

RISING SINOPHOBIA IN KYRGYZSTAN:
THE ROLE OF POLITICAL CORRUPTION

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DOĞUKAN BAŞ

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

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

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

Prof. Dr. Pınar KÖKSAL
Supervisor
Political Science and Public Administration

Examining Committee Members:

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

Prof. Dr. Pınar KÖKSAL (Supervisor)
Middle East Technical University
Political Science and Public Administration

Assist. Prof. Dr. Yuliya BILETSKA
Karabük University
International Relations

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

Name, Last name : Dođukan Bař

Signature :

ABSTRACT

RISING SINOPHOBIA IN KYRGYZSTAN: THE ROLE OF POLITICAL CORRUPTION

BAŞ, Doğukan

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In recent years, one of the major problems that Kyrgyzstan witnesses is rising Sinophobia among the local people due to problems related with increasing Chinese economic presence in the country. While Sinophobia surfaces as anti-Chinese public demonstrations and violent assaults against Chinese citizens residing in Kyrgyzstan, political corruption scandals around China's economic activities shape perceptions of the Kyrgyz people negatively toward their government officials and Chinese companies operating in Kyrgyzstan. This thesis explores political corruption in Kyrgyzstan and reasons of Sinophobia among the Kyrgyz people specifically referring to the impact of political corruption in anti-Chinese public demonstrations in Kyrgyzstan.

Keywords: Sinophobia, Political Corruption, Kyrgyzstan, China, Central Asia

ÖZ

KIRGIZİSTAN'DA ARTAN ÇİN DÜŞMANLIĞI: SİYASİ YOLSUZLUGUN ROLÜ

BAŞ, Doğukan

Yüksek Lisans, Avrasya Çalışmaları

Tez Yöneticisi: Prof. Dr. Pınar KÖKSAL

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Son yıllarda, Kırgızistan'ın en büyük sorunlarından birisi ülkede artan Çin ekonomik varlığına bağlı problemler nedeniyle yerel halk arasında yükselen Çin düşmanlığıdır. Bu durum kendini Çin karşıtı gösteriler ve Kırgızistan'da ikamet eden Çin vatandaşlarına karşı şiddet saldırıları olarak göstermekte ve Çin'in ekonomik faaliyetleriyle ilgili siyasi yolsuzluk skandalları Kırgız halkının hükümet yetkililerine ve Kırgızistan'da faaliyet gösteren Çinli şirketlere yönelik algılarını olumsuz yönde şekillendirmektedir. Bu tez hem Kırgızistan'daki siyasi yolsuzluğu hem de Kırgız halkı arasındaki Çin düşmanlığının nedenlerini özellikle siyasi yolsuzluğun Çin karşıtı gösterilerdeki etkisine değinerek incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çin Düşmanlığı, Siyasi Yolsuzluk, Kırgızistan, Çin, Orta Asya

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------------|---|
| BRI | Belt and Road Initiative |
| CPC | Communist Party of China |
| FDI | Foreign Direct Investment |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| RATS | Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure |
| SCO | Shanghai Cooperation Organization |
| SDPK | Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| WTO | World Trade Organization |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to analyze political corruption in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan and rising Sinophobia among the Kyrgyz people by using the analytical framework of Inge Amundsen on political corruption. The main research question of the study is the following: How does political corruption in Kyrgyzstan increase Sinophobia among the Kyrgyz people? As such, two parallel topics, political corruption and Sinophobia both of which have been important topics in the country in the post-Soviet era. Since 1991, political corruption has been observed as a constant phenomenon which had an impact on various areas of life in Kyrgyzstan. One such area, rising Sinophobia, is the main focus of this thesis.¹ In that sense, this study aims to establish a relation between political corruption and its impact on rising Sinophobia.

Political corruption has been a major issue in Central Asian countries in the post-Soviet era. However, political corruption in the Kyrgyz Republic was one of the main factors that triggered the popular uprisings and leadership changes in the years of 2005 and 2010 as well as the inter-ethnic conflict between the Uzbeks and the Kyrgyz in Osh in 2010. This instability as a result of political corruption

¹ In this thesis, Sinophobia is defined as “a fear or dislike of China, or Chinese people, their language or culture” (Sinophobia Definition and Meaning: Collins English Dictionary. (2019, October 5). Retrieved February 22, 2020, from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/sinophobia>).

differentiates Kyrgyzstan from other Central Asian countries. Sinophobia too has historically been an existing phenomenon among the Central Asian people. In the eyes of the Central Asian people, historically China was perceived as the enemy of Turkic people and Muslims (Peyrouse, 2016, p. 14). Today, the huge economic and demographic power differences between China and the Central Asian states cause anti-Chinese sentiment in the region (Laruelle, 2015, p. 3). In Kyrgyzstan, Chinese labor migration into the country makes the Kyrgyz people uncomfortable, since they have to compete with this labor power for a limited number of jobs. Moreover, the Kyrgyz people have fears about becoming the most westerly province of China as a result of this demographic movement (Garibov, 2018, p. 147).

In addition to such concerns, the Kyrgyz people also claim that Chinese presence in their country is associated with political corruption. At the end of 2018 and at the beginning of 2019, three demonstrations were organized in Bishkek, in which the participants demanded transparency for the expenditure of Chinese grants and loans (Aliyev, 2019). This situation also differentiates Kyrgyzstan from other Central Asian countries. While other Central Asian countries could suppress such anti-Chinese initiatives by their authoritarian laws and policies, such demonstrations can be seen in Kyrgyzstan since the country has been the least authoritarian one in Central Asia (Peyrouse, 2019, p. 5). Therefore, such unique characteristics of Kyrgyzstan regarding political corruption in general and Sinophobia in particular as well as the relation of the two make this topic an important and interesting one to conduct a research on.

1.1. Literature on Political Corruption and Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan

As pointed out above, this thesis is about the role of political corruption in rising Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan, so political corruption in Kyrgyzstan and Sinophobia in Central Asia are the key concepts of the study. Political corruption is a concept on which there is no common or agreed upon definition (Kurer, 2014, p. 30), although the study of the term can be traced all the way back to the Ancient Greek philosophers of Aristo and Plato (Evertsson, 2008, p. 9). When we look at the

literature on political corruption in general, we can see that there are five main topics that the scholars have focused on.

First, political corruption is an activity that is observed during the electoral processes. According to this, the election rules are manipulated and the voting procedure is flawed (Jackson & Moreno, 2016, p. 6). Political parties and politicians could use different ways of vote buying during the electoral processes in order to maximize their votes, such as providing economic benefits to the supporters through the corrupt networks in return for their support in elections, allocating resources from the state budget to regions where the supporters live in order to reward them (Aktan, 2015, p. 54-55), and offering economic or political privileges to the members of the opposition parties so that they would change side (Aktan, 2015, p. 56). If vote buying does not work, then election rigging could occur which means that politicians could manipulate election results by “ballot-stuffing, misinforming voters, mis-recording of votes, manipulations of voter’s register and/or manipulation of demographic information” (Bosso et al., 2014, p. 17).

Second, political corruption is seen in the process of public policy formulation. In local, regional and national legislatures, as well as executives, those politicians who have the power of making decisions are involved in corruption to enhance their own personal interests (Jackson & Moreno, 2016, p. 7). Political corruption in public policy formulation process can also involve non-state actors, such as companies, professional groups and public interest groups. These groups try to influence decision-making process via lobbying activities. In some case, however, their activities can go beyond legal limits resulting in corruption, undue influence and even state capture (Bosso et al., 2014, p. 25).

Third, political corruption is also observed among bureaucrats who are responsible for implementing legislative and executive decisions. Since politics and bureaucracy are intertwined in most political systems, the involvement of bureaucrats in corrupt actions makes them an integral part of political corruption (Bardhan, 2006). Bureaucratic corruption occurs during the stage of implementation of corrupt

policies when the appointed bureaucrats misuse their public offices and abuse the public trust bestowed on them (Gerring & Thacker, 2004, p. 324).

Fourth, political corruption is a term that is closely related to regime types. Indeed, political corruption is a reflection of the political system in which it is formed. In other words, different political systems with different regimes would create different ways in which political corruption functions (Casas-Zamora et al., 2009, p. 2). In autocratic regimes, political corruption is a tool used by the ruling elites for rent-seeking activities in order to maintain regime stability by gaining support of certain people. Likewise, in semi-democratic regimes political corruption maintains regime stability, but in two different ways. First, we see vote buying to silence the demands of the people for democratization. Second, political corruption creates an environment in which informal structures prevail. In other words, when politicians reward their political base through corrupt methods and create exchange networks, their tenure in office becomes dependent on these informal structures. However, in democratic regimes, there is an opposite tendency regarding stability. In such regimes, political corruption is a threat for regime stability since the public could monitor politicians through formal institutions and can punish them through elections (Fjelde & Hegre, 2014, p. 6-12).

Fifth, political corruption can also be seen in economic sectors. The ruling elites could also be involved in a process of eliminating market mechanisms in order to get private gain. They can do so as they have the political power to manipulate the market. They also determine how resources could be distributed among the people as well as non-state interest groups (Chetwynd et al., 2003, p. 9; Heywood, 1997).

In addition to the literature on political corruption in general, we also need to briefly focus on the literature on political corruption in Central Asia in general and Kyrgyzstan in particular. When we look at the literature on political corruption in Central Asia, we see that one of the basic topics is about the reasons of this phenomenon. First of all, structural problems are given as the main cause of political corruption in the region. According to this, the state structure inherited from the

Soviet era and the unsuccessful process of the democratic state-building after 1991 are the main factors that result in political corruption (Bowser, 2001; Casas-Zamora et al., 2009). More specifically, centralization policies of the Soviet Union resulted in an inefficient administrative structure. The Soviet efforts to control the state mechanism resulted in decline in the governance capacity. As one scholar explained, regarding the issue of corruption in the state apparatus, the response of the authorities was “basically punitive rather than managerial. That is, rather than change the incentive structure, Soviet officials relied upon threats as a deterrent” (Gleason, 1995, p. 41). The problems of low-level state capacity and high level of corruption, both of which were inherited from the Soviet state structure, continued to be pervasive in the post-Soviet Kyrgyz attempts of building a solid and well-regulated state apparatus (Engvall, 2011, p. 88). Although the state is the dominant actor in politics and economy, competing elites who are split along regional and ethnic lines, also have some room to maneuver. This competition resulted in increasing levels of political corruption due to “a corrupt game of buying patronage” in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan (Kupatadze, 2015, p. 207).

Secondly, the economic situation and economic policies of Central Asian governments result in political corruption. Economic collapse after the independence, state involvement in privatization process, poverty and low-income levels are given as the economic causes of political corruption (Bowser, 2001; Cokgezen, 2004). More specifically, when independence was gained, these countries as well as Kyrgyzstan had to deal with problems like hyperinflation, unemployment and increasing poverty (Cokgezen, 2004, p. 88). In this era, privatization was seen as one of the most important economic reforms, however the process of privatization itself resulted in political corruption since the ruling elite saw it as an opportunity of self-enrichment (Cokgezen, 2004, p. 89).

Thirdly, the social structure in the region causes political corruption: nepotism and dominance of clans are widespread throughout the region (Aslam, 2011; Berdikееva, 2006; Bond & Koch, 2010; Bowser, 2001; Karymshakov & Abdykaparov, 2008).

Clans are based on kinship ties and they serve as the informal social organizations (Collins, 2003, p. 173) which provide goods in short supply to the people. Although the Soviets tried to undermine the importance of clans in Central Asian societies, they preserved their importance for the local people as a result of the Soviet shortage economy. When the economic hardships continued after the independence, clans protected their place and importance among the people throughout the region (Bond & Koch, 2010, p. 535-536). In the Kyrgyz political scene, for example, competition is based on the clan and regional ties (Kupatadze, 2015, p. 208), especially within the framework of the north-south division (Morozova, 2005, p. 76). Political power and economic resources have been accessed through this division in the country (Bond & Koch, 2010, p. 537). Finally, the general culture and perception of people in Central Asia result in political corruption (Bowser, 2001; Cokgezen, 2004). In the region, the majority of people think that political corruption is an inevitable part of the daily life. In fact, as a result of the strong kinship ties, individuals can be accused by not supporting of “their own” and therefore do involve in corruption. The main motivation for these people is an “everyone does it” attitude, which prevails and normalizes being a part of corrupt networks for most of public servants. Public servants, who do not want to be involved in corruption, face accusations of being not supportive for his family and clan (Bowser, 2001, p. 6).

As for the literature that specifically focuses on political corruption in Kyrgyzstan, one main topic focuses on the negative impact of political corruption on political stability in the country. As such, the role of political corruption in the revolutions of 2005 and 2010 (Gürbüz, 2013; Kubicek, 2011; Radnitz, 2006; Ryskulov, 2010) and in 2010 Osh events (Akiner, 2016; Galdini, 2014; McGlinchey, 2011; Melvin, 2011) are analyzed by scholars.² Another main topic is related to how political corruption negatively affects the living standards of the people. As a result of such corruption, quality of public services like education and health decreases, and inequality of income increases (Aslam, 2011; Cokgezen, 2004). Finally, political corruption

² The analyses of those scholars will be given in more detail in Chapter 2.

causes criminalization of the state apparatus and the political system. Criminal actors played important roles in suppressing the opposition during Bakiyev's term and in the Osh events of 2010 (Engvall, 2011; Kupatadze, 2015; Marat, 2015a).³

As mentioned above, this study also focuses on Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. The literature that focuses on this topic focus on two main aspects of this phenomenon: reasons of Sinophobia and consequences of Sinophobia. As will be elaborated in the third and fourth chapters, in those studies, one of the main reasons is the lack of sufficient knowledge among the people of Central Asia about China, as well as the Chinese people and their culture. Since the Soviet educational system had presented China as the enemy of Central Asian people, this perception continues to be valid in the region (Sadovskaya & Utyasheva, 2018; Vakulchuk & Overland, 2019). Moreover, China's limited soft power in Central Asia (Gurbanmyradova, 2015, p. 26) and the failure of Chinese companies in terms of contacting local people further contribute to the lack of knowledge among the Kyrgyz people (Tian, 2018, p. 28).

Another reason of Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia is related to China's relations with Kyrgyzstan in particular and with Central Asian countries in general. Issues such as Chinese policies toward Uyghurs and the Belt and Road Initiative increase Sinophobia. The first one, which is Chinese policies toward Uyghurs, is one of the most important reasons of anti-Chinese sentiment not only in Kyrgyzstan but also in all Central Asian countries because of the cultural and religious bonds that they share with the Uyghur people (Peyrouse, 2016; Peyrouse, 2019; Vakulchuk & Overland, 2019). The second one, which is the Belt and Road Initiative, is a recent development for Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. Chinese presence in the region became much more visible with this economic initiative and this situation increases Sinophobia in the region and in Kyrgyzstan (Jaborov, 2018; Sternberg et al., 2017; Tian, 2018; Wolters, 2018).

³ These developments are elaborated in Chapter 2.

The third reason of Sinophobia is the Chinese merchant and labor migration into the region, causing two main problems in Kyrgyzstan. The first problem is unfair competition with the Chinese merchants who have the opportunity to get access to cheap Chinese goods and soft loans from their country easily. This advantage resulted in Chinese takeover of almost all distribution networks and the dominance of Chinese merchants in Kyrgyz bazaars (Jarosiewicz & Strachota, 2013; Steiner, 2013). The second problem is closely related to the competition for a limited number of jobs. One quarter of the Kyrgyz labor force already works in Russia due to low wages and high unemployment. So, they do not want to compete with the Chinese labor force in their own country (Garibov, 2018, p. 148-149). In fact, the Kyrgyz people blame Chinese companies by bringing Chinese labor force and taking jobs away from the locals (Tian, 2018, p. 33).

The fourth reason of Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia is religious and cultural differences between China and the Central Asian countries which plays a major role in Central Asians' attitude toward China (Laruelle, 2015; Peyrouse, 2016; Vakulchuk & Overland, 2019). It has been suggested that only a small group of scholars favors Chinese values, whereas a majority of the Kyrgyz people, who adopt different worldviews such as Western, Russophile,⁴ Pan-Turkic and Islamist, consider China negatively (Peyrouse, 2016, p. 22). These differences and widely accepted negative views on China are exploited by nationalist and conservative public figures and organizations which further contributes to the rise of Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan (Laruelle, 2015, p. 5).

The fifth reason of Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia is given as the perception of conspiracy on the part of China. According to this perception, China has a hidden agenda and it is taking over Central Asia. In Kyrgyzstan, people claim

⁴ According to the Collins Dictionary, the term Russophile has two definitions, which are “an admirer of Russia or the former Soviet Union, its customs, political system, etc.” and “showing admiration of Russia or the former Soviet Union” (Russophile definition and meaning: Collins English Dictionary. (2013, December 30). Retrieved May 8, 2020, from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/russophile>).

that the Chinese government want to make Kyrgyzstan western part of China (Owen, 2017, p. 104) and their claim is based on unrevealed agreements on border disputes. China and Kyrgyzstan peacefully solved the issue of such disputes with the agreements signed in 1996 and 1999. However, neither of these agreements was revealed publicly, resulting in suspicions that there were some secret clauses in them and that eventually, China would make additional demands (Peyrouse, 2016, p. 19). Another source of conspiracy theory is China's increasing presence and economic activities in the region. Some claim that Central Asia would eventually end up becoming a source of raw materials for China. The final source of conspiracy theory is the Chinese labor migration into the region. While the Central Asian people think that China would solve its own problem of overpopulation by using Central Asian lands (Toktomushev, 2018, p. 78), in Kyrgyzstan, people believe that they will be drown in a Chinese sea as a result of demographic expansion of the Chinese people (Garibov, 2018, p. 147).

As for the literature on the consequences of Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia, it mostly focuses on Central Asian peoples' attitude against China and the Chinese people who live in Central Asian countries. Many studies present Sinophobia in Central Asia as the biggest obstacle for China for several reasons (Garibov, 2018; Hudec, 2018; Wolters, 2018). There were some instances of racist and violent acts against the Chinese in the region. For instance, in 2004, two Chinese authorities were murdered during their visit to Kyrgyzstan (Chung, 2004, p. 999). In addition, there were several public demonstrations against Chinese companies and scuffles between the Chinese workers and the local people. For instance, Chinese-run Taldy-Bulak Levoberezhny gold field was closed as a result of the protests in October 2012. The reason of protests was the fight that broke out between Chinese and Kyrgyz workers (International Crisis Group, 2017, p. 11).⁵

⁵ These points will further be elaborated in Chapter 4.

As mentioned earlier, in this thesis the analytical framework developed by Inge Amundsen on political corruption will be used to explain rising Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan. Amundsen (1999) looks at political corruption both at the level of politicians and bureaucrats who are at the top levels of the political system. For Amundsen (1999), politicians, who have the power of making laws are involved in corruption by using their authority to maintain their political power, status and economic wealth. As such, political corruption results in misallocation of resources, institutional decay, and an ineffective legal system in which there is weak accountability. As for the bureaucrats who are involved in bureaucratic corruption, the process takes place during their implementation of public policies (p. 3-4).

According to Amundsen (1999), although political corruption provides personal gain and thus has a private nature, it also is a collective practice. In other words, people choose to be involved in corrupt networks, since being part of such networks is both rewarding and easier than opposing corruption. Those people who are involved in corruption seek political power or economic wealth, sometimes both. The distribution of political power and economic wealth has two sides which may have different powers in this corrupt exchange mechanism. If the strong side is non-state interest groups, then sources flow from the state to the society and it is called redistributive corruption. However, if the strong side is the ruling elite who owns the state, then sources flow from the society to the state and it is called an extractive corruption (p. 4-5) as in the case of Kyrgyzstan.⁶ The theory of extractive corruption suggests that the state apparatus is a tool for the extraction of sources from society for the benefit of the ruling elite (Amundsen, 1999, p. 7). This form of political corruption exists in the neo-patrimonial political systems in which the incumbent holds public office through personal patronage, rather than political ideology or rule of law. In other words, in the neo-patrimonial political systems, political power is

⁶ The fundamental power in Kyrgyzstan is holding public offices. The state is a source of wealth and power and the elite, who own the state, decide the distribution of sources. In fact, absence of the public offices exposes the Kyrgyz elite into a great risk and that is why competition for the public offices is so intense in Kyrgyzstan (Lynch, 2019).

“exercised more through the informal clientelist and nepotist practices than through formal routes of authority” (Amundsen, 1999, p. 8-9).⁷ This brings us to two important components of neo-patrimonialism: clientelism and nepotism. As Amundsen (1999) defines, clientelism is “the sophisticated hierarchic network of patron-client relationships through which the patrons grant services, positions, and public support to his clients, in exchange for political and material support” (p. 9). As Amundsen (1999) defines, nepotism occurs when “an office holder (ruler) with the right to make appointments, prefers to nominate to prominent positions his proper kinfolk and family members (wife, brothers and sisters, children, nephews, cousins, in-laws etc.)” (p. 14). As such, many presidents would attempt to secure their power positions by nominating and/or promoting their own family members to important political, economic and military/security positions (Amundsen, 1999, p. 14). Thus, according to Amundsen (1999), loyalty is the criterion in determining who will be nominated and promoted in the public sector, not merit (p. 10). As a result, “neo-patrimonial regimes are not efficient, legitimate nor [sic] development-oriented regimes. For instance, the resources of the state are not redistributed to the needy or invested in production, it is extracted, amassed, and consumed by the rulers” (Amundsen, 1999, p. 10).

As is seen, there is quite a large a body of literature on both Sinophobia and political corruption in Central Asia in general and Kyrgyzstan in particular. However, these studies do not focus on the impact of political corruption in rising Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan. Furthermore, the analytical framework provided by Amundsen has not been so far used in explaining political corruption in Kyrgyzstan and its impact on Sinophobia in this country. As such, this thesis is expected to make a contribution to the literature.

⁷ As in the case of Max Weber’s classical patrimonialism. The main difference between the neo-patrimonialism and the classical patrimonialism is “modernity, legality, rationality, and professional bureaucratic structures” that the neo-patrimonial political systems have. However, as mentioned, the rule is exercised through the informal practices.

1.2. Methodology and Outline

This thesis is a case study that uses a qualitative research method. Case studies are considered to be practical and beneficial methods to help us explain unique cases (Yin, 2009, p. 47). As mentioned earlier, the case of Kyrgyzstan in terms of both the consequences of political corruption and the impact of political corruption on Sinophobia is unique in Central Asia. Likewise, the qualitative research, a method that is mostly based on interpretation of the gathered data on the studied topic and answering open-ended questions (Streefkerk, 2019), also suits well to the purposes of this study. By using a desk research model (Travis, 2016), relevant academic books, articles, news reports and websites on the topic are gathered for interpreting the role of political corruption in increasing Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan for providing a more comprehensive understanding of this topic.

This thesis is consisted of five chapters. After the Introduction, in the second chapter information about political corruption in Kyrgyzstan during the terms of office of all five presidents of the country after the 1991 is given. In other words, this chapter provides both the historical background of political corruption in Kyrgyzstan and information on the corrupt policies of leaders. In this chapter, the impact of these policies on Kyrgyz politics are also evaluated.

The third chapter is about China-Kyrgyzstan relations. This chapter is consisted of two main parts. In the first part, the general framework of political and economic relations between China and Kyrgyzstan are given. Then, the most related and important points that fall within the scope of this thesis are examined in detail, with a specific emphasis on how these points are related to Sinophobia among the Kyrgyz people.

The fourth chapter is specifically about Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan. This chapter is consisted of two main parts. In the first part, the reasons of rising Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan are presented in detail. In the second part, the role of political corruption in China-Kyrgyzstan relations and rising Sinophobia are analyzed by specifically

referring to the impact of political corruption in anti-Chinese public demonstrations in Kyrgyzstan.

The fifth and last chapter of this thesis is Conclusion, where the topic chosen is analyzed and findings of the thesis are discussed.

CHAPTER 2

POLITICAL CORRUPTION IN KYRGYZSTAN

Political corruption in Kyrgyzstan already existed at the time of the Soviet Union and this corrupt political system of the Kyrgyz Republic did not change after the independence (Aslam, 2011, p. 246). In the year of 2005, Kyrgyzstan was ranked as 130th out of 158 countries in the Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International with the score of 2.3 out of 10.⁸ In the year of 2010, Kyrgyzstan's rank was 164th out of 178 countries in the same index and its score was 2.0 out of 10.⁹ These are the two years in which revolutions took place and leaders changed. Moreover, one major ethnic conflict erupted in the year of 2010. Widespread political corruption played an important role in these events. Although Kyrgyzstan changed its political system from a presidential to a parliamentary one by the referendum in 2010 (Aydingün & Aydingün, 2014, p. 406), this system change did not really have an impact on the issue of political corruption, which continues to be one of the major problems of the country. According to the nationwide poll of February 2018, 95 percent of the Kyrgyz population expressed that corruption is important problem for their country (Zahn, 2018). Transparency International's

⁸ Transparency International. (2005, October 18). Corruption Perceptions Index 2005. Retrieved April 28, 2020, from https://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/cpi_2005/0

⁹ Transparency International. (2010, October 26). Corruption Perceptions Index 2010 View Country Results. Retrieved April 28, 2020, from <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2010/results>

Corruption Perception Index 2019 supports such concerns. In this index, Kyrgyzstan was ranked as 126th out of 180 countries with the score of 30 out of 100.¹⁰

This chapter provides historical background information on political corruption during the terms of all five presidents of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan: Askar Akayev (1991-2005), Kurmanbek Bakiyev (2005-2010), Roza Otunbayeva (2010-2011), Almazbek Atambayev (2011-2017) and Sooronbay Jeenbekov (2017-present).

2.1. Akayev's Term

As one expert suggests, Kyrgyzstan's democratic experience ended when President Akayev dissolved the parliament in November 1994 (Gleason, 1995, p. 42). Political corruption became a pervasive element of the next ten years of Kyrgyz politics (Gürbüz, 2013, p. 194). After the dissolution of the parliament, authority and powers of president were increased by the 1996, 1998 and 2000 constitutional amendments (Aslam, 2011, p. 246). These amendments had two major consequences. First, they had a negative impact on the parliament. Instead of being a force of democracy and a forum of public discussions, it turned out to be a rather corrupt institution in which the members had the basic goal of protecting their own interests (Radnitz, 2006, p. 140). Second, while the role of the parliament in politics was declining the role of the Akayev family increased. The family members started to interfere more and more in state affairs as if the country was their own fiefdom. In time, the interests of the ruling elite became the major determining factor of public policies. It was as if the whole state apparatus was built in order to preserve the economic wealth and political power of the Akayev family (Engvall, 2011, p. 91).

When we look at the Akayev era, there are four main areas in which political corruption is clearly observed: clannism and nepotism, the executive dominance over the judiciary and the hegemony on the economic resources of Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁰ Transparency International. (2020, January 23). Corruption Perceptions Index 2019. Retrieved April 28, 2020, from <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2019/results>

Political corruption in these areas would have an impact on both the Kyrgyz people and the political system of the country.

Akayev administration's policies that aimed to preserve political dominance resulted in rampant clannism and nepotism in the state apparatus of the newly independent Kyrgyz Republic. A "mega-clan" was established around the presidential family that come from the northern clan of Kemin by the exclusion of southern clans (Bond & Koch, 2010, p. 538). Members of the northern clans were appointed to most senior positions in the bureaucracy, even in the south. After the independence, all five governors of the Osh oblast, for example, were from the northern clans (Berdikeeva, 2006, p. 10). In addition, members of the Akayev family were either elected or appointed to important institutions of the state. For instance, Akayev's daughter Bermet Akayeva was elected as a member of parliament in the 2005 elections. Another example is the first lady's niece Altynbek Abdrashitov who became the consul of New York (Ryskulov, 2010, p. 101). The practice of the "sale" of public offices started in mid-1990s and became an extensive practice just in a few years. Akayev's wife Mayram Akayeva played an important role in this process and people started to call her "Otdel Kadrov", which means department of cadres, because of her place in this corrupt practice (Engvall, 2011, p. 108-109). For instance, the "prices" of positions at the Ministry of Internal Affairs were changing from US\$100 to US\$50.000 depending on the rank (Cokgezen, 2004, p. 92).

Akayev family's policy of maintaining dominance on the state apparatus significantly affected the judiciary and it became one of the most corrupted branches of the state in the eyes of the Kyrgyz people according to a public survey conducted in 2000 (Osmonaliev, 2008, p. 146). It has been suggested that unfair and politically motivated decisions were being taken by the courts. For instance, in the year 1998, the Constitutional Court violated the constitution and allowed Akayev to run for the third time for the presidency in the 2000 elections. Moreover, law enforcement agencies became instruments of putting pressure on the opposition in the country. They targeted leading opposition figures by preventing them to freely and fairly

participate to politics and limited the media freedom by suing and closing media outlets when they criticized the government. (Engvall, 2011, p. 92).

The dominance of the Akayev family and the northern clans on the political system was also strengthened with the hegemony on economic resources of the country. The main source of rent for the Akayev family came from the gold sector and privatization (Collins, 2002, p. 146). Kyrgyzstan had around 700 tons of unexploited gold reservoir which makes the country one of the leading countries in the world. The Akayev administration established the Kumtor Operating Company by signing a non-transparent production-sharing agreement with the Canadian company Cameco in the year 1994. By the end of 1990s, gold exportation started to constitute one sixth of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (Pomfret, 2018, p. 3). The Kyrgyz government renegotiated the terms of the agreement with the Canadian company when the gold prices increased rapidly at the beginning of 2000s, and the two sides reached to a new agreement in June 2004. However, the new agreement, was also non-transparent and resulted in corruption allegations about the Akayev family and other high-level officials (Pomfret, 2018, p. 3). During the investigations on corruption accusations directed against the Akayev family, it was revealed that the Kyrgyz state budget received only US\$107 million out of more than US\$2 billion of gold revenue, although the state had 70 per cent of shares of the gold mining company (Soltobaev, 2005, p. 13).

In the field of privatization, the ruling elite took control of the state farms and collective farms as a result of a process which had no transparency and was implemented with incoherent practices (Cokgezen, 2004, p. 89-90). The Akayev family had complete or partial control over 178 companies, some of which were used for money laundering purposes. For instance, the rent received from the United States-controlled Manas Airbase was transferred to the firms which were controlled by Akayev's son and son-in-law (Engvall, 2011, p. 91-92).

When Akayev's era ended in 2005, the extent of widespread corruption in the country would be better understood. It has been pointed out that the total amount of

wealth of the Akayev family was estimated to be between US\$500 million and US\$1 billion (Wilkinson, 2014, p. 151). Such an extensive amount of wealth acquired by politically corrupt methods had a negative impact on both the Kyrgyz people and the political system of the country. First of all, the public trust to the government and the state institutions significantly decreased, as the state ended up being quite dysfunctional in providing public services to the society (Bowser, 2001, p. 8-9). This situation resulted in the development of a shadow economy, in which people tried to meet their needs from alternative sources (Bowser, 2001, p. 5). As such, there emerged a decline in tax revenues which in turn further decreased the quality of such services, especially in the two most important areas of education and health services. Many teachers were forced to do other jobs in addition to teaching at schools due to very low salaries (Cokgezen, 2004, p. 86). Likewise, as a result of budget cuts, the quality of health services in the hospitals significantly decreased. In addition, these hospitals could also perform less and less services, which would eventually lead to their being closed (Cokgezen, 2004, p. 88).

The development of the shadow economy also led to the emergence of organized crime in the country. The money and power that came from drugs as well as humans and arms trafficking gave an opportunity to some opposition figures to become a rival of Akayev. For example, Bayaman Erkinbayev was one of the politicians who had relations with the criminal underworld and used the weakness of the state institutions to his advantage by providing public services to the people that state could not provide. He built roads and mosques in Osh in order to gain the support of the people. Erkinbayev later became a member of the parliament in 2005 (Engvall, 2011, p. 93-94) and played an important role during the Tulip Revolution that took place in same year (Kupatadze, 2015, p. 207).

The Tulip Revolution which ousted Akayev from power was in a way a reaction on the part of the Kyrgyz people to widespread political corruption in their countries. The roots of the revolution can be traced back to the clash between the police and the protestors in the Aksy district of the southern Jalal-Abad region in January 2002.

The demonstration was organized by the people of Aksy who protested the detention of an opposition figure Azimbek Beknazarov, the president of the Parliamentary Committee for Judiciary Affairs and Constitutional Reform. This detention was seen as politically motivated by many people. The situation got worse as tensions escalated. On March 17, approximately 2000 people hit the streets of Aksy to show their support to Beknazarov. The police opened fire, killing six civilians (Akiner, 2016, p. 35). Some scholars suggest that the Aksy events were the first sparks of the Tulip Revolution (Omuralieva, 2014, p. 61) and that political corruption, abuse of power, and clannism and nepotism favoring northern clans were among the main reasons of these events (Akiner, 2016, p. 35; Berdikееva, 2006, p. 10).

In 2005, political corruption and its negative consequences once again resulted in a serious social unrest in the country. Protests, which eventually led to the Tulip Revolution, began in the southern part of the country where the clans of which have systematically been excluded from political power (Kubicek, 2011, p. 118). The revolution was not organized by civil society organizations or political parties, but by those local elites, who were unhappy from the results of the 2005 parliamentary elections. They mobilized mostly unemployed youth and retired old men from rural areas. On March 3, protests began in the southern province of Jalal-Abad. The demonstrators, first, targeted the election-commission headquarters. The next day, they marched to the regional-administration headquarters (Radnitz, 2006, p. 134-135). Eventually, the protests jumped to the other major cities (Radnitz, 2006, p. 136). As a result of the growing unrest, Askar Akayev fled with his family on March 24, 2005 and took refuge in Russia (Radnitz, 2006, p.137).

However, the developments in the aftermath of the revolution showed that it was just a transfer of power rather than a revolution (Radnitz, 2006, p. 133). In other words, Kyrgyzstan simply witnessed a power struggle between the elites for political and economic resources (Marat, 2015a, p. 48). That would be one of the main reasons why political corruption continued to be a major problem in the country.

2.2. Bakiyev's Term

When Kurmanbek Bakiyev came to power, he promised to end corruption and started an investigation which focused on the corrupt acts of the Akayev administration. The multimillionaire businessman Danyar Usenov,¹¹ who had a legal dispute with Akayev (Kupatadze, 2009, p. 66), was appointed by Bakiyev to investigate the business activities of the Akayev family. Usenov found out that there were more than a hundred companies which belonged to the Akayevs (Radnitz, 2006, p. 141). Moreover, the Bakiyev administration claimed that two-thirds of all tax collections were directly transferred to the Akayev family's purse instead of the state budget (Berdikeeva, 2006, p. 11). However, since Bakiyev as well as his government officials were also involved in political corruption during the Akayev administration, these investigations could not achieve their final goals (Radnitz, 2006, p. 142).¹²

As in the case of Akayev, President Bakiyev also took steps in order to preserve the political power and economic wealth of his own family and clan. With the 2006 and 2007 constitutional amendments, Bakiyev increased his presidential powers (Aslam, 2011, p. 246) and abandoned the separation of powers principle completely by the administrative changes of fall 2009, soon after his electoral victory in the same year. In line with these changes, all executive power was transferred to the president who now could directly appoint the heads of all state agencies (Engvall, 2011, p. 99). Similar to the Akayev era, nepotism played an important role in these appointments (Kubicek, 2011, p. 118).

Maksim Bakiyev, the younger son of the president, was one of the major actors of political corruption during the Bakiyev's term. He served as the head of the Central

¹¹ Danyar Usenov is a Kyrgyz banker and politician who served as the mayor of Bishkek between 2007 and 2008, and the prime minister between 2009 and 2010.

¹² Bakiyev himself was part of the political elite. He had served as the governor of the Jalal-Abad and Chui regions between 1995 and 2000. In December of 2000, he was appointed by Akayev as the prime minister of the country, however dismissed on May 2002, after the Aksy events.

Agency for Development, Investment and Innovation between October 29, 2009 and April 7, 2010 where many of his financial machinations were carried out. He was the owner of most holiday resort houses located on the shore of the Yssyk-kul, the lake located in northern Kyrgyzstan that attracts several tourists from not only Kyrgyzstan but also all around the region. Maksim Bakiyev also established the Asia Universal Bank with the main aim of money laundering. In fact, on the day of the 2010 revolution, he transferred huge amounts of money to abroad through this bank. (Ryskulov, 2010, p. 102-103). Moreover, his fake offshore firms won state bids of privatization of energy and telecommunication enterprises. In short, as one scholar suggested, he ruled a vast financial empire (Laumulin, 2012, p. 58).

Besides his younger son, Bakiyev's other relatives were also appointed to important positions. For example, his elder son Marat Bakiyev served as the head of the National Security Services. In addition to his sons, Kurmanbek Bakiyev also appointed his brothers to important positions. His younger brother was assigned to the National Guard and the State Protection Service. His second brother was appointed to Berlin as the ambassador of the Kyrgyz Republic. His third brother served as the Special Trade Representative of Kyrgyzstan in China. His fourth brother became one of Jalal-Abad's local strongman.¹³ His fifth brother served as a local village administrator and his sixth brother served as the head of Agency of Community Development and Investment until his death in 2006 (Engvall, 2011, p. 99).

In addition to such nepotism, the role of clans, this time from the south, continued to play a dominant role in the political system. These clans captured political and economic power under the rule of Bakiyev who was from the southern part of the country (Kubicek, 2011, p. 118). Now, Bakiyev and his close circle could gain access to state resources and public offices (Bond & Koch, 2010, p. 537). The "sale" of these offices continued under Bakiyev as well. Furthermore, after the October

¹³ A local strongman is considered to be a person who can deliver his local people's electoral support to politicians in exchange of economic benefits (Sandberg, 2000, p. 94).

2007 constitutional amendment, candidates started to buy spots in their party lists since the amendment increased the importance of political parties, making the parliament almost a “market place”. As one of the leading opposition figures, Omurbek Tekebayev would suggest, the cost of such positions and the money to be gained from them were known by everyone. The “owners” of some positions could gain millions of dollars (Engvall, 2011, p. 110-111).

As mentioned earlier, the anti-corruption campaigns of Bakiyev did not reach their aims. In fact, these campaigns became yet another instrument of political corruption. Bakiyev preserved his political power by launching such campaigns in order to put political pressure on the opposition (Wilkinson, 2014, p. 152). One major area in which political corruption can be observed was elections. In most cases, opposition candidates were not given free and fair opportunities to compete in these elections. In December 16, 2007 parliamentary elections, for example while many opposition parties stayed out of the parliament, pro-presidential party “Ak Zhol” (Bright Path) won the highest number of the seats. The Central Election Commission of Kyrgyzstan was accused of cheating by many international observers (Ryskulov, 2010, p. 103). Before the presidential election in 2009, many leading opposition figures, including Omurbek Tekebayev, Alikbek Jekshenkulov and Ismail Isakov, had to deal with several accusations directed against them (Engvall, 2011, p. 98).

Criminalization of the political system significantly increased during the term of Bakiyev and the criminal world started to penetrate much more into the state structures in order to maintain and increase their economic gains. Under Bakiyev, the state itself turned into a criminal organization, becoming the key actor of both legal and illegal activities (Marat, 2015a, p. 51-52). In late 2009, Bakiyev disbanded the Drug Control Agency which was known as a “clear” institution since it was funded by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. He transferred responsibilities of the Agency to the highly corrupted Ministry of Interior Affairs. It has been suggested that Bakiyev’s real aim was to enable the state to be the main

agent of drug trafficking, which was the most important component of the shadow economy (Marat, 2015a, p. 52-53).

Political corruption continued to be the main mechanism of channeling the state revenues obtained from the gold and hydropower sectors to the Bakiyev family. One such example was the Toktogul hydropower station which was generating 60 per cent of total electricity for public use. The water reservoir of the station dropped from 19 billion cubic meter in 2005 to 6.5 billion cubic meter in 2008. Experts who investigated the situation claimed that water reservoir dropped because of high level of corruption, inefficient management and lack of transparency. Water was being smuggled illegally during the irrigation seasons into the neighboring countries. Another example was the Kumtor goldmine. When the contract between the company and the Kyrgyz state was renewed in the year 2009, it was agreed that the Canadian company would pay a much higher price that would increase the revenue of Kyrgyzstan significantly. However, due to the high level of corruption, the extra money paid by the goldmining firm ended up being melted without reaching the state budget (Laumulin, 2012, p. 54).

Political corruption in Bakiyev's term had several negative impacts on both the Kyrgyz people and the political system which eventually led to the 2010 revolution and the 2010 Osh events. First, the Uzbek community significantly suffered by the nepotism and clannism under Bakiyev. Since the president was from the south, he did not need to support of the Uzbek people most of whom also lived in the south. On the contrary, pro-Bakiyev interest groups pressured the Uzbek community by threats of extortion and expropriation. Number of Uzbeks in public offices and security forces declined (Melvin, 2011, p. 12) and as a result of political pressures the head of the Republican Uzbek National Association Muhammadjan Mamasaidov had to leave his position. His successor Kadyrjan Batyrova demanded from the government to put an end to corruption. However, the Bakiyev administration did not take these demands into the consideration (Melvin, 2011, p. 13-14).

Second negative impact of political corruption during Bakiyev's era was political violence in the country, which reached to unprecedented levels due to criminalization of the state. Dozens of beatings and well-organized political assassinations of criminal kingpins, opposition leaders and journalists took place. Especially, the murder of Medet Sadyrkulov, who was the former head of Bakiyev administration, in the year of 2009 proved that the leadership had no hesitation to kill anyone who could be a potential rival to their authority (Marat, 2015a, p. 51).

Bakiyev's term ended with another revolution in 2010 and as in the case of Akayev one of the most important reasons of this development was political corruption. As mentioned earlier, Kurmanbek Bakiyev was from the south of the country and he favored southern clans during his rule. Since the limited natural and economic resources of the country were not enough to be shared among the elites (Gürbüz, 2013, p. 196), this time protests began in northern Kyrgyzstan, then spread to the southern part of the country (Kubicek, 2011, p. 118).

Local and Russian media agencies started to criticize the Bakiyev administration for the widespread political corruption in late March and early April 2010 (Bond & Koch, 2010, p. 541). On April 6, protests began in Talas and Naryn. In Talas, protestors removed government figures from local public offices. The Minister of Internal Affairs flew to the city in order to stop the protests; however, he failed. In fact, the minister was caught and beaten up. In the meantime, the government arrested leading opposition figures like Almazbek Atambayev in order to suppress protests. However, this arrest increased the fury of the people which turned out to be an uncontrolled mass attacking the police forces with Molotov cocktails, stones and bludgeons. The situation suddenly turned into a drama (Laumulin, 2012, p. 62-63).

On April 7, 2010, protests reached to the capital city Bishkek where thousands of protesters hit the streets. The anger of protesters was mainly directed to widespread corruption and government repression as well as the increasing prices of utilities. The crowds stormed several government buildings and forced Bakiyev and many of

his relatives to flee to Jalal-Abad on the same day (Bond & Koch, 2010, p. 542). Later, on April 20, 2010, Bakiyev and his family fled the country and took refuge in Belarus (Tierney, 2010, p. 14), leaving behind the casualty of 83 death and 1500 injured protestors (Bond & Koch, 2010, p. 542).

2.3. Otunbayeva's Term

On April 7, 2010, Roza Otunbayeva talked with the Prime Minister Usenov about the resignation of the government. The next day, Otunbayeva announced the dismissal of the cabinet of ministers and the dissolution of the parliament. She also announced that "the new interim government had taken over the powers of the prime minister, president and legislature." Finally, she underlined that this interim government would be in the charge until the next presidential election (Nichol, 2010, p. 3).

The interim government had to deal with the aftermath of 2010 revolution in the first months of its rule. On May 13, yet another wave of political unrest in the southern part of the country started. Ousted President Bakiyev still had supporters in his hometown Jalal-Abad. They hit the streets and stormed regional administration buildings. The next day, pro-interim government forces took back these buildings. Moreover, they burned Bakiyev family's houses. Among these people there were Uzbeks and the incident of burning these houses was seen as an act of Kadyrjan Batyrov, the leader of Uzbek community. That was the turning point after which the bloody ethnic conflict between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbek people started. In May 19, pro-Bakiyev forces burned the People's Friendship University the founder of which was Kadyrjan Batyrov while Uzbek students were organizing cultural activities. In this incident, three people died and seventy people were injured (Akiner, 2016, p. 53-54).

Tensions between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks continued and reached its peak in June 2010. Events started in Osh and then spread to Jalal-Abad. On June 9, the argument that emerged between a group of young Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in a casino resulted in

widespread violence in the city of Osh (Akiner, 2016, p. 54). In order to take the events under control, Otunbayeva's interim government declared a state of emergency on June 12 that would continue until June 22 in Osh and June 25 in Jalal-Abad (Akiner, 2016, p. 56). These events had an impact on approximately 400.000 Uzbek people, 100.000 of whom migrated to Uzbekistan, while the rest moved to other regions of the Kyrgyzstan (Akiner, 2016, p. 55).

One of the main reasons of these events was again the rampant political corruption in the country and its negative consequences on the society and the political system. First, as mentioned earlier, the Uzbek people suffered from nepotism and clannism, and were excluded from political and economic life during Bakiyev's term. When Bakiyev came to power in 2005, the Uzbeks did not increase their voice for their rights since they were aware of the power of Bakiyev in the south of Kyrgyzstan (McGlinchey, 2011, p. 90). However, when Bakiyev was ousted, they saw this political uncertainty as an opportunity and the Uzbek leader Kadyrjan Batyrov established a de facto Uzbek police force in Jalal-Abad against pro-Bakiyev forces (McGlinchey, 2011, p. 91).

Second, criminalization of the state played a major role in these events. In 2013, Minister of Interior Affairs Shamil Atakhanov expressed that the Osh events were related with this issue. According to him, Osh events were basically about the redistribution of property between politicians and criminal kingpins (Galdini, 2014, p. 15). During Bakiyev's term, criminal interest groups increased their power, influence and activities in the southern part of the country since they were supported by the president. In fact, the Bakiyev family was allegedly involved in the criminal world (Melvin, 2011, p. 21). Government official Erkin Mamkulov claimed that Kurmanbek Bakiyev's brother Akhmat Bakiyev used to control local drug smuggling businesses. He also claimed that the Bakiyev family probably used their connections with the criminal underworld in order to recapture their lost political power during the ethnic clashes of 2010 (Leijonmarck & Asyrankulova, 2010, p. 2).

No matter what the role of the Bakiyev family was, these criminal groups saw the ousting of Bakiyev as a threat for their interests. When the Uzbek community became a part of pro-interim government forces, pro-Bakiyev criminal groups saw them as their opponent in the new power struggle. Eventually, this competition evolved into the bloody interethnic conflict in June 2010 (Melvin, 2011, p. 22).

Although the consequences of political corruption of the Bakiyev era destabilized the country, Roza Otunbayeva launched an anti-corruption campaign. Top officials of the Bakiyev administration were faced with criminal charges about stealing hundreds of millions of dollars given as aid from Russia. Also, corruption in economic sectors, like mining, was investigated with some success (McMann, 2014, p. 169). Another progress was achieved in the criminality of the parliament. The number of MPs associated with the criminal underworld significantly decreased (Marat, 2012, p. 337).

However, these steps were not enough to fight against the widespread political corruption in the country which continued without even slowing down. After Bakiyev, the competing elites tried to use the power vacuum to their benefit and enjoyed their popular backing at local levels in order to reach their goal of placing their own cadres within the new government. As a result of this situation, Otunbayeva often served as a mediator for competing interests. In fact, her government was threatened with “the third revolution” by those political elites who wanted to become more dominant in the political arena and were ready to create chaos by the support of their own local people (Marat, 2012, p. 333-334).

Although Otunbayeva was popular in Bishkek and beyond, her interim government made many decisions without her knowledge. A phone conversation, which showed that the sale of offices continued, was leaked in May 2010. The conversation was between the General Prosecutor Azimbek Beknazarov and the acting Economics Minister Almazbek Atambayev and involved US\$400 thousand of bribe that allegedly was paid for a prestigious government position. During the era of Otunbayeva, the system of sale of positions in the parliament continued (Marat,

2012, p. 333-334). The prices of top party ranks were between US\$50.000 to US\$250.000. The aim of the people who would pay these amounts was enrichment through their position in the parliament and politics (Marat, 2012, p. 336).

The end of Otunbayeva's term was peaceful. She went down in history as the leader who realized the "first peaceful leadership change" in her country. After 18 months, Otunbayeva gained the appreciation and love of the people by leaving the presidency as promised (Akçalı, 2012, p. 204).

2.4. Atambayev's Term

Almazbek Atambayev came to power by taking 63 per cent of the votes in the presidential elections held on October 30, 2011. The first priority of Atambayev, who started his duty when Otunbayeva was still the acting president of the country, was to fight corruption. According to him, widespread political corruption in Kyrgyzstan could cause "the third revolution" (Akçalı, 2012, p. 204).

In order to fight corruption, Atambayev created a new specialized unit: The Anti-Corruption Service under the supervision of the State Committee on National Security. This new unit's task was investigating the parliament, executive branch, the Supreme Court, and law-enforcement agencies of the Kyrgyz State (Marat, 2015b, p. 358). In a short time, several investigations and arrests took place. Corruption in the state-owned energy companies and coal trade was revealed, and those individuals who were involved were arrested. In addition, judges of the Toktogul and Nookat districts were arrested with the accusation of taking bribe. However, these investigations and arrests only targeted certain individuals and did not have an impact on the systematic corruption in the country (Nogoibaeva, 2012, p. 2).

The anti-corruption campaign of Atambayev eventually turned into an instrument to suppress the opposition. Investigations started to target mostly the prominent opposition figures, but only rarely the members of the ruling party, the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK) (International Crisis Group, 2015, p. 4).

The case of Isa Omurkulov in the year of 2014 was seen by the opposition parties as a test for Atambayev and his commitment to fight corruption. In August 2014, Isa Omurkulov, who was the mayor of Bishkek between 2010 and 2013, and a member of SDPK, was not given a sentence on corruption charges. This was interpreted as a kind of a double standard because those people who were loyal to the president would not be the target of the anti-corruption campaign (Marat, 2015b, p. 358).

While those who were loyal to the president did not get any punishment, two important opposition figures were targeted by the judiciary when they challenged the president. First, the leader of the Ata Meken Socialist Party (Fatherland Socialist Party), Omurbek Tekebayev was arrested on charges of corruption in February 2017. According to the indictment, he received a bribe of US1\$ million from Leonid Mayevsky, a Russian businessman. In August 2017, the penalty of eight years in prison was given to Tekebayev and his ally Duishenkul Chotonov. Before his arrest, Tekebayev had brought very sharp accusations against Atambayev. In fact, he was planning to start an impeachment process against the president in late 2016. Moreover, he had claimed that Atambayev was hiding unreported incomes and the president had bought land from the mayor of Bishkek by a suspicious deal (Freedom House, 2018, p. 5). The second opposition figure who was faced with serious criminal charges was Omurbek Babanov. Babanov had challenged a political ally of Atambayev, Sooronbay Jeenbekov, in the 2017 presidential elections. Less than three weeks after the elections, Babanov was accused by the Prosecutor General's Office on November 4, 2017 with "calling for forceful change of the constitutional order and instigating interethnic hostility" during his speech in the southern city of Osh. To put more pressure on him, his company NTC TV's assets were ruled to freeze on December 19, 2017. The case has continued until the resignation of Babanov from his seat in the parliament and quitting the politics completely. According to the observers, he did this in order to save his remaining assets (Freedom House, 2018, p. 4).

Another important point that needs to be mentioned is related to the transformation of the traditional clannist approach of political corruption under the rule of President Almazbek Atambayev. Whereas Akayev and Bakiyev founded “mega clans” around their families and kinship ties, the Atambayev family did not dominate the Kyrgyz politics and economy (Marat, 2015b, p. 358). Instead, Atambayev established his network from close party members, friends and advisers (Putz, 2019c). For instance, Albek Ibraimov, former car mechanic of Atambayev, served as the head of Bishkek Free Economic Zone, the head of the state enterprise Dastan, the deