power was such a legitimacy in foreign affairs that a country would be able to get other countries to do what it wanted without ordering or using military force as opposed to hard power. If we look at how American policymakers and states understood the term, soft power involves

increased diplomacy, strategic communications, foreign assistance, civic action and economic reconstruction and development (McClory, 2018).

Joseph Nye (2004) does not necessarily consider China to exude soft power, but instead focuses on Asia as a region and sees the region having potential resources of soft power. At the time, Nye assess China's accumulation of soft power as follows:

In the last two decades of the twentieth century, China, Asia's largest country, had high annual growth rates of 7 to 9 percent that led to a remarkable tripling of its GNP and enhanced its reputation and soft power. Nonetheless, even China has a long way to go, and faces many obstacles to its development. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the American economy was more than twice the size of China's. And, as a Singapore columnist observed, "When it comes to soft power, it will take much longer before it can make an impact close to what the V.S. enjoys now"

(Nye, 2004:83-84).

Nye found the Asian economic miracle, which China evidently experienced, to help support the ideology of Asian values as an excuse for the authoritarian leaders of the region to maintain their political power and stability (2004:84). Although he mentioned the events like of Chinese novelist Gao Xingjian winning the Nobel Prize for literature in 2000, the Chinese movie *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* becoming the highest-grossing non-English-language film, China hosting the 2008 Summer Olympics and interestingly, China's investment in manned space flight increasing its "prestige and attraction" (2004:88). He concluded his observations on the Chinese ability to seek and hold soft power as:

Rapid economic growth is likely to increase both countries' hard and soft power, but at this point, neither country ranks high on the various indices of potential soft-power resources that are possessed by the United States, Europe, and Japan. While culture provides some soft power, domestic policies and values set limits, particularly in China, where the Communist Party fears allowing too much intellectual freedom and resists outside influences

(Nye, 2004:88-89).

Nye (2004) finally yields the answer to the question whether China can utilize soft power to the future. Today, when we look at reports such as the Portland Report on world's soft power listing 'The Soft Power 30', China does not make it to the top 10. In 2011, before becoming the General Secretary of the CCP, Xi made large emphasis to make China into "a socialist cultural superpower" and in 2014, Xi stated: "We should increase China's soft power, give a good Chinese narrative, and better communicate China's messages to the world" (Shambaugh, 2015). It is evident that the Chinese leader knows what the premises of soft power is and how to utilize it. All the mentioned efforts and policies mentioned throughout this chapter proves the existence of such awareness and wish. If economic parameters and efficient bilateral diplomacy are not still enough for China to improve its global position and exude complete soft power and influence, and China strongly refuses to utilize hard power, then what type of power does China have? The answer could be a very niche concept of "sharp" power.

Christopher Walker's sharp power notion comes with an example of the PRC having a deal between the Shanghai Media Group and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), which at first ought to be a new era of television and cooperation between the two countries. The alleged problem was "the ABC management had agreed to eliminate news and current-affairs content objectionable to Beijing from the respected ABC Mandarin-language service, both in Australia and overseas" (Walker, 2018:9). This intervention to independent journalism is translated as one of many ongoing "influence operations that CCP is aiming at education, publishing, politics and cultural life" (9). Walker (2018) identifies sharp power to be exactly a combination of these by suggesting: "This is an approach to international affairs that typically involves efforts at censorship, or the use of manipulation to sap the integrity of independent institutions. Sharp power has the effect of limiting free expression and distorting the political environment" and it is called "sharp" because its policies are designed to pierce and penetrate the political and information environments of targeted countries (Walker, 2018:11-12).

On the Chinese case and its usage of sharp power, Walker also states the following:

Sharp power may be used to degrade the integrity of independent institutions through manipulation, as when Chinese entities acting on behalf of the communist party-state disguise their initiatives as commercial ventures or as grassroots civil society initiatives... More specifically, the party-state likes to paint China as a benign force in the world. In order to look more appealing in democratic societies, the communist regime is not above clothing itself in the vestments of soft power.

(Walker, 2018:12).

The usage of censorship on digital platforms, the existence of the Great Firewall in China in addition to other measures of control on the speeches and freedom of expression are known features of the PRC and now it is argued to be applying pressure to foreign tech giants like Google and Facebook to censor to remove selected content (Walker, 2018). As concerning as it is for the core liberal democratic values, in light of rising far-right populism and the democracy fatigue all around the world, sharp power can be a useful term to label what many countries have been doing in its authoritarian agendas. In addition, Walker himself suggests that sharp power should not be considered as an opposite to Nye's soft power but in fact:

It is not the case that countries can wield either "sharp" or "soft" power but not both. Some of China's soft-power appeal undoubtedly comes from its investment and infrastructure-building around the globe. Yet as Nye himself acknowledges, when certain lines are crossed, these shifts tell us that states are moving from soft to sharp power.

(Walker, 2018:18).

In other words, Walker suggests that countries cannot have both powers, and China appears to have sharp power. The descriptive nature of the sharp power can be traced in Chinese policies and we can use the term for the typology of China's current power. Some lines were perhaps already crossed if we consider Nye's words, but China is still a key player in the global order and governance. Its economic policies increase its area of influence every single day and it is debatable whether utilizing tools of bribery, pressure against media outlets and limitations on the expression of free speech enable this complete sphere of influence or not. As China adds on to the list of its BRI participants, countries race with each other to get a greater share of the Chinese investments, but no one really brings up the absence of liberal

democracy while signing agreements with China, apart from reports of NGOs like the Human Rights Watch. Sharp power is definitely different than soft power, but I argue here that the recent global tendencies of rising populism, illiberal democracies and different types of authoritarian regimes are also both the source and the outcome of China's rising power, whether deemed soft or sharp. I suggest that China is utilizing soft power via economic connections and investments, but it does not hesitate to switch to sharp power when it is needed for political adjustments and propaganda. I also argue here that there is a fine line between both types of power, and as long as the countries continue to show interest in Chinese mega-strategy, I do not see a problem in suggesting that China's power can be identified as both *soft and sharp* power. It is evident that China still wishes to work on its soft power on hegemonic terms regardless of the sharpness of its power: "China has been sending out a lot aid for strengthening its reputation that took a hit during the post-Covid period. Anything that China has been doing to increase its soft power will contribute to challenge of the US in the future" (S. Bardakçı, personal communication, May 21, 2020).

3.7. Sustainability and its Challenges

In this last section, I build on my recent argument on the international ambitions of China being tied to its internal fragilities, while also questioning the sustainability of the mega-strategy of Xi in the global sphere. More importantly, I argue that simultaneously behind the scenes, there is a reason for the recent escalation of such ambitious hegemonic assertiveness of the Xi period, which is inevitably connected to the efforts regarding domestic concerns. Slowing growth rates, domestic income inequality, and the new generation of Chinese youth not being easily swayed by the CCP's ideals are being the major three issues. I also argue that if continued in such an ambitious manner, there is a very high chance for China to finally sit on the invisible throne of the global system in a hybrid system that is still affected by the US. The next chapter will focus on the perception of threat, opportunities, and the form of dependency that all come with interacting with the People's Republic of China via being a participant to either one of its mega-strategy policies.

It is not a bed of roses in terms of economy, military, foreign policy, technology and maintaining the stability as a whole inside. If you look at the other side of the coin,

China also has serious domestic issues. So, it is meaningless to portray everything as perfect and show China as the new economic superpower, there is a need for a balanced analysis.

(M. Ögütçü, personal communication, March 12, 2020).

Regime survival in authoritarian regimes is a broad literature and it is outside of the scope of this thesis. However, I mention few of the recent work in order to build my argument of the internal sustainability issues regarding China's rise and development. If one wishes to understand the complete picture of the regime survival for authoritarian regimes, the institution-based answers may not be sufficient. The contemporary studies on authoritarian regime survival broadens the scope of the discussion and the economic tools for regime survival receives much needed attention in such recent works. Hence, another area of focus in the literature stems from more empirical discussions and such discussions can be ultimately categorized under "authoritarian bargaining", where a tradeoff between letting go of the citizens' political influence and increased public spending takes place in an implicit agreement done by the ruling elite and the ordinary people (Desai, Olofsgard & Yousef, 2009:94). Desai et al. (2009) claim that subsidies, direct or indirect transfers of goods, protections or regulations that yield profits, employment or more consumption are provided with the support of the political offering for the ability, albeit limited, to influence policy making (p.94). The partial political liberalization or the increase of public participation in governmental decision making in such way leads to regime survival and legitimacy while also enabling the ruling elite to apply policies that are closer to citizen preferences (Desai et al., 2009).

On a similar note, redistributive policies are commonly stemmed from the rising concerns regarding inequality in a given regime, and the regime survival literature provides us with trade liberalization as a tool to fix this internal fragility as seen in most authoritarian regimes. Wu (2015) follows an empirical study to prove that not only the trade liberalization is in fact a policy decision coming from the inequality concerns under authoritarian regimes, but she further argues that economic globalization is actually helping authoritarian regimes for strengthening its power and legitimacy. Trade liberalization increases overall welfare of the authoritarian country, not necessarily causing more democratization but in fact, contributes to

the “authoritarian consolidation” (2015:800). Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) are further discussed regarding their contribution to the authoritarian regimes’ ability to further consolidate their power due to the fact that such agreements enrich poor citizens and thus, balances out the income inequality to a certain degree and neutralizes the pressure for regime change (Chang and Wu, 2016:289-290).

It is no secret that China has income inequality issues at the top of its domestic concerns. Over the last two decades we have seen a rapid growth of the Chinese economy in addition to an imbalanced development that caused major income inequality and disparity between the rich and poor parts of the country. Along this disparity, the economic sustainability has affected the regime’s confidence in its authoritarian sustainability and mentality survival in the Linzian sense. The symptomatic indications of such fragility and anxiety can be grouped under the economic and political reactions of the Chinese state as well as the CCP. Both are arguably complementary to each other and not because of one on the other. Considering the literal scope and size of a country like China, such disparities and inequalities perhaps pose a bigger concern for the regime sustainability than it would for any other authoritarian regime of modern times. As Akgünay suggests:

...China has been acting more actively on certain issues...it has been vocal in UNSC. Its commercial and economic relations continue but this can also reach its limits. Why am I suggesting this? Because they cannot provide a democratic development and this inability causes slight unpleasantness inside the country, this includes the income inequalities as well...

(R. Akgünay, personal communication, December 19, 2019).

This kind of a reading is linked to Samuel Huntington’s “performance dilemma” or also known as “king’s dilemma”, as a strategy that was once adapted by the Chinese elites and their awareness of the need to provide nonmaterial support as a side to the material reforms (Holbig and Gilley, 2010:400). However, it is not so clear whether there is a direct linkage between growth and regime legitimacy for China throughout its development. Instead, we see that in China, the economic success of the regime had to be still portrayed in such a way that it could positively build a subjective trust for the regime. CCP’s awareness of the ambiguous

nature of the growth-based legitimization ultimately led the regime to look for new and alternative sources for legitimacy and thus, survival.

What was a major one of those alternative sources? The answer points towards nationalism, or more so national image-making. The Chinese nationalism has been a rhetorical area of interest of the regime and the CCP in China since 1990s (Holbig and Gilley, 2010:402). For China, as it is widely accepted in the literature, the usage of nationalism is a combination of anti-western and anti-Japanese sentiments as well as a tool to homogenize the uncertainties within the Chinese society stemming from pluralization and heavy marketization of social life that ultimately had damaging impact on identity and socialization on top (2010:402). In order to achieve this, the regime and the CCP utilized national myths for the collective memory of the nation and thus, framed the Chinese people in a victim mentality against all the imperial aggression it faced over its historical progress.

As people in China no longer pay attention to the “Little Red Book”, ideology seems not to be a successful tool of legitimacy to combat China’s internal weaknesses and fragilities anymore. The “Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation” in this sense serves as a narrative while in a normative manner the grand-strategy of Xi on global affairs provide the fuel needed for the narrative to fix the legitimacy issues. As much as learning from the previous mistakes of the predecessors in China’s rulers seems to be a common point, their take on how to fix the previous issues differ when we look at Xi’s very own reforms and policies towards internal fragilities as well as international issues and representation of the country. One thing to note is that despite changes of the scope and vision of China’s official state policies, legitimacy is still eagerly tried to be established and maintained. China under the Xi regime, a technocrat as opposed to revolutionary Deng, has experienced an era of transformation and reform as well. “Deepening reform” be Xi’s internal vision for the regime sustainability, which is argued to be applied through five strategic measures according to Tsang and Men (2015). Firstly, Xi is also aware of the dangers of corruption for regime sustainability, therefore, the first order of business for Xi was to strengthen the institutions of governance and enhance their efficiency (Tsang and Men, 2015:9). Secondly, Xi decided to emphasize the importance of maintaining social stability under a concept of what he calls “the new normal” which

refers to improving the Chinese people's livelihoods and maintain order in the country while also rebalancing the economy via lowering the rapid economic growth that China had gotten used to over its developmental process (pp.9-10). In addition to this institutional framework of reform, the Chinese regime under Xi has paid attention to a question that was left untouched by Deng, which was ideology. Xi's vision includes a focus on promoting the regime's socialist core values and revival of the Chinese culture, starting from 2013 (2015:10). Fourth and fifth elements of Xi's revisionist and niche global vision responds to the weaknesses of China's national security system and institution building as well as advancing strategic interests by pointing out mutual benefits in its foreign affairs in the region and also in the world (pp.11-12).

As much as the institutions' impact for keeping the authoritarian regime sustainability intact is a major tool to understand regime survival, we can see that there can be other empirical factors we can take into account such as efficient foreign policy making. The People's Republic of China presents a case that at points show conformity with the existing theories of the regime survival for a strong party state, while there also are certain fundamental issues which the regime in China still manages to fix. Establishing and sustaining legitimacy is still a crucial part of the authoritarian regime survival whether it uses ideology, "mentality" or simple obsession towards economic success and growth.

In China's case, Xi Jinping appears to move beyond the existing survival strategies for the party's authoritarian rule in the country. The domestic issues are still very much alive and the confident image-making under Xi leadership can be a distinct sign of China's regime fragility now. Domestic assertiveness and foreign initiatives that are seemingly designed to have a more global role in the international scene can ultimately be telling us that China has been going through its fair share of transition and reform, but not in the direction that the CCP and the Chinese state would have liked it to move towards. As much as he has the ambition to move away from "chaos", it is questionable whether Xi will avoid the mistakes of his generational predecessors. Finally, it is also fair to say that the case of China's regime survival will be further discussed in the future years to come. The next chapter dives into a discussion on global reactions to the dependencies created by the assertive global attempts of China on its hegemonic journey in the international system.

