Meta-Geopolitics of Central Asia: A Comparative Study of the Regional Influence of the European Union and the Shanghai Co-operation Organization

Master Thesis

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To My Father
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Central Asia has invariably been the focal point of intense geopolitical power struggle over the last three centuries. It has often been depicted as an important region being caught in a vortex of rivalry for influence and access to natural resources. But there is more to this region than its vast natural riches. At the dawn of the 21st century, Central Asia has metamorphosed from a quintet of quiet and passive actors—Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan—to a more active region, gaining in paramount normative as well as geopolitical significance. In recent years the European Union and the China-led Shanghai Co-operation Organization have emerged as two normative powers, both seeking to influence the patterns of security governance in the heart of Eurasia. The problem is that traditional geopolitical approaches that tend to concentrate mostly on realist doctrines are unable to explain the normative and ideational transformations that have taken place in the region as a result of the growing presence of these two emerging normative agents. In this thesis, I have attempted to interweave both realist and constructivist theories into a new all-encompassing analytical framework, termed 'meta-geopolitics' in order to examine if and how the interest/security-oriented (geopolitical) and values-based (normative) ingredients of the EU and Chinese regional strategies have had any impact on the behaviors, preferences and perceptions of the Central Asian countries and of Beijing and Brussels themselves. Key questions arise as to whether and to what extent these seemingly divergent strategies have been feasible, effective and legitimate in a reshaped Central Asia that is seeing a clash of normative powers.

**Keywords:** Central Asia, Meta-geopolitics, the European Union (EU), China, normative power, the Shanghai Co-operation Organization, Realism, Constructivism, geopolitics, The Great Game, energy security, socialization, Confucianism, balance of power, Eurasia, the Shanghai Spirit, legitimacy.

**Words: 24950**

*Excluding footnotes, references, abstract, acknowledgment, interviews, titles, list of figures and abbreviations.*
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<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BOMCA</td>
<td>Border Management Program in Central Asia</td>
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<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Central Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CADAP</td>
<td>The Central Asia Drug Action Program</td>
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<td>CEE</td>
<td>Central and Eastern European</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIS</td>
<td>The Commonwealth of Independent States</td>
</tr>
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<td>CNPC</td>
<td>China National Petroleum Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSTO</td>
<td>The Collective Security Treaty Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCI</td>
<td>The Development Co-operation Instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIDHR</td>
<td>The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>ENP</td>
<td>The European Neighborhood Policy</td>
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<td>ESS</td>
<td>The European Security Strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>The European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>EurAsEC</td>
<td>The Eurasian Economic Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUSR</td>
<td>The EU Special Representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMU</td>
<td>The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INOGATE</td>
<td>Interstate Oil and Gas Pipeline Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>IR</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>The North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCAs</td>
<td>Partnership and Cooperation Agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PfP</td>
<td>The Partnership for Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRC</td>
<td>The People's Republic of China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCO</td>
<td>The Shanghai Co-operation Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIPRI</td>
<td>Stockholm International Peace Research Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TACIS</td>
<td>Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAP</td>
<td>The Trans-Adriatic Pipeline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRACECA</td>
<td>Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>The United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>The World Trade Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XUAR</td>
<td>Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region</td>
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Map 1. Central Asia
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. A prelude to ‘Meta-geopolitics’ of Central Asia

From the old “Great Game” to the new great power contest among various regional and external actors, Central Asia (CA) has been pervious to endless geopolitical rivalries and at the same time fraught with unsolved geopolitical dilemmas. Abundant with significant oil and gas reserves, CA has been a region of paramount geo-strategic importance not only for the British and Russian Empires in the 19th century, but also for a number of emerging regional and global powers—chief among them, the United States (U.S.), the European Union (EU), the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Russian Federation, Turkey, India, Israel, and Iran.¹

Most importantly, China's rise to 'great-power status' in the 21st century, together with the growing influence of the EU as a 'normative power'² has ushered in a period of significant geopolitical reorientations of the CA states and of major external players. Specifically, over the past decade, the emergence of the Shanghai Co-operation Organization (SCO) appears to have relatively altered the existing 'balance of power' in the CA region.³ By inventing the SCO—an inter-governmental security cooperation organization which comprises China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as permanent members, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Iran, Mongolia as observer states, and Belarus, Sri Lanka and Turkey as dialogue partners—China has markedly increased its presence throughout the region politically, culturally, economically and militarily. The SCO expansion has also posed serious challenges to European interests and has also been viewed as a counterweight to the U.S. influence in the post-Soviet space.

But this relative shift in the balance of power, among other changes, may have not been caused merely by geopolitical/non-normative factors, such as geography, economics and military power. Rather, it can also be a corollary of ideational forces, such as norms, values, and identities that the EU and the SCO seek to disseminate as they struggle to achieve feasible, effective, and legitimate foreign policy objectives in the region. Set against this background, this research aims to incorporate both normative (ideational/values-oriented) and non-normative (interest-based) components of China’s and the EU’s

regional policies into the analysis of current power dynamics in Central Asia. The assertion is that the proliferation of new geopolitical actors in the region has been accompanied by emergence of new foreign policy instruments, whose relevance and impact cannot be properly explained if only traditional geopolitical approaches were used as our tools of foreign policy analysis. Thus, an intriguing question arises as to whether new explanatory and analytical frameworks are required in order to understand the complexities of new power dynamics in Central Asia; whether the old turbulent dynamics of geopolitical competition are still relevant, and if so, to what extent, how differently, or/and on what theoretical and empirical grounds. Such caveats seem pertinent to this research as it seeks to present a new analytic framework for understanding the impact of the regional policies of the EU and China on CA countries.

The main point of departure for this study is that gaining a balanced and holistic understanding of current power dynamics in Central Asia requires new methods for unpacking socio-economic, political, and cultural complexities of regional and international involvement. This is partly because different regional and external actors tend to evince distinct ways of conceptualizing their identity, interests, and security imperatives, and different ways in which each of them conceive of their actorness in the region. Therefore, framing the contemporary power dynamics in Central Asia in terms of pure geopolitical precepts would be insufficient to account for the growing complexities of states’ modern interactions in an interconnected world system in which the issues of norms transfer, identity diffusion and socialization are growing in salience. To borrow Nayef al-Rodhan’s words, “geopolitics, in its narrow, deterministic sense, thus fails to incorporate the important human factor in political and economic processes,” and pays little attention to diffuse and ever changing nature of modern state interactions in international politics.

Keeping these caveats in view, this study sets out radical points of departure that aim to be critical of classical geopolitical doctrines. It seeks to add more sustenance to traditional realist assumptions concerning geopolitics by taking into account multi-dimensional views of power within a new all-

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6 *Note*: One should not denigrate or underestimate important contributions made by classical geopolitical theorists such as Alfred Thayer Mahan, Nicholas Spykman, and Halford Mackinder to the study of international politics. Therefore, any critical observation of geopolitics should not be judged by its value but by the depth and breadth of its analytical and logical rigor.
encompassing analytical framework, termed *meta-geopolitics*.\(^7\) As shall be discussed in greater details in Chapter 3, the concept of meta-geopolitics differs from traditional concepts of geopolitics. Whereas the latter singles out geographical location, and the military might as tell-tale barometers of the state’s capacity in today’s multipolar word, the former identifies more power projection tools, including “all of the soft- and hard- power tools that states can employ to project power.”\(^8\) Of particular relevance in this research is the potential capacity of meta-geopolitical paradigms to uncover and explain the often-overlooked normative and socio-cultural aspects of geopolitical interplay in the region.

In these settings, it seems fair to conjecture that only through gaining awareness of such meta-geopolitical paradigm can one establish sound causations as to ascertain why the Central Asian puzzle has remained unresolved, and its geopolitical mosaic so deeply fragmented ever since the end of the Cold War. It is against this background that the study proceeds to explain, scrutinize and evaluate the dynamic of power relations in this region of utmost strategic importance for normative powers, such as the EU and China.

1.2. Significance and aim of the study, research questions

The importance of the region was acknowledged in 1904 by Sir Halford Mackinder in the paper *The Geopolitical Pivot of History* in which Central Asia occupied the southern part of ‘the Pivot area’— the landlocked region of central Eurasia.\(^9\) In the late 20th century, the fall of the Soviet Union (USSR) added overwhelming complexities and uncertainties to the geopolitical landscape of the region, as new sovereign states with new borders were born out of the ashes of the great collapse.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, however, new patterns of geostrategic and geo-economic competition have emerged in the region as a result of three important transformations. First, the “peaceful rise” of China, following the collapse of the USSR, caused political and strategic nervousness in the region and beyond, particularly in the West where the idea of “China threat” has been more prevalent.\(^10\) Indeed, China’s growing expansion into Central Asia, since the SCO inception in 2001, has had serious political, economic and foreign policy implications for all the regional and external actors.

In recent years many scholars have viewed the SCO as “a linchpin of China’s Eurasia policy”, and as


\(^8\) ibid., p. 51.


“an example of ‘new regionalism’” or “geopolitical maneuvering”.\textsuperscript{11} Some experts argue that the SCO, in effect, serves “China’s goal of promoting world multipolarity” vis-à-vis U.S. hegemony.\textsuperscript{12} What seems indisputable is that the SCO, owing to Beijing’s “charm offensive”\textsuperscript{13}, has played a prominent political and economic role in recent years in attracting CA countries into the Chinese sphere of influence.

Second, as soaring energy demands and rapidly shrinking oil supplies have posed serious threats to energy security and to the balance of the global energy market, many regional actors have had their eyes on CA energy resources. Hence, there is also an energy dimension to the CA geopolitical competition which China has taken advantage of to satisfy its growing need for further oil and gas reserves. The region is also vital to the European plans for diversification of energy supply routes, given the fact that the EU-28, as the world’s largest energy importer, will have to import over 80\% of its natural gas needs by 2030.\textsuperscript{14} For now, an energy security dilemma exists between the EU and Russia over plans to transport natural gas from the Caspian region and Central Asia.

Third, the emergence of new threats to international peace and security, particularly in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 demonstrated the need for a new treatment of the CA republics. In the post-9/11 era, while the EU sought to enhance its security and border management in the face of potential instabilities close to the European borders,\textsuperscript{15} China used the SCO as a multilateral mechanism to address its domestic security concerns in the country’s Muslim-majority region of Xinjiang.\textsuperscript{16} Central Asian republics themselves sought to create or join new multilateral mechanisms in order to tackle threats as varied as religious fundamentalism, terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime. As one scholar observes, “between 2001 and 2005, Central Asia went from an obscure region of Muslim-majority ‘Stans’ to one of the world’s most vital regions.”\textsuperscript{17} Intent on raising their regional and


\textsuperscript{16} Farrell, Mary, et al. op. cit., p. 245.

\textsuperscript{17} Kurlantzick, Joshua. op. cit., p. 197-198. *The term refers to the five Central Asian states, abbreviating them to ‘Stan/s’
global profile, the CA countries (except Turkmenistan) joined the SCO, supported the U.S. in its war in Afghanistan, and became the co-founders of several other regional organizations. These trends revealed the growing propensity of the CA states to strengthen their bargaining capacities vis-à-vis major regional and macro-regional entities. The post-9/11 trends once again underscored the strategic importance of the region, but above all they added fresh perspectives to the West’s hackneyed perceptions of the CA republics as passive players.

In view of the foregoing considerations, the significance of this thesis is seen as two-fold.

First, from an empirical standpoint, the study highlights regional and global implications of a growing geopolitical competition in a region whose geopolitical landscape has been rapidly reconfigured as the EU and the SCO have emerged as important stakeholders and new norm entrepreneurs. Most specifically, since the adoption of ‘The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership, Brussels has stepped up its strategic partnership and economic relations with the CA countries, while focusing on the central aim of promoting human rights, rule of law and good governance. Under the current circumstances, Central Asia can be seen as a litmus test for the EU to gauge whether European collective identities, values and norms are transferable beyond its geographical borders. The region can also be viewed as a testing ground for Russo-Chinese strategic partnership in an emerging struggle for influence in the region. In these settings, the foreign policies of the EU and China toward Central Asian ‘Stans’ will have a profound impact on the prospects for peace and stability at both regional and global levels. As the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) prepares for a drawdown of troops from Afghanistan in 2014, the competition among major powers has been heating up, thereby prompting debates as to whether Russia and China under the aegis of the SCO might seek to supplant the U.S. in Central Asia. Needless to say, any post-2014 deal on Afghanistan will have huge impact on the future of EU-CA/China-CA relations and on the prospects for peace and security in a region that former U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski once called ‘the geopolitical axis of the world’.

Second, from a theoretical standpoint, it should be noted that the study of the SCO and the EU affords us valuable insight into different ways in which the Chinese and Europeans conceptualize power and security in world politics. For example, some scholars argue that it is the ‘Confucian principles of

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statecraft’ embedded in China’s cultural traditions that underpins many aspects of China’s thinking and behavior in the international sphere.²¹ In this respect, the SCO’s fixation with safeguarding sovereignty, as opposed to the notion of sovereignty-pooling in the EU, bears close resemblance to Confucianism with its strong emphasis on values, such as mutual respect and non-interference.²² In Alexander Cooley’s words, the SCO is “one of Beijing’s most ambitious contributions to global governance, embodying a new international relations” and this new International Relations (IR) paradigm aspires to forestall the ‘American unilateralism’ and replace it with a new security concept known as the ‘Shanghai Spirit’.²³

These are the very important premises that will be discussed and analyzed in this research. Most importantly, the contention is that barely any of new normative changes in Central Asia can be sufficiently explored merely by using ‘classical geopolitical’ doctrines that generally favor geographical variables over ideational factors in discussing inter-state relations.²⁴ Therefore, the meta-geopolitical framework employed in this study is an attempt to provide a thorough understanding of how and why ideational matters, including identity, history, culture and norms and values are as equally important as non-ideational factors in discussing power dynamics in the region. By taking into account a host of varied interest-based and values-based power projection capacities, ranging from socialization capacities to military power, the proposed meta-geopolitical framework enables us to analyze and measure the extent to which China’s and the EU’s Central Asian policies have been feasible, effective, and legitimate.

Bearing these propositions in mind, the purpose of this research is two-fold. Firstly, using the framework of meta-geopolitics, this thesis seeks to overcome the shortcomings of ‘classical geopolitical perspectives’ that fail to appreciate the normative aspects of power interactions between the EU-CA and China-CA. Secondly, recognizing the importance of incorporating both normative and non-normative factors into the study of modern power relations, this study also seeks to scrutinize challenges facing Brussels (the EU) and China (the SCO) in crafting practical, effective, and legitimate foreign policy approaches toward the CA countries. To this aim, two theories, Realism and

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Constructivism, will be used in order to explain and analyze the dynamics of power relations in Central Asia based on a specific number of ideational and material capacities that the EU and China utilize in order to induce positive change in the region or/and influence the actual behavior of CA states to get the outcomes they want.

In view of these ontological and epistemological premises, the following research questions can be formulated:

1- How and to what extent does the proposed meta-geopolitical paradigm explain the EU’s and China’s Central Asian foreign policies? How have the CA states reacted to the growing meta-geopolitical influence of the SCO and the EU in the region?

2- From a meta-geopolitical standpoint, have the regional strategies of the EU and China had any impact on the behaviors, preferences and perceptions of CA states? To what extent have these strategies been feasible, effective and legitimate?

3- If we conceive of China as an emerging normative power in the international sphere, how does China’s ‘normative power’ differ from the EU’s, given the fact that two normative powers may possess divergent meta-geopolitical capacities in the region?

In this Master thesis a comparative case-study of the meta-geopolitical influence of the EU and China has been carried out in order to provide answers to these questions. How the EU (through the ‘Strategy for a New Partnership’) and China (using the SCO) have influenced power dynamics in the heart of Eurasia will be juxtaposed and compared based on seven power projection tools (meta-geopolitical sub-capacities) that will be outlined and explained in the proceeding chapters. This study also uses qualitative methods in the form of document analysis, content analysis, and qualitative interviewing as main data gathering techniques, while case study and process tracing will be used as specific methods.

1.3. Literature review

A growing body of empirical and theoretical research on CA politics has been saturated with geopolitical creeds and ‘hard power’ politics. Specifically, the traditional scholarly literature of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries on CA tend to highlight the strategic, economic and geopolitical interests of major powers, whereas few efforts have been made to take stock of the least-noticed normative and cultural aspects of inter-state relations. In sum, the missing link in the bulk of literature on CA can be attributed to overreliance on geopolitical factors, such as geography, natural resources,
and preponderance of economic and military power at the expense of normative factors. Drawing on a plethora of scholarship on the normative components of China’s and the EU’s Central Asian policies, this study has endeavored to build on the concept of meta-geopolitics, which was first coined by Prof. Nayef Al Rodhan in his seminal book ‘Neo-statecraft and Meta-geopolitics: Reconciliation of Power, Interests and Justice in the 21st Century’.

In this study the meta-geopolitical framework has been further developed congruent with the realities of CA power dynamics for the purpose of assessing the weaknesses and strengths of the foreign policies of the EU and China toward the five ‘Stans’. In order to investigate the normative ingredients of their policies in the region, the scholarly views of leading experts in this field, such as Emilian Kavalski, Alexander Warkotsch, Brantly Womack, and Michael Clarke, Ian Manners and Jeffrey Checkel have been examined and used extensively. This is due to the fact that the aforesaid scholars, who have written extensively about the normative agency of the EU (Manners and Checkel) and China (SCO), provide a cornucopia of solid knowledge about the implications of the external relations of the two major powers.

1.4. Limitations

This study has focused on a phenomenon that is extremely broad and full of complexities. It has been famously said that “in Central Asia the position of affairs changes not every hour; but every minute.”

Further to this, in the words of Shirin Akiner, “to map the region accurately is rather like trying to produce a portrait of Proteus, the figure in Greek mythology who kept changing his shape.” In this respect, the assertion is that as the geographical boundaries of the CA region have shifted throughout history, so do its meanings and the ways in which it should be treated. As a result of this dynamicity of CA politics, any study related to CA geopolitics remains a very difficult task and, therefore, will not be devoid of shortcomings and limitations. The most important limitation concerns lack of space, given the fact that taking on the whole complexities of the topic of inquiry (which is complex and broad itself) stretches far beyond that of just an academic paper. The second limitation deals with the novelty of the concept of meta-geopolitics, which in academic circles has remained relatively under-developed and, as of the time of writing, has not been applied previously in any similar context(s).

Nevertheless, the hope is that the conclusions as well as the limitations of this study will provide a breeding ground for new ideas and likely opportunities for future research projects that might be needed in relation to the theme of the current study.

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Chapter 2: Research Design and Methods

In order to gain ‘a holistic understanding’ of the subject of inquiry and provide answers to the research questions, the thesis presents a qualitative methodology. In qualitative research behaviors and interactions are to be understood “in the context of meaning systems employed by a particular group or society” and the emphasis is largely upon “discovering novel or unanticipated findings” and observing the social world from the participants’ point of view.27

Since the study involves a group of actors that disseminate divergent forms of understanding and conceptualization of the Central Asian region, it is thus crucially important to search for meaningful relationships, their consequences for action, and discovering how different actors interpret the world in which they live. One of the reasons for choosing qualitative methods in this research is that analyzing the EU-CA and China/SCO-CA relations based on the proposed meta-geopolitical paradigm would require a more detailed focus on the meanings, experiences, and attitudes of the actors (CA-China-EU) rather than providing quantified answers to our research questions. Due to the nature of the research questions, case-oriented comparative methods will also be used to compare the meta-geopolitical influences of the EU and the SCO in Central Asia.

It should be noted from the outset that due to the inability of qualitative methods to pin down and count information, therefore, data gathering techniques used in this study include both primary and secondary sources as well as document analysis and qualitative interviewing. In sum, qualitative research methods used in this volume are as follows:

2.1. Comparative case study

Comparative case-oriented research is one of the principal methods of inquiry within the international relations milieu.28 Practitioners of case study research use cases for a variety of reasons. In essence, comparative research “examines two or more cases to highlight differences and similarities between them, leading to a better understanding of social phenomena and their theoretical basis.”29 In this research the cases of the EU and China were chosen because the two entities seek to promote distinct ‘normative models’ of their own in Central Asia while retaining many of their realpolitik policies.

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Therefore, comparing and contrasting the CA foreign policies of the EU and China based on the proposed meta-geopolitical framework not only provides valuable insight into complex and ever-changing patterns of power dynamics in the region, but also helps discover the similarities and differences between the two foreign policy approaches. Moreover, by the ‘logic of comparison’ the root causes for the feasibility, effectiveness, and legitimacy of a specific foreign policy approach can be discovered and analyzed when juxtaposed against the other.

One of the primary concerns in this research is also to generate patterns and linkages of theoretical significance. In this respect, new hypothesis and causal inferences will be engendered inductively and further adjustments will be made on theoretical assumptions to determine whether constructivist and realist theories used in the study “account for the processes and outcomes of selected cases.”

It is essential to note that the case study method has considerable merits, as it plays an important role in enhancing conceptual validity, identification of new variables and hypotheses and in establishing well-founded causal mechanisms. However, there are major demerits associated with this method. For example, case study researchers should be alert to hazards of unwittingly choosing cases that share a particular outcome or selecting information that corroborate their theories rather than choosing what contradict them. To overcome this gap, the research will make use of process tracing as a means to provide valuable leverage for causal inference in qualitative research.

2.2. Process tracing

Process tracing is considered a “fundamental tool of qualitative analysis” as well as an “indispensable element” of case study research. Qualitative research tends to study social life in terms of a process, which is defined as “a sequence of individual and collective events, actions and activities unfolding over time in context.” As Andrew Bennett argues, “process tracing involves the examination of ‘diagnostic’ pieces of evidence within a case that contribute to supporting or overturning alternative explanatory hypothesis.” In fact, in process tracing diagnostic pieces of evidence will be accumulated

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32 ibid., p. 22-23.
and then systematically analyzed in light of research questions and hypotheses throughout the research.\textsuperscript{36}

In order to provide answers to our research questions, it is essential to look for ‘diagnostic pieces of evidence’ through detailed examination of historical sequences of events, actions and activities unfolding over time within the cases of the EU and China’s foreign policies. Process tracing pays close attention to “sequence of independent, dependent, and intervening variables,” close examination of which will lead to testing hypothesized causal mechanisms.\textsuperscript{37}

As regards the application of this procedure, this study first monitors the trajectory of how the EU’s and China’s Central Asian foreign policies have evolved over time and then examines whether or not a correlation exists between the pieces of evidence discovered in each case and those meta-geopolitical variables outlined in this research. In this process, a detailed description of the evolution of the EU and China foreign policies can establish causal links and alternative explanatory hypotheses, which “can form the basis for a comparison with similar situations.”\textsuperscript{38} Since the meta-geopolitical variables entail both normative and non-normative features of the foreign policy approaches, the efficacy, legitimacy and the likelihood for success of their foreign policies can be evaluated and analyzed by the degree to which CA states view those policies as acceptable, applicable and legitimate. In this process, a good analysis of change and sequence is needed to gain inferential leverage and make descriptive and causal inferences.\textsuperscript{39}

Despite the usefulness of process tracing in ‘drawing descriptive and causal inferences’ and providing inferential leverage, one of the critiques of process tracing concerns “degrees of freedom” problem when conducting a research on a small number of cases with a large number of variables.\textsuperscript{40}

2.3. Documents analysis

As an integral analytical component of this research, document analysis was conducted to critically review, evaluate and interpret several documents obtained from both print and online sources.

This study draws on a plethora of sources, including books, academic journals, policy briefings, official documents produced by the CA governments, the SCO, the Council of the European Union, European

\textsuperscript{37} ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} ibid., p. 823.
Commission as well as documents that are accessible on the websites of regional and international organizations, namely the SCO and the EU. In data analysis, information will be assessed and interpreted “in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge.”

For the purpose of this investigation, a great deal of time has been spent on deciphering the meanings in different contexts, discovering patterns, and comparing data with data in order to establish meaningful relations that would ultimately lead to producing empirical knowledge. However, there are potential drawbacks to data analysis such as “biased selectivity”, and “low retrievability.” Therefore, a crucial point that has been taken into consideration is to collect data that are authentic, accurate and credible with high degrees of accessibility.

2.4. Semi-structured interviewing, content analysis

This study is also accompanied by a series of interviews conducted with prominent authors and specialists in the realm of geopolitics as well as experts on EU-Central Asian strategic and security studies. The purpose of these in-depth interviews is to acquire qualitative material for the research and to explore and discover the meaning the interviewees make of the phenomenon under investigation. The technique used in this research involves semi-structured qualitative interviews. In this type of interviewing, a list of questions or fairly specific themes will be prepared beforehand to be discussed with a number of selected interviewees. Interviews in this research were conducted in multiple stages through telephone conversation and in the form of questionnaires in April and March from Linköping, Sweden. In general, semi-structured interviews are particularly advantageous because they focus on “how the interviewee frames and understands issues and events—that is, what the interviewee views as important in explaining and understanding events, patterns, and forms of behavior.” It is important to note that the present study also attempts to conduct a content analysis of the transcripts of recorded verbal or online conversations than to merely transcribe the arguments in an unanalyzed written form.

The complete list of the interviewed experts and questions are presented in Appendix 2.

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44 At first sight the usage of interviews might seem to be less than usual in numbers, but a content analyses of the interviews are embedded and fluid throughout the whole text.
Chapter 3: Meta-geopolitics: Theory and Practice

This section intends to provide reasons for choosing meta-geopolitical framework for the analysis of EU-CA and China/SCO-CA relations, followed by a brief overview of the theoretical assumptions underpinnings the proposed meta-geopolitical paradigm. The contention is that by interweaving realist and constructivist approaches into a unified analytic framework for evaluating power dynamics between China and the EU in Central Asia, meta-geopolitics offers a holistic understanding of material as well as ideational components of power struggle in the region.

3.1. Why meta-geopolitics?

The annals of CA history have been replete with chronicling of the rise and fall of several empires and major colonial powers, who fought fiercely for political dominance and control over land and populations in this historic crossroad between Europe and Asia. The Anglo-Russian rivalry of the 19th and early 20th centuries, known as “The Great Game”45, was emblematic of an unbridled quest for maximization of power, hegemony and profit in the region. At the dawn of the 21st century, however, the old “Great Game” in the region has metamorphosed into a new power struggle between the U.S. and major regional economic power, such as China, the EU and Russia. At first glance, it seems that the “New Great Game” of the 21st century bears many marks of the old geopolitical power struggle. But upon closer examination, it appears that the power dynamics in the contemporary post-Soviet Central Asia tend to verge away from Mackinder-esque geopolitics that once emphasized on the passivity of the so-called ‘Pivotal Area’.46

Broadly speaking, the term “geopolitics” has widely been used in reference to the study of the old and new great games.47 Geopolitics—originally coined by the Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén in 1899—has generally been associated with ‘the realist view of international relations’.48 In fact, Mackinder’s geopolitical doctrine, for many IR scholars, is seen as a specific form of realist

approaches, one that concentrates on a state’s geographic and material features “in order to explain its interests and its capabilities in entering certain international relations in a certain way.”

The claim here is that geopolitics as a method of foreign policy analysis falls short of capturing the intricacies and nuances of inter-state relations in the 21st century, which is characterized by new patterns of ‘security interdependence’ and ‘security complexes’. Further to this, the ‘post-Cold War multipolarity’ seems to have moved away from “strict realist (and neo-realist) conception of power as aggregated capabilities” in terms of military, economic and political strength *per se*, thereby focusing also on “the power of knowledge, ideas, culture, ideology, and language, that is, discourse” and norms in the international system.

In the words of Alexandros Petersen, one of the critiques of geopolitics is that it is “unable to account for the full range of motivations impelling action at the international level, perhaps because it fails to acknowledge much of what happens at the sub-state level.” Consistent with this observation, this section provides two important examples in order to illustrate why the narrow view of ‘classical geopolitics’ fails to account for major post-Cold War ideational transformations and the causes for the success or failure of different normative agendas pursued by the EU and China in the region.

The first caveat is that unlike the old ‘Great Game’, which was mainly focused on ‘high politics’ of international relations (i.e. in the form of military and economic contest), the ‘New Great Game’ deals with issues pertaining to ‘low politics’ (i.e. in the form of cultural, social affairs and domestic politics). In this regard, state-centric approaches which reject ‘low politics’ fail to capture the relevance and impact of ideational and normative propensities of states in the international system. The second example concerns the fact that over the past decade, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks, CA countries are no longer perceived as marionettes in a pre-ordained ventriloquism of power struggle orchestrated by major regional powers, such as the U.S., Russia, China, India, and Turkey.

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Clearly, Central Asian ‘Stans’, namely Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan with their ‘multi-vector policies’ have not only gained a semblance of *actorness*, but also have been relatively successful in playing the great powers off against each other in pursuit of their own interests. As a result, the CA states have relatively strong say in the current regional transformations.

It is for these reasons that the author has endeavored to move away from explaining the dynamics of power relations merely in terms of ‘classical geopolitics’, and towards observing and analyzing these new trends and patterns through the prism of meta-geopolitics. It should be noted, however, that this analytical framework does not rule out or downgrade the relevance of national interests and struggle for power; only that in stark contrast to geopolitics, it does not regard general interest of a state as a given and material characterization of a state as the most decisive factor in making foreign policy decisions. Meta-geopolitics attempts to provide a comprehensive framework for the identification of a set of variables according to which the regional power dynamics will be examined on the basis of the two theories applied in this research. To be more specific, as opposed to geopolitics which posits that geographical position and the sheer size of a country are important factors in the role it can play in international politics, the meta-geopolitical framework help make this geopolitical map more detailed and accurate by taking into account all-inclusive capacities of state power in analyzing international power relationships.\(^5^4\) This framework includes ‘all of the soft and hard power instruments that states can employ to project power.’\(^5^5\)

Considering all of the above, the framework of *meta*-geopolitics identifies “seven areas of state power, which are referred to as the state capacities: social and health issues, domestic politics, economics, environment, science and human potential, military and security issues and international diplomacy.”\(^5^6\)

Looking at China’s and the EU’s Central Asian foreign policies through the prism of meta-geopolitics offers a holistic understanding of how these seven capacities or “unevenly distributed resources” can be utilized by states as instruments of leverage in their relations to other actors. But since these capacities are very broad, therefore, for the purpose of this study seven sub-capacities have been distilled from the seven areas of state power in order to assess whether and how these capacities were utilized by the SCO or the EU to change the preferences of the CA states.


\(^{55}\) ibid., p. 51.

\(^{56}\) ibid. (emphasis added)
These seven sub-capacities are considered to be indispensable parts of a state’s foreign policy or as variables according to which the current patterns of geopolitical order can be traced and analyzed. As a result, from social issues, socialization capacities of regional and international actors were assessed. With respect to domestic politics, the promotion of human rights, rule of law and good governance were chosen and examined. In economic terms, a state’s ability to expand trade and economic relations with CA states came under scrutiny. As regards human potential, programs concerning youth and education as part of development strategies for CA countries were discussed. Military- and security-wise, the issues of energy security and military power dynamics were partly scrutinized, and from international diplomacy, the role of cultural diplomacy were explored as part of the analysis of the EU and SCO’s meta-geopolitical impact on CA region. Though playing a marginal role, a state’s capacity to develop environmental policies was also included in the meta-geopolitical framework for the present analysis.

Having delineated the central facets of meta-geopolitical framework, it is worth mentioning that this study employs a combination of realist and constructivist theories for three important reasons.

First, the realist paradigm affords us great opportunity to delve into the geo-strategic competition with a greater attention on power relations and national interests.\(^\text{57}\) Specifically, realist precepts illustrate how China and Russia are using their organizational capacities through the SCO to cultivate new modes of political, security and economic cooperation in Central Asia, where the EU has increased its engagement since the adoption of ‘The Strategy for a New Partnership’.\(^\text{58}\) Realist doctrines are lenses through which we can enhance our understanding of how present regional and global actors seek to alter the “balance of power” in their favor. Undoubtedly, divergent modes of security governance promoted in Central Asia by the SCO, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the U.S. and the EU are partly shaped by such realpolitik mentalities and are indeed regarded as research-worthy problems for scholars wedded to realist theories. In fact, as one scholar argues, “realist thinking and zero-sum game strategies are very apparent in the thinking of many policy-makers,” in the region.\(^\text{59}\)

Second, it is important to note that just because the lexicon of realism is saturated with terms, such as “security dilemma”, “realpolitik”, “hegemony” and “balancing”, this does not mean that the theory is devoid of normative elements. In other words, the thesis does not claim that the realist approaches lack

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any normative content. Rather, this study primarily attempts to overcome the limitations of geopolitical doctrines and state-centric approaches in explaining the ways in which international and security identities are formed within the international structure and how norms and values affect the behavior and preferences of states in the system.

An alternative theory used for this thesis is thus anchored in the constructivist approach, which rejects one-sided material assumptions about international relations and posits that “the most important aspect of international relations is social, not material.”60 The constructivist paradigm helps us gain analytical leverage into ideational components of inter-state relations in the region, as it underlines the discourse on identity, socialization capacities and norm entrepreneurship.

In fact, many of the above-mentioned seven sub-capacities are ideational and normative in nature (i.e. socialization capacity, cultural diplomacy and promotion of human rights in the case of the EU and the ‘Shanghai Spirit’ in the case of the SCO). These are of paramount importance particularly when issues connected with Beijing’s ‘identity politics’ and its burgeoning “Eastphalian order” are being discussed.61 Noteworthy too is how the CA states are susceptible to China’s ‘multilateral diplomacy’ and its ‘charm offensive’, wherein “state sovereignty is respected and diverse political systems, economic models, and culturally beliefs can coexist.”62

Lastly, the most important reason for looking at the dynamics of power relations between the EU and China vis-à-vis CA countries through constructivist-realist dichotomy is that these theories combined (see Figure 1) provide an excellent vantage point from which to assess both norm-based and security-based dimensions of meta-geopolitical developments in the region.

Keeping in view the above paradigm, it is now appropriate to outline the theoretical approaches of the study.

### 3.1.1. Political Realism

Historically, realism has been the dominant perspective in international relations theory.\(^6\) This tradition of thought derives its name from its followers’ belief that they are being realistic and that they describe the world ‘as it is, not as it ought to be’.\(^4\)

In general, the realist school of thought argues that states are the principal actors in an international system that is inherently anarchic.\(^5\) In this anarchic and self-help system security must be the overarching goal of any state and, as offensive realists argue, the *ultima ratio* for states is “to be the

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hegemon in the system”. Realists also claim that “international institutions serve primarily national rather than international interests.” In brief, both realism and its structural variant (neo-realism) appear to share similar starting assumptions: (a) states are primary actors in international politics, (b) anarchy exists in the international system, (c) the international system is self-help and states are first and foremost concerned about their security.

Having specified the basic tenets of realism, we now turn to a brief examination of the potentials and limitations of the realist tradition of thought and try to determine whether and to what extent the realist paradigms are still relevant in describing the meta-geopolitical changes in Central Asia. On the whole, the theoretical picture of CA meta-geopolitics does to a large extent feature a number of theoretical sub-schools of realism, ranging from “balance-of-power theory” and “security-dilemma theory” to “hegemonic-stability” and “power transition” theories. For instance, both ‘internal balancing’ and ‘external balancing’ dynamics can be seen in how China and Russia are concentrated on improving their own capabilities (internal) while also ‘aggregating their capabilities with other states’ in the form of joining alliances (external). It also needs to be reminded that even though Russia and China are among the co-founders of the SCO, Moscow seeks to prevent the organization from developing a more high-profile role than the Russia-led CSTO, which is considered the only regional organization with ‘a genuine military dimension’ in the region. Another example of the ‘balance-of-power theory’ can be found in Uzbekistan’s attempts to balance both Moscow and Beijing by means of engaging in mutual cooperation with other important global actors like the United States.

With regard to hegemonic stability perspectives, some commentators point out that key regional players, such as the U.S. and China seek dominance either through bilateral means or via their institutional capacities. Clearly, one of the primary objectives of the U.S. foreign policy is to develop CA’s rich oil and gas reserves. China also competes with other actors to have a better access to the hydrocarbon resources in the region, thus challenging one of Russia’s core strategic goals: monopoly

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control of energy flows in Eurasia. The EU, for its part, has been in a tight race for supplying Europe with gas from the Caspian and the Middle East through Nabucco pipeline, as it develops a geo-strategic approach towards Eurasia.”

From the perspective of transition theory, the Strategy adopted by the European Council in June 2007 plays an important role in the development of a “normative, rules-based world order” for CA countries with a heavy reliance on promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Some scholars argue that “the EU’s good governance focus might be the only feasible strategy to contribute to the breakup of authoritarian structures” in strategically important target countries in Central Asia. However, Brussels is still caught between pursuing realist (interest-based) priorities, particularly on energy security front and promoting values, such as human rights.

In sum, realist tradition of thought figures strongly in explaining current power dynamics in Central Asia. However, this school of thought has been criticized for allegedly concentrating too much on power, to the relative exclusion of other important variables. Since the realist tradition shows only a part of the theoretical picture of current power dynamics in Central Asia, therefore, alternative theories are needed to capture the whole spectrum of the ideational aspects of meta-geopolitical trends in the region. In the proceeding section, the relevance of constructivist approaches in this study will be explained.

3.1.2. Social Constructivism

Constructivism has gained an increased intellectual ascendency in the study of world politics since the early 21st century and is considered to be “the newest but perhaps the most dynamic of the main theories of international relations.” Constructivists put a premium on “normative or ideational structures” and the ways in which these structures “define the meaning and identity of the individual actor”. In general, constructivists shift from a materialist notion of international politics to a socially constructed view of international relations. Contrary to (neo-) realists who argue that states pursue individual interests by means of a material and rational calculation of costs and benefits, constructivists

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77 Devetak, Richard, et al. loc. cit.
hold that it is the social and relational aspect of international politics that determine how states behave. Additionally, whereas realists like Mearsheimer identify “the distribution of material capabilities” (balance of power) as a key factor in understanding world politics, constructivists highlight “the process of meaning-making and identity-shaping” as intervening factors between material and strategic objectives. For the adherents of this strand of thought, the interests and identities of states are not a given, but are “the products of inter-subjective social structures.” The constructivist attention to the social and intersubjective meanings and norm entrepreneurship in world politics helps us uncover the ideational components of geopolitical relations in different regions like Central Asia.

In order to drive a parallel between meta-geopolitics and constructivism, one should focus on core concepts such as norm-transfer, identity-diffusion, socialization capacities, culture and a range of other intersubjective factors. When applied to security studies, “constructivism takes concepts of ‘culture’ and ‘identity’ seriously, both of which have largely been ignored in the mainstream realist approach to national security.” To obviate this shortcoming, ideational aspects of inter-state relations, such as norm-diffusion and socialization activities of the EU and China are taken as variables that constitute parts of the proposed meta-geopolitical framework. Therefore, when discussing the dynamics of interactions of the EU, SCO vis-à-vis CA states, one should be cognizant of the impact of these ideational factors, which together with material aspects of geopolitical interplay will define the meta-geopolitics of Central Asia.

As shall be examined, the EU and the SCO possess identity-formation and norm-making capacities, both of which contribute greatly to the way in which the two organizations perceive of their actorness in the region. The EU and the SCO are perceived as two compelling cases of ‘normative powers’ possessing strong potentials to influence, constrain, and define behavior and norms of international interaction. Emilian Kavalski provides a unique assessment of the normative dynamics that have allowed China and the EU to influence and shape the security governance in Central Asia. While alluding to the lack of attention to “the individuality and autonomous agency” of CA countries, Kavalski contends that more often than not “the international actor’s involvement in Central Asia has

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been a projection of the perceptions, attitudes, and feelings of international actors about who they think they are, rather than about the objective reality of the region.”82 One of the principle arguments of Kavalski is that very little attention has been accorded to the subjectivity of the CA countries in international life and that the region has largely been treated “as the context for the agency of external actors.”83 What emerges out of this discussion is that the SCO operates in diametrically different cultural and normative settings in comparison to the EU. With respect to the SCO’s normative influence, one can point to a range of socializing discourses and practices through which China has ‘Shanghaied’ the region into its sphere of influence.84 However, some scholars argue that the ‘Shanghai Spirit’ that encapsulates China’s normative precepts tend to promote ‘authoritarian norms’ in Central Asia. 85 Examples of these norms can be found in Russia’s opposition to the color revolutions in Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan as well as China’s crackdown on political dissenters and human rights activists in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).86

3.2. Conclusion

As indicated in this chapter, geopolitics has largely been linked to the realist approach to foreign policy analysis. It is associated with a Mackinder-esque view of the world in which non-normative factors, such as geographic location and military power take precedence over ideational factors, such as norms, identities, values, culture in explaining and analyzing power relationships. Having identified a set of ideational and material power projection tools, meta-geopolitics attempts to interweave realist and constructivist approaches into a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the extent of practicality and impact of norms, identities and values disseminated by the EU and China (SCO) in Central Asia.

83 ibid., p. 2.
86 ibid.
Chapter 4: Redefining Central Asia

In this chapter, I will provide a synoptic view of CA’s geographical and demographic characteristics, followed by a close examination of the growing visibility and influence of Russia, China and other external actors in the region, particularly since the 1990s.

4.1. Introduction

Flanked to the east by China; to the north by Russia; to the south by Afghanistan and Iran, Central Asia comprises the five independent republics of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan only.\(^{87}\)

In terms of its physical characteristics, Central Asia has a land area of approximately 1,542,200 square miles (around 3,994,000 square kilometers), which is mostly comprised of water-scarce deserts and treeless steppe zones.\(^{88}\) The most densely populated areas and arable lands suitable for agricultural production, both crops and livestock are situated in the southern and south eastern Central Asia.\(^{89}\)

In demographic terms, Sunni Muslims make up the overwhelming majority of the population in the region.\(^{90}\) The region is also home to many large and small ethnic groups, such as the Persians, Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Uyghurs as well as the Russians who constitute the largest ethnic minority group in Central Asia.\(^{91}\)

In terms of natural resources, CA is also host to vast deposits of major mineral resources, including chromium, copper, gold, silver, and iron ore. The region has abundant oil and natural gas resources, which are largely located in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan has the largest oil reserves in Central Asia and is also the world's largest uranium producer.\(^{92}\) Turkmenistan has the largest reserves of natural gas in the region. Approximately 90 percent of total water resources of the CA region are located in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

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\(^{87}\) Abazov, Rafis. *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Central Asia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Note: In fact, there is no accurate definition of CA in terms of its geographical borders. Nevertheless, the term Central Asia is commonly used in reference to these five ‘Stans’.

\(^{88}\) ibid.

\(^{89}\) Note: Greeks called it Transoxiana, which means trans-river territory (modern-day Uzbekistan).

\(^{90}\) The total population of Central Asia is estimated at approximately 65 million as of 2012. The area figure is based on the combined areas of five CA countries.

\(^{91}\) Abazov, Rafis. op. cit., Map 4.

4.2. Proliferation of outside powers vs. the rise of the ‘Stans’

The breakup of the USSR provided the CA states with ample opportunities to raise their profile on the international scene through membership in various international and regional organizations. During the 1990s, major regional and global trends took place that helped the CA region to foster economic growth and become new independent political entities. Between 1993 and 1998, just as Boris Yeltsin launched massive market-oriented reforms aimed at privatization and westernization of the Russian economy, known as "shock therapy" plan, the five CA states set about drastic economic transition strategies. Most particularly, the Kyrgyz Republic significantly liberalized its trade and embraced rapid economic growth. Uzbekistan, for a brief period until the second half of 1996, gained economic progress as a result of the rise in world cotton prices, while Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan experienced economic boom because of the spike in oil prices. In an interesting case of synchronicity, China’s foreign policy underwent major changes under Jiang Zemmin in the 1990s. At that time Beijing sought to pursue ‘multilateralism’ and engaged in partnerships with organizations that were previously labeled as ‘Western-dominated and hostile’. As Marc Lanteigne puts it, Jiang Zemin and his successor Hu Jintao attached greater importance to multilateralism and developed tremendously the economy and diplomacy of China. Such policy was in stark contrast to Mao’s traditional realist views of international politics and his aversion to “the growing web of international regimes and laws.” In this context, it is fair to contend that had not been for the volte-face in China’s foreign policy in the 1990s, the convergence of the CA states, except Turkmenistan, within the SCO grouping might have never taken place.

By and large, taking advantage of its economic growth and geographic proximity to Central Asia, China made the most of geopolitical changes that unfolded after the Soviet collapse and effectively managed to represent itself as a new model of regional cooperation. However, a race for ‘monopolar power’ had begun in a triangle of the US, Russia and China, despite the augury of the new era of multipolarity. In the early years after the Soviet collapse, Russia made no major efforts in building strong

97 ibid.
ties with the new republics, mainly due to the fact that it was embroiled in economic crisis. It was only after the Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan in 1996 that Moscow flexed its muscles in the region. As a result of these changes, for most of the 1990s, almost all of the CA states increased trade ties with the U.S., Iran, the EU and Turkey, and consequently verged away from Russia and moved towards joining international organizations. At around the same time, the enlargement of the EU had contributed greatly to the decline of Russia’s outreach in the post-Soviet space. However, this was not a corollary of direct engagement of the EU in the region, but an indirect consequence of the Union’s Eastern European enlargement plans, especially during the 2000s. In the late 1990s CA states became desirous of balancing their relations with Moscow through strengthening ties with the U.S. and other major trans-regional powers.

The 9/11 attacks marked yet another turning point in the history of Central Asia. The post-9/11 era was accompanied by growing propensity of CA states for engaging in multilateral initiatives, as evidenced by the fact that almost all of them jumped on the terrorism train and supported the U.S.-led “war on terror” campaign. The new wave of anti-terrorism activities also served as a catalyst for Russia. It provided Russia with an opportunity to recalibrate its policies towards CA countries and play a more active role in the region. Consequently, a U.S.-Russian alliance was formed and Vladimir Putin, eyeing to keep pressure on Chechen fighters, exploited the new security challenges in order to elevate Moscow’s position as a leading regional power.

However, the Russo-American rapprochement was short-lived. The U.S. plans to deploy a missile defense system in Eastern Europe and the Color Revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and most notably the so-called ‘Tulip Revolution’ of March 2005 in Kyrgyzstan prompted grave concerns among both Russian and Chinese authorities over the Western military presence in the CA region. These events, Alexander Cooley argues, not only “contributed to an air of intense geopolitical competition and concern about the U.S.-sponsored democratization”, but also reinforced Beijing and Moscow’s

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100 ibid.
104 ibid.
105 Nygren, Bertil. op. cit., p. 164.
commitment to institutionalize the SCO and promote their own regional security agenda in Afghanistan and in Central Asia in general.\textsuperscript{107}

What emerges from the study of these phases of geopolitical transformation is that the region has always been of immense strategic importance throughout history. From the era of Qing dynasty’s expansion in the eighteenth century and the Czarist Russian conquest of Central Asia in the nineteenth century to the present-day meta-geopolitical struggle, the region has never lost its geo-strategic luster, and continues to pose formidable challenges for regional and external actors. Needless to say, these historical and geopolitical transformations have had an enormous impact on ‘the potential of Central Eurasian people for development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ and indeed on the evolution of China and Russia’s foreign policies to date.\textsuperscript{108}

It now seems indisputable that more than two decades after the end of the Cold War, many analogies can still be drawn between today’s ‘New Great Game’ and the former ‘Great Game’. Now, reminiscent of the ancient ‘Silk Road’, China has developed the SCO to build up strong links with CA states, while the U.S. has launched a unified Eurasian continental trade and transport system, dubbed ‘Modern Silk Road’ project to enhance the security and prosperity of Afghanistan and the wider region.\textsuperscript{109} In the meantime, the EU, as a latecomer in Central Asian geopolitical landscape has also emerged as a power to be reckoned with in its own right.

4.3. Conclusion*

As noted in this chapter, the CA countries seem to have gained relative degrees of \textit{regionness} in the past decade, and therefore, they are no longer perceived as “pawns of great powers”.\textsuperscript{110} The CA region has increasingly morphed into an active subject with a separate, albeit weak identity of its own, and distinct capabilities to alter the current patterns of geopolitical interplay. This contention is in stark contrast to Barry Buzan’s characterization of Central Asia as “a region of both weak states and weak powers… whose ability to engage in classical state-to-state rivalry is limited.”\textsuperscript{111} By contrast, this

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chapter sought to debunk the myth of passivity and objectivity of CA states in the 21st century’s power relations. Since the early 1990s, China and Russia have played instrumental roles in assisting CA countries to raise their national image, improve their negotiating/bargaining capacities, and enhance their security-building practices. Most particularly, the SCO has provided much-needed catalyst for the CA states not only to ensure their regime security but also to materialize their strategic, economic and geopolitical goals in the region. As a result, almost all CA states appear willing, albeit in different ways and to varying degrees, to form their own political, security and trade alliances and to engage in balance of power behaviors.¹¹² Borrowing Kavalski’s words, the region is turning into “a fully-fledged international player in its own right“, which reveals that “all roads no longer merely run through Central Asia, they run to it.”¹¹³

It is through acknowledging the ‘centrality’ and growing *actorness* of the CA region that the proceeding chapters will delve into how the EU and China have made use of a set of meta-geopolitical tools to promote stability in the region and achieve their foreign policy goals.

¹¹² *Note:* Such willingness is noticeable even in countries, such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which are generally labeled as the poorest CA countries. Kazakhstan through membership in Russia-led Customs Union, and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan through membership in the WTO and the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) have raised their bargaining capacities.

Chapter 5: The Case of EU’s Meta-geopolitical Influence

This section sets out to explain and analyze the EU’s Central Asian policy based on the proposed meta-geopolitical framework. In carrying out this case-study analysis, I will first present a brief chronological overview of major events leading up to the formations of ‘the Strategy for a New Partnership’, which serves as a core foreign policy instrument vis-à-vis the CA region. Next, the relevance of the seven sub-capacities as applied to the current Strategy will be explored and analyzed in an attempt to generate new hypothesis about the EU’s meta-geopolitical influence in the region. Finally, I will test these hypotheses using realist and constructivist theories. The purpose is to parameterize the dynamics of EU-CA interactions and determine the extent to which the EU’s normative programs and hard power instruments have been feasible, effective and legitimate in the region.

5.1. The EU foreign policy: the road to ‘The Strategy for a New Partnership’

Prior to the dismantling of the Soviet bloc, Central Asia was considered almost terra incognita to the Western world. After the break-up of the USSR, however, the EU commenced its engagement with the region, albeit in a fairly cautious and tactful manner. In the early years of engagement, the EU accorded less attention to the CA countries chiefly because, inter alia, it was preoccupied with its East European neighborhood and did not want to infringe on the “Russian sphere of influence”. However, the EU maintained a multi-pronged yet fragmentary approach toward the region.

In 1991 the EU launched the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS), which was an administrative framework aimed at providing assistance for “economic and commercial reforms, state-building processes, and encouragement of foreign investments” in the CIS countries. TACIS was formulated to support the so-called Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) that form the legal basis for establishing bilateral cooperation with the CA states.

In 1999 the EU concluded PCAs with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan with the assent of all EU Member states and relevant CA states. The PCA with Tajikistan came into force in 2010 while the

PCA with Turkmenistan has yet to be ratified by both the European Parliament and the EU Member States.117

The TACIS encapsulated a multiplicity of initiative and projects, four of which were relevant for the CA states: the Interstate Oil and Gas Pipeline Management (INOGATE) and the Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia (TRACECA), which both became operational in the early 1990s, and the Border Management Program in Central Asia (BOMCA) and the Central Asia Drug Action Program (CADAP).118 In the early 1990s the EU focused mostly on enhancing its hard security and economic interests, as it allocated funds for development of various energy projects, and enhancing border management in the CA countries bordering Afghanistan, mainly Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.119 The corollary of such approach was that issues pertaining to promotion of human rights, rule of law and good governance, which form the bedrock of the EU’s normative practices, were put on the backburner in the face of more urgent and immediate security concerns for the Union and its Member States. It was only after the passage of the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993 that the EU incorporated ‘democratization’ as one of its main objectives in its relations with the CIS countries.120

At the beginning of the 21st century, however, the EU’s foreign policy toward the CA states underwent radical changes. On the basis of empirical observation, it can be argued that the events of 9/11 accompanied by the rise in ‘global discourse on terrorism’ made EU policy makers more aware of the rising political profile and strategic importance of the CA countries and encouraged them to carve out a differentiated, meaningful and value-oriented strategy vis-à-vis the region. To this aim, the EU firstly adopted its new ‘Security Strategy’ in 2003, according to which a range of issues such as “terrorism,…, the existence of weak state institutions, and organized crimes” were outlined as “new threats of the post-Cold War era”.121 Additionally, issues connected with human rights violations and other normative concerns came onto the EU’s foreign policy radar. In apparent move to increase its visibility in the five ex-Soviet republics, Brussels also established the post of the EU Special Representative (EUSR) to the region in 2005.

120 Warkotsch, Alexander. loc. cit.
In 2007 the TACIS program was replaced by the new ‘Development Cooperation Instrument’ (DCI), which accorded less emphasis on transition to market economies and focused more on poverty reduction and democratization.\(^{122}\) However, the DCI was not designed exclusively for the CA region; it also covered four other geographical territories: Latin America, the Persian Gulf countries, South Africa, and Africa, Caribbean and Pacific. Noteworthy too is that the post-TACIS strategy retained many if not all of the EU’s technical assistance programs such as INOGATE, TRACECA, BOMCA and CADAP.\(^{123}\) All in all, both the TACIS and DCI formed the EU cooperation and development assistance to the CA countries.

Nevertheless, a more comprehensive and ambitious strategy was to emerge during the German presidency of the EU in the first half of 2007.\(^{124}\) Under the German EU Council Presidency, “The Strategy for a New Partnership” was presented in June 2007 and subsequently endorsed by the European Council.\(^{125}\) The Strategy functions as the general framework for the EU’s relationship with Central Asia in line with *Millennium Development Goals* of the UN. It is backed up by the "Regional Strategy Paper for Assistance to Central Asia for the period 2007-13”, which provides a complementary force for better implementation of the Strategy and focuses on supporting development cooperation between the European Commission and the CA countries at both regional and national levels.\(^{126}\)

Overall, the EU Strategy outlines seven priority areas for cooperation: 1) human rights, rule of law, good governance and democratization; 2) youth and education; 3) economic development, trade and investment; 4) energy and transport; 5) environmental policies; 6) combating common threats; and 7) intercultural dialogue.\(^{127}\) On the positive side, the ratification of the Strategy marked a breakthrough in the EU-CA relations, as the EU approach towards security became comprehensive and forward-

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\(^{125}\) ibid ; Warkotsch, Alexander. op. cit., p. 11.


looking.\textsuperscript{128} By articulating its objectives and interests in Central Asia, the EU projected itself as a serious political and strategic actor willing to combine its hard security interests (energy, security and border management) with the promotion of normative principles, including human rights, democracy, good governance and rule of law. In other words, the new \textit{modus operandi} provided the EU and its Member States with a unique opportunity to infuse their security-based approaches with values-based interests for the purpose of developing meaningful and long-term relations with the CA states. For instance, the Strategy clearly explains that “the development of a stable political framework and of functioning economic structures are dependent on respect for the rule of law, human rights, good governance and the development of transparent, democratic political structures.”\textsuperscript{129}

Before proceeding with the empirical analysis of the EU’s meta-geopolitical influence, it is worth acknowledging the fact that the Strategy introduces novel mechanisms and a new approach through which the EU develops its role as a ‘normative power’ outside its geographical boundaries. In other words, the seven policy priorities provide a more complex and detailed account of the Union’s objectives, policy instruments, and institutional capacity in dealing with the region, apparently because they encapsulate a wide array of policy areas, as compared to the ones stipulated in the previous European strategies. Hence, the argument is that ideational components of current geopolitical interplay in the CA, such as the EU’s socialization capacity and a range of other often-ignored socio-cultural factors are more conspicuous in the current Strategy. The problem is that they cannot be properly analyzed and assessed by means of geopolitical perspectives which are predominantly associated with the realist view of international relations. The rational for this argument lies in the fact that the seven themes of the Strategy tap into a much larger set of non-material perceptions and internal/ideational characteristics of states. Therefore, geopolitics with its ‘geographical-impact-on-policy assumptions’\textsuperscript{130} fails to adequately explain the formation of security identities as well as addressing the salience of socio-cultural particularities within the context of EU-CA relations. Alternatively, a meta-geopolitical framework is used to tackle the analytical shortcomings of geopolitical perspectives in assessing the impact of norms and values in the CA region. The main contention here is that one can evaluate the efficacy and success of ‘\textit{The Strategy for a New Partnership}’ by using meta-geopolitical paradigm,


which for the purpose of this study is divided into two categories of norm diffusion/ identity transfer and security-based/ geopolitical power dynamics. For the purpose of empirical deployment, of the seven meta-geopolitical sub-capacities— including socialization capacity, promotion of human rights, good governance and rule of law, environmental policies, youth and education programs, cultural diplomacy, energy security and trade expansion— the first five factors fall into the norm diffusion/identity transfer category while the rest of meta-geopolitical factors fit into the category of security-based/ geopolitical power dynamics (see Figure 2, p. 33).

I have employed Arnold Wolfers’ distinction between ‘possession goals’ and ‘milieu goals’ to describe according to which criteria this categorization has been made between meta-geopolitical sub-capacities.131 The assertion here is that those value-based elements of meta-geopolitical paradigm that fall into the category of identity diffusion and norms transfer can, in fact, be defined as a set of policy programs that a state or a polity formulates in order to achieve its milieu goals vis-à-vis other states and entities. According to Wolfers, ‘milieu goals’ aim to shape the environment in which the state— or the EU, in our case— operates.132 In addition, nations pursue milieu goals “not to defend or increase possessions they hold to the exclusion of others, but aim instead at shaping conditions beyond their national boundaries.”133 On the basis of this classification, meta-geopolitical sub-capacities, such as promotion of human rights and inter-cultural diplomacy are, in essence, a set of state capacities for achieving milieu goals, such as improvement of human rights situation and cultural ties between the various regional and global actors.

By contrast, those interest-based features of meta-geopolitical paradigm that form the category of traditional geopolitical power dynamics can be viewed as sub-capacities that a state or a polity uses in order to achieve its ‘possession goals’ in its dealings with other states and entities. Using Wolfers’ taxonomy, possession goals further national interests.134 Thus, if a state seeks to pursue energy security goals or trade expansion, this means that the respective state is in pursuit of its possession goals. However, one should be mindful that ‘milieu goals’ may also be used as means of achieving possession goals.135

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133 ibid.
134 ibid.
135 ibid.
With this analytical framework in mind, the assertion is that there are noticeable links between the priorities of the EU’s Central Asian strategy and the seven introduced meta-geopolitical sub-capacities. For example, one can posit that the issues of promotion of human rights and intercultural dialogue as two of the EU’s seven policy areas are closely interlinked with the variable of socialization capacity in meta-geopolitical paradigm. In addition, it is argued that the efficacy of these policy areas are measurable by the extent to which the Union’s attempts to transfer its norms, values and ideas to CA countries have been successful through active socialization. In order to analyze the meta-geopolitical sway of the EU over Central Asia in these areas, it is essential first to briefly examine the genesis of the Europeanization project and its normative and geopolitical implications for the EU’s policy toward CA.

Note: these Meta-geopolitical sub-capacities (Figure 2.) are not exclusively applied to the analysis of the EU’s influence in the region. The same sub-capacities have also been used and incorporated in the case of China, except the promotion of human rights, which is not seen as a primary concern for Beijing, at least within the SCO framework. Thus, in the analysis of China’s meta-geopolitical influence, special attention has been given to values, such as the ‘Shanghai Spirit’ and the ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence’, instead of promotion of human rights. This categorization is bereft of any value or moral judgment and is merely an attempt to reveal the constitutive elements of China’s foreign policy in the region.
5.2. Analysis of EU’s influence in light of meta-geopolitical paradigm

The collapse of the USSR not only triggered major geopolitical changes, but also ushered in a new era of growing assent of liberal democratic values in lieu of communist ideology. In the early 1990s there were the Central and Eastern European countries (CEE) who sought integration with the EU, mainly due to economic benefits of trade liberalization. Because of the CEE’s demands and in light of the “realignment of geo-strategic orientations and foreign policy priorities in Eastern Europe”, the EU pursued enlargement as the major tool with which to implement its commitment to promotion of political and economic transformations to the east of its borders.137 However, as most commentators argue, it was after the Kosovo crisis in 1999 that EU found a unique chance to enforce its normative agenda in the Western Balkans and promote its security identity.138

It is important to note that two phases of eastern enlargement in 2004 and 2007, which have been widely regarded as “the EU’s biggest foreign policy successes to this date,”139 more than anything else revealed the success of the Europeanization project and the ability of Brussels to compel countries in its immediate neighborhood to adopt its norms and values. The claim here is that these successive enlargements had two significant implications for the development of the EU foreign policy toward Central Asia. First, in theoretical terms, the enlargements consolidated the EU’s position as a strong, distinct normative power in international politics, with civilian means of socializing the aspirant countries into the ‘European way of doing things’. Second, in traditional geopolitical terms, the success of enlargement plans provided the EU with a new impetus and political determination to extend “superior European values”140 beyond its immediate neighborhood, to regions where the U.S., China and others had a greater geopolitical sway than the EU. The European Commission in its “Regional Strategy Paper for Assistance to Central Asia,” corroborates the claim that in the wake of several waves of enlargement, the EU came closer to Central Asia, geographically, politically and economically, and sought “to strengthen and deepen its relationship with Central Asian countries.”141 Against this background, it can be argued that the current EU Strategy was strongly informed by the


139 ibid; Tocci, Nathalie, and Daniel S. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 29.


abovementioned *normative* and *geopolitical* considerations. On the one hand, multiple projects in the areas of human rights, rule of law, and good governance, namely the Rule of Law Initiative for Central Asia and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) were intended to extend the EU’s normative influence and export a Western-style democracy to the CA region. On the other hand, a range of pragmatic security-based goals and geopolitical concerns were included the Strategy, such as diversification of energy resources, increasing trade exchanges in the region and combating drug trafficking.

Against this background, a number of questions arise: firstly, whether or to what extent these normative (value-based) and geopolitical (interest-based) considerations, which together are perceived as integral constituents of the proposed meta-geopolitical paradigm, had any effect at all on the actual behavior and preferences of CA states and above all on defining what can be “normal” in the region. Secondly, what are the conditions under which EU-type norms, regulations and practices are successfully exported to and/or internalized in the domestic policies of the CA countries? The third question concerns whether the prescribed European regulations and values are legitimate and attractive alternatives for the CA countries, given the rising attractiveness and pervasiveness of the SCO in the region. The remainder of this volume is dedicated to meta-geopolitical analysis of EU-CA relations using constructivist and realist approaches.

5.2.1. Socialization deficit in EU’s normative stance

Since its inception, the EU has been regarded as a ‘civilian’, a ‘soft’, or a ‘normative’ power in international politics. The scholars that tend to portray the EU as a ‘normative power’ generally put a premium on the relevance of ideational factors in foreign policy analysis and the role of values, ideas and norms in “affecting identity-related processes and politics.” This proposition derives from Social Constructivism and Sociological Institutionalism in international relations, which highlight the role of ideational and normative structures as well as socialization activities. On this basis, a constructivist

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account of EU-CA relations thus posits that the EU as a ‘normative power’ appears interested in altering the ‘behavior, emotions, and beliefs’ of CA countries by focusing more on ideational aspects of inter-state relations. Furthermore, while constructing its own collective identity internally, the EU is also trying to diffuse its visions of European identity in third countries, through the formation of a range of normative values that tend to distinguish “Self” from the “Other”. Moreover, using constructivism as central theoretical lens, a close examination of the European strategy toward CA countries suggests that most of the EU’s seven areas of engagement listed in the document, such as democratization, environmental policies, inter-cultural dialogue, and education are normative in essence, and that they can be seen as part and parcel of socialization activities that constitute the meta-geopolitical aspects of the EU’s Central Asian foreign policy. In fact, the nexus between constructivism and meta-geopolitics can be found in the extent to which ideational issues are relevant in analyzing the EU-CA relations on top of other material interests as assumed by realists.

Turning to an empirical investigation of the normative impact of EU’s engagement in Central Asia, it should be noted that, Brussels uses two mechanisms, ‘socialization’ and ‘emulation’, as part of Europeanization efforts to shape ‘conceptions of the normal’ in the region. According to Schimmelfennig, socialization is the “process that is directed toward a state’s internalization of the constitutive beliefs and practices institutionalized in its international environment.” On the other hand ‘emulation’ denotes “a process by which an actor learns from or copies a successful exemplar’s or cultural peer’s norms and practices.” It is worth noting that “socialization efforts take place through the institutional channels provided by cooperation agreements with regional organizations, especially in the form of political dialogues and technical assistance programs.” The EU Strategy incorporates several such socialization activities in the Central Asian ‘Stans’ through “intensification of political ties (regular dialogue on a variety of topics with top officials), more assistance (double the amount/budget for the period of 2007-13) and a strong focus on bilateral relations.” It also emphasizes that “good

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149 Lenz, Tobias. op. cit., p. 215.
150 ibid.
governance, the rule of law, human rights, democratization, education and training are key areas where the EU is willing to share experience and expertise.”

To attain these objectives, a range of bilateral and regional cooperation agreements and initiatives have been laid out in the Strategy to enhance the EU’s visibility in the region. For example, as regards the implementation of legal reforms, the ‘Rule of Law Initiative’ has been put forward by Germany and France to meet the needs of CA countries. In the area of education the ‘European Education Initiative’, administered by the Commission, is intended to “enable Central Asian students, teachers, academics, and scientists to participate in modern forms of life-long learning.” The ‘Environment and Water Initiative’ was laid out in the Strategy in 2008 to address environmental issues as well as to enhance water management policies in the region. With regard to cooperation on human rights, the bulk of activities are being conducted under the EIDHR, the ‘Non-State Actors’ Program’ and the ‘Institution Building Partnership Program’. However, majority of human rights programs are being implemented in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, whereas progress on human rights issues has been very limited in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan whose authoritarian governments led by Karimov and Berdymukhammedov are less willing to comply with the EU-type norms and values. As most observers of CA politics agree, “during the life of the EU Strategy, there has been little evidence of any substantial progress on human rights, governance, democracy and civil society in the countries of Central Asia as a result of EU activity.” As Oleg Kbtzef argues, the impact of EU’s engagement in Central Asia is practically ‘zero’ compared to that of other external players such as the U.S., Russia or China. Likewise, reflecting on the normative and strategic influence of the EU in Central Asia, Emilian Kavalski contends that “the EU has neither normative, nor strategic influence in the region and most regional actors (not only state-elites) do not seem to take Brussels into account into their policy calculations….the only time, the region gained some meaningful significance in EU foreign policy was under the German presidency of the Council.”

153 ibid., p. 19.
154 ibid., p. 39.
157 Author’s interview with Prof. Oleg Kbtzeff conducted on March 19th, 2013. (see Appendix 2 for a complete transcript)
158 Author’s interview with Dr. Emilian Kavalski conducted on April 30th, 2013. (see Appendix 2 for more details)
Despite the above-mentioned, one should not assume that the adoption of the Strategy and related regional and bilateral schemes has had no impact on the level of EU’s cooperation with the CA states. For one thing, the capacity for political dialogue and the number of high-level meetings and visits (i.e. visits by the EUSR) have substantially increased since the adoption of the Strategy and the coming into force of the existing PCAs. But contradictions and deficiencies abound when it comes to adopting balanced and consistent approaches and employing appropriate socialization mechanisms, particularly in the domain of promoting liberal norms and values to ‘out-of-Europe’ territories. For instance, a detailed examination of the content of the PCAs confirms that only a brief section (one page out of some 60 pages) of the documents is allocated specifically to issues concerning ‘political dialogue’, despite the emphasis given to such issues in the preamble of the PCAs.\(^\text{159}\) In fact, economic and financial issues, in particular the promotion of free trade constitute the main planks of the PCAs for CA countries.\(^\text{160}\) It is also argued that the objectives of the political dialogue are ‘vaguely’ specified and that communication between Brussels and the region are “far from being consistent”.\(^\text{161}\) Additionally, projects and instruments such as EIDHR, TACIS or the PCAs were targeted not specifically for the CA countries, but ‘for a wider geographical focus’, including all post-Soviet countries.\(^\text{162}\) Only the establishment of the post of the EUSR in 2005 was exclusively aimed at dealing directly with the CA issues.\(^\text{163}\) There is also a general consensus among EU officials that despite EU’s efforts in supporting the security and stability of the region, regional instruments, such as BOMCA, CADAP, TRACECA, and INOGATE have not borne particularly fruitful results.\(^\text{164}\)

Now, aside from the question of what impact the Strategy has had on the actual behavior, interests and preferences of the CA countries, the assertion in this analysis is that these examples of EU’s low effectiveness more than anything else reveal the oft-ignored significance of the socializing capacity of normative powers (EU) to alter the policy preferences of target countries, particularly those located outside European borders (i.e. CA). In other words, what undergirds many of EU’s bilateral and regional schemes is the overarching question of how effectively the Union can socialize the region into the shared norms, values, customs and practices of its member states by using norms transfer and identity diffusion mechanisms outlined in our meta-geopolitical framework. Thus, it can be argued that

\(^{160}\) ibid.
\(^{161}\) ibid., p. 243-244.
\(^{163}\) ibid.
\(^{164}\) ibid., p. 27.
the conundrum facing Brussels is not so much whether it should find equilibrium between pursuing liberal objectives of democratization and realist goals of energy diversification, but rather how effectively it can extend its socialization capacity beyond the geographical confines of Europe. This is a major foreign policy challenge confronting the EU, as CA states look to other external actors, notably the U.S., China and Russia as viable alternatives for pursuing their realist goals and raising their level of actorness in the region.

In general, socialization is vital to the successful implementation of EU’s policy priorities, such as good governance, democracy and human rights, security, environment, education, intercultural dialogue, and energy. From a constructivist perspective, socialization as “a process of inducting actors into the norms and rules of a given community” will be successful if the prescribed norms and rules are internalized in the receiving state.\(^\text{165}\) Internalization is, in essence, the outcome of an effective socialization process. Internalization occurs when social beliefs and practices are adopted into the actor’s own ‘repertoire of cognitions and behaviors’.\(^\text{166}\) On the basis of these premises, it is fair to say that internalization is, in fact, the spin-off of a successful norm transfer and identity diffusion processes, which form the proposed meta-geopolitical framework. Hence, it is the degree of internalization of prescribed EU norms, rules and values that determines whether or not the EU’s Central Asian strategy has been feasible, effective and successful in the region.

It is believed that political dialogues, participation proposals and bilateral and regional agreements are regarded as main vehicles for any socialization activity.\(^\text{167}\) However, internalization process is not without local and/or external constraints. Among other things, Warkotsch identifies lack of attention to ‘socio-cultural peculiarities’ of CA countries as the major hindrance to effective and successful socialization of the region into ‘European ways of doing things’.\(^\text{168}\)

This important caveat beckons attention to the following interrelated factors while assessing the limits and challenges of EU norm diffusion and identity transfer in the region. The first point is that internalization of norms and values, as some scholars argue, are likely to be extremely difficult in those

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third countries that are situated outside the framework of a Habermasian “common lifeworld”\textsuperscript{169}. In other words, European ideas, norms and values, such as promotion of human rights and democratic principles are particularly influential if they conform to the social, political, economic, cultural and historical conditions and experiences of the recipient states\textsuperscript{170}. Another key point worth pondering is that successful socialization is also dependent on the ‘systematic interaction’ with the identity-producing countries as well as the legitimacy of European norms and policies as perceived by the external actors\textsuperscript{171}. Lastly, as a rule of thumb in EU Foreign Policy (i.e. ENP), the ‘voluntary commitment’ of the recipient countries is seen as a\textit{sine qua non} for implementation of EU reform plans and regulations—a proposition implying that, in the case of Central Asia, “it is the non-EU Europe that needs to learn to adapt’, not the EU.”\textsuperscript{172}

Now, when it comes to adoption of the human rights norms by the CA states, it seems that the prospects for the internalization of the EU’s norms and values, such as good governance and democracy promotion are considerably limited in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan, and only a little better in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan\textsuperscript{173}. All five CA countries are ranked as ‘Not Free’, according to 2013 data from Freedom House, with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan labeled as ‘Worst of the Worst’ in terms of press freedoms\textsuperscript{174}. Only the Kyrgyz Republic has seen relative improvement in human rights issues, particularly since the overthrow of Askar Akayev in 2005.

As noted previously, the success of socialization process is, to a large extent, dependent on whether the recipient state “has few prior, ingrained beliefs that are inconsistent with the socializing agency's message.”\textsuperscript{175} This proposition beckons two important caveats: First, in an environment thick with (semi-)authoritarian tendencies at the top echelons of political systems in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan (to a lesser degree in Kyrgyzstan) and given the patron-client, tribal, and kinship legacies still running through the veins of Central Asian cultural and political system, then it is

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\textsuperscript{170} ibid. \\
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no exaggeration to posit that the EU’s socialization activities in spheres of democracy and human rights promotion are likely to bear no tangible results. Closely related to this argument is that regime survival and safeguarding of sovereignty are among the primary driving forces behind the CA political system as opposed to the pooling of sovereignty within the EU. The emphasis on regime survival poses formidable challenges to internalization of the European norms, particularly in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Some experts postulate that it is the lack of attention to these ‘socio-cultural idiosyncrasies’ that contributes to weakening of EU’s chances of promoting its identity and liberal norms to the region.176

In order to get to the root cause of this deficiency, it is imperative to pay a special attention to the relevance of specific contexts in which a normative power interacts with other actors— that is “the inter-subjective environment to which its agency is applied.”177 Reflecting on the ability of ‘adaptive normative powers’ to change the context they engage, Kavalski argues that, “an actor’s capacity to define the normal depends on the recognition of this agency by target states,” and that “normative powers need to understand the patterns of appropriate behavior in a particular context— it is such contextual attunement that can persuade local actors to grant them agency.”178 This inference draws attention to the importance of mutual recognition, and of repetition of the practice of interaction (deliberate practices) aimed at providing the breeding ground for such recognition to grow.179

In the context of EU’s normative practices in Central Asia, the EU need to be aware that it would be at risk of being projected as an “identity hegemon” if it inculcates a sense of ‘normative superiority’ in transferring its rules, norms and values instead of demanding recognition from third countries through meaningful deliberate practices and complex learning processes.180 This caveat is profoundly important if we assume that CA states as ‘rational actors’ are likely to make cost-benefit calculations of the EU reform plans. In other words, they are more likely to search for alternative sources of recognition (i.e. SCO, CSTO) unless they realize that they are engaged in a genuine, meaningful relation based on mutual respect and recognition. The multi-vector foreign policies of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan can be seen as cases in point.

176 Similar points have been raised by Emilian Kavalski and Alexander Warkotsch.
178 ibid.
179 ibid., p. 261.
Another important point is that a considerable amount of literature on socialization underline the role of ‘social and material incentives’ (naming and shaming, and financial assistance) and political conditionality in the socialization process. As Duchêne argues, ‘rewards (positive conditionality)’ are functional methods that can be employed by “civilian powers to persuade the target countries to change their behaviors.” Under the circumstances, it is evident that the amount of financial assistance allocated to CA states through the Commission’s instruments like the DCI and the EIDHR remains ‘relatively small in scale’ in comparison to countries of East Europe and those who receive funds under the ENP program. Moreover, most of the EU’s financial assistance concentrates in particular on support for democratic development and good governance in Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, whereas Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were only provided by very limited financial and technical assistance, particularly under the EIDHR projects.

In general, as regards the application of different forms of conditionality and other reward-based policies to the CA region, most commentators agree that neither positive nor negative conditionality is effectively and consistently used vis-à-vis the governments of the region. Noteworthy too is that EU-CA relations are not part of the ENP, nor are they part of Brussels’ relations with Russia. In Kassenova’s words, “the EU does not have enough leverage with the governments of Central Asian states, for its ‘sticks’ and ‘carrots’ are not that big.” Hence, the EU’s cautious approach in regard to conditionality instrument is claimed to have been one of the problems which has not only posed a serious dilemma for the EU, but also has turned into a source of dissonance among the Member States when it comes to making and/or pursuing unified and consistent decisions towards the five ‘Stans’. For instance, EU sanctions against Uzbekistan in 2005 after Andijan civil unrest was initially interpreted as the one collective position adopted by all the member states in implementation of EU human rights and

democracy promotion policies in Central Asia.188 However, two years later the sanctions imposed on Tashkent were eased by the German-led EU presidency, despite Karimov’s refusal to allow an independent inquiry into the human rights abuses during the uprising. Additionally, in 2009 Brussels lifted its last remaining part of sanctions in a move described by some observers as “a ‘pragmatic’ approach towards the Uzbek regime for military-strategic and other considerations.”189 Many experts argue that the rapprochement between the EU and Uzbekistan was motivated by growing importance of Uzbekistan in terms of its strategic location as well as the presence of the German base at Termez—a key transit base for NATO-led operation in Afghanistan since 2001.190 Further to this, the lifting of EU sanctions on Uzbekistan also exposed fissures among EU Member States, with Germany in favor of suspension of sanctions and Sweden, UK and the Netherlands wanting to maintain them.191

On the basis of these observations, it can be argued that the EU’s approach to human rights in Uzbekistan was revelatory of the alleged ‘double standards’ pursued by Brussels in its external human rights policies in Central Asia.192 From a meta-geopolitical standpoint, the discrepancy between what the EU does and what it says in the field of human rights protection undercuts the validity and legitimacy of its normative agency and the credibility of its socialization endeavors in the region. As Alston and Weiler cogently observe, “a cleavage between the increasingly generous verbal affirmation of commitment to human rights without matching the rhetoric with visible, systematic and comprehensive action will eventually undermine the legitimacy of the European construct.”193

The analysis of post-Andijan relations between Brussels and Tashkent suggests that the EU’s Central Asian strategy is increasingly driven by economic interests and geopolitical concerns, some of which have at times taken precedence over norm-based policies, such as promotion of political reforms and commitment to human rights. In this sense, the EU has found itself in a quandary about how to remain closely engaged with the CA countries, particularly with the more authoritarian regimes of Uzbekistan

and Turkmenistan without becoming simultaneously too lenient and too stringent. For example, Turkmenistan ranks among the most repressive and isolationist countries in the world. But the strategic role it can play in Europe-bound pipeline projects across the Caspian Sea has led to a relaxation of EU human rights pressure on Ashgabat in recent years. For Brussels, surmounting these dilemmas is seen as an immensely important challenge on the path of successful norm transferring in the region.

That aside, the EU is confronted with yet another challenge: its normative agency and soft security approach are strongly opposed by major regional powers such as China and Russia, who are also closely engaged with the five ‘Stans’ in order to attract energy-rich Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan into their sphere of influence. Indeed, realist thinking and zero-sum game mentalities are present in the EU’s strategic thinking, as evidenced by the inclusion of interest-based projects into the EU Strategy, namely enhancing energy security, combating common threats and fostering economic development. As a result, notwithstanding its moral authority and missionary zeal to induce normative change in the region, the EU seems to be enmeshed in a complex web of geopolitical rivalries with China and Russia. In fact, the preceding discussion on the normative influence of the EU illuminated only a slice of the kaleidoscopic meta-geopolitical landscape of the region. To gain a better understanding of the dynamics of EU-CA relationships, it is imperative to assess the feasibility and effectiveness of key EU initiatives that have been shaped by strong economic and security imperatives.

On the energy security front, Brussels has developed and conducted regular energy dialogues with the CA countries in the framework of the “Baku Initiative” in order to facilitate the integration of the energy markets of ‘INOGATE’ partner countries into the EU market. The INOGATE mechanism is a key instrument in facilitating cooperation on energy projects of mutual interest between the EU and the Black Sea and Caspian Sea littoral states, as well as the CA states. In the area of regional cooperation on transportation, the ‘Baku Initiative’ and the TRACECA program serve as main tools for implementation of a transport corridor between the EU and the CA countries. In regard to border management, regional programs, such as BOMCA and CADAP focus on issues pertaining to border management and fight against drug trafficking from Afghanistan. However, significant challenges lie

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196 ibid.

ahead for the EU in the domain of security cooperation. For one thing, whereas Europeans tend to single out drug trafficking, organized crime and terrorism as the overarching security concerns in the region, CA states have a different perception of what a common security threat is. Put differently, of primary concern for most CA states are threats, such as terrorism and Islamic extremism, and in general any form of external or internal pressure that might threaten regimes’ survival. More often than not, CA governments interpret EU political reforms and democratic norms as challenges to their sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence. In this respect, it can be argued the Confucian notion of ‘harmony with difference’ practiced by China through the SCO framework— as opposed to the EU’s self-conceptualization as better ‘Self’— projects Beijing as a socializing actor that is capable of integrating other actors through awarding ‘recognition’ and subsequently internalizing ‘new understandings of appropriateness’. This inference, more than anything else, reflects the necessity for ‘complex’ learning and ‘normative persuasion’ based on ‘unselfish exchange of arguments’ for the purpose of reaching consensus and mutual recognition with the CA countries. Overall, the above-mentioned divergent views between the EU and the CA states on the notion of common security threat stems partly from the EU’s weakness in increasing “mutual recognition” and enhancing the legitimacy and appropriateness of the norms and identities that it seeks to internalize in the CA countries. According to this view, the EU should engage in steady communicative and teaching processes with the goal of enhancing the legitimacy of its institutional identity and prescribed norms instead of using its ‘normative supremacy’ as a means to legitimize its policies without having to recognize the interest and security needs of the third states.

Nevertheless, perhaps the most pressing geopolitical challenges facing Brussels and other regional powers in Central Asia relate to the energy supply security and trade and investment issues. As noted in previous chapters, besides being the biggest economy in Central Asia, Kazakhstan is the main oil producer in the region while Turkmenistan is a leading gas exporter in the Caspian and CA region. Seeing Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan as viable alternative energy suppliers, Beijing has in recent years fostered extensive and long-term energy ties with Astana and Ashgabat in order to support its economic growth. A clear example of China’s quest for energy security can be seen in the construction of 3088

200 ibid., p. 942-943.
kilometer oil pipeline stretching from the Atyrau oil base in western Kazakhstan to Alashankou in China’s Xinjiang region. The opening of a 1,833-km gas export pipeline in 2009 from Turkmenistan through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to China is another case in point. These pipeline projects have had enormous implications for the European and China’s gas security. For example, whereas the former project represents a geostrategic maneuvering against the U.S.-backed Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline in Eurasia, the latter has set the alarm bells ringing in Washington and Brussels where diplomats are engaged in fierce debates over the future of Nabucco pipeline project in the face of Beijing’s intensive energy diplomacy.

But the Europe’s biggest pipeline project has run into numerous troubles since its inception and has been strongly opposed by Russia. The Nabucco project (see Appendix 1) suffered a devastating blow in June 2013 when the BP-led consortium that is developing a huge gas field in Azerbaijan announced that they will opt out of Nabucco and join the rival Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), which crosses Turkey, northern Greece and southern Albania before traveling under the sea to Italy. TAP, which is 400 kilometers shorter than Nabucco will “supply just 10 billion cubic meters (about 330 billion cubic feet) a year of gas compared to the 30 billion cubic meters (1 trillion cubic feet) a year of gas that Nabucco originally proposed to ship into the continent.”

Clearly, “the Nabucco’s death” has kept alive Russia’s hopes of channeling its gas to the European market from Central Asia via the South Stream project—which is estimated to transport annually up to 63 billion cubic meters of natural gas to central and southern Europe. In other words, with Azerbaijan choosing TAP instead of Nabucco to transport natural gas from the Caspian, the EU’s hopes


203 Schmidt-Felzmann, Anke. "EU Member States' Energy Relations With Russia: Conflicting Approaches To Securing Natural Gas Supplies." Geopolitics 16.3 (2011): pp. 574-599. Note: the Nabucco project was originally planned to link the EU to new gas sources in the Caspian Sea (Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan) and Middle East (Iran and Iraq) and Egypt. It was intended to run along former eastern bloc countries that are heavily dependent on Gazprom' gas and, for that matter, was considered a serious rival to Russia-backed South Stream gas pipeline project. (see Appendix 1)


of cutting the CA countries, especially Turkmenistan loose from the Russian gas monopoly have been severely dented. Now, what merits pondering amid this ‘clash of pipelines’ is that while Western energy companies and EU Member States were vacillating over the viability and political nuances of the Nabucco project for almost seven years, the Chinese diplomats successfully signed major energy contracts with the CA governments and built the CA-China gas pipeline in 18 months— the fastest built pipeline of its size in history. As a consequence of Beijing's ambitious "energy diplomacy”, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) has overtaken Gazprom as Central Asia’s energy hegemon, “extracting gas and oil from countries like Turkmenistan and Afghanistan where Western companies have had no luck.”

Sum it up, the claim is that in these shifting circumstances the region still remains the focal point of traditional geopolitical rivalry for regional primacy and continues to be an epicenter of ‘balance of power’ activities among major regional powers in the realm of energy security and commerce. The EU’s efforts to diversify gas imports away from Russia through construction of the Nabucco project exemplifies Brussels’ growing tendency to balance Gazprom's market power and to gain a footing in resource-rich countries of the region.

Besides being at the forefront of efforts to win on the energy front, China has also advanced into the CA region economically. In 2010 China outpaced the EU as Central Asia’s first trading partner. The EU, for its part, is a main trading partner of Kazakhstan and a major source of investments. In the sphere of trade and investment, The Strategy for a New Partnership focuses on the accession of the CA countries to the World Trade Organization, seeking to help them benefit from the EU’s Generalized Scheme of Preferences. For most of the EU Member States, Kazakhstan is the key trade partner, although major political and economic inroads have been made into the Turkmen and Uzbek markets. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have been less attractive to European investors, and Brussels focuses on poverty reduction, good governance and humanitarian assistance in these resource-poor countries.

209 ibid.
Despite these efforts, experts believe that the EU has played ‘a minor role’ and taken a backseat to China and Russia in fostering a broad range of economic relationships with the CA countries. In Kavalski’s words, “the EU has no appeal in the region. The lack of appeal then translates into lack of influence… China on the other hand has been much more successful in developing policies that differentiate between the individual Central Asian countries, rather than treat them as part of a homogeneous region. In fact, the EU can learn a lot from China when it comes to extending its normative influence in the region.”

5.2.2. EU’s balance-of-power strategy in Central Asia

Realists argue that Asia’s international relations is characterized by balance of power dynamics, as the U.S. plays the role of chief balancer vis-à-vis China and Russia. Realists also posit that “states care deeply about the balance of power and compete among themselves either to gain power at the expense of others or at least to make sure they do not lose power.”

According to structural realism, as it is the theoretical framework used in this part of analysis, “power is a means to an end and the ultimate end is survival.” Scholars wedded to this theoretical approach maintain that states are rational unitary actors that make cost-benefit calculations of all alternative policies and make decisions on the basis of what will enhance their prospects for survival.

In the context of EU-CA relations, it can be argued that “Europe, unlike the United States, cannot offer any immediate guarantee of security or balance based on military power.” Bounded by its raison d’etre as a ‘civilian power’ in pursuit of a norm-driven foreign policy, the EU runs out of munitions in terms of capacity building activities in comparison to the U.S., Russia and China, who are engaged in serious balancing behaviors vis-à-vis the CA states. In other words, the EU as an institution which started with ‘low politics’ does not pose a formidable challenge to Russia and China on the security front, partly because it has not provided the Central Asia ‘Stans’ with alternative frameworks for regional security cooperation, such as the SCO or NATO’s Partnership for Peace (which all CA countries have joined). As Marco Rossi puts it,

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213 Author’s interview with Dr. Emilian Kavalski conducted on April 30th, 2013. (see Appendix 2 for more details)
216 ibid., p. 72.
217 ibid.
“Most Central Asia states still consider the partnership with the EU as strategically convenient, but are aware that a closer relation with China and Russia will allow them to obtain major deals in the economic and security domain while avoiding EU’s conditionality. This has been the case for Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and the EU’s influence might soon be confined to states that rely almost exclusively on foreign aid, such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.”

However, the mere notion that the EU possesses a multiplicity of ‘soft power’ capacities does not imply that the polity and its member states are not engaged in geopolitical power struggles with major regional powers, and that such realpolitik dynamics have not been taken into consideration in any of EU’s external actions vis-à-vis CA states. Conversely, regional initiatives such as INOGATE, TRACECA, BOMCA and CADAP reveal the EU’s desire to be taken seriously on the security front and be recognized as an alternative security provider for the CA countries. But a wide range of geopolitical constraints have greatly sapped the Union’s ability to effectively promote its model of security governance in the region in tune with the security needs of the CA countries. The attractiveness of Russo-Chinese ‘strategic partnership’ to counterbalance the influence of the EU and U.S. in the region as well as Brussels’s prioritization of identity and institution building over enhancing meaningful ‘hard security’ cooperation and capacity building are among these challenges.

5.3. Conclusion

The case study of the EU suggests that the Union as the world’s leading trading power can only be content with having limited economic and normative pull in the region. From a meta-geopolitical standpoint, the EU has established itself as the engine of ‘normative suasion’ in Central Asia, particularly in areas such as human security, rule of law, democracy and good governance, environmental policies, youth and education programs, all of which are closely linked to policies aimed at achieving milieu goals. However, thanks to a confluence of internal and external factors, such as the EU’s poor attention to the security needs of the CA countries as well as their socio-cultural particularities, the EU Strategy has seen its normative impact constricted rather than broadened since 2007.

On the whole, the EU lacks a coherent and realist strategy that sees this bewildering and complex region not as a homogeneous whole. For the time being, the EU, suffering from socialization deficit in the region, continues to be a secondary actor in the security realm as long as it cleaves to its reactive

civilian approach, which seems to have overlooked the CA countries’ penchant for recognition. It is notable that even the balance of power in the realm of energy security will be geared toward the east, as China, Russia and other Asian countries (India, Japan, and South Korea) compete with the Western energy companies for influence and access to oil and gas resources. In this environment, the SCO provides the region with an opportunity to guarantee their political survival and at the same time bandwagon with Russia and China for their own security and economic interests. Pierre Morel, the EU Special Representative to Central Asia, has recently referred to the SCO as a “mirror of new trends in an unstable world” and “a barometer of a new relationship in the making.”

The next chapter deals with the meta-geopolitical influence of the SCO in Central Asia.

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Chapter 6: The Case of China’s SCO Influence in Central Asia

6.1. Introduction

“Let China sleep, for when the Dragon awakes, she will shake the world”

Napoleon

Between 1600 and 1800, the last imperial dynasty of China, Manchu Qing Dynasty gained control over large tracts of Central Eurasia, which extended as far as present-day Tibet, Mongolia and Xinjiang. In a shockingly short period of time, the Qing Dynasty was expanded to the Central and Southeast Asia and eventually transformed into a ‘Central Eurasian empire’ with world significance. What is particularly interesting is that, contrary to popular belief, the westward expansion of the Qing Empire (1644-1911) was not achieved solely through military means. Rather, the Chinese relied a great deal on their economic and cultural capacities to ingratiate themselves with the Central Asian rulers and win their support of China’s position on Xinjiang (East Turkestan).

Two centuries later, however, it still remains a matter of debate as to what exactly constitutes China’s core interests and how or through which mechanism(s) they are being materialized in Central Asia. Nevertheless, scholars draw linkages, albeit not necessarily identical, between the Qing dynasty’s approach toward Inner Asia (CA) and the contemporary Chinese foreign policy toward the five ‘Stans’, arguing that reminiscent of imperial China’s “vassal” relationships, Beijing uses the SCO as the custodian of its erstwhile “tribute system” to provide the CA states with certain economic and security advantages in return for guarantees concerning the issue of Uyghur “separatism” in Xinjiang.

The reference to Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in analyzing the meta-geopolitical impact of the SCO on CA politics merits considerable attention, because it lends great insight into the core interests and driving principles of the contemporary China’s Central Asian strategy.

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224 ibid., p. 133.
226 ibid.
In this chapter, I will first describe why Xinjiang is strategically important to the Chinese leaders and examine how Beijing has skillfully managed to turn ‘Xinjiang problem’ into a catalyst for boosting its presence in Central Asia through the SCO. Second, based on the meta-geopolitical framework, the impact of Beijing’s policies (interest-based and values-oriented policies) on the development of SCO-CA relations will be assessed, followed by a thorough analysis of how effectively Beijing has been exercising its ‘fledgling normative power’ through the SCO with a focus on its socialization capacities. The purpose is to parameterize and explain the dynamics of SCO-CA interactions in view of meta-geopolitical paradigms, using realist and constructivist theories.

6.2. Xinjiang problem, China’s SCO solution and the ‘Great Leap Westward’

As noted above, the reference to XUAR is of utmost importance because, for China, the security and stability of its far-western Muslim-majority Xinjiang region is to a large extent dependent on Central Asia’s security and stability.

Generally speaking, Xinjiang is divided between Turkic-speaking Muslim people, including Uyghurs, and non-Muslim Han Chinese. The cultural and ethnic heritage of Uyghurs and other ethnic minority groups living in Xinjiang has more affinity with that of people in the neighboring CA countries.228 Home to “15 percent of China’s ensured oil reserves and 22 percent of total ensured reserve of natural gas”, Xinjiang has always been beset by interminable troubles.229 Specifically, since the mid-1980s, the autonomous region has been the scene of sporadic ethnic clashes between minority Uyghurs and Chinese security forces, due to growing resistance to the Chinese rule.230 Deeply worried about the negative impact of potential ethnic unrests on its ‘quest for national identity’, Beijing, in the 1990s, adopted first and foremost a policy of “stability above all else” in Xinjiang and launched massive development policies to achieve the integration of Xinjiang.231

Set against this background, however, an important question arises as to where does Central Asia fit in China’s post-1991 strategy?

The assertion is that it was the ‘Xinjiang problem’ that served as a catalyst for China to accelerate its westward expansion into Central Asia. In fact, the increased pressure of religious sectarianism and growing fears about potential spillover of separatist activities into Xinjiang— following the USSR’s collapse— prompted China’s top leaders to pay a considerable attention to issues of security and stability in Central Asia. Hence, over the past two decades, Beijing has made strenuous efforts to “utilize Xinjiang's geopolitical position in order to simultaneously achieve the security and integration of Xinjiang and, as this project has progressed, China's rise as a Central Asian power.”

But the pathway toward becoming a Central Asian power has indeed been bumpy for China, perhaps even bumpier than the ancient ‘Silk Road’. Undoubtedly, Beijing in “the post-Cold War ‘unipolar’ international system of Pax Americana” needed to overcome a multiplicity of challenges that were too big to be dealt with unilaterally. In strategic terms, since the immediate post–Cold War world was largely unipolar, Russia and China were quite apprehensive of the potential rise of the American influence in Central Asia.

Having lost its superpower status and deeply suspicious of the NATO expansion, Russia on the one hand, was desperate to regain its leverage over the CA states, whose leaders were seen as balancing their relations with Moscow to some extent through bilateral relationships with the U.S. and other major regional powers. China, on the other hand, not only viewed Central Asia as a vital zone on which its own internal security in Xinjiang depended, but also ‘as a source of income and of low-cost raw materials, a market for its goods, and a corridor to Europe and Middle East’. In these settings, the signing of a “strategic partnership” in April 1996 between Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Chinese President Jiang Zemin set the foundation for establishment of the Shanghai Five, which on 15 June 2001 with the accession of Uzbekistan to the group became the Shanghai Co-operation Organization. The Shanghai Five initially dealt with border issues and pledged to protect the region against transnational security threats, the threat of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), etc., or what the Chinese termed the ‘three evils’ of separatism, terrorism and religious fundamentalism.

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short, multi-lateral anti-terrorism activities were high on the agenda of the SCO from the start and have further developed since 2001.

As can be seen, in contrast to the EU’s initial emphasis on reaching ‘milieu goals’ in its relations with the CA states (such as human rights and democracy promotion), the Shanghai Five, from the very beginning, put a heavy emphasis on reaching a number of possession goals (access to natural resources and trade agreements) set by Russia and China. Although between 1996 to 2000 both China and Russia favored an SCO with an emphasis on combating transnational security threats, it looked like Beijing took the SCO much more seriously than Moscow and targeted more ‘clearly defined long-term objectives’, most notably the goal of promoting “a new ‘multi-polar’ international political and economic order,” in addition to simply addressing security risks in their immediate vicinity.237

Overall, considering China’s ambition to play a leading role in promoting security and stability in the region through the SCO, and given Russia’s weakened position in the 1990s, particularly its poor economy and its preoccupation with two wars in Chechnya, the SCO thrived in an environment conducive to China’s ‘peaceful rise’ in Central Asia. Nonetheless, internal and external security issues were placed at the top of SCO’s agenda in the region.

On the basis of these premises, it is thus fitting to make two important inferences about the SCO’s organizational and operational foundations. First, as one scholar observes, “Unlike the European Union, which started with ‘low politics’—economic cooperation and then gradual expansion into security and foreign policy domain—SCO was security oriented from the outset. In other words, SCO put functionalism upside down. It was the function of a highly successful cooperation in security areas that eventually ‘spilled over’ into other non-security areas, such as foreign policy, coordination, economic, and cultural cooperation.”238 What is more, while the EU’s charters place a heavy premium on a set of democratic values shared by the Member States, namely respect for human rights and civil liberties, it seems that far less attention has been devoted by the SCO to promotion of such values among the organization’s members. Specifically, the SCO’s official documents are fraught with references to respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression and non-interference.239

Deriving from these observations, it can be also inferred that the preponderance of ‘high-politics’ together with the prevalence of non-Western principles were seen as facilitating factors in encouraging the CA states to participate in an inter-governmental organization that would allow them to not only raise their profile but also to make their hitherto-unknown interests known. As such, between 1996 and 2000, China and Russia confidently sought to pursue their self-interests within the SCO, and exploited the organization as a platform to implement their regional policies more effectively than other regional actors. However, the emergence of a multiplicity of new challenges following the September 11 attacks and the subsequent U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan caught the SCO in an unguarded moment.

The United States’ increased campaign in Central Asia, which was accompanied by a greater focus on human rights and democracy promotion in the region made the Chinese and Russian leaders particularly apprehensive of the America's motives in their immediate vicinity. One of the most immediate consequences of the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent presence of the U.S. in the region was the shifting of the balance of power toward the U.S. to the detriment of China and Russia, and the SCO. Despite earlier promises to oppose American unilaterality, all CA states, except Turkmenistan, signed military cooperation agreements, offering military facilities to fights against terrorism in exchange for significant economic aids. In this setting, the SCO appeared ‘redundant’ in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, despite major attempts made by Russia and China to restore the SCO’s position as a primary security actor in Central Asia. As a result, the bulk of post-9/11 Russia/China-CA engagement continued in bilateral forms, especially for China which “would have to rely on itself to build relations with the Central Asians, and the SCO was the obvious vehicle.” As a consequence of the Sino-Russian focus on striking bilateral deals, the SCO’s attractiveness to the CA states was profoundly undercut as compared to economic and geopolitical advantages that they could achieve through either accommodating or bandwagoning with the U.S. and other regional actors.

Nevertheless, the ‘War on Terror’ discourse presented a unique opportunity for both Moscow and Beijing to fashion stronger ties with CA states. As one scholar puts it, the post- 9/11 discourse on international terrorism helped Moscow re-establish a military presence in the region through the CSTO framework, a NATO-style alliance founded in 2002 between Russia and Armenia, Belarus,

241 ibid.
Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan, with Uzbekistan. Needless to say, Putin was the first world leader to throw his weight behind the U.S.-led anti-terrorism efforts and, from very early on, used the mantra of 'international terrorism' not only to pull CA states into Moscow's orbit but also to portray Russia-Chechnya conflict as a war against terrorism tantamount to U.S. actions in Afghanistan. The rhetoric and policies of the ‘Global War on Terror’ also provided an opportunity for China to step up its campaign against Uyghur separatists in Xinjiang. Heavily dominated by the Sino-Russian willingness to play the anti-terrorism card to their own benefit, the SCO between 2001 and 2004 gradually morphed from a fledgling regional grouping to an organization seeking international recognition and cooperation. In 2004 the SCO obtained an observer status at the UN and saw the ‘establishment of a Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in Uzbekistan, followed by the signing of ‘the Shanghai convention on fight against terrorism, separatism and extremism’.

However, the SCO seemed to have changed its course by the summer of 2005 when a string of ‘Rose and Tulip revolutions’ in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan stoked fears among the Chinese and Russian officials about the U.S.-sponsored democratization projects in Eurasia. The ‘color revolutions’ were interpreted by the then SCO Secretary General Zhang as “disturbing events” and “negative excesses” that could threaten CA regime’s stability. Both Moscow and Beijing supported the view that the popular uprisings like the so-called Andijan events of May 2005 were instigated from abroad, notably through the Western-backed NGOs. The high-water mark of the SCO’s criticism of the US foreign policy was on 29 July 2005 when the Uzbek government ordered U.S. forces to leave Karshi-Khanabad base within six months. The Uzbek decision caught Washington by surprise and sparked major geopolitical realignments in the region. Since then, while the SCO has been viewed by Western scholars as a nascent “anti-Western alliance governed by authoritarian regimes with poor human rights records”, Moscow and Beijing see it as a “constructive trend in multilateral diplomacy, protecting the legitimate interests of members states, irrespective of their sizes and interests.”

messages and conflicting interpretations, one thing is clear: suspicious of the ‘U.S. hegemony’ and the Western democratizing influence in the CA region, especially since 2005, China and Russia have sought to stymie any attempt that would gravely endanger the security and stability of the region, be it through color revolutions or by an Arab Spring-style change. Put succinctly, what emerges from this discussion is that it is the emphasis on stability and territorial sovereignty that forms the bedrock of SCO’s magna carta. As Emilian Kavalski observes, “the emphasis on the peacefulness of China’s rise reiterates the prioritization of stability as a key social norm in Chinese international relations.”\footnote{Kavalski, Emilian. Central Asia and the Rise of Normative Powers: Contextualizing the Security Governance of the European Union, China, and India. New York: Bloomsbury, 2012, p. 110.} Upon closer examination, the emphasis on the rules and norms of sovereignty and stability in essence reflects Beijing’s adherence to “the ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’— mutual respect for territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, mutual nonintervention, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.”\footnote{ibid., p. 112.} Interestingly to note here is that the so-called "Shanghai Spirit", as stipulated in the Declaration establishing the SCO, actually embodies these five principles that China sees as new norms of international relations and global security.\footnote{Declaration on the Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, [online] available at : http://www.ecrats.com/en/normative_documents/2006 accessed 23 June 2013.}

On the basis of this argument, it can be argued that although the post-2001 environment in Central Asia has been consumed with strong realpolitik tendencies exhibited by Russia and China, it seems that Beijing, under the aegis of the SCO, has emerged as an influential norm entrepreneur in pursuit of promoting fundamentally different set of values and principles from that of other players like the EU.

Having delineated some of the basic principles of the SCO political system, it is important now to study and analyze the meta-geopolitical impact of the organization in Central Asia through the lenses of structural realism and constructivism.

6.3. China’s Defensive Realism through the SCO

At the outset, it should be noted that any study of meta-geopolitical impact of the SCO in Central Asia must examine Beijing’s policies toward the region. Understanding the role of China within the SCO framework first and foremost demands a careful analysis of how effectively Beijing has advanced its normative as well as its interest-based policies in the region. In other words, from a meta-geopolitical point of view, not only is it important to ascertain whether China’s CA policies are driven by the ‘Great
Power’ rivalry and realpolitik of 21\textsuperscript{st} century geopolitics, but also it is equally important to assess whether Beijing employs norms transfer and identity diffusion mechanisms in order to socialize the region into its norms, values, and practices. Thus, a careful study of socialization capacity of China within the SCO framework is essentially needed to see if Beijing has been meta-geopolitically influential in comparison to the EU.

Before proceeding with a constructive analysis of China’s socializing capacity in the region, it is imperative to analyze the traditional geopolitical power dynamics between China and other regional actors through the prism of realism.

6.3.1. Bringing balance of power back in?

If we assume, as Kenneth Waltz does, that “international institutions are created by the more powerful states… and serve the major interests of their creators,”\textsuperscript{254} then the SCO provides a good example of such realist thinking, for it can be perceived as the byproduct of a close but strategic partnership between Russia and China aimed at facilitating broader Sino-Russian interests in the CA region. For realists, institutions are essentially "arenas for acting out power relationships"; they largely reflect the distribution of power in an international system where the states compete among themselves to shift the balance of power in their own favor.\textsuperscript{255} Linking SCO’s \textit{raison d’être} and China’s CA policy with the structural realist view of international politics, one can argue that the SCO is in effect a Chinese-led balancing coalition to contain the Western influence. Therefore, for an empirical understanding of SCO-CA relations it is essential to look at the origins of the SCO from a structural realist point of view and further discuss what China and Russia seek to gain from today’s ‘Great Game’ in the region.

As noted previously, the end of the Cold War ushered in the beginning of ‘the American era of unipolarity’.\textsuperscript{256} In fact, it was in this ‘unipolar moment’ that the Shanghai Five, as the predecessor to the SCO, came into existence. Most importantly, the Shanghai Five was established at a time when Russia viewed NATO’s plans to expand eastward as a threat to its security, and China was also deeply worried about the U.S. arms sales to Taiwan and its potential adverse effects on pro-independence movements in Xinjiang and Tibet. This dynamic clearly illustrates why China in the post-Cold War era tried ardently to engage in a vast arrays of regional and global diplomatic activities aimed at balancing

against the perceived threat of U.S. dominance.\textsuperscript{257} In general, from the standpoint of balance of power theory, when faced by external security threats, states may choose either ‘internal balancing’ or ‘external balancing’ or both.\textsuperscript{258} Internal balancing refers to using internal resources, such as military, political and economic activities within a state to deal with external threats or powers, whereas external balancing refers to dealing with external threats by forging, strengthening, and expanding one’s own alliance or shrinking and debilitating an opposing one.\textsuperscript{259}

There are two forms of external balancing: hard balancing and soft balancing. The former refers to joining military alliances with other states while the latter means using non-military instruments such as international institutions and diplomatic efforts to check the power of the stronger state.\textsuperscript{260} According to this view, the establishment of the Shanghai Five can be seen as an instance of soft balancing or a prelude to formation of a military alliance against the U.S. in the future (external balancing).\textsuperscript{261} What is more, China’s foreign policies from the mid-1990s was also characterized by internal balancing activities, as Beijing aimed not only to strengthen economic and political relationships with the CA states as part of a concerted ‘multilateral diplomacy’, but also to increase military spending in order to protect and advance its national interests. Broadly speaking, from the mid-1990s to 2001, both Russia and China came to share similar internal (fundamentalism) and external (the U.S. dominance) security threats and that both were aspiring to establish and promote a “multipolar order”.\textsuperscript{262} The external manifestation of the convergence of security interests was the establishment of a Beijing–Moscow “strategic partnership” and the subsequent birth of the SCO.

As a result of China’s proactive engagement of its periphery (Central Asia), offensive realists like John Mearsheimer argue that as Beijing continues to grow economically, it will transform that economic might into military power and that— like all great powers before— will inevitably seek regional ‘hegemonic dominance’ while preparing for the inevitable conflict.\textsuperscript{263} This argument derives from the offensive realists’ assumption that “states seek security by intentionally decreasing the security of others and that there is no likelihood of genuine cooperation among states except (temporary)

\textsuperscript{258}ibid; Waltz, Kenneth N. \textit{Theory of International Politics}. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub., 1979, p. 163-169.
\textsuperscript{260}Clarke, Michael. op. cit., p. 6.
\textsuperscript{261}KAI, HE. op. cit., p. 128.
\textsuperscript{262}Clarke, Michael. op. cit., p. 9.
Mearsheimer posits that hegemony is the ultimate goal of every state and that a regional hegemon does not tolerate peer competitors. By contrast, defensive realists, such as Kenneth Waltz and Robert Jervis argue that states will not intentionally threaten other states’ security, and that other states will choose “engagement” to seek cooperation with great powers. For defensive realists, seeking hegemony does not seem to be a strategically reasonable alternative for states, because their competitors will set up a balancing coalition to frustrate or destroy them. Meanwhile, an interesting question arises as to what extent each of these theories can explain China’s growing influence under the auspices of the SCO.

As was stated before, the establishment of the SCO amounted to an act of soft balancing aimed at counterpoising “hegemonism” over the long term. However, although China has been using its influence in the SCO to defend and promote its regional interests and to counterbalance U.S. primacy in the post-Soviet era, it has not purposefully threatened the security of other states in Central Asia, as evidenced by its willingness to pursue amicable ties with its neighbors and seeking membership in international organizations since the late 1970s. In addition, the creation of the SCO itself seems to corroborate the claim that China recognizes a degree of (security) cooperation among states, thus helping to mitigate the security dilemma between Beijing and regional states.

However, one should not overlook the fact that as China endeavors to become a global power, it is also keen on enhancing its ‘hard power’ capabilities, such as military and economic strength, in tandem with its growing diplomatic and cultural ‘soft power’ capacities. Specifically, in the wake of September 11 attacks, China bolstered its security and military partnership with the CA states and sought to provide them with a viable alternative to security alliance with the United States.

By some accounts, China’s defense spending more than tripled between 2001 and 2011. It is estimated that the combined military expenditure of China and Russia stood at roughly $257 billion in

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266 Ross, Robert S., and Feng Zhu. loc. cit.
269 Ross, Robert S., and Feng Zhu. op. cit., p. 156.
2012, compared to $281.7 billion spend by all the EU member states prior to Croatia's accession in 2013. While Russia and China increased their military expenditures between 2011 and 2012, the EU’s defense budget shrank during this period, mostly due to the recent financial crisis. In the case of Central Asia, from 2002 onward, China provided military assistance to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, engaged in SCO “Peace Mission” joint military exercises, and signed various bilateral agreements with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan for combating terrorism. Despite an increased military assistance in Central Asia, China under the aegis of SCO did not achieve its goal of displacing U.S. primacy in the region until after the color revolutions in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which resulted in significant shift in the balance of power in favor of Moscow and Beijing. Since then, China’s CA foreign policy has been primarily aimed at four key objectives: 1) to keep Muslim Uyghur separatists in Xinjiang at bay in order to guarantee national security and regional stability; 2) to diversify and guarantee China’s access to Central Asia’s vast energy resources in order to ensure its energy security; 3) to keep Central Asia as one of China’s main economic and trading partners; 4) to indicate Beijing’s quest for a “peaceful rise” to great power status.

At first glance, these set of goals reflect most of security-based features of geopolitical power dynamics embedded in our meta-geopolitical paradigm. These interest/security-based concerns are also evident in Russia’s foreign policy toward Central Asia. Overall, Russia’s interests in the region revolve around three main themes: security, energy and trade. However, Russia is particularly interested in exploiting the SCO to balance U.S. presence in the region and retain its control of CA gas flows for the purpose of sustaining its lucrative gas trade with Europe. Despite the fact that Russia’s concerns have dovetailed with China’s interests in Central Asia, the two powers are not invariably on the same wavelength about almost all issues. For one thing, China favors an SCO with the emphasis on trade and economics, whereas Russia emphasizes security matters. Further to this, differences and disagreements abound among SCO members over the extent to which the organization should be ‘anti-Western’. Some

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276 ibid.
experts argue that Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, India and Mongolia do not want to counterbalance the West, especially the U.S., even though China and to some extent Russia may want to do that.”

On this basis, I argue that despite the convergence of interests and a common emphasis on breaking the U.S. dominance in Central Asia, Russia and to a greater extent China seem less than enamored by the prospect of seeking hegemony or turning the SCO into a fully-fledged anti-Western security alliance, at least in short term. The reason is that the creation of such entity would significantly undercut the two countries’ economic growth strategies that are inevitably contingent upon integration with Western markets. This line of argument seems congruent with one of the key assumption of structural defensive realism: “states will be sensitive to costs that the system imposes and will modify policies if negative consequences accumulate.” In economic terms, China is evidently in pursuit of deepening economic cooperation within the SCO, thereby turning the organization into a mechanism for implementing China’s economic strategy in Central Asia. In military terms, as one scholar point out, “there is little prospect that China’s economic and military capabilities will increase so rapidly that it can become a peer competitor of the United States in the next few decades,” partly due to the domestic development burdens that Beijing faces. Under these circumstances, and given defensive realists’ assumption that “states ought to generally pursue moderate strategies as the best route to security” — a trend which seems consistent with China’s behavior toward CA states— it seems that structural defensive realism provides a satisfactory account of China’s contemporary CA foreign policy within the SCO. In fact, owing to China’s unique strategic culture which rests on a dualism or a traditional overlap between the two concepts of wen (civilization or culture) and wu (war, force or military), the SCO has become the dominant regional framework in Central Asia, seeking to design a multipolar international system in which the U.S. would no longer be the hegemon.

Having discussed the general applicability of latter concept (wu) to China’s CA policy, it is time to focus on the normative aspects of Beijing’s multilateral diplomacy and socializing role in the region.


279 ibid., p. 144-145.


6.4. Socialization through the ‘Shanghai Spirit’: the rise of ‘Eastphalian’ order?

There is little doubt that China’s security strategy still bears the signature of realpolitik. Acknowledging this reality, however, most commentators argue that what is often viewed as Beijing’s realpolitik is, in fact, “an ideationally rooted foreign policy behavior” informed by Confucian ethics and values. What can be inferred from this line of argument is that, in addition to material forces, China’s foreign policy is also driven by ideational forces, including culture, ideas, and norms as evidenced by Beijing’s adherence to the “five principles of peaceful coexistence.”

These arguments beckon two important caveats: first, the reference to China’s emphasis on a range of norms and values, such as mutual respect, mutual benefit, etc., contribute, in effect, to the increasing salience of China as a ‘normative power’ possessing “the ability to define acceptable standards of behavior”. The second caveat is that by focusing merely on realist approaches we would fail to notice the importance of the normative bearings and ideational components of Chinese foreign policy. In Andrew Lathan’s words, “realist analyses typically end up providing little more than incredibly thin accounts of Chinese foreign policy, accounts that ultimately fail to explain the recurring patterns of actual Chinese practice on the world stage.”

Having said this, the conjecture is that if we analyze China’s CA foreign policy from a purely geopolitical standpoint, we would almost certainly be dealing with interest-based and material features of the country’s interplay with other CA states at the expense of ideational and normative ones. Thus, in order to capture the whole spectrum of the Chinese influence, it is necessary to look at China’s proliferation of its norms and values across the CA region through the lens of meta-geopolitics. For this to happen, a constructivist approach is needed to determine whether China, using its influence in the SCO, is engaged in the business of norm transfer and identity diffusion with the Central Asian ‘Stans’ and examine how differently it operates from the EU’s.

While acknowledging the importance of interests, constructivists argue that the interests and preferences of states are shaped by their identities, and that interests and identities are endogenous to

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interaction, meaning that they change through the process of social interaction. This endogeneity between interest and identities, as viewed by constructivists, suggests that, for example, identity as liberal democracy (promoted by the EU) cannot be separated from an interest in complying with the principles of human rights and democracy. Likewise, identity associated with “peaceful rise”, and “harmonious world” (in the case of China) cannot be detached from an interest in abiding by certain norms and values related to these concepts.

On the basis of these premises, zooming in on the normative impact of China’s CA policies requires a careful study of how China sees itself in international life and of what kind of norms it intends to transfer and diffuse. Before proceeding further, it should be reminded that many of China’s meta-geopolitical sub-capacities, some of which are value-based (such as socialization, inter-cultural diplomacy, youth and education programs) are being implemented through the multilateral framework of the SCO. Simply put, China utilizes the SCO to socialize with the CA countries and to lure them into adopting its distinctly different norms and values. For example, in the area of youth and education, the SCO University was established in 2008 as a single educational network based on universities engaged in research in regional studies, information technology and a range of other fields of study. Central Asian youths in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have shown vested interests in studying Chinese culture and language in the Confucius Institutes in their respective countries. Intercultural diplomacy efforts have also increased within the SCO framework with joint events held between the member states to exchange cultural views.

These few examples illustrate not only the SCO’s socialization propensities, but also Beijing’s reliance on its normative power as the exporter of a set of norms and values, which are perceived as fundamentally different from that of the EU’s. As suggested in previous chapters, both the 2001 SCO Declaration and the 2002 SCO Charter contain normative values known as the ‘Shanghai Spirit’. Similarly, the SCO Charter identifies ‘respect for each other’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs’ as one of its key principles. Interesting to note is that many of the SCO’s avowed norms are derived from the ‘five principles of peaceful

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coexistence’. Of all these principles “respect for the other” has been singled out as the “cardinal virtue” of China’s foreign and security policy. Most scholars argue that the inviolability of sovereignty and respect for the other in Chinese external policies emanates from 100 years of humiliation (guochi) at the hands of the colonial powers. In Kavalski’s words, “China’s normative power has been preconditioned by the reflexive construction of the past of national humiliation as other.”

This retrospective process-tracing clearly alludes to the fact that Chinese foreign policy can be interpreted as an attempt to “rectify this legacy by projecting a self-conscious international identity dispelling the specters of the past, yet, whose socializing rhetoric proclaims that others need not experience humiliation either.” Thus, it is this Chinese self-identity, or self-image that underpins the country’s normative power and shapes the way in which Beijing attempts to affect Central Asian perceptions of itself. Accordingly, it is argued that what China sees as ‘normal’ and ‘acceptable standard’ in international life is reflective of its own past and present experience of achieving “modernization without democratization”. In other words, what China seeks to achieve by dint of promoting the ‘Shanghai Spirit’ of mutual respect for sovereignty is to demonstrate that it is possible to pursue market reforms without necessarily giving up elements of state control.

Now back to the discussion about “Habermasian lifeworld” with its emphasis on developing shared common understandings, including values between different interlocutors, it seems that CA states have fewer prior, ingrained beliefs’ that jar with the socializing message of China than that of the EU. The claim is that, in contrast to the geographical and cultural distance between the EU and the CA region, there is a certain level of geographical and geo-historical proximity between the CA countries, especially Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and parts of Chinese society, especially the Uyghurs. Cognizant of this geo-historical nearness, China has turned the SCO into a ‘common lifeworld’ that appears more in tune with the realities of Central Asia. Put differently, the SCO is that ‘common lifeworld’ that the EU has so far been unable to create for the purpose of facilitating the

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291 These principles include mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence.
295 ibid.
297 ibid.
construction of shared identities, values and beliefs and enhancing its intercultural and intercivilizational contacts with the countries of the region.

It is also important to emphasize once again that the processes of norm transfer and identity diffusion are likely to yield fruitful results provided that they resonate with the social, political, economic, cultural and historical realities of the recipient countries. As one scholars puts it, “fortunately, CA states have authoritarian regimes that are congruent with China’s own illiberal political system; China shares with these states the resentment against the promotion of ideas such as human rights by the West in general and the USA in particular.”298 For China, stability in Central Asia is of utmost importance, chiefly due to rampant security concerns in the country's most westerly province of Xinjiang, which shares borders with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Skeptical of the EU’s influence as a powerful ‘norm entrepreneur’, and mindful of the Western influence in the region China has established the SCO as a counterweight to any external pressure that might infringe on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of CA states. Of note is that for all CA countries, albeit to a lesser degree for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan which are generally perceived as more liberal than the other ‘Stans’, stability and development are synonymous with regime survival and state autonomy. Similarly, issues pertinent to sovereignty and stability— which are relatively preserved under the SCO aegis— are so sacrosanct for CA states that any external attempt to promote human rights and democracy in the region will be interpreted by these states as direct or indirect forms of interference into their domestic politics.

Thus, well aware of these circumstances, China frames and projects its normative power as underpinned by the principle, ‘let others reach their goals as you reach yours’.299 As one scholar posits, “traditional Chinese ethics suggest that it is in interactions premised on respect for (not engagement with) those different from us that meaningful engagements can occur, not in the imposition of rules and norms.”300 Hence, the emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference aims to draw attention to ‘the tolerance’ and flexibility of its normative power in relations to others. In this regard, the legitimacy of China’s normative agency is embedded in the relationships it has rather than any implicit or explicit conditionality that might frame such interactions.301 Such inference highlights the pervasiveness of Confucian logic in contemporary Chinese foreign policy that tends to propagate the concept of ‘harmony with difference (he er butong), which denotes ““harmoniz[ation] with others [and] not

301 ibid., p. 257.
necessarily agree[ing] with them’’.\textsuperscript{302} Consistent with this logic, China’s socialization message thus contains a set of core principles, such as “participate actively, demonstrate restraint, offer reassurance, open markets, foster interdependence, create common interests, and reduce conflict’’\textsuperscript{303}

In sum, these inferences confirm Brantly Womack’s argument that Europeanization and Sinicization projects follow two different normative logics: whereas the EU’s normative power is framed by ‘logic of appropriateness’, China’s normative power is driven by ‘logic of relationships’\textsuperscript{304} Borrowing Womack’s words, “as China applies relationship logic to international relations, its actions aim to optimize relationships rather than transactions. In this model China does not use preponderance of power to optimize its side of each transaction, but rather to stabilize beneficial relations.’’\textsuperscript{305} Furthermore, while the Western focus tends to be on the actor and its moral drive, the Chinese tend to concentrate more upon relationships and the ethics of relationships.\textsuperscript{306} In this respect, the SCO can be seen first and foremost as an epitome of the ‘logic of relationship’ embedded in China’s socialization activities in the Central Asian region.

Considering all the above, the contention is that Beijing’s unrivaled power in engaging the ‘Other’ in a self-made community of practices— that is the SCO— is what makes a distinction between Sinicization and Europeanization projects in Central Asia. By creating and leading the SCO, China has given the ‘logic of relationship’ a special locale, through which the CA countries can earn international recognition, raise their profile and pursue many of their national interests in a multilateral setting, which is more attuned to and compatible with the idiosyncratic particularities and realities of the region. The inclusion of the CA states (except Turkmenistan) in the SCO seem to have made the internalization of Chinese norms and values somewhat easier in comparison to the EU’s norms diffusion processes under the EU’s Strategy for a New Partnership, which seems to have deprived the CA countries of that much-needed locality and sense of inclusion. As one scholar argues, “Brussels seems to disconnect itself from the region. In fact, the tendency appears to be to decouple the EU’s

\textsuperscript{305} ibid.
\textsuperscript{306} ibid., p. 266.
approach to the region from its policies to other post-communist regions, however, without incorporating it within its Asian strategies.\textsuperscript{307}

Having said this, the assessment of China’s normative behavior in Central Asia brings into sharp focus the importance of inter-subjective interaction in a \textit{specific environment} in which norm transfer and identity diffusion takes place. In other words, cultural settings and domestic structures in target countries can be considered as intervening variables that determine the degree to which norms, rules, and values of a normative power can be effectively internalized in the receiving societies. Thus, since normative suasion is a process based on interaction, the legitimacy of norms and values, as perceived by the target countries would matter as much as the supremacy of those values as portrayed by the normative agents. The reference to legitimacy conjures up an image of two normative powers: one normative power depicted by Ian Manners as the ability to define the ‘normal’ and the other one that Jay Jackson perceives as stressing the legitimacy of what is ‘normal’.\textsuperscript{308} For the time being, the Eastphalian order embedded in the SCO seems to have earned that legitimacy among the Central Asian ‘Stans’.

6.5. Conclusion

The autopsy of China’s strategy in Central Asia in light of meta-geopolitical paradigm reveals how Beijing is expanding it westward influence in the region and how effectively it has utilized the SCO’s soft and hard power resources to attain its security, strategic and economic objectives in the region. From a meta-geopolitical perspective, China has projected itself as a viable security provider for CA states, successfully balancing the U.S., the EU and Russian influences in economic, energy and security spheres. The ‘Shanghai Spirit’ of mutual respect, mutual recognition and non-interference has significantly contributed to the effectiveness and legitimization of its normative visibility and socialization capacity in the region. However, it remains to be seen whether the public perception toward China’s westward expansion will withstand the internal or external pressures in Central Asia.


Chapter 7: Summary of the Main Findings and Conclusion

In this thesis, I presented an alternative analytic framework to decipher, explain and analyze ‘the black boxes’ of Chinese and European foreign policy decision makings in Central Asia. Using a meta-geopolitical framework, the case-study research attempted to offer a holistic approach to the understanding of how the EU and China employ distinctive normative and non-normative power projection tools to alter the preferences of the CA countries in a 21st century version of the old ‘Great Game’. The concept of meta-geopolitics was used for its analytical leverage to tap into oft-ignored ideational and normative aspects of contemporary power dynamics in the heart of Eurasia and also for its theoretical capacity for identification of and addressing a range of questions to which ‘classical geopolitics’ with its overreliance on political realism in IR have not provided sufficient answers.

Clearly, the ‘New Great Game’ of the 21st century in Central Asia is not a game of ‘high politics’ and ‘zero-summness’ being played out between Great Powers. It is also a game of ‘low politics’ characterized by positive-sum competition and cooperation in a region that has seen a proliferation of both internal and external actors— some of whom, until recently, were perceived as ‘pawns of great powers.’ These are indeed profound transformations that have occurred in this strategically pivotal region since the end of the Cold War and in particular since 2001. As discussed in previous chapters, perhaps the most striking change of all is revealed by the ways in which post-Soviet states in Central Asia, namely Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, have actively engaged in balancing of foreign policies towards the U.S., Russia and even China, thereby posing difficult dilemmas and problems for major powers in the region. Nevertheless, the region remains exceptionally susceptible to the overbearing influence of China and Russia; the two regional powers that increasingly seek to offset the Western influence in security, trade and energy sectors throughout their strategic partnership under the aegis of the SCO. China has used the SCO as a foreign policy mechanism not only to cement the security and stability of Xinjiang but also as a macro-regional balancing mechanism against the U.S., and to a lesser extent against Russia. Fearful of Beijing’s military modernization and its westward economic expansion, Moscow has also sought to reclaim its erstwhile grandeur in Central Asia by enhancing regional security cooperation under the mantle of the CSTO. For the EU, it was through the lens of counter-terrorism that CA states were given special attention. In other words, the growing presence of the EU in the region was in fact a reaction to the post-9/11 events and the ensuing security concerns, such as terrorism and border control rather than the spin-off of a proactive foreign policy approach toward the five ‘Stans’. From a meta-geopolitical point of view, the EU Strategy includes all of the hard (non-normative) and soft power (normative) tools that the EU and its Member States can
employ to provide the CA countries with the security and stability that they are in dire need of. In fact, issues related to the better use of natural resources, effective border management, fighting religious extremism and the fight against drug trafficking and organized crime are among major challenges that threaten not just the CA region but also the wider region. However, due to limited funds available for implementation of BOMCA and CADAP, and perhaps due to the authoritarian and inward-looking nature of the political systems in CA countries, particularly in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and most importantly because of divergent perceptions of what constitutes a security threat in the region, the impact of the EU as a formidable security provider in the region is limited, spurring many CA states to turn to alternative security providers such as the SCO and CSTO to address their security concerns. Overall, the EU plays a peripheral role in terms of providing security for the CA countries as compared to the SCO. In economic terms, although the EU has substantially increased its activity and presence in the region, it has been replaced by China as the CA’s largest trading partner. With regard to EU’s plans for diversification of energy sources, it seems that Europe’s biggest pipeline project has lost out to Russia and China, especially after Azerbaijan decided to send its gas into the Trans Adriatic Pipeline consortium, instead of the EU’s Nabucco gas pipeline consortium.

Six years have passed since the European Council adopted the _Strategy for a New Partnership_ yet the impact of the seven policy areas outlined in the document have been considerably low in comparison to the meta-geopolitical impact of policies adopted by China vis-à-vis Central Asia. Clearly, EU human rights, democracy and good governance promotion efforts have not yielded fruitful results in the region, given the fact that all CA states to a lesser or greater degree are still considered undemocratic and, above all, not inclined to comply with the European norms and values. This is likely to remain unchanged as long as the CA countries are being treated as the outside “Others”. Overall, the EU has only relatively stronger influence in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the Central Asia’s two poorest countries. However, I argue that the EU Strategy should focus on increasing the socialization capacity of its Member States vis-à-vis CA countries and, in order for this to happen, it should engage in a meaningful communication and teaching processes aimed enhancing the legitimacy of its institutional identity and prescribed norms rather than trying to portray itself as a benevolent ‘normative hegemon’ that does not recognize the Central Asian quest for recognition on the world stage. The assessment of the meta-geopolitical impact of the EU’s Central Asian Strategy in light of constructivist and realist paradigms revealed that the EU’s Central Asian Strategy represents a piecemeal approach toward CA countries, treating them as a homogenous group of countries with similar cultural, social, political and historical characteristics. Clearly, there are hard lessons to be drawn from China’s regional approach,
which not only seems more attuned to the realities and particularities of CA countries but also more attentive to their security needs and regional aspirations. As indicated in the research, China has shaped the SCO to socialize with the CA states in a ‘common lifeworld’ that serves as a catalyst for internalization of Chinese norms and values, including peaceful coexistence, mutual recognition, and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of other countries. The reference to the ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’ underwrites the Confucian logic in contemporary Chinese foreign policy that focuses largely on using discursive resources and socializing capacities aimed at getting others to view its norms and values as legitimate rather than imposing a set of rules and values that only it views as legitimate. The analysis of the meta-geopolitical impact of China’s CA Strategy in light of constructivist and realist paradigms corroborates the claim that even though Beijing continues to lag far behind the EU on human rights and democracy promotion in the region, it ,nevertheless, has managed to render its norms as feasible, effective and legitimate to the eyes of most CA states. This inference, however, is not intended as a value judgment, but should be perceived as an attempt to throw some light on the different ways in which the EU and China conceptualize what is, or ought to be ‘normal’ in the region.

The analysis suggested that, since the foundation of the SCO, Beijing has been in a better position in comparison to the EU to strike lucrative trade, military and energy deals with the CA states, even if there are indications that CA populations are growing suspicious of China’s rapid westward expansion. Nevertheless, fully aware of the idiosyncratic peculiarities of the Central Asian cultural, political, and historical context, China has also consolidated its position as a norm entrepreneur in the region alongside the EU. In sum, a meta-geopolitical autopsy of the current power dynamics in Central Asia strikes at the heart of least-noticed normative transformations that have taken place in the region as a result of the rise of the EU and China as normative powers. The main thesis of the study is that whereas the Great Power’s quest for primacy and energy resources were the defining characteristics of the 19th and 20th century geopolitics, the 21st century meta-geopolitics is defined by the clash of normative powers in a more assertive Central Asia. Aside from the continued rivalry for control over natural resources, one should note that it is the quest for legitimacy and the struggle for ‘power based on knowledge’ of the regional context that will determine whether or not the EU and China can make a lasting imprint in Central Asia. As Max Webber once observed, “authority is domination legitimated”. It is unclear whether the Sino-Russian meta-geopolitical domination of Central Asia in the 21st century will continue to remain unchallenged and legitimated as the peoples of the region seek to make their own voices heard in this enigmatic part of the world.
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**Online sources:**


### Appendix 1

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<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td>5/113/040</td>
<td>Ashgabat</td>
<td>27 Oct. 1991</td>
<td>Turkmen (85%) Uzbek (5%) Russian (4%)</td>
<td>EDP-real growth: 11% Unemployment: 60% Population below poverty line: 30%</td>
<td>Crude Oil-PR: 600 million bbl Natural gas-PR: 24.3 trillion cu m Export partners: 1) China 2) Ukraine 3) Italy Import partners: 1) China 2) Turkey 3) Russia 4) UAE 5) Germany</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
<td>96</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>28/661/637</td>
<td>Tashkent</td>
<td>1 Sep. 1991</td>
<td>Uzbek (80%) Russian (5.5%) Tajik (5%) Kazakh (3%)</td>
<td>GDP-real growth: 8.2% Unemployment: 4.8% Population below poverty line: 17%</td>
<td>Crude Oil-PR: 594 million bbl Natural gas-PR: 1.841 trillion cu m Export partners: 1) China 2) Kazakhstan Turkey 4) Russia 5) Ukraine Import partners: 1) Russia 2) China 3) Korea 4) Kazakhstan 5) Germany</td>
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<td>95</td>
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<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>7/910/041</td>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
<td>9 Sep. 1991</td>
<td>Tajik (79.9%) Uzbek (13.6%) Russian (1.1%)</td>
<td>GDP-real growth: 7.5% Unemployment: 2.5% Population below poverty line: 39.6%</td>
<td>Crude Oil-PR: 12 million bbl Natural gas-PR: 5.663 billion cu m Export partners: 1) Afghanistan 2) Kazakhstan 3) Turkmenistan Import partners: 1) China 2) Russia 3) Kazakhstan 4) Turkey 5) Iran</td>
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<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>5/548/042</td>
<td>Bishkek</td>
<td>31 Aug. 1991</td>
<td>Kyrgyz (64.7%) Uzbek (13.6%) Russian (12.5%)</td>
<td>GDP-real growth: -0.9% Unemployment: 8.6% Population below poverty line: 33.7%</td>
<td>Crude Oil-PR: 40 million bbl Natural gas-PR: 2.407 trillion cu m Export partners: 1) Uzbekistan 2) Kazakhstan 3) Russia 4) China 5) UAE Import partners: 1) China 2) Russia 3) Kazakhstan 4) Ukraine</td>
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<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>17/736/936</td>
<td>Astana</td>
<td>16 Dec. 1991</td>
<td>Kazakh (63.1%) Russian (23.7%) Uzbek (2.8%)</td>
<td>GDP-real growth: 5% Unemployment: 5.3% Population below poverty line: 8.3%</td>
<td>Crude Oil-PR: 30 billion bbl Natural gas-Proved reserves: 2.407 trillion cu m Export partners: 1) China 2) France 3) Germany 4) Russia 5) Italy 6) Canada Import partners: 1) China 2) Russia 3) Ukraine 4) Kazakhstan</td>
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<table>
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<th>The People’s Republic of China</th>
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<td><strong>Kazakhstan</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Formed diplomatic relations in 1992.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Co-founders of the SCO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In 2004, developed security cooperation with China, spurring geopolitical rivalry from Russia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In 2005, China became involved in the first oil pipeline in Central Asia. (Atasu-Alashankou)</td>
</tr>
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<td>• China has become the largest trading partner of Kazakhstan.</td>
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<td><strong>Uzbekistan</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relations improved from 2004 onward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In 2006, China began to export oil and gas resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In 2010, Beijing and Tashkent signed an agreement for the sale of Uzbek natural gas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In 2012, the Uzbek aimed to join Turkmenistan-Kazakhstan-China gas pipeline project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• China, Russia and Kazakhstan are largest trade partners of Uzbekistan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kyrgyzstan</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• China made first forays in 2003, when FMs signed a treaty of cooperation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 2004, new military co-op to combat terrorism.</td>
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<td>• 2006, signing of another bilateral agreements and serious investments in Kyrgyzstan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 2010, joint anti-terrorism military drills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Bishkek is dependent on Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for gasoline.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tajikistan</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Established diplomatic relations in 1992.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ties further developed in summer 2006.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Having border with Xinjiang province, stability of Tajikistan is vital to Beijing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• China is one of Tajikistan’s largest trading partners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Tajikistan has invested in Tajikistan hydroelectric projects.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Turkmenistan</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• In 2006, plans for Turkmen gas export to China were announced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Export began in 2009 as part of Trans Asia Gas Pipeline from Turkmenistan to China. (runs along Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Growing economic cooperation with China is regarded as a counterbalance to Russian influence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not a member of the SCO.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>The Russian Federation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• In 1998, Nazarbayev and Yeltsin signed a declaration of eternal friendship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• After 9/11, ties remained strong, despite Astana’s cooperation with the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In 2005, the two signed a 55-year old pact for development of a major oil field in Kazakhstan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Kazakhstan is a member of the Customs Union of Russia, launched in 2011.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bilateral relations are generally seen as stable.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The European Union</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• PCA was signed in 1995 and it came into force in 1999.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• In 2008, they signed a MoU on cooperation in the energy field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The ‘Path to Europe’ adopted in 2008 by Astana.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Kazakhstan sought observer status in the Council of Europe and wants to be included in the ENP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A major supplier of oil to the EU and the largest trading partner of the EU in C. Asia</td>
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<tr>
<th>The European Union</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Uzbekistan</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• PCA was signed in 1996 and it entered into force in 1999.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Uzbekistan is participating actively in BOMCA and CADAP projects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Andijan 2005 events created a rift in EU-Uzbek relations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• There is no EU delegation office in Uzbekistan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The German base at Termez is strategically important for Afghanistan operations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• In 2009, the EU lifted sanctions on Tashkent despite serious human rights concerns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kyrgyzstan</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PCA was signed in 1995 and it came into force in 1999.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• EU-Kyrgyzstan cooperation is mostly focused on development assistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The EU contributes to poverty reduction, promotion of good governance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participated in BOMCA and CADAP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bishkek has no EU aspirations and has looked to China and Russia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tajikistan</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PCA was signed in 2004 and ratified in 2009.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• EU-Tajik relations are focused on poverty reduction, good governance and reform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dushanbe is particularly interested in EU assistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tajikistan plans to build the giant Rogun hydropower plants and EU helps in water/energy management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The EU provides support via BOMCA and CADAP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Turkmenistan</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PCA was signed in 1998, it still awaits EU ratification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Turkmenistan is highly authoritarian and not a comfortable EU partner due to poor human rights record.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In 2008, the two signed a MoU on energy cooperation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ashgabat is primarily interested in energy cooperation, i.e. Nabucco gas pipeline project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• EU assistance to Turkmenistan is limited.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3.** Five Central Asian states vs. the EU, China and Russia  
Sources: (Alexander Warkotsch, 2011), (Bertil Nygren, 2008), (Dilip Hiro, 2009)

http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/MH25Ag01.html
Appendix 2

Interview No. 1: It was conducted in the form of a questionnaire (via e-mail), which was answered by Dr. Emilian Kavalski on April 30th, 2013. 309

- **Interviewee**: Dr. Emilian Kavalski (Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations, University of Western Sydney)
- **Interviewer**: Hossein Aghaie Joobani (Master’s student in International and European relations, Linköping University, Sweden)

1- Are there any possible choices to make for the Central Asian states, whether they prioritize relations with the SCO or the EU, or the Russia-led CSTO?

**Kavalski**: I am not certain I understand the question. Some of the Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, in particular) appear to have a choice, the rest, not so much. The EU at present does not appear to be a choice that any of the governments in the region see as a viable alternative, and to be frank, the EU itself is not really interested in the region.

2- Do you think that the Central Asian states would like the SCO to be more active? What do Central Asian leaders expect from China?

**Kavalski**: I suspect most governments are more or less satisfied with the way the SCO works at present. I am not certain what the individual Central Asian leaders expect from China, but most of the regional governments (as well as most other countries in the world) expect more Chinese investment in their economies.

3- How do you evaluate the EU’s normative influence in Central Asia? There are debates 310 within both academic and government circles about whether those EU members that hold more pragmatic views of the region are prioritizing their national interest over the EU’s normative agenda. Do you think that realism prevails when it comes to the European Union’s implementation of its strategies toward Central Asia?

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309 The opinions and conclusions expressed in the thesis belong to Dr. Kavalski and do not necessarily reflect the views of the author.
Kavalski: In my opinion, the EU has no strategy in the region. Anything that is labeled as such is merely a discursive ploy which has not implementation capacity. The only time, the region gained some meaningful significance in EU foreign policy was under the German presidency of the Council… but this is several years ago now. In many ways, I wish realism did prevail in EU thinking about the region, because it would then lead to the development of some kind of strategy. As a result, the EU has neither normative, nor strategic influence in the region and most regional actors (not only state-elites) do not seem to take Brussels into account into their policy calculations.

4- In your opinion, what differentiates the EU’s normative power from China’s normative push that underpins Beijing’s current foreign policy pursuits in the region?

Kavalski: What appears to be the main difference is that the EU has no appeal in the region. The lack of appeal then translates into lack of influence. This is largely the EU’s fault, since Central Asia was never a high on its foreign policy agenda during the 1990s (which were mostly focused on the conflicts in former Yugoslavia) and then the 2000s (which were mostly preoccupied with enlargement). Now the focus seems to be on the EU’s own economic and political survival, so Central Asia is again not a priority. China on the other hand has been much more successful in developing policies that differentiate between the individual Central Asian countries, rather than treat them as part of a homogeneous region. In fact, the EU can learn a lot from China when it comes to extending its normative influence in the region.

5- Under the current circumstances, who is succeeding, and who is lagging behind in terms of effective expansion of (their) regional outreach and the ability to convert soft and hard power resources into preferred outcomes?

Kavalski: Again, I am confused by this question. I would say, China has emerged as the leading external to the region actor.

6- Do you consider Russia a normative power? What is the most important challenge that Moscow faces in Central Asia?
No, I do not think Russia is a normative power. The most important challenge is adjusting to the fact that Moscow will play the second fiddle to Beijing’s tune in the region.

7- In January this year, the US administration announced that the US troops plan to withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014. Given the fact that Central Asia has been the scene of instabilities in and around the Ferghana Valley, what is your take on the security implications of this withdrawal? Who do you think is capable enough to fill the potential security vacuum?

Kavalski: Any potential security vacuum can be filled by China (which is already operationalized under the SCO security treaties). However, I do not think that China will do this unilaterally, so I suspect that Russia and Uzbekistan will continue to be important regional security actors.

Thank you in advance!
Interview No. 2: Telephone conversation with Prof. Oleg Kobtzeff, Ph.D., F.R.G.S. Assistant Professor American University of Paris, conducted on March 19\textsuperscript{th}, 2013.

A. Preparation:

Do you want to be anonymous, may I mention your position?

B. Conversation:\textsuperscript{311}

1. It seems that after 9/11 there was a relative consensus between the EU, China and Russia in terms of collaborative efforts to combat terrorism and extremism, but now it seems that there are divergent views between these three players in Central Asia. For instance, Chinese leaders are focused on economic expansion, using the Shanghai cooperation Organization to further their goals while on the other hand Russia seeks security assurances and the EU is also a promoter of norms and values, such as human rights. Against this background, what is your expert view on the interplay between these three players (the SCO vs. the EU) and how they are playing out their goals and visions in Central Asia?

Kobtzeff: The thing is that, regarding the EU’s vision … I don’t think they have much leverage there. They need something much to offer in Central Asia. They have nothing special to sell, may be some technology, yes right, but nothing that the Chinese or the Russians can sell them cheaper… they don’t have that many… you know, beside the French wine and German automobile, tell me what really, seriously the EU has to offer in Central Asia. Concerning security and military aim or whatever, it is inexistent. The EU has no leverage at all.

[…] One more aspect, what is missing in your equation is the American presence, that’s the thing. What this really is about is a triangle…The real players are China and Russia, as you said really well, but also the United States and that is essentially what it’s all about; it’s… who will control Central Asia would be the U.S., China or Russia in a triangular circulation.

2. Based on what you said, (it can be said that) the EU, in terms of hard power, they don’t have anything to offer in Central Asia, it has zero influence…

\textsuperscript{311} The opinions and conclusions expressed in the thesis belong to Prof. Kobtzeff and do not necessarily reflect the views of the author.
Kobtzeff: in terms of hard power, it’s zero.

3. But in terms of soft power, you know in the past during the Cold War there was mere focus on hard power, but now especially in the EU the ambiance is different, the EU is focusing on soft power, they are…

Kobtzeff: Again, what could they sell? What could they offer to Central Asia? Human rights and democracy that they are not interested in?

4. That’s why Central Asian countries are not really responsive to these things, especially human rights values propagated by the EU, but the EU is trying to, because as you know the EU is very dependent on energy in Central Asia, and that’s why they want to expand their economic outreach in Central Asia.

Kobtzeff: Yes! But all they can do, all you can do is how we want to be your client that’s it, that’s it, the only thing you would have is your money, they could be good clients, that’s all. There’s nothing much they can sell there, plus remember that, there’s something important to remember also that great parts of Europe are under American influence, even if the EU was trying to push through some kind of agenda, whether it’s, as you say, soft power, and if they had any possibility of exercising some kind of hard power in Central Asia which is very very unlikely, the Americans, the U.S. would say wow wow wow calm down, you know, we are the players in Central Asia. So, the EU is, I would say; its place in Central Asia is insignificant, I would say. This is probably how they see it but I would say it is insignificant.

5. You made a very good point; they don’t see it, I mean that they are playing a peripheral role, if any, in Central Asia, but despite these things they are trying to sell many initiatives in terms of soft power, but as you said they are not really influential…

Kobtzeff: … they are present; they are making money… in Central Asia depending what business there is, but again from a geostrategic, from really a geopolitical point of view very very little influence, I would say.

6. In January this year, the U.S. administration announced that the U.S. troops will withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014. Given the fact that Central Asia has been the scene of Islamic movements from Afghanistan, Pakistan and in and around Ferghana Valley, how
do you the implications of this potential security vacuum in central Asia? Do you think it will give some leverage to china or Russia to give the vacuum?

Kobtzeff: look carefully, you should carefully analyze the map of Central Asia and look at where you have U.S. military bases there; that will answer your question. It’s all over and they’re all over Central Asia, you know… and that’s … I would say they have to get out of Afghanistan because it is exploding the U.S. budget, that’s the thing. The great question, you are actually the specialist and I haven’t been on top of things recently, but you should check what is going to happen should the U.S. military bases in Central Asia and my feeling is that they are going to stay for a while. The U.S. troops or NATO troops, most essentially the U.S. troops are going to stay in various countries of Central Asia for a while. But you should verify that.

7. So, from your point of view, you don’t see any concrete attempts by the Chinese or the Russians to engage more militarily in Central Asia, trying to counter or fill the security void there.

Kobtzeff: For now they cannot, because the Americans are present. However, there are always the borders and you do have, for example, some Russian military facility like, of course, Baikonur in Kazakhstan. The Russians are not completely absent. Of course, they cannot engage, as you say. The only thing they can do is to do some counter terror, but that’s how they keep a foot in the door I would say the Russians, they need the Chinese a little bit. One problem for the Chinese right now is how they are fighting the Uyghurs in their north west and that is actually what weakens the position of China in Central Asia, from a military point of view, and at this point I really don’t think it’s really realistic to consider any risk that China would, you know, invade any Central Asia countries in pursuit of some kind of ’rebels’ or whatever… it would create complete chaos in the region; it would start wars worse than Afghanistan and Iraq.

8. Another question has to do with the ‘strategic partnership’ between Russia and China and, as you know, in much of the scholarship on Russia and China relations, this partnership has been described as an ‘axis of convenience’. But it seems that there is an evident competition between the two in the energy sector, especially after the recognition by Moscow of the independence of the breakaway Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It seems that on the one hand Russia seeks to expand the influence of CSTO and on the other hand China strives to raise the SCO profile in Central Asia.
Therefore, my argument is that the strategic partnership is now turning into an ‘axis of inconvenience. What is your take on this?

Kobtzeff: It’s a very good definition. I think it’s a very good analysis. Let me give you my opinion of what’s happening in the long term. In the long term, I believe that Russia is progressively becoming, it will progressively become to China what the United Kingdom was to the United States. I think they are themselves are in complete denial of it, but just like the British were in denial of that situation until the same as the Egyptian affair in Cairo. It’s kind of a historical metaphor that I am giving you but I think that the comparison is legitimate. Right now, the Russians do not realize that little by little they are being forced to become the junior partners in a Russian Chinese alliance. I think that the Chinese are fully aware of that.

So, Putin, Medvedev … or anybody else in Russia is trying to rebuild Russia into a power but, as I said, they have zero soft power that they could use; they have absolutely no leverage of that kind; they don’t have an international message that anybody on the planet could be interested in. They have nothing to propose. They have lost big territories in the 1990s including Central Asia itself and they realize that they cannot get anything back. Little by little when they do think like that China supports them and that’s how they begin to drive into… China is preventing any kind of rapprochement between the United States and Russia. In addition, I would say internally they are more and more Russians who are anti-American and there are more and more Americans who are anti-Russian… What’s happening is that progressively, China does have this extraordinary international leverage… and the Chinese have a much better understanding of the future. They are moving little by little, very discreetly just like they are doing in Africa as well, they are not pushing like the Russians or the Americans.

Another very important actor which also represents NATO interest is Turkey and that’s very very important. Turkey has a lot of soft power in Central Asia and their soft power… I would say they are on equal level with the Russian’s… But I would say with their cultural ties, Turkey has gained a position that is almost equal, it’s not even superior, to the Russians.

------ End item------