IV. Global Reactions to China's Rise

The question ultimately comes down to what the United States and China can realistically ask of each other. An explicit American project to organize Asia on the basis of containing China or creating a bloc of democratic states for an ideological crusade is unlikely to succeed—in part because China is an indispensable trading partner for most of its neighbors. By the same token, a Chinese attempt to exclude America from Asian economic and security affairs will similarly meet serious resistance from almost all other Asian states, which fear the consequences of a region dominated by a single power.

(Kissinger, 2011)

Previous chapter dealt with the historical progress, steps and policies initiated by China under its new and improved global politico-economic agenda. It also browsed through its domestic sustainability concerns via the linkage of external leadership vision for the outlook of a new and improved China. This chapter takes the discussion onto a further outer dimension from exploring the means of China's rise to a relative end point. I first put forward that all the previously mentioned policies create a form dependence between China and its participating countries, which further supports its linkage and influence over the international community. I analyze some of the most important examples of Chinese diplomatic interactions and the influence or the type of perception it possibly left on partner countries in order to reflect on how the Chinese dependency works. I briefly question the nature of such dependency in a not-so-normative yet descriptive manner about its malignity or disservice. Finally, before moving onto the case study at hand on Sino-Turkish relations, I discuss the implications for China's participants based on the overall progress of the Chinese foreign policy mega-strategy.

4.1. Dependency via Chinese Economic Statecraft Policies

As the grand aim and plan of Xi is to “build a great modern socialist country by mid-21st century” and the pledge to make China into the world's superpower through a vision as grand as the BRI still is very tangible, this great responsibility is ought to come with great power and vice versa. In other words, this new responsibility for acquiring greater power comes

with greater risks for China and the risks bring greater assertiveness for the regime. Xi also has been identified as “the emperor” who is not going to be retiring anytime soon, thus, such assertiveness is linked directly both diverting public attention from domestic issues as well as getting political benefits via the diplomatic relations (NHK News, April 4, 2018).

As discussed earlier, the scope of the Belt and Road Initiative has been expanding rapidly since 2013. To sum up the volume once again, on April 25, 2019, the second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation was held with the participation of nearly 40 countries for its roundtable meeting only. From 2013 to 2018, the trade volume between China and BRI participant countries reached and exceeded US\$ 6 trillion, while China’s direct investment to these countries surpassed 90 billion US dollars. These numbers do not include the volume of e-commerce and the total value of retail goods imported and exported through the cross-border e-commerce platform of China Customs which reached to 20.3 billion US dollars in 2018. At the same time, 50 banks from the participating BRI countries opened seven corporate banks, 19 branches and 34 representative offices in China (Xinhua, April 26, 2019). More significantly, by the end of 2018, the membership of the AIIB, also known as the “Chinese World Bank”, had increased from 57 founding members to 93 across five different continents. It is said to have approved US\$ 7.5 billion worth of loans and has been controlling other investments totaling around 40 billion dollars under 35 approved projects all around 13 countries including Indonesia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Oman, Turkey and Egypt (Xinhua, 2019).

Volume and aims are high through the Chinese grand strategy and all participating countries are getting more entangled with the Chinese influence as the multi-faceted BRI continues to grow and enhance the lending and investment connections. When we consider the extent of the BRI for enabling China, the influence and connectivity it has built, it is legitimate to argue that connections can be easily shaped into certain requirements and concessions. In other words, the connections that are created can be shaped into dependencies. The BRI is no longer a solely “grand connectivity project”. It is more than a chain of Global Production Networks (GPNs). It is a tool of geopolitical global competition with the US, regional influence and economic integration that inevitably allows political advantages for China. Economic and political aims of the Chinese grand strategy is almost inseparable as BRI itself

is a multi-faceted plan that foresees the necessary territorial arrangements for the all-inclusive economic development that China proudly advocates with any chance it gets. Parallel to the territorial adjustments, the geopolitical goals of which China has been trying to achieve are met through the economic development/vision in a two-way interactive manner. The combination of geopolitics and economic connectivity is the peak for China's hegemonic power transition as the politics of economic development known to play a role in such shifts (Flint and Zhu, 2019:96).

Geopolitical codes are known to be the combination of the practices of economic connectivity and political cooperation that forms the BRI vision for China (Flint and Zhu, 2019:96). The economic connectivity that is enhanced by the BRI and the Chinese economic statecraft can be centered on five fundamental bases as also highlighted by Liu and Dunford (2016) which are policy coordination, facilitating connectivity, trade facilitation, financial cooperation and people-to-people connections (Liu and Dunford, 2016 as cited by Flint and Zhu, 2019:96). These five objectives are based on numerous inter-connecting, bilateral agreements, projects, and investments that are orchestrated by the unique state-owned or state-backed enterprises.

In physical terms, strategies such as the BRI rests on, but not limited to, infrastructure projects that can be categorized as intra-state, bilateral, neighboring, trans-continental as well as oceanic (Zhu, 2019:98). For its regional or neighboring/contiguous-level goal, China is willing to implement a political order that has Chinese political principles at heart for a "harmonious Asia" that ultimately translates into the respect for China's security-sensitive issues such as the South China Sea dispute with an emphasis on a rigid "Asian" cultural identity (98). Many experts agree with Xi's such assertive regional and global vision as Elizabeth Economy rightfully puts it: "[Xi]has driven the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) more deeply into Chinese political, social and economic life, while constraining the influence of foreign ideas and economic competition" (Zhu, 2019). Following along the theme of harmonious Asia, under the regional geopolitical aims, China has been negotiating a "South China Sea code of conduct" with the ASEAN countries "...to exclude non-ASEAN or Chinese multinationals from oil exploration and to bar foreign powers from conducting

military drills, unless agreed to by all signatories” (Economy, 2019). That is just one example on the geopolitical regional scheme.

On the other side of the coin, the global influential goals are embedded within the global visionary tools primarily by BRI, while expanding its ports, railroads, highways, and pipelines, it is also creating connections in technology sphere. Major Chinese brands such as Alibaba, which promotes to Chinese e-commerce all over the world including its sub-brands like AliExpress with millions of users due to its competitively cheap prices, Lenovo, Huawei have gone global in recent years. China’s political attraction to smaller countries is deemed to come from its alternative offer of development as opposed to the Western-style liberal market democracy (Economy, 2019). In countries who have authoritarian regimes, especially in Africa, the Chinese guide to control political dissent maximizes the appeal to the Chinese influence, investment and hence, increases the dependence to Beijing. However, the appeal started to being questioned as countries such as Bangladesh, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Sierra Leone as debt kept piling up. When economic means cannot be matched, China’s advantages geopolitically flourishes. Having said that, it is also questionable what would happen within China if the debts are left unpaid and the investments deemed unsuccessful. I argue that the concerns of the mounting investments and lending abroad can lead to a even more assertive foreign policy and that could easily increase the dependency via its economic statecraft. It is plausible to suggest that as more countries ask China to invest and invite China to do business within their borders, China will go under more risks economically while politically that can translate into China demanding more and increasing the sharp power and influence around the globe. The most common concern and critique of the BRI remains to be the “...accusations that China is luring poor countries into debt traps for its own political and strategic gain” (The Washington Post, 2019).

China’s response to the accusations made relatively clearer during a high-profile forum in April 2019, Xi hinted that the Chinese government would exert more control over the BRI’s projects and increase the oversight. Xi also emphasized the importance of higher quality and greener projects withing BRI instead of his usual boasting of the initiative’s scope and growth (The Washington Post, 2019). In the light of this new commitment for its debt exposure, China stopped the process of new loans mounting up to \$4.9 billion for a rail project in Africa

in the same year. However, it is important to look in-depth to the dependency in practice as many countries from different regions are still part of the initiative in multiple ways.

4.2. *How does it work?*

In order to understand the mechanism of connectivity induced dependence by the Chinese government around the globe, I find it useful to separate the regions that China has been interacting with. I argue that under the “new major-power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics”, just like how Beijing differentiates between different “strategic pivot countries”, the regions also play a pivotal role for China’s certain geopolitical or domestic need-oriented aims. In such fashion, I wish to cover China’s dependency/influence practices in Africa, Asia (including Central, South and Southeast Asia), Middle East and Gulf region, Latin America and finally Europe. Some of these regions enable the leverage China needs to strengthen his composure against the US, while others provide solutions to on-going geopolitical issues and others are key to enhance China’s energy security as well as increased infrastructural connectivity. I try and show the most crucial examples of Chinese dependence in all these regions, albeit not in depth as case studies, to pinpoint the practices of Chinese influence in an effort to move away from simply theory.

Firstly, the Chinese investments in the African continent is not necessarily a new agenda, it has been widely known and discussed both in media and in the literature. It is also important to note that China has probably answered Africa’s call more than any other country until this date. China is argued to become a central player in Africa’s urbanization process as a great percentage of the countries’ infrastructure initiatives are driven and controlled by Chinese SOEs with Chinese funding (Shepard, 2019). “Right now, you could say that any big project in African cities that is higher than three floors or roads that are longer than three kilometers are most likely being built and engineered by the Chinese. It is ubiquitous” (Roggeveen as cited by Shepard, 2019). It is said that China began its lobbying in Africa right after the establishment of the PRC back in 1949, getting each and every single country of the continent to recognize the country instead the Republic of China (Taiwan) as “the China”. China now is Africa’s biggest trading partner as the Sino-African trade amounts to \$200 billion every year. To give a more concrete picture, it is suggested that:

...over 10,000 Chinese-owned firms are currently operating throughout the African continent, and the value of Chinese business there since 2005 amounts to more than \$2 trillion, with \$300 billion in investment currently on the table. Africa has also eclipsed Asia as the largest market for China's overseas construction contracts. To keep this momentum building, Beijing recently announced a \$1 billion Belt and Road Africa infrastructure development fund and, in 2018, a whopping \$60 billion African aid package, so expect Africa to continue swaying to the east as economic ties with China become more numerous and robust.

(McKinsey as cited in Shepard, 2019, para. 6)

Starting with Xi's vision for Africa, the biggest Chinese contribution to the continent has been the infrastructure as Xi also stated, "Inadequate infrastructure is believed to be the biggest bottleneck to Africa's development" (Shepard, 2019, para 7). Even so, the Chinese contributions to Africa goes beyond that by establishing protocols for "in-depth cooperation in agriculture, infrastructure, personnel training, and financial sectors..." (Hongwu, 2018:106). There are series of diplomatic exchanges and visits between China and almost all countries of the continent from Kenya to Gabon or from establishing "cooperative partnership" with Egypt to become a "strategic partner" with South Africa are all embedded in these numerous accounts. Within the BRI, Beijing argues that new results are achieved in the continent and even though the BRI covers only East African and North African regions, the initiative is still very closely linked to "the Agenda 2063", which is a collaborative oath to make the continent into a future global powerhouse (2018:107). The BRI is said to bring impetus into African development even further, while connecting Africa to the Chinese market as well as the Middle East market. According to Hongwu (2018), bilateral import and export volumes maintained an average growth rate of 35 percent each year between 2003 and 2011. In addition, although experiencing a decrease between the years of 2012-2017, according to the data of China Customs, during the first five months of 2017, bilateral trade volume reached \$70.14 billion and even surpassed China's overall foreign trade growth rate over the same period (2018:114). The year of 2018 was also the year of Africa in China's diplomacy, as many ministerial level conferences were held in China while the BRICS summit of that year was held in South Africa. Elevating the Africa-China cooperation is believed to have positive outlook for African development from the Chinese point of view, as partnership and cooperation is encouraged on every single incident (115).

On the one hand, infrastructure-induced development and economic growth can be said to be what exactly Africa has been looking for and needed. Many African leaders are still looking for China to bring this kind of experience to their countries as well. Since 2011, the infrastructure boom in the continent has mainly been orchestrated by China as it claims “... a 40 percent share that continues to rise” while the other countries’ involvement in the region falls on 34 percent for Europe and only 6.7 percent for the US (Shepard, 2019, para. 13). This dominance in the region enables Beijing on two terms that can be considered both geo-economic rather than geo-political for the case of dependence of Africa to China. By enhancing the economic dependence, which African countries desperately need, China first continues to internationalize its construction and IT companies while extracting and exporting African resources as over a third of China’s oil, one fifth of its cotton as well as other materials like steel, cobalt and coltan which are needed for most electronics (Shepard, 2019). This tells us that African “cooperation” enables China further to increase its global influence in such a high-volume continent while on domestic ends, China secures its energy and material needs. The African “dependence” to China, on the other hand, causes concerns for many countries in the region as Shepard (2019) neatly summarizes:

There have already been warning signs: the \$4 Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway ended up costing Ethiopia nearly a quarter of its total 2016 budget, Nigeria had to renegotiate a deal with their Chinese contractor due to their failure to pay, and Kenya’s 8 percent Chinese-financed railway from Mombasa to Nairobi has already gone four times over budget, costing the country upwards of 6 percent of its GDP. In 2012, the IMF found that China owned 15 percent of Africa’s external debt, and hardly three years later roughly two-thirds of all new loans were coming from China...

(Shepard, para. 16).

For the Middle East and the Gulf region, the story is not so different. Beijing continues to play its cards for regional prominence while holding the power for the aim of reshaping regional markets as countries in the region “reorient their economies to take advantage of Chinese outreach and largesse” (Berman, 2019:1). The progress of the Chinese influence in the region is argued to start with China’s sale of weaponry followed by its interest in region’s energy resources (Berman, 2019; Fulton, 2019). Diplomatically, the high-level visits started in 2016 to show the regional rulers their importance in the eyes of the Chinese leader. In 2019, during the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF), Chinese officials promised

\$23 billion in loans and development aid to the countries in the region (2019:2). Also, like African countries, China again is heavily involved in many constructions and infrastructure-based projects from Kuwait to Oman (Berman, 2019:2; Fulton, 2019). In addition to geo-economic goals, China has been trying to expand its military influence in the region which included port visits by the People's Liberation Army Navy in Persian Gulf region. China also increased its peacekeeping activities in the region as the second largest financial contributor to the UN's peacekeeping missions after the US (2). Earlier in the previous chapter it was mentioned that China does not foresee its military power to expand or fight a war to increase its influence around the world, hence, even though the region is mentioned in PRC's 2015 National Military Strategy for proactive military engagement, it is clear that this is simply the result of China's ability to read the needs of each region well (3). In other words, as the African continent needed infrastructure the most, the conflict-ridden status of most Middle Eastern countries requires some sort of military assistance, but China is simply enjoying the US security dominance in the region to its advantage, while seemingly contributing to the efforts for its greater geopolitical and geo-economic goals. Xi's congratulatory message in 2019 for the Arab League's 30th Arab League (AL) Summit showed exactly how much China has its eyes on the region as the message "...praised the AL's efforts to promote peace, stability and development in the Middle East, and recalled the agreement between the two sides in last July to establish a future-oriented strategic partnership of comprehensive cooperation and common development, which was a new starting point for Sino-Arab cooperation" (Xinhua, 2019, para. 4).

At the end of the day, China deepens its influence in the region and the leaders of the countries welcome China. In the Middle Eastern case, China is cooperating for its oil needs as countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Oman are continuing to account for larger shares of the Chinese oil imports each year and Beijing sees Middle East as a very crucial part of the BRI. On geopolitical terms, an interesting strategy appears as Israeli Chinese relations deepens via FDI pouring into Israel's tech industry and China positions itself at a greater role in Israel's "Silicon Wadi". It is indeed a strategic move on China's part to build a strategic partnership with Israel's high-tech industry for China's global competition against the US since the ties between Washington and Israel has always been the closest in the region (Barren, 2019). There is also evidence that by getting the control over the parts of Haifa Port of Israel, China deepened its roots in the country in the light of growing anxiety of the US. In

addition, by doing so it is argued that China has now a greater access than ever before in Northern Mediterranean Sea as, in geopolitical terms, it now has the control of two end points of the region, Haifa Port being at the one end and Greece's Piraeus Port being the other (M. Örgen, personal communication, February 12, 2020). In addition, the dependency that is created here could be considered as one of the most balanced ones when projected on the levels of engagement and dependence of China with other regions. The trade relations are mostly balanced and the Chinese FDI in the region is very substantial, rounding up to \$90 billion. Countries and the monarchies of the region welcome the Chinese investments as they are under pressure to diversify their economies and decrease dependency on oil exports (Fulton, 2019). In return, in terms of geo-economic goals, the region is one of the hotspots for China's currency internationalization goals as renminbi is used during most of the trade transactions. Overall, the region is highly beneficial to Chinese strategic partnership goals and the region further depends on China for its investment and funding. It can be argued that Gulf countries are enjoying a more relaxed and less problematic type of dependency with China compared to the poor nations of the African continent. It is also useful to point out here that Turkey does not fall into the category of Middle Eastern region in this context and this unique position of Turkey will be discussed further in the next chapter.

In the region of Asia-Pacific, the aims are more important on geo-political terms as some of China's most strategic geopolitical concerns stem from its own neighboring countries in its region. Parallel to that is region's growing concerns and the imbalanced interactions between the poorer countries of the region and China's immense lending to such countries. The dependence to China is most visibly seen through the countries of South and Southeast Asia such as Sri Lanka. Xi Jinping also places the most importance on this region for its obvious impact on China itself while emphasizing the need for "cooperation" in the region as it can be read in his speech during Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference in 2013:

We need to build on past success and promote cooperation in Asia. There are many mechanisms and initiatives for enhancing cooperation in Asia, and a lot of ideas are being explored by various parties. What we need to do is to enhance mutual understanding, build consensus and enrich cooperation so as to strike a balance among the interests of the various stakeholders and build mechanisms that bring benefits to us all.

(Xi, 2013).

Contrary to the cooperation, within the countries of the region, there are more than one policy implementations that makes the region more dependent on China and increases China's "inducement". Firstly, the obvious lending and "debt-trap" appears to be the biggest issue in the region. Usage of economic leverage known to help Beijing achieving its political goals within East Asia and ASEAN countries (Schultz, 2017). In 2003, China shut off an oil pipeline to North Korea for three days to exercise its economic power to pressure Pyongyang to attend the trilateral meeting on nuclear disarmament in Beijing at the time (Lai, 2017). In 2011, Beijing suspended its exports of rare earth materials after Japan's detention of a Chinese fishing boat in the East China Sea. Similarly, in 2012, as a response to the territorial disputes in the South China Sea, China imposed restrictions on banana imports from the Philippines (2017:170). China refused these actions to be strategies of economic retaliation of any sort as the peaceful rise of the country does not match with such themes of coercion and inducement.

Within ASEAN, it is argued that the regional role of organization has been changing and its ability to mediate for regional issues has been declining as China's rise has been impacting the power balances more and more in its own favor. On the South China Sea dispute, Chinese leaders have been showing their disinterest for coming up with a regional solution but rather deal with the issues via bilateral relations with each individual country instead. As suggested earlier, the new major power diplomacy which engages heavily on bilateral terms with its partnering countries brings China a unique leverage in terms of political gains on one-on-one terms. As a result of such strategy, ASEAN as an institution has been "captured" by Chinese influence via the dependency each of its member states that later serves both the dissolution of the ASEAN's regional power as well as serving the Chinese interests. In other words, as Thu (2019) argues, "Over the past five years, there has been a noticeable change in the ASEAN diplomatic behavior towards increasingly towards accommodating Beijing's preference. However, not only did this trend contributed to resolving the disputes, but it has further accentuated internal divide within ASEAN" (2019:21). The region is also ultimately volatile due to both China's and the US' presence that contributes China's ambitions to show its own capabilities in front of the US. China is argued to be discouraging the member states of the region from even using the terms such as the South China Sea, "the China threat" in their public discourse (2019:25). The presence of China's military in the region can be

considered a form of coercion, however, it should not be noted as the main tool of regional power nor it should not be considered as the most cost-effective Chinese strategy within ASEAN.

If we look at the China's relationship with India in South Asia, the reflections on the Chinese involvement and influence differs with a dose of rivalry for the two Asia giants. Although, rivalry exists, co-operation between the two countries outweigh the tensions. Conflicting interests persist over the issues of territory, water, and the imbalance in trade. It can be said that China does not necessarily see India to be a challenging power of its authority in the region (Paul, 2020, p.5). This is not to say that India does not have objections against the overall Chinese usage of the BRI and its adjacent tools to get an upper hand. The quests for resources are important for both actors as energy demands have grown and will continue to grow drastically in the upcoming years (Chen, 2020:122). The rivalry and competition become clearer on Central Asia and Africa regions due to their potential as energy markets. Conflict rooted in such energy security concerns also comes to surface via the BRI and its success in the Central Asia region, in which the influence and involvement of India remains so little (Chen, 2020:128). However, the power asymmetries found between the two countries' economic capabilities limits India's scope of action. China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean increases the latent conflict as it is concerned by India's effort of alliance with US and Japan to curb China's naval presence. In return, it is argued that China's ability to counterforce in a possible confrontation and to threaten India's cities could induce India's retaliation. However, due to an anxiety that India can be pushed towards the US for a possible military alliance, China appears to be cautious on its bilateral relations still.

In Central Asia and Caucasus too, China, has been using the economic leverage instead of a type of military coercion to enhance the dependency in the region. The loans that are given the countries of the region have been equally generous as borders of the region's countries with China connect the country to Middle East, the Mediterranean and then to Europe (Yellinek, 2020). "The China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor" is considered as one of the main routes of the BRI as through Georgia and its coast on the Black Sea serves as the connection point to Europe. The need for investing in infrastructure is large in the region as well as these countries do not have a direct access to major maritime shipping routes which

is known to be one of the most crucial points for trade flows (2020:2). For the countries of the region, it is plausible to argue that the positives can outweigh the negatives. BRI could easily boost jobs and tax revenues, the projects can have a domino effect for future FDIs pouring in and the BRI can allegedly help reducing the tension in the region by increasing connectivity and cooperation.

In Latin America, China is known to show interest, albeit not limited to, in Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, and Cuba. Even in the small yet strategically positioned OPEC country of Ecuador, there is a \$2.2 billion project that will turn the river water for eight giant Chinese turbines designed for producing electricity for more than a third of the whole country (Krauss and Bradsher, 2015). On the Pacific Ocean near the port of Manta in Ecuador, Chinese banks were in talks of lending \$7 billion for the construction of an oil refinery in 2015 and currently China holds the second biggest oil output in the country under “Andes Petroleum” and Sinopec (Krauss, and Bradsher, 2015; Long, 2019). The region once again holds great importance for China in terms of its energy security, and the cooperation is in symbiotic terms for Beijing, however, all of such long-term investments ultimately brings a dependence for China’s existence in the region. On political terms, in 2017 the Panamanian President recognized PRC, its relations with Taiwan deteriorated and the next six months following that showed progress in Panama-China relations faster than any other Latin American nation (Mende and Alden, 2019). Panama overall signed 48 bilateral memorandum of understanding (MoU) and some other agreements with Beijing on issues ranging from cultural exchanges, journalist training to free trade and infrastructure development (Mende and Alden, 2019:2). These agreements were all under the Framework of the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative. Panama is curious case as it is so far away from Eurasia and ultimately be an outlier for the Chinese goals when looked through the lenses of BRI. However, bringing Chinese influence in the region of South and Central America is still part of the broader global mega-strategy of China. It is not surprising in that sense that China has been reaching out to any possible strategic country it can to bring its influence, and hence, deepen the global system’s dependence on Chinese capital while making it an inevitable actor in global affairs.

For larger countries of the region such as Brazil, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, China has been serving as a “commercial partner, investor, and international lender for social and infrastructural projects” (Flores and Jatoba, 2016:128). On the case of how the dependence is built on this region, there is debate on the growing “North-South” dependency pattern between China and Latin America. In Nicaragua, this translates to a highly contested canal project by a Chinese firm that caused concern for its environmental impact and hopes for its economic impact. It was showed by a survey conducted within Nicaraguans in 2014, as part of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), as 72 percent had positive expectations for new job opportunities (Flores and Jatoba, 2016:138). For Venezuela, oil exports were the key between Beijing and Caracas, as China was looking for resources and Chavez administration was in need for an alternative market to sell its oil (Flores and Jatoba, 2016). There is a unique “loans-for-oil” arrangement through which “Venezuela has access to state credits via the China Development Bank, while Venezuelan oil barrels are shipped to China on a long-term basis as a way of payment” (2016:140). Those state credits are then transferred to the Venezuelan Development Bank which are then turned into special funds that are called “*Fondo Chino*” or “Chinese Fund” in English (Flores and Jatoba, 2016:140). And for Brazil, as it was discussed earlier under the relations of BRICS, the economic dependency are more institutionalized as its start lies back in 2004 when the Brazil-China Entrepreneurship Council was established which reported to gather around 70 most important companies of both countries (2016:144). The ties between the two countries ultimately yields to the BRICS delimitation led by China.

As China has been becoming more assertive and aggressive on its global influence, Brazil-China “rivalry” is also a point of concern that should be noted for the Latin American region. Brazilian reaction for China’s dominating position over the BRICS has been one that is not necessarily a black and white picture until very recently. For instance, Brazilian public mobilization on China-related issues has been relatively low compared to its neighbors in the region despite its BRICS involvement. It is argued that the Chinese presence in the country was aimed to be portrayed as “business only” by the Chinese authorities. On economic terms, it is also reported that the reaction from Brazilian side has been to improve investment relationships in the context of improving of South-South relations (Flores and Jatoba, 2016:145). China’s economic presence in the region had indirect political implications as long as it continued the favorable measures for Brazil to needed levels of economic growth

during the 2000s and it has not been much of an opposing issue for the previous administrations before Bolsonaro's time in the office (2016:146). In the recent term, after-2018, Bolsonaro is known for its China-bashing narrative since his presidential candidacy days. He portrayed China, its largest trading partner, as a predator trying to get a hold of all of Brazil's important markets. In his own words, he stated: "The Chinese are not buying in Brazil. They are buying Brazil..." (Bolsonaro, 2018). The tone of the Brazilian reaction to Chinese assertiveness is now in the hands of Bolsonaro and Xi, in an ongoing circle of China avoiding a possible trade war with Brazil and Brazil accusing China of dominating its economy and the BRICS formation itself. Although, in the context of US-China trade wars, Brazil reported to gain a certain amount of leverage, it is still a solid fact that Brazil can not turn its back against its biggest trade and investment partner just like many other countries of the world today.

Finally, for the case of Europe, bringing Chinese influence into the region can be categorized as one of China's greatest aims. Politically, the region is the biggest arsenal for historic US influence. It is a huge market for China, and it is no secret that the exports of Chinese goods have been pushing the trade deficits between the countries of EU and China to whole new levels. EU-China relations can be said to increase over the course of past three decades, in 2003, the EU and China announced a "comprehensive strategic partnership" which was "...intended to elevate their relationship from the economic to the political and even security domains" (Christiansen and Maher, 2017:122). The EU is the top destination for Chinese exports and the second largest supplier of goods after the US. According to the China Global Investment Tracker, between the years of 2005-2019, China invested an overall of \$329 billion in Europe. The dependency transforms into millions of jobs that are dependent on this trade and investment relationship between Europe and China. Chinese firms, either SOEs or state-funded, have been looking for a range of investments and joint projects with European companies (Christiansen and Maher, 2017:124). The investments follow similar path that with other regions and continents in the sense that they center around infrastructure such as making of the ports and airports or the energy sector, telecommunications, and real estate (124). Clearly this cooperation within European countries and China has expanded in terms scope after BRI, as countries such as Greece started allowing the Chinese to run its ports, creating further dependency to the Chinese capital.

As China is now visible within any part of the world today, these above-mentioned examples are only the scratch of the Chinese influence medley. The involvement with China's SOEs or directly with Beijing increases the volatility of the partnering countries and leaves them relatively attached to the Chinese money. The question of the implications and the nature of this increasing dependency is interlinked with the rise of China reality on a first-come, first-serve basis. In other words, as more countries are willing to invite China and welcome its capital on various sectors and projects in an almost "competitive" state, "who gets what and how" type of questions yield to questions on the level of understanding and perception of these strategic partner countries on China's involvement within their borders.

4.3. *The Nature of Dependency*

It was in 2013, a few months after Xi became the president of the PRC, when The Washington Post's editorial board put its June 10th headline as: "Is China willing to listen to the world?" The editorial depicted China as a country who was ready to be more attentive on global affairs while the domestic issues of repression persisted. Three years later, The New York Times stated that "Mr. Xi has sometimes succeeded in positioning China as a responsible power by stepping up when Washington has stepped back — speaking up for globalization at Davos, or in favor of the Paris climate change accord" (Perlez, 2017, para. 19). Although not a direct answer to the former question, China has been portraying itself as a responsible global influencer in the international system while simultaneously moving away from the possibilities of becoming a liberal democracy. This assertiveness of Xi's China translated to its global affairs as it was discussed before throughout this thesis. In my opinion, the important question to put forward then comes to this: Has China been listening the world or has it been making the world listen to what it finally has to say after being the "Red China" of the system for so long? In other words, should the nature of the above-mentioned policies and geo-economic as well as geo-political ties/dependencies be understood as symbiotic, imperialistic, or hegemonic?

I would consider the Chinese influence and dependency as imperialistic if it had coercive means at its core. Military measures or hard power-oriented policies are not necessarily a stable piece in Chinese relations today. Diplomatic affairs and economic dependencies are far more important on its bilateral and regional affairs. This is part of its mega-strategy, its discourse both on the inside and outside as suggested in previous chapters. The idea revolves around a peaceful, co-existing, all-inclusive agenda that what China has been doing its for its own good but also for the goodness of all. Throughout the interviews conducted for this thesis as well, the coerciveness of Chinese policies was not a point of discussion. If the Chinese policies were ought to be entirely based on imperialistic measures, there would not be a point of discussing its positives for the host countries in terms of the heavy lending, investments, and infrastructure projects. China could have followed a path of military coercion starting from its region and then moving along and spend its capital on destructive mechanisms such as nuclear weaponry. I argue that if China were to hold all its funds and invest in its own military capabilities over the years, it could have easily turned into one of world's most dangerous and capable nuclear powers following the footsteps of North Korea as well as use the nuclear energy as a point of negotiation or threat similar to the US-Iranian relations. This is not the case for Chinese perception as it has been wishing to solely to integrate itself into the global system and not actually change or fight against it as I have provided the examples and evidence throughout the previous chapters.

Is the Chinese dependence a symbiotic one? The answer is not a definitive “yes”. I argue this time that for this dependency which China has built cannot be identified as symbiotic. Even though both sides acquire some sort of benefit throughout the investments and projects, whether it be job opportunities, improved infrastructure or special credits for trade, there is imbalance between China's acquired benefits and the host countries' long-term debt-oriented issues as well as environmental concerns. If the policies could have implemented with better outlook and feasibility concerns for its participant countries on China's part, the economic dependency could have been argued to appear as symbiotic. However, at this point, considering not only China has been fulfilling its energy needs but also getting political free-passes for some of its most stressing issues, the relationship does not appear as a symbiotic one.

As there is a clear dependency to China for the countries of different regions and those who are currently engaged within the BRI context, it is plausible suggest that the dependency comes in form a hegemon that provides a certain level of legitimacy. The legitimacy is in a way that the countries wish and want China to provide its investments and further strengthen ties with Beijing in hopes to boost their own economic capabilities. It is also visible that the countries do not engage with China in terms of forced conditions nor fear of invasion. In return, China can implement its global vision, take the floor on global issues that concerns us all and thus, pushes its position on global leadership further up. This analysis is rather a descriptive one, of course, and it is not unproblematic, nor it is a fixed normative reality. It is subject to change as concerns continue to rise. However, at the end of the day, it would still be wrong to oversee Chinese efforts as mere regional attempts at geopolitical relief and leadership as the scope of its mega-strategy surpassed that level in Xi period.

In order to find an answer to this question in a more normative manner, I discuss the global reactions from the members of the above-mentioned regions both in its positive formations as well as the negative concerns and anxieties. The repercussions, impressions the Chinese influence leaves around the world is a valuable research point to build on the existing discussion on China's hegemonic efforts. If the participant countries perceive China as a threat, then the spectrum for Chinese dependence moves towards more imperialistic than symbiotic, if Chinese dependence is seen more as opportunity then it is only reasonable to consider its nature and character more on the symbiotic side. In addition, it is important to keep in mind that all the projects, investments and initiatives has its costs for China as well. Many of the developing countries which China is creating such dependence with suffer from weak and unstable economies, inadequate public governance or from issues of political instability and/or corruption (Perlez and Huang, 2017, para. 33). Risks outweigh the advantages in the long-term for China for its connections in some parts of the world, this should bring the question of "willingness and capacities" discussion of the hegemonic stability literature from earlier. The risks for China suggest that there must be a sense of willingness from its part in addition to the capacity to take on these roles all around the globe today. This willingness can be considered as a yet another visible sign of a hegemonic rise for China.

I suggest that, with this kind of schematization in mind, the blurry and mixed perceptions of Chinese influence leads to a semi-hegemonic state that does not fit with either of the extreme ends similar to the unique type of power that China exudes (a mixture of soft and sharp power, as discussed in Chapter 3).

4.4. *Impression and Implication*

In 2018, after yet another pro-globalization speech of Xi Jinping as the keynote speaker at the China International Import Expo (CIIE), international community welcomed such a narrative once again. Australian Trade Minister showed his enthusiasm about China's commitment to opening-up while pointing out the further need for strengthening and preserving the multilateral trade system. Britain's International Trade Secretary Fox stated that "it is "fantastic" to hear more from President Xi on China further opening up its markets to imports and investment", adding that the British government is "delighted to be supporting the event" (Xinhua, November 6, 2018). Similarly, the Peruvian Foreign Trade Minister equally praised Xi's speech and claimed that it is "... a piece of good news to the world, especially at a time when waves of protectionism and unilateralism are threatening global growth" (Xinhua, 2018). The tone did not change when the commerce minister of Cote d'Ivoire said, "The Chinese president's remarks show that China honors its international commitments and wants all countries to have peaceful trade relations" (Xinhua, 2018). The expo itself was suggested to "help the globalization process to go on" by Associate Professor and the head of the International MBA program at the University of Haifa in Israel (Xinhua, 2018).

At the same time, it is crucial keep in mind that the clearest examples of the "debt-trap" causes fear and anxieties for other developing nations all around the world. Sri Lanka's borrowing from China for its new port turned out to be the biggest failure of the Chinese lending for the participant party till this date. Sri Lanka gave a Chinese SOE a 99-year lease in exchange for its debt relief and the port reported to provide China with a "strategic berth along key shipping lanes" (The Washington Post, 2019, para. 3). In Pakistan's case, China was set to lend \$8 billion for upgrading a railroad from Karachi to Peshawar, however, Islamabad wanted to cut the cost in half as it has been struggling with long-standing deb

problems already. Likewise, Myanmar drastically cut back the costs for a port deal with China from \$7.5 billion to \$1.3 billion in the same fears experienced by its neighbors. In Malaysia, the government cancelled \$3 billion worth of pipelines in 2019 and renegotiated a rail project in 2019. In June 2019, Kenya halted a construction of a Chinese-backed plant on one of its islands which is known to be a major tourist destination and ordered a newer environmental impact test (The Washington Post, 2019, para. 3-4).

On one side of the coin, we see a China that is willing influence more and more in “peaceful” ways via Confucian institutes, global media operations by television, radio, and social network platforms in addition to the economic and financial efforts to connect with the world (Markey, 2020). On the other side of the coin, however, there are examples of concern. In Australia, the government is concerned about Beijing’s interference in its domestic politics. In Europe, although the economic dependency achieved an all-time high in the past decade, it is reported that politicians and statesmen are raising the issues of “heavy-handed trade tactics aimed at acquiring foreign technology” (Perlez, 2017, para. 7). In Germany, it is reported that the sharp increase in Chinese investment caused complaints about China closing its own markets when it goes “...on a buying spree abroad” (Perlez, 2017, para. 11). In Southeast Asia and Africa, the start of complaints about a “new era of Chinese colonialism” is visible to detect. There are also concerns about China’s intentions in EU based on the claims that China is trying to divide the union by supporting the poorer nations such as Greece and Hungary and further use them to”...block policies supported by richer countries that hurt Beijing” (para. 12).

In the Western media and literature, one impression that takes the center is the confusion on whether China has been trying to coexist with the US or overturn the system all together. For a superpower like the US, some observers have concluded that China has not been trying to replace US nor they have the intention to do so (Mastro, 2019). This is in line with the Beijing’s rhetoric that its peaceful rise would not aim at threatening the global system. Xi Jinping, with much assertiveness and ambition, still suggested that “China lacks the gene that drives great powers to seek hegemony” (Mastro, 2019: para. 2). It is almost as though there is an invisible line between China’s perception of a superpower and a hegemon. It feels as though China sees the word hegemon as the taboo that should be avoided in its narrative

while implementing policies that contribute more towards its hegemonic positioning. One argument is that the avoidance of that kind is simply the Chinese strategy according to the US media. Mastro (2019) analyses that by doing so China was able to hide its hegemonic agenda and remain unbothered as it continued its journey quietly, she argues the following:

The way that China has gone about this project has caused many observers to mistakenly conclude that the country is merely trying to coexist with American power rather than fundamentally overturn the order in Asia and compete with U.S. influence globally. In fact, ambiguity has been part of the strategy: Chinese leaders have recognized that in order to succeed, they must avoid provoking an unfavourable response, and so they have refrained from directly challenging the United States, replicating its order-building model, or matching its globally active military. Although Beijing has pursued an indirect and entrepreneurial strategy of accumulating power, make no mistake: the ultimate goal is to push the United States out of the Indo-Pacific and rival it on the global stage.

(Mastro, 2019, para. 4)

In other words, not wanting to become a hegemon is China's strategy to become the hegemon which ironically fits with Nye's "best propaganda is not propaganda" understanding in a strange way (Nye, 2012). This narrative portrays China as a very malicious and strategic of a country as opposed to the pragmatic, cautious and "feel the stones while crossing the river" kind of China. Anxieties about China's rise stems from this unsure feeling of the essence of its development and influence over the global system. The lack of transparency feeds into this kind of narrative and the implications of such a China for the world translates to covert actions, latent intentions of erasing China's foreign oppositions all together and yield a global political system that is dominated by the appeal of authoritarian regimes. In this regard, BRI is seen as the biggest strategy to create the dependency for compliant foreign governments externally (Mastro, 2019). The Confucius Institutes that are established all around the world are also seen as tools for shaping the discourse on sensitive topics in addition to launching English-language media outlets to propagate CCP's agenda and narrative (2019: para. 8). This also stems from the realist IR literature on the "The China Threat" which can be traced back to Mearsheimer's "*China's Unpeaceful Rise*" that predicts a state competition followed by conflict with the US in the anarchic system (Mearsheimer, 2006 as cited by Scott and Wilkinson, 2013:764).

This kind of readings of the China's rise, leads to the perception that the PRC is no longer a contender or a passive player in the world system but a disruptive one (Scott and Wilkinson, 2013). The implications in this sense that are based on the visible dependency China has created rather ignores the depth and uniqueness of the phenomenon and the stages of development for China. I argue that it is fair to suggest that there has been a change in Chinese narrative and that as much as emphasis made on being a superpower, being a hegemon is not proudly advertised by any Beijing official even today. Having said that, China's competence for observing the US hegemony during its reign, allowed China to learn lessons and write down the path China is ought to unfollow. I argue that China has seen the price US' had to pay in Vietnam or Middle East to bring its power to forefront in conflict-based, military confrontation in its journey to be the hegemon. It also watched US' devotion to the UN, WTO, IMF, WB financially to get to its decision-maker position. As one Chinese saying goes China knows "*wind damages the flourishing trees in the forest*" (Ge, 2018:14). It has been watching different winds take its toll on the US dominance in the forest and it is plausible to argue that the avoidance to identify itself as a hegemonic power stems from this cautionary perspective.

One argument is that the authoritarian regime and repressive political culture of China should be a threat to liberal order. I argue that this understanding is flawed in couple of ways. Firstly, there is the reality of growing far-right populism and increased authoritarian tendencies all around the world today, and I have not come across an evidence that suggest a correlation or direct linkage between China's rise and the populist phenomenon. The democracy fatigue that can be seen through declining number of voters in liberal democracies, the election of populist figures like Trump, or even the infamous BREXIT, is an already ongoing issue that did not start off with Xi's presidency nor with China's membership in the WTO. The global phenomenon has been already damaging the appeal of liberal order and thus, China's rise and existence does not what makes the liberal order volatile. It is true that the current global political climate helped China to continue its path with less worries. Secondly, this volatile state of the global system led dependency to China to be built in a much easier way, it pushed countries to open their borders to the authoritarian CCP-run economic superpower. Thirdly, because of such dependence today, the problems within China that are naturally against the liberal order such as its repression on the freedom of expression, human rights abuses that goes down in its "re-education camps", constant surveillance on its citizens are now left

untouched, and no accountability is asked from China by any of the rising, middle or major powers of the system itself. In many ways, China is shaping the system without really pushing down any of its fundamental institutions or norms, but the system's volatility allows China to co-habit with a liberal superpower like the US at the same time and in relative "harmony".

In the processes of doing so, it is fair to argue that in the post-2016 period, with Trump's election in the US, the system experienced a retreat from the US for its global responsibilities in a stage-based progression of Chinese influence period. The increasing assertiveness for China's stern decision-making and policy-implementation both for its domestic affairs as well as bilateral diplomatic agenda leads to an exporting of the Chinese authoritarianism. In many ways, as much as post-2013 is a crucial economic stage for Chinese global influence, the post-2016 period is also a critical juncture for the visibility of China's influence turning into political dominance in its region and beyond. The political criticism, or the lack of it, resonates with this period as the major actors of the world turning a blind eye for China's internal authoritarian policymaking towards its limitations on freedom of expression and the human rights violations towards its ethnic minorities, most evidently against the Xinjiang Uyghur Turks. In the external realm, in the age of diminishing liberal democratic values and systems, China's way of doing politics and diplomacy seems to become popular as an exemplary success story on development for the small countries of the developing South.

What about the middle powers then? If the cautious non-confrontational indirect approach to the US is one implication of China's growing influence, even though the trade wars have been the one incident that was inclined to be the confrontation which the US wished for and China relatively avoided, what is the implication for the regional, middle powers and the other developing countries? Does China's rise bring a "Hobson's choice" for countries that have been engaging with both ends of the system, the US and China? For now, I argue that since their co-habitation, hybrid existence, the third parties do not have to pick sides as of now. It is because of this hybrid and non-dichotomous stand of China and the US that allows countries such as Turkey to pursue a multi-lateral foreign policy. In the next chapter, I show in-depth of how a regional power like Turkey actually has been re-adjusting itself towards

cooperation with China while not leaving its historical Western ties behind in the context of bilateral ties before and after its BRI involvement.



V. A Case Study: Sino-Turkish Relations

We are acting in line with the conscience that the Sino-Turkish economic and trade partnership, besides its regional benefits, has potential to contribute to world peace, prosperity, and stability...I believe that we will witness together how our relations will be upgraded in all fields when we boost our consultations with our Chinese friends.

(Erdogan, 2019).

5.1. Sino-Turkish Relations before the BRI

It is also crucial to briefly look at the relations between Turkey and the emerging major powers historically. It is said that Chinese civilization was influenced by many nomadic nations, one of them being the Turks. Thus, the bilateral relations are said to be going back all the way to the 16th century between the Ottoman Empire and the Ming Dynasty of China (Fidan, 2015: 308). According to Ming Historical records, there were nineteen envoys from Ottoman Empire to China. In 19th and 20th centuries, the Qing Empire and the Ottoman Empire had gone through changes caused by the overall developments in the Western world such as the ‘age of discovery’ and the ‘Industrial Revolution’ (2015:308). In the late Ottoman era, Sultan Abdülaziz helped Turkestan Khanates in their struggles against the Russian imperial forces in the territory of today’s Xinjiang region (Ersoy, 2008:57). His successor, Abdülhamid II, was primarily concerned with the Western involvement and threat, thus, his objective said to be to ‘keep the European States busy in the Far East and to ensure that they were not struggling with the Ottoman State’ (Sirma, 2000 as cited in Ersoy, 2008:58). Abdülhamid II was content to allow German Kaiser William II to send missions to China. However, according to Ersoy (2008) ‘the Ottoman activism’ had ended after the dethronement of Abdülhamid II (2008:58). Later, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, the newly established Turkish state had made its way to the conversations by having relative impact within the Chinese nationalists against heir imperial struggles against Japanese Empire in mid-1920s. In 1940, the communists did not share the Turkish way of independence and Mao, himself saw Turkey as a pseudo-colony and part of the Western imperialist world (2008:60). The participation of Turkish troops in the Korean War of 1950 then started the initial change of the Chinese image in Turkish narrative based on the “Red

China” and the horrors of the war itself, thus, the relations and the perceptions mutually changed throughout the mid years of the Cold War (2008:61).

The diplomatic, formal relations between Turkey and People’s Republic of China (PRC) have started very recently, in 1971, considering the long history of the two countries coming from two major empires of their time but gained momentum in economic terms in 2010 (Kamel, 2014:265). The bilateral relations have been established on economic and financial terms mostly except for the Syrian crisis a few years ago (Atlı, 2016). Although having their interests and aims clash in the Middle East region geopolitically, the two countries came to a strong consensus on economic ties when Chinese president Xi Jinping declared the famous ‘*One Belt One Road*’ initiative around the same time of Turkey’s ‘*Middle Corridor Initiative*’, both projects aiming to revive the Ancient Silk Road and facilitate establishing an uninterrupted connection between Asia and Europe, which will evidently promote the trade flow between the two regions.

However, as scholars like Shichor (2009) puts forward the argument of the importance of what he calls ‘ethno-diplomacy’, the long history of China’s rigid goal to eradicate the Muslim identity of Uyghur Turks in the Xinjiang region has always casted a shadow on the bilateral relations. China has always raised their concerns and disturbance about Turkey’s involvement, support for the Uyghur Turks and their wish for insurgency (Çolakoğlu, 2015). Consequently, Turkey has always put emphasis on the vitality of the issue, while Uyghur Turks in the region has always counted on Turkey for making their voices heard in international community (Shichor, 2009).

From a foreign policy analysis perspective, Turkey, until recently, has handled the issue as a two-level game, famously introduced by Robert Putnam in 1988. Thus, Turkey acknowledged the domestic reactions for backing the Uyghur Turks who were victims under the strict rule of *Red China* while also took considerations of the future outcomes of its position in the Central Asia. However, even the two-level game came to a strict dead end after China started heavily investing in Turkey and a tremendous amount of goods started flowing from China. As it is heavily argued in the literature Turkey still has a strong stance

on the issue, however, economics now play a major role for the continuation of the bilateral relations (Shichor, 2009; Çolakoğlu, 2015; Ergenç, 2015). Finally, the relations gained momentum after 2013 with new investments and business coming from China to Turkey. However, before analyzing the tone and scope of the relations after the 2013 or I argue it to be the BRI period, a brief revisit to the recent escalations in the Xinjiang Uyghur region is needed.

Geopolitics of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR)

Human Rights Watch (2018) recently published their 125-pages long report on Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and the PRC government's escalated strict policy to monitor and control over the region. The report heavily consists of in-depth interviews with the people who ran away from the XUAR region after being detained in China's *Political Education Camps* in the region and faced multiple forms of systematic identity eradication methods, ranging from singing nationalistic communist anthems every single morning and vowing a pledge to the country, all the way to being physically tortured to renounce their Muslim identities. Although the report shows the latest and most recent levels of direct and indirect violence in the region, the policies changed names but not aims in the region. This chapter will not go into a detailed history of the ethnic Muslim minority of the country, but it is important to highlight few cut-off points about the geopolitical issue of Xinjiang Uyghurs to understand its importance for the recent Sino-Turkish relations.

To begin with, the way the Chinese government dealt with the issue clearly changed its tone in May 2014 when China launched its “*Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism*” aka “*Strike Hard Campaign*” based on Chen Quanguo, who had been elected newly as the party secretary at the time and still keeping the position until this day. (Wang, 2018). Historically, such policies to correct “flawed citizens” was initiated by the “*Laojiao*” system which was re-education to those who opposed or questioned the fundamentals of the Red China through labor camps. *Laojiao* was then replaced by the new system which had eliminated the labor part, but instead, according to the HRW report (2018), turned into a violent strategy in such a way that “the human rights violations in Xinjiang today are of a scope and scale not seen in China since the 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution” (Wang, 2018:5). *Strike Hard Campaign* was then followed by side projects like the *Becoming Family*

Campaign in 2017, which is a compulsory homestay program where more than a million officers (cadres) spend at least five days every two months in the homes of Xinjiang residents primarily in the countryside (Wang, 2018:13).

Such higher density policies and attention on the XUAR came after the announcement of the One Belt - One Road project, because the region is geographically in a strategic position if the initiative can ever successfully connect China to Eurasia. Thus, as one can imagine, security concerns increased immensely in the region (Zenz, 2018:4). After only showing a glimpse of the Chinese aims and initiatives in the region and the *Muslim crackdown*, of course, it will be mentioned here what the region and the Uyghur Turkic identity of the region means for Turkey and its ties with China diplomatically in the recent period of the relations, especially before the BRI and Turkey's involvement with the project.

Before all the economic developments took place and gained momentum by trade and investments, the diplomatic relations were mainly based on and revolved around the situation of East Turkestan on Turkey's side since the Turkish government had a position of supporting the Uyghur movement unofficially at first. As Shichor states,

On an unofficial basis, however, Turkey has provided the Uyghurs with freedom of action, offices, and some financial support. Whether willingly or not, Turkey has gradually become the basis of the Uyghur nationalist movement and the headquarters of worldwide associations and organizations. For many years, the movement was led by İsa Yusuf Alptekin and Mehmet Emin Buğra.

(Shichor, 2009:17).

In the 1950s and 60s, the Uyghur movement showed its extensions in Turkey by the multiple organizations and publications both initiated and organized by Alptekin and Buğra. After the establishment of official relations as well as China's overall changing foreign policy in Deng Xiaoping era in the 90s, the Uyghur issue became evident for PRC and Turkey started appearing as an important component of the issue. Turkey officially started supporting the Eastern Turkestan following the collapse of the Soviet Union as it coincided with Ankara's foreign policy at the time which "...aimed, for a moment, at re-creating a great Turkic-cum-

Turkish nation” (Shichor, 2009: 21). Until the mid-1990s, Turkey ignored China’s displeasure about its involvement with the Uyghur nationalist activism.

Military relations have been rather stagnant between the two countries, and I do not see it as a necessary need to have an in-depth analysis on, due to China’s focus on high-level diplomatic and economic relations with the rest of the world as well. Having said that, I wish to briefly sum up a few of the important military exchanges between the two countries to give a depth to this case study. I utilize one of the very few books written on Sino-Turkish Military relations by Eyüp Ersoy (2008) called “Turkish-Chinese Military Relations: Spinning More Moving Less” which was originally written for the International Strategic Research Organization of Turkey (USAK in Turkish). Throughout the book, Ersoy (2008) describes a detailed analytical run-down of military interactions between China and Turkey based on a timeline. As having the second largest army in NATO, Turkey has profound experience and places a great deal of emphasis on its military relations with other countries both at the regional and international level. However, Turkey overall has signed only three military agreements with China. These are the ‘*Defense Industry Cooperation Agreement*’ of 1997; ‘*Cooperation Protocol on Military Education between the General Staff of the Republic of Turkey and People’s Liberation Army of PRC*’ of 1999 and the ‘*Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Turkish Naval Special Warfare Basic Training Course*’ which was signed in 2003 (Ersoy, 2008:109). Although the numbers of agreements still being low, Ersoy points out the importance of reciprocal visits of high-ranking military personnel between the two countries as an indication and wish to establish strong military relations (2008:111). In terms of operational military relations, author suggests that employment of the weapon systems between the two countries and joint exercises the armies held, and the total number of military personnel participating in such activities are all indicators of the improvement of bilateral military relations (2008:117-123). However, for the case of China and Turkey, although the two countries have engaged in other international military activities, the two are yet to conduct a solely bilateral military exercise of their own (2008:125). Finally, for the case of technical military relations, which primarily consists of the purchasing of weaponry systems, Ersoy (2008) states that there has been low levels of importing on Turkish side from China similar to their lack of collaborative military activities (2008:131). Though, he adds the following:

Turkey has hitherto concluded two joint defence industry projects with China, both of which pertained to the development and production of Chinese missile systems in Turkey under license... According to Major General Armağan Kuloğlu (Ret.), there were two main reasons for the Turkish involvement in these two collaborative projects with China on missile systems. The first reason was the increasing missile threat around Turkey in the mid-1990s and the realization of the Turkish authorities that Turkey had severe deficiencies in missile defense systems.

(Ersoy, 2008:134).

Ersoy (2008) overall makes the conclusion that there have been several occasions where military authorities of both countries expressed their desire to improve the military relations. Arms sales helps enable many Chinese foreign policy objectives to come to life with specific countries including Turkey (2008:151). Finally, he addresses the room for improvement of the military relations considering the higher volume within the context of economic relations via trade (2008:162). He then concludes the reason for low levels military relations due to several reasons. There are two main motives to improve military relations with China, particularly on two reasons according to the author, which are the wish of Turkey to diversify its “defense industrial relations” with different countries and the wish to “...capitalize the rapid developments in Chinese military modernization” (2008:164). Having said that, once again, the main driving force between Sino-Turkish relations remains to be economic rather than military nor political/social.

As Turkey’s defiance went along with the increasing pressure and concern from China, eventually by the end of the 1990s China started improving its economic relations with Turkey by a momentum that has never been experienced before. A look at the statistics demonstrates China’s formidable economic drive, which has transformed Sino-Turkish trade patterns dramatically since the 1990s. Turkey’s exports to China was around \$500 million in 1993 and by 2007 Turkey had increased its exports to China by nearly 50 percent, to more than one billion dollars, and by 2008 they had increased by another 38 percent, to \$1.43 billion (2009: 37). Today, the levels are even higher than ever before. According to the China Global Investment Tracker, between the years of 2009 and 2013, the Chinese investment in Turkey totaled around \$5.82 billion and between the years 2013 and 2019, this number almost doubled and mounted up to \$10.14 billion. This sort of a drastic escalation clearly showing the rightful need to separate the time periods before and after the year of 2013 to get a deeper grasp of the nature of Sino-Turkish relations and the growing economic dependency.

5.2. Sino Turkish Relations after the BRI

Looking at the Belt and Road Initiative from a Sino-Turkish perspective, Turkey has a prominent place within the Belt as a gateway to Europe and Africa for Chinese trade operations. Through the BRI, Chinese banks have already entered the Turkish financial sector and there has been an acquisition of a Turkish port by the Chinese investors in addition to the already booming levels of trade between the two countries and growing numbers of investments on various sectors. The reason why the BRI has its high rates of appeal for Turkey is because it is a conjunction point in foreign policy objectives of the two countries, which perhaps never happened in history of bilateral diplomatic ties when Turkey announced its Middle Corridor Initiative in the same year of the BRI, both projects aiming to revitalize the Silk Road and use it as a major transportation route for trade (Guo and Fidan, 2018).

Diplomatically, the visits have been more and more frequent after the year 2015, as the Turkish Consul General Arman notes:

...However, when we look at the year 2015, because that was the year when Mr. President paid a visit to China and during that visit, both sides reached a common agreement on solving all issues through dialogs, highlighting dialogues and focusing on visits and, hence, began a new chapter. The Uyghur issues is included in this as well. After that, Xi Jinping and Mr. President have been meeting frequently. In the G20 meetings of 2015, 2016 in Antalya, 2018 BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, G20 Buenos Aires meeting as well as they had a phone call in April of the same year. Except these, Mr. President visited China in 2017 for the Belt and Road Initiative. In 2019, the "Security and Cooperation in Asia" mechanism took place... Again, the two leaders met in a G20 Summit in Osaka (Japan). Immediately following the summit, Mr. President paid a short daily visit to China in last July.

(M.Ö. Arman, personal communication, Jan. 7, 2020).

I first wish to update on the Sino-Turkey relations to make my case clearer and stronger. What has happened since 2015 between China and Turkey? Economically, China became Turkey's third trade partner globally while becoming the first in East Asia. China has also become Turkey's second import partner in 2018, first one being the Russian Federation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, 2018). Chinese investments in Turkey rose to \$2 billion in total, in sectors predominantly including energy, infrastructure, logistics, finance, telecommunication and livestock (MFA, 2018). As the biggest Chinese investment in the country, Kumpot, a port that is located in Istanbul, was purchased for \$940 million for the 65 percent of its overall shares by the Chinese firm COSCO Pacific (Atlı, 2020:155). All these

sectors play very important roles in Turkey's development and economic growth, and with the current amount of Chinese involvement in top industries, one can clearly see how the dependency is being shaped through irreversible commitments like these. In addition, to update on Turkey's involvement with the Belt and Road Initiative, since 2015, as it was mentioned before, Turkey's own Middle Corridor Initiative heavily aligned with China's BRI and thus the "...a Memorandum of Understanding was signed on 1st of July, 2016 before the G20 Hangzhou Summit. Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, a main component of the Middle Corridor, was officially inaugurated on 30 October 2017" (MFA, 2018). Not only economics and trade, but also the growing aim of China to promote its culture in line with boosting its soft power in the world and in Turkey has led tourism to gain momentum between the two countries.

Işık and Zou (2019) recently discussed the new forms of security-oriented cooperation between China and Turkey based on the economics of the BRI and the Middle Corridor Initiative. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there has not been a military-based relationship between China and Turkey in the history of the bilateral relations. However, in recent years, due to the rise of international terrorism, the two states decided to take common actions after seeing a common threat to both (Işık and Zou, 2019). Additionally, to update on the formal military related visits between the two countries, since 2008, there has been visits from the Turkish side as follows:

...Commander of the Turkish War Academies Hasan Aksay in 2009, Deputy Chief of the Turkish General Staff Aslan Guner in 2010; Gendarmerie Commander, Chief of General Staff-to-be in the same year, Necdet Ozel in 2011; Turkish Deputy Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar in May 2013; Turkish Naval Forces Commander Bulent Bostancıoğlu in July 2014; Deputy Chief of General Staff Yasar Guler in June 2015.

(Işık and Zou, 2019:4)

On reciprocal terms, visits from the Chinese officials are also as follows:

...Vice President of the Chinese Military Commission Guo Boxiong in 2009; Chief of Chinese General Staff Chen Bingde in 2010 and Deputy Chief of the Chinese General Staff Ma Xiaotian in 2011; Deputy Chief of the Chinese General Staff Wang Guanzhong in 2014; The Special Envoy of Chinese President Xi Jinping and Secretary of Political and Legal Committee of CPC Meng Jianzhu in 2014.

(Işık and Zou, 2019:4)

Common terrorist threats play a major role on security relations rather than the bilateral visits of the military officials, nevertheless, it is still crucial to highlight the increased frequency of such visits considering the geographical distances between the two. Global terrorist organizations which are identified both by Turkey and China are the Eastern Turkistan Islamic movement, the ISIS, Al-Nusra, and Al-Qaeda (Işık and Zou, 2019:5). Not only the threat of global terrorism, but the specific position of Turkey to its neighboring Syria's military interventionist policies has caused a clear difference between the policy expectations of the EU and the USA from Turkey (Haihou, 2018). Such disruption caused Turkey to look for a closer relationship with an opposite end like China. Geopolitics caused both countries, China and Turkey, to build a trust relationship to cope with the issues and uncertainties of regional problems. On the one hand, one of the results of such closer ties on security related issues was Turkey's purchasing of weapons and military equipment from China starting from the late 1990s but escalating recently after 2013 (2019:8).

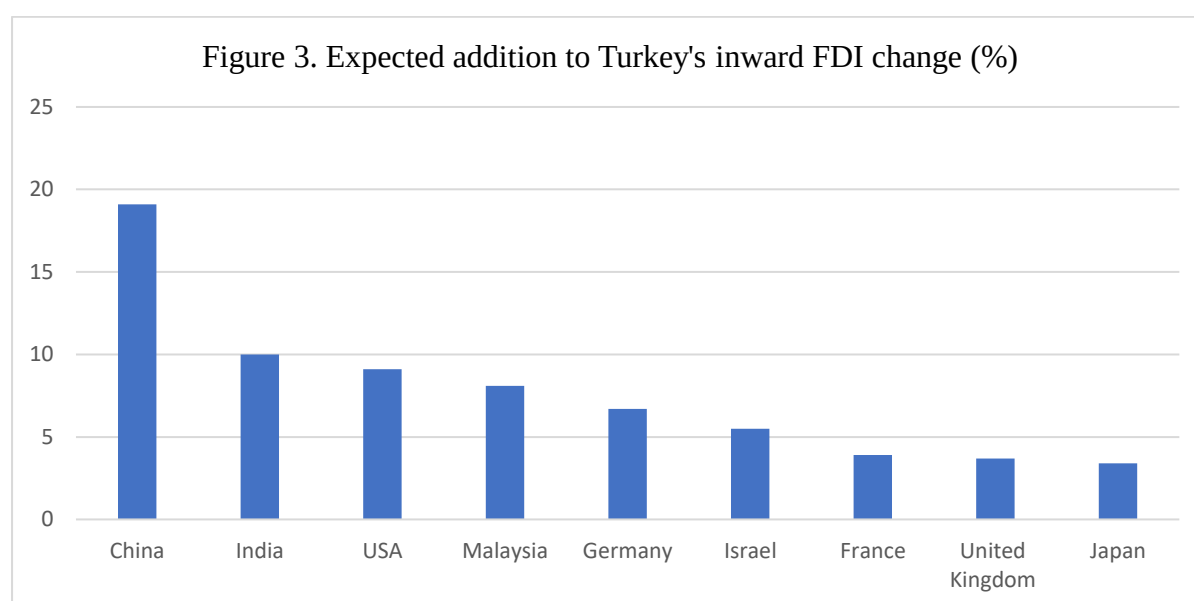
Moving back to economic ties and exchanges after the announcement of the BRI, there has been multiple occasions on emphasis on the positive outlook Turkey has for the Chinese business. For BRI, Turkey aims at a greater cooperation that should benefit its strategic advantages in a meaningful way through BRI rather than being a passive bridge that connects China to Europe. In this context, the 2019 report "The Positioning of Turkey in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)" by Turkey's Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK) shows Turkish aims in a clear and detailed manner. Firstly, the report summarizes possible gains of Turkey by participating in the initiative as follows:

... The important point in this regard is to not position Turkey within the BRI but to map Turkey's needs based on a complex network of corridors and poles... BRI can be considered as a Chinese-led network of national interests. Unlike some of the BRI countries, since Turkey's level of expertise on infrastructure and institutional linkages is high, Turkey can select and even create projects that are low-risk (on financial, political terms) and high-profitable (on economic, political terms).

(DEİK, 2019:14)

Specifically, the report emphasizes the need for Turkey to position its ports in the Mediterranean within the Maritime Silk Road dimension of the BRI. The need for the

utilization of the Chinese funded-BRI capital on a broader institutional spectrum for Turkey in relation to its increased need for investment are both highlighted in the report. There are three major potential strategies listed by the report. These are increasing Turkey's trade volume with China, increasing and facilitating trade between Turkey and other BRI countries, and finally, protecting Turkey's position as a bridge between China and Europe (2019:24). The expected impact on the inward FDI based on the BRI is reported in the following figure.



Source: DEIK (2019) Report on “Turkey’s Positioning in the BRI” (p. 39)

In addition to the abovementioned expectations, there are three important strategies that are designed within the context of logistics and transportation via the BRI. These are improving logistics infrastructure of Turkey, increasing Turkey's competitiveness as a logistics hub and finally, increasing the potential and activities of the Turkish logistics industry (2019:41). In terms of political economy, five strategy areas are highlighted in the report. It is advocated that Turkey should increase its appeal for the Chinese investments, produce with China and improve its technology also with China, prioritize on becoming a logistics hub, prioritize entering into new markets in addition to China, and finally, prioritize increased trade via the BRI in terms of entering Chinese markets in different sectors (2019:46). These elevated economic strategies and aims to connect and cooperate with China has its roots in 2013. Although the period after 2013 was not necessarily homogenous, it is plausible to argue that economic cooperation and pragmatic rapprochement of Turkey with China shows great levels

of increase in a relatively short period of time. In 2018, China was announced as one of the four high-priority trading partners for Turkey amongst Mexico, Russia, India (Milliyet, 2018). In August of the same year, at the time of writing thesis, there has been a SWAP agreement between Ankara and Beijing for the usage of Chinese currency RMB in its trade exchanges between Chinese and Turkish companies (Bloomberg HT, 2020).

In addition, there has been a recent call for Chinese firms and investment into Turkey from the Trade Minister Pekcan for the purposes of increasing the balancing of the trade volume between the two countries (Çakır, 2020). There are further important economic steps that were taken recently, which were highlighted by M. Özgün Arman, the former Head of Department and Deputy Directorate General for East Asia at MoFA, during our personal communication:

...In Turkey as well, there is an expectation for China to bring capital and contribute to infrastructure...The expectations are high... In 2018, one of the world's most important e-commerce brands, Alibaba bought Trendyol... When we look at the past ten to fifteen years of the relations, economically there has been significant change and improvement. The numbers are out there. In the recent years of the 2000s, the trade levels increase by ten to fifteen folds...There is significant Chinese presence in Turkey. When we look at it from the other side, is Turkey present in China? The Turkish firms are in China but proportion wise, it is way smaller.

(M.Ö. Arman, personal communication, Jan. 1, 2010).

Do all of these contribute to a type of dependency that was discussed in the previous chapter? The next section focuses on answering this question.

5.3. *Geopolitics and Dependency*

Geopolitics still a part of the Sino-Turkish relations, to say the least. There is no case from the Turkish experience that is similar to Sri Lanka's port lease to China, following an inability to pay its debt. Nor there is a case we can observe that shows direct concessions to China's advantage given from Ankara. However, the uniqueness of the Sino-Turkish case stems from the reality that the two countries have moved from geopolitical terms to geo-economics for their bilateral relations so quickly that it was inevitable to question the place of the geopolitical concerns as of now. The stressing issue of the livelihoods of Xinjiang Uyghur

Turks in the region of XUAR plays a secondary, if not further down, role on the diplomatic relations. It is neither avoided nor ignored, but the amount of emphasis given on the issue is no longer visible, as economics took the center stage due to the previously mentioned events and policies.

Turkey has been following a multilateral diplomacy with the countries of the West as well as the East. Trying to balance its relations with Washington as well as Beijing for its economic pragmatic terms ultimately allowed the Xinjiang issue to be placed on less aggressive and non-confrontational means. The Turkish lesson as a regional middle power undoubtedly allows a picture that the co-existence of both the US and China is a reality as two superpowers with hegemonic tendencies. The reason why I am suggesting it is due to the fact that as a country who has been identified by its Western orientation, whether due to its NATO membership or EU accession process, Turkey has been able to maneuver and execute a foreign policy that does allow it to have strong institutional ties with the West, while also steadily increasing its economic network with the East, specifically China.

Having said that, I do not suggest a complete non-existence of a Turkish dependency on China due to its still evident need of capital and investment in addition to its search for new markets for exporting its goods. In other words, Turkey has not been completely autonomous on making the choice of lowering the levels of confrontation of the still-sensitive Xinjiang issue in its diplomatic relations. In return, it would also be wrong to suggest that China's Turkey policy is irrelevant to its global mega-strategy in its strategic pivotal terms. Based on both countries' shifts and changes in their foreign policies over the last decade, it can be argued that both strategic goals are still affected by the geopolitics but with a twist of geo-economics that now knots the policies on more limited terms on Turkey's part. As Akgünay and Akgünay (2020) neatly summarizes it:

China's Turkey policy essentially continues to move forward on traditional parameters. In this context, the security concerns that have been going on between the two countries continues to create limitations for China's approach to Turkey. However, the two countries continue to improve their relations in economic terms... On the other hand, through the domestic and foreign policies of Xi Jinping, who came to office with an ambitious agenda in 2019, it is crucial to look closely to the results of the repercussions of these [security concerns and conflict of interests in the M. East region] on the economy and its possible impact on the China-Turkey relations.

I put the additional ‘before’ and ‘after’ words in my subsection titles as I believe the official “attitude” of the Turkish foreign policy changed, or simply had to change, about the Xinjiang issue *after* the BRI. Not only it had a transformation, but I will argue here that the bilateral relations also revolved around geopolitics *before*, and now the talks have economic partnerships, trade and investments at the center, while the geopolitics are pushed back to second or even third places in the priorities of the Turkish government. It is also plausible to mention the trade deficit between the two countries here in this final part to move onto and connect it to my policy suggestions. Although Turkey has growing investments coming from the Chinese side, the relation between Turkey and China does not appear to be an equally interdependent one by any means. The trade deficit Turkey has with China is now at concerning levels and there must be meaningful initiatives to balance the trade. This is not to say that the BRI is not a beneficial asset for Turkey, but it should not be used as an excuse to give China unlimited economic as well as political freedom within the scope of the bilateral relations. For instance, in 2019, twenty-two ambassadors in the UN jointly called on Beijing to halt its mass detention of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, while Turkey avoided taking any sides, which shows the post-2016 period of the bilateral relations being more dependent than before (Mai, 2019).

This brings me to my next suggestion, which is the ongoing issue of the Xinjiang Uyghur Turks and the systematic identity-eradication program of the Chinese government that should not and cannot be overlooked or tolerated. Turkey must make its stance clear and strong against the human right violations happening in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region and should not avoid bringing light to the issue only for the sake of keeping Chinese authorities satisfied. Just like in the cases of Syria, Palestine, Rohingya and many other conflict-ridden countries, Turkey should avoid the human sufferings in the region of Xinjiang. It is true that many countries today are choosing compliance based on the economic dependencies that are created with the hegemonic efforts of Beijing. However, it is important for Turkey to play out its geopolitical middle power position to its advantage and further try to reach a consensus on the issue due to its political sensitivity. The issue can be brought up in friendly terms with China to stabilize the cooperation between Turkey and PRC by making use of the newly accelerated economic interactions and cooperation without fully giving into Turkey’s Chinese dependence. Turkey also should not avoid its commitments to the European Union and the

accession process, and try to find a balance between the bilateral ties it is creating now with the Eastern side of the world and its historically bounded EU ties. In this seemingly dichotomous sense, a sound policy would be to emphasize Turkey's importance for the BRI project mainly because of its geographical position as a bridge of Eurasia, by making sure the prominent place of it within the BRI and the need for Turkey to be part of the initiative. Turkey itself should place its cards on the table and should demand from China to stop its systematic violence against Uyghur Turks. Thus, Turkey should not let China's threats and pressure to silence its position and should not allow such ignorance to become a Hobson's choice within its foreign policy and continue to treat both sides of the world in a multilateral manner.

5.4. Turkish Reactions and Awareness

The most crucial part of this case study is to show what kind of perception and awareness persist amongst the Turkish elite and experts who are focused on Sino-Turkish relations. The interviews mostly pointed towards an understanding for positive remarks and China's rise, and cautious remarks for becoming dependent on China. First point of commonness was that cooperation with China deemed essential:

If you ask me where Turkey stands in all of these; Turkish and Chinese firms can make joint projects, again they can produce in Turkey by collaborating. They can come together with third-party countries and cooperate. Turkey can become a logistics hub...

(M. Kolbaşı, personal communication, December 18, 2019).

When asked about the "debt-trap", the business elite overall suggested to be careful and smart before interacting with China, and interact for Turkey's own interests and benefits, which were similar to what Murat Kolbaşı, the former head of Turkey-China Business Council, neatly summarizes here:

...If one sees this as a "trap" or consider it as a threat, then they should not be involved with it. If you wish to enter but on particular terms, then play the game by those rules... Hence, the BRI is not something like a snap at the chance nor a missed opportunity. It has its advantages and disadvantages. Countries, firms and individuals should participate on the terms that are advantageous for themselves... there is a need for calculations and evaluations.

(M. Kolbaş, personal communication, December 18, 2019).

For diplomatic terms, the heterogeneity of the Sino-Turkish relations and some of the crucial junctures were detected during the interviews that were conducted with the experts who are engaged in the field of diplomacy. One striking example was that even before 2010, which is considered as the starting period of this research, we have seen important policymaking in favor of the Sino-Turkish relations with the PRC. As Rafet Akgünay walked us through the diplomatic conjunctures that showed geopolitical and economic implications as follows:

The rapprochement period continued from mid 1980s until the end of 1990s. After that, in the year of 2000 an event that showed our commitment to "One China" policy took place. Mesut Yılmaz, during his time in office as the prime minister, issued a decree that prohibited all Turkish bureaucrats and government officials from participating in meetings of Uyghurs who resided in Turkey. In my opinion, this has been an important step for the relations and after that there has been rise to strategic partnership between the years of 2000 and 2010.

(R. Akgünay, personal communication, Dec. 19, 2020).

A diplomatic emphasis that was collected through the interviews was the still evident emphasis on distrust between the countries and this distrust is further on the meaning of strategic partnership and whether such a formation exists in Sino-Turkish bilateral relations. The combination of the historical distrust and awareness of the existence of a hegemonic China ultimately leads the discussion to question the nature of Sino-Turkish relations in terms of its (inter)dependency. Interviewees who engage in diplomatic realm with China agreed upon the terms of being smart and careful before dealing with China. Benefits that can come by partnering up with China is seen through the glances of providing a multi-faceted foreign policy that reads the multipolar world order carefully. As a middle power, Turkey deems a multipolar world order as a beneficial one for its own interests and it remains important to not foresee its roots with the West.

The dependency discussion that was dealt with in the previous chapter does not go unnoticed by the business elite even in a middle-power country like Turkey. On how the tables have turned in the previous decade in terms of China's rise, Ömer Buğer stated the following summary:

You are becoming dependent on them [China and Asia]. In the past when their economy was weak, you were considered a "king" for bringing investments and all possibilities were put forward for you. Now, it is not like so. You had your factories there, as American or other country-based firms, you had completely took advantage of China but now China became much bigger and it no longer needs such things meanwhile you became dependent on it.

(Ö. Buğer, personal communication, December 24, 2019).

Deciding on whether to get rid of “inter-” from the word “interdependency” to describe the nature of Sino-Turkish relations have gradually become more evident as observed in the interviewees’ emphasis on the lack of Turkish involvement and gains. On Turkey’s part, there is an ongoing uncertainty as to whether it has been gaining from its partnership with China in its full potential. Questioning this takes center stage as those who engage in business with Chinese enterprises emphasize the efforts to increase parallel gains but the failure to achieve it due to political sensitivities (Ö. Buğer, personal communication, Dec. 24, 2019).

The relationship had to have a base for China to consider Turkey as a “pivot partner”. The personal interactions of the interviewees also suggested the Chinese awareness on Turkey’s such strategic geopolitical importance:

China says that, I am referring to what the Chinese consul general and commercial attaché said to me personally: "you [Turkey] are in the region. Yes, we are geographically closer to the Turkic nations, but you speak the same language; have historical ties with the Middle East and thus, we can cooperate with you based on these."... As always say, our biggest fortune is our geography and geo-strategy. There has been a negative perception about our relations with China based on the Uyghur Turks again by the orientation of manipulative third parties. However, the government right now wishes to have close ties with China.

(M. Örgen, February 12, 2020).

The interviewees also repeatedly showed their emphasis on the Uyghur issue between the countries, which shows that the sensitivity of the issue still has a prominent place for the Turkish public opinion. The discussion on the distrust between the two re-emerged when asked about analyses of the BRI and Turkish involvement in the initiative:

... We cannot say that China trusts Turkey very much. There is distrust that stems from history. In addition to that, Uyghurs' uprising in what we call East Turkestan, or XUAR as they call it; some groups' resorting to terrorism and the China's belief for Turkish participation in such activities cause problems. The trade volume is very imbalanced. There has been

attempts for arms trade in the past but when Turkey gave up on the last minute that caused unpleasantness...

(M. Ögütçü, personal communication, March 12, 2020).

Those who have expertise on central banking and national economic policymaking in Turkey's Central Bank share the concern of the "debt-trap" and dependencies, while pointing out the cost-benefit axis for the Chinese investments. Yüksel Görmez, a senior economist in the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey, summarized the pros and cons of the BRI and Chinese OFDI for middle power countries like Turkey effectively as follows:

Turkey is a country that has savings deficit. It is a country that shows high demand for any type of foreign investment. There is no importance as to where the investment comes. It can be from Europe, the US, Japan, China... wherever its source is from, any initiative that can meet Turkey's needed investment deficit is something that is in favor of Turkey...

He added for the particular phenomenon of debt-trap:

...If you have deficit on your infrastructure investments; if you trust Chinese capital till the end and say "come and fix my infrastructure problems with Chinese money", then you go bankrupt because of the funding of such investments. That is the deadlock. China has the capacity to fund many countries' needed investments for infrastructure due to its economic scale. However, if it does not use this in the right projects, there will be very serious problems regarding the return of these investment for sure. Therefore, Turkey can benefit in BRI by attract capital to those project that have high return of investment rates.

(Y. Görmez, personal communication, Dec. 25, 2019).

From the diplomatic elite interview that I conducted, much of the emphasis remains on the awareness of China's rise and success, however, the issue of XUAR does not go unmentioned either:

...Turkey's sensitivity towards the Uyghurs is apparent; there is a Uyghur community living in China and there is also the sensitivity to them. Therefore, as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we have the responsibility to express our concerns and worries for the practice in the XUAR and we did do so. Of course, it was not received nice in China... However, it is needed to point out that when we look at the many countries of the world, they all continue their relations with China. So, the ties with China are not cut because of such violation of human rights. This is perhaps a discrepancy, but all countries are in high-volume relations with China, including the US and it is the same for Turkey...

(M. Ö. Arman, Jan. 7, 2020).

In other words, when we understand the official Chinese tone on the issue itself and Turkey's emphasis on the Uyghurs, we see a softer level of dependency that is both similar and different from other examples. China does not want a Turkey that uses what they refer to as "microphone diplomacy", which issues statements from Ankara without having a face-to-face discussion on the problem. As China completely sees the Xinjiang Uyghur issue as part of its own national security and terrorism, they see it as their rights to intervene and implement policies that they seem fit. Therefore, China wishes to have a bilateral focus on all its partner countries, and Turkey is not an exception. For the sensitive geopolitical issue of the XUAR region, the topic reported to come up often during their visits and conversations (M.Ö. Arman, January 7, 2020).

At the same time, we see that from the Turkish official perspective, it has been a new era for Turkey's multilateral foreign policy agenda. It has been positioned as the Western part of Asia while still experiencing an EU accession process. According to Arman (2020), the outlook is positive in terms of strengthening Turkey's geopolitical position as a bridge and improving trade via the Silk Road. This bridge is both considered on transportation terms as well as energy routes. In terms of connectivity with Africa, Europe, or Asia, even Russia, the BRI seems to be speaking to Turkey's interests.

As mentioned previously, Turkey also has its Middle Corridor Initiative that has similar goals as the BRI which was put forward before the announcement of BRI. Middle Corridor Initiative was focused on strengthening Turkey's ties with mostly Central Asia. The Middle Corridor also aims at improving the transportation routes, liberalization of trade on these routes via cooperation between customs. Based on these, Middle Corridor Initiative seems to be an indispensable part of the BRI according to Turkish perspective. After signing an agreement with China in 2016 based on these mutual understanding on the importance of the Middle Corridor, one approach to China seems to be intriguing. As Consul General Arman states: "China should not be looked on solely financial capital terms. China is now a player for global order of balance" (M.Ö. Arman, personal communication, Jan. 7, 2020).

Overall, when we consider the history and progress of the last decade of Sino-Turkish relations, the numbers tell the story of economic dependence and not an interdependence. The numbers for trade increases by ten or fifteen folds in the last twenty years or so, in addition to the investments for finance or infrastructure. Just like almost any other country in the world right now, the case is similar in this sense: there is a significant amount Chinese presence in Turkey. The uniqueness of the Turkish case can be based on how China was seen as a competitor in the early 2000s and this perception started to change gradually. This gradual shift coincides with China's coming to the fore in global scene. According to Kadir Temiz, another point that creates a difference for Turkey than China's other partners is Turkey's NATO membership and its relatively close ties with the US. This is argued to "...bring a diversity of perspectives for foreign policy between China and Turkey" (K. Temiz, personal communication, February 5, 2020). On Turkey's end, it is a debate whether Turkey has a strategic plan or policy for China as much as China has for Turkey, and all other countries. For Turkish experts like Temiz, Turkey does not necessarily have a "China strategy" but in the last decade, there have been improvements in the field of academia, cultural exchanges as well as in the business sphere. These, he argues, essentially become a tool of foreign policy and diplomacy. In other words, all these improvements also created a Chinese awareness in the Turkish public opinion, which is then used for both commercial as well as political relations.

The discrepancy also allows a favorable position for Turkey in the eyes of Beijing. A country such as Turkey that has ties with the EU, a member of the NATO and has the ability to have close ties with the US allows China to partner with an actor that can also help establish relations with the Middle East as well as the West. This strategic pivotal partnership on China's end makes Turkey appealing, but the two countries also has a far-fetched and difficult path to a complete strategic partnership. It is fair to suggest that due to geopolitics, both countries are aware of this long and winding road. Fragility between the two countries are evident and the bilateral relations have experienced fluctuations. In terms of tourism and trade there has been a rather positive period, but the Uyghur issue is argued to be "an area of obstacle that neither China nor Turkey was able to pass through in a reasonable manner" (E. Demir, personal communication, February 14, 2020).

Ultimately, I question if Turkey is yet to have a complete and strategic policy on China for tackling the issues, while improving its connectivity: what does this mean for a possible "debt-trap" in the near future? Through the interviews, a common theme I observed is the awareness of the "debt-trap" for others, while believing its unavoidability with smart policymaking for the terms of investments. Thus, on the one hand, Turkish elite and experts are advocating the need for improving ties and cooperation with China in ways that are beneficial for Turkey. On the other hand, they point out the issues of geopolitics, the need to tackle them and surpass the severity of economic dependency to China. Obviously, it would not be reasonable to have a comparison of a regional power like Turkey to Sri Lanka in terms of its infrastructure and institutional strengths. The relative confidence Turkey has on its relationship with China signals the continuity of relations in heightened levels soon. As Demir suggests:

There are benefits of building relations with China without losing it all on commercial, economic, and political terms... I am not saying this only for Turkey, for instant China has been trapping many developing countries of Africa or Northeastern European countries in a "debt-trap" via its infrastructure investments. Even if China has such intentions, it is actually in the hands of those target countries to prevent it. Before we criticize China, perhaps we are ought to prepare our own investments laws accordingly...

(E. Demir, personal communication, February 14, 2020).

As I stated earlier, it is evident that the Turkish cooperation and wish to focus on China even further signals a definite path to dependency. The tone on the Xinjiang Uyghur issue seems to become less personalized for Turkey at the same time of peak economic interaction and Chinese presence in the country. When these two are considered in a correlative relationship, there is already a growing dependency as part of the mega-strategy which China embodied for all its relations. I argue that for the reasons why we have not seen a "debt-trap" incident as clear as the other existing cases are based on three issues, two based on important characteristics of Turkey and the other one being related to China.

First, although there has been a significant increase, the levels are not still as high as the other developing nations of the regions of Africa or Caucasus. Turkey does not have that much Chinese capital still within its borders. This is due to a delay in Turkish bureaucratic competency, focus and awareness. Turkey has only been recently adding China to its

strategic partnership policies for its foreign commercial and diplomatic relations. As Selma Bardakçı neatly summarizes the Turkish situation:

The multipolar Turkish foreign policy that we have learnt over the past years and based on the context of our "Asia Again" policy, China comes to the forefront. Our increased interest in Asia-Pacific, China becoming an important trading partner and our deteriorating relations with EU and the US calls for us to get closer with an actor that no one really can avoid. The awareness came very late [on Turkey's part].

(S. Bardakçı, personal communication, May 21, 2020).

The "being late to the China train" ultimately allowed some room of thought and lower levels of Chinese investment and involvement in Turkey, therefore, the dependency is not on such crucial levels as compared to others. The second reason is immediately correlated with Turkey's very own multipolar foreign policy understanding mentioned earlier in this chapter. Pursuing a diverse and multipolar foreign policy allows Turkey to have certain push and pull factors between different sides of the global superpowers. The expertise of Turkish foreign policy does not have a specific subcategory on China or Asia-Pacific still, but it has expertise on avoiding making Hobson's choice-like decisions. Having said that, the issues of XUAR is still one of those China-oriented fixations for Turkey. China's usage of economic tools are powerful in the sense that such a sensitive issue is now pushed aside in diplomatic terms so much that in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, during a session on July 10th 2020, İYİ Party's research proposal for the "Practices conducted by the Chinese state against the Uyghur Turks" has been rejected by a coalition of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). The rejection caused conflict during the session as representative from the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) Gergerlioğlu accused the AKP regime by stating: "You have sold out the Uyghur Turks for \$50 million" while referring to the Chinese capital (Günboyu, 2020). This brief incident shows the sensitivity of the issue as well as the awareness of the Chinese influence and its success at maneuvering foreign policy issues for its own benefits.

The combination of these two softening tools for the levels of dependency to China, this still portrays a picture that can be read as a success story on China's hegemonic rise. I argue that even though Turkey has been able to pursue a multi-dimensional policy with China, while figuring out its need to participate rather late than its counterparts in the region, the

heightened importance given to China is still significant. The increase of the awareness of China in public opinion is still significant for a country like Turkey who only had problematic exchanges until very recently with China. Considering that Turkey has always had options such as cooperating with the EU and the US, the current levels of strategic cooperation is rather a diplomatic success story of China for making Turkey push its sensitive XUAR agenda to a lesser degree. It is a result of the Chinese influence, increasing economic dependency and Xi's new "major-power diplomacy".

To give a brief comparison, a country like India softens its tone when addressing the killing of its twenty soldiers in a recent border dispute in the problematic Kashmir region that was considered "the firstly deadly clash in the border are in at least 45 years" (BBC News, 2020). India only chose to say "17 Indian troops who were critically injured in the line of duty" and died from their injuries, taking the "total that were killed in action to 20" (BBC News, 2020, para. 9). India is a country with much larger human capabilities than Turkey, and through its high levels of dependency via the BRI on China, the reaction to China immediately pushes such a high-level security issue to an ordinary degree. When we try to indirectly correlate this case to Turkey's position on the XUAR issue, Turkey has more ties with the West than India, but still resorts to bilateral dialogue, and continues its economic and diplomatic ties with China just like India, regardless of the severity of the issue.

Turkey is, of course, also a different case than India due to its qualities based on European standardization, its relative European identity and character and its geographical uniqueness (S. Bardakçı, personal communication, May 21, 2020). However, even so, these qualities do soften the debt-trap blow that Turkey could have gotten but it does not protect from China's hegemonic influence in the region and on bilateral terms.

As the final and third reason for Turkey's avoidance of a debt-trap so far, I consider it to be China's global success at creating alternatives and partners from all around the world. Meaning, as much as China is a very crucial partner for Turkey, Turkey does not hold the exact position for China. Not only this feed into the imbalances in the relations that causes a one-way dependency, it also shows China's capacity and willingness to be have a hegemonic

standpoint. As considered a hegemonic power, China is interacting with everyone, sees the advantages of strategic partners, but also focuses on multiple addresses for its interests. As we can understand better in Bardakçı's comments:

Turkey is China's market that opens to Europe. However, there is also the fact that China has gotten a port in Egypt, Greece, and Georgia and in a way, built a frame around Turkey. Therefore, if Turkey wishes to be part of this, it will be doing it for itself. I do not see China considering Turkey as an indispensable prerequisite.

(S. Bardakçı, personal communication, May 21, 2020).

Therefore, I argue that there is a dependency between Turkey and China that stems from a successful hegemonic policymaking and implementation in the global political and economic sphere by China and Xi. The case of Sino-Turkish relations shows us a path to the infamous dependency to China in a unique manner due to Turkey's historical and geographical characteristics. It should be further traced in the near future to see if the dependency is going to reach such levels that adds to the list of "debt-trap" examples that caused by the invasive Chinese mega-strategies.

In addition, it is important to state here that BRI is definitely not the only milestone or a critical juncture for the case of Sino-Turkish relations. If we were to understand the process in a more stage-based evaluation, there has been a series of turning points for the two countries' engagement. Based on Turkey's own foreign policy reformations, there has been discussions on its "shift of axis" from its traditional Western orientation towards the East or as inferred from my interview with Dr. Akgünay, there has been a "refraction of axis" within Turkish foreign policy in the post-2015 era. This refraction translates to an era of Turkish foreign agenda moving away from the West due to its deterioration of relations with the US over the failed coup attempt's repercussions and the threatening ways of Trump imposing sanctions on Turkey's already fragile economy. The distancing of Turkey from the West paved the way of Turkey looking for new markets and allies in the East with Russia and China. In 2018, with the Turkey's special participation in the BRICS summit in Johannesburg, the multi-faceted Turkish foreign policy showed yet another turning point of its relations getting stronger with the East with a stronger emphasis on China.

Therefore, I acknowledge that the BRI is not the only important point in the timeline of bilateral relations of China's involvement with Turkey and similarly of the Turkish interest in building the ties stronger with China. However, when I consider the visibility of the impact and the emphasis repeatedly placed on the initiative both in the diplomatic and business elite interviews conducted for this study, it would be wrong not to take the BRI as a major conjuncture of the progress of Sino-Turkish relations. I see the BRI to be a great rite of passage for this case study, while not ignoring the importance of the other mentioned points of diplomatic exchanges in the last six years or so.



VI. Conclusion

This thesis attempts to understand the rise of China phenomenon via its recent policy shifts and critical junctures in its progress. The research question at hand is: In what ways has China attempted to achieve hegemonic status in the global system over the recent decade? Throughout the chapters, I first provided a stage-based observational evidence from China's economic statecraft and economic usage of investment overseas through the unique structure of the state-commercial actors linkages through SOEs. In addition, I showed the usage of such economic tools on managing bilateral relations through strategic foreign policy making as well as geopolitics for deepening the connections of China's presence in its partner countries. In addition, I showed its increase in global influence via the reactions of the second and third parties before taking a closer look on Sino-Turkish relations to show how China's economic presence in Turkey allowed room for China to get the political concessions it needed for the sensitive issue of the Uyghur Turks. At the same time, while doing so, the theoretical framework of the HST was kept intact to question the phenomenon through the lenses of hegemonic attempts at global leadership by utilizing the process-tracing method that was enhanced due to novel data that was collected through the semi-structured interviews.

Going back to the comprehensive description of a hegemon that was stated in Chapter II, is China today stronger than other states in the global system in both economic and military dimensions? The answer is a positive yes for the economy. As for the military capabilities, there is definitely a large room for improvement on China's part. Having said that, the PRC wishes to invest more on its military power, even though, as I discussed in the previous chapters, it does not need to do so because of its immense economic capacity, capital investments and global economic dependencies it created. That is to say that the economic dimension covers for China's lack of military capabilities via its usage of "no-conditionality" lending and the mixture of its latent "sharp power".

Secondly, is China aware of its power supremacy and willing to use this kind of power to shape the global environment based on its own interests and values? As I showed the observable implications in Chapters IV and V, China has been using its high-level economic dependencies with other states via investment and lending to get fixations on the political issues it has been dealing with on the table. In other words, the dependencies that are created alongside the mega-projects like the BRI provides China the area to use its power to shape its regional and international environment based on its very own interests. In the India-China border conflict case, the South China Sea Dispute case or the XUAR issue of the Sino-Turkish relations, the solution has been through China's strategic and pragmatic usage of its economic power. Even if not a solution is found, the narrative has been softened and changed in China's favor in many cases.

As a third section of the hegemon description, I ask if China is active in the building, developing, sustaining of international institutions that signifies the negotiations and renegotiations of hegemonic bargains with other states in the system. As I gave the examples of these in Chapter III, China has been willing to fill the gap in global governance that is caused by the US decline of interest in global issues. Whether it is for the environmental issues, in the UNHRC, in the scope of financial institutions of the IMF, WB, or the G20 summits, China has been anything but silent about its wishes, aims and own perceptions. In the case of environmental sustainability, it has been vocal due its own needs to maintain energy sources and manage the environmental issues it has been facing domestically. For the UNHRC case, it is apparent that China has been trying to shape the international environment to allow its own domestic human rights violations to go uncriticized by rotating the global norms on human rights. For the financial institutions, it has been loudly advocating the importance of globalization and the need to abandon protectionist policies everywhere, for the sake of its own continuum of economic growth and increasing its economic linkages/dependencies. It also has been creating its own institutions, as discussed in Chapter III, to further its goals on creating a web of states who answer China's very own economic goals. There have been trade-offs between China and participant states of the BRI on various issues, concessions given and once again the narrative has shifted towards China's benign existence.

As discussed throughout the thesis, there have been efforts to increase dependency on Beijing for other states as well as to increase China's discourse power in global affairs. This should not be understood as a mere propaganda or a series of slogans for a mere developing country. These are the observable implications of China's determination to alter the ideals that lay in the foundation of Western-oriented international institutions today. Through gradual evolution of the blocks of the international system, the number of countries which cooperate, accept capital, and provide China with means of politico-economic advantages increase each day (Roland, 2020). As Beijing continue its efforts for a "new" world order, its attempts also translate into a partial hegemony that does not forgo the US presence. I argue this unique order that is linked to China's continuous development and pragmatic efforts to build more ties with the members of the global community ultimately does not necessarily mean other emerging and developing countries to become battlegrounds of global influence for these two superpowers. This hybrid hegemonic existence over the global system allows some room for multilateral foreign policy arrangements for middle power countries such as Turkey as of right now.

In 2018, Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi stated that "China will not repeat the old practice of a strong country seeking hegemony" (Mastro, 2019, para. 1). I argue that we should read this statement as the intentions of Beijing conforming with the idea of a dual, hybrid, albeit post-Western, hegemonic order alongside with the US. As I have discussed already, Beijing does not wish to replace Washington if it can co-exist and influence for its strategic and pragmatic goals. The peaceful development that has been the theme of China's rise for the past forty years is further attached to this wish of co-existence, but with the system being adjusted more for the Chinese interests. It is also plausible to once again suggest that China does not wish to create a military alliances system like NATO or the Warsaw Pact. However, it should not be taken as these are based on China's unwillingness or lack of capacity to influence other countries. China does not seek to be a hegemon as the hegemony is portrayed by the Western powers in the modern history of IR. China is willing to confront the US in non-violent ways for its own interests, while keeping cooperation in tact also for its interests with the US at the same time. As one Chinese official told the Foreign Affairs author Mastro (2019): "Being a great power means you get to do what you want, and no one can say anything about it" (Mastro, 2019:2). This understanding is how China perceives its global rise to power and it conducts its foreign policy in accordance with the domestic concerns of

income inequality, energy needs and environmental concerns. China has domestic issues just like any other country of the global system right now, but the difference is that China has been attempting to become a hegemon by using its own economic advantageous parameters and creating dependencies to further get what it needs and wants from the other members of the global arena. In other words, China wishes to export and impose its authoritarianism in the scope of global governance on the issues it needs leverage and to move forward on its development and rise without any disturbance. If not disturbed, then China claims its rise to be an all-inclusive and benign common good for all members of the global community. If disturbed and disrupted, China's pragmatism comes into picture once again.

Considerations for Further Research

What is next? This question perhaps has never been more important than it has become in the year of 2020. Firstly, since 2018 the world has seen the first ever great stand-off between the USA and the PRC in the context of a trade war. The tensions increased in the span of few months as the US imposed tariffs of more than \$360 billion on Chinese products and China responded by imposing tariffs of more than \$110 billion on US goods (BBC, January 16, 2020). The tariffs continued in bilateral terms until the talks started on the issue as "Phase 1" and "Phase 2" deals took place. The world economy was affected heavily from the situation and red alerts all around the globe pushed the two major powers to tone their allegations down, even though a concrete solution has yet to be found. The trade wars have stayed at the center of attention for the two superpowers until the beginning of 2020, when China had taken forefront for the Covid-19 pandemic.

Even in the timeline of the pandemic, there have been also the observable implications of the usage of Chinese economic statecraft to shape the narrative via international institutions when we consider how China dealt with the very recent Covid-19 pandemic that originated from its own city of Wuhan on January 1st (WHO, 2020). Once again, we have seen the Chinese pragmatism in its peak. I argue that true to its hegemonic attempts at global leadership, China has always been a country to turn the crisis in to an opportunity for itself. In the height of the pandemic, the global perception of China had become the source of a global health crisis with

many racist accusations of the backwardness of Chinese culture for its consumption of wild animals with further remarks such as Covid-19 being a “Chinese virus” or “Kung Flu” by the US President Trump himself (Cranley, 2020). However, as time passed by and China found the pandemic not to be a literal death sentence for its global outlook that it has worked over the past decades, and instead, it turned into a successful foreign policy tool that has boosted its image. It provided the countries with technical support and knowledge of the virus based on its own experiences (Campbell & Doshi, 2020). The Chinese committees travelled across the globe, bringing the most popular medicine that is used on Covid-19 patients as well as advice and strategic plans on how to tackle the pandemic. A constant reminder of hope and unity messages were shared from China’s embassies social media accounts. Numerous video conferences held and through what is described today as China’s “facemask diplomacy”, it managed to use it to maneuver for global leadership. In this sense, as China shifted the crisis into an advantageous foreign policy propaganda, it appears that its public policy as become its foreign policy in such sense. It exports its public health policies to the countries in need during these tough times. I predict that this pattern will only continue as Chinese pragmatism will allow its sphere of influence to grow in new areas of opportunities whether it be a pandemic or a global linkage of infrastructure investments.

This has particular importance in terms of a real-life event of China’s show-and-tell moment for its aim at hegemonic leadership. This has come in a time of the US’ missed opportunity to tackle the global issue for its initial response since the start of the pandemic. It was stated in a Foreign Affairs article that “...internationally, the pandemic has amplified Trump’s instincts to go it alone and exposed just how unprepared Washington is to lead a global response” (Campbell & Doshi, 2020, para. 2). In many ways, the pandemic is almost a natural experiment to show both leading powers’ ability and willingness to be the world’s hegemon in a short few month’s period. This is not the first avoidance of the US of the global responsibilities, and having noted that, it appears that it may not be the last. The differences in the American approach to the pandemic is so different than the Chinese one that it definitely provokes the need for further research with the implications of the pandemic on China’s global influence and the world’s dependency levels on China. As part of the global governance dimension, China responded to those in need by sending medical equipment and protective gear for the countries of all regions, as much as the countries of the EU did (Campbell & Doshi, 2020). Material assistance has been enhanced and the capacity of China

to provide for the world has been sharpened by the pandemic. Considering the fact that we have not seen the end of the pandemic, with no clear-end date in sight, China's influence and the pandemic's impact on the Chinese hegemonic leadership paves the way for further research.

When we consider the future outlook of the Western liberal order, the repeatedly mentioned competitor of China, the US, has found itself in a strong confrontation with its systematic racism in the past month due to a yet another police brutality committed against an African-American citizen. The riots against the long-history of racism in the US amid rising numbers of Covid-19 patients on top of constant rejection of the usage of protection, and the previous riots against the Covid-19 measures in the country all portrayed a troubled image of the US, which I argue to be very hard to change in the near future. As the US continues to pull back its own influence and leadership from the global issues, the void is becoming larger to be filled. In this exact point, we can see a China that is going to become even more aggressive to fill that void created by the US. In an era of questioning the appeal of liberal democracy and the Western order of norms and ideals, it is now more crucial than ever to question the alternatives to the system and the leadership of that system. One thing that certain is that the dynamics of the global order has never been this shaky in such a unique way in the modern history. I leave for the considerations of my future research on the issue of China's rise to tell us the answer whether China continues to win over the US or keeps this binary co-existence with the US intact. For future research, it is also important to analyze whether the void left by the US will be filled by China in more aggressive and assertive measures. There is a famous Chinese saying: "Wind damages the flourishing the trees in the forest". In this sense, the question for the future of the PRC comes down to whether the harsh wind of global dynamics will damage the flourishing Chinese influence in the future.

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VIII. Appendix

Appendix A. List of Interviewees

Interviewee Name	Interviewee Function	Date
Dr. Ceren ERGENÇ	Associate professor at the department of China Studies at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University	17.12.2019
Emre DEMİR	Journalist in the People's Republic of China	14.02.2020
Fatih OKTAY	Lecturer at Koç University	13.05.2020
Dr. Kadir TEMİZ	Assistant professor at the department of Political Science and International Relations at İstanbul Şehir University	05.02.2020
Mehmet ÖĞÜTÇÜ	Chairman of Global Resources Partnership	12.03.2020
Mehmet ÖRGEN	Corporate Affairs Coordinator/Director	12.02.2020
Mehmet Özgün ARMAN	Former Head of Department, Deputy Directorate General for East Asia at Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey	07.01.2020
Muhammed GÜVEN	MSc PIEGL Candidate at Zhejiang University	25.12.2019
Murat KOLBAŞI	President of the Turkey-China Business Council at Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEİK)	18.12.2019
Ömer BUĞER	China Network Member at Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSİAD)	24.12.2019
Dr. Rafet AKGÜNAY	Former Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey in Beijing	19.12.2019
Selma BARDAKÇI	Coordinator of the Turkey-Asia Pacific Business Council at Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey DEİK	21.05.2020
Yüksel GÖRMEZ	Senior Economist at Istanbul School of Central Banking/Central Bank of Turkey	25.12.2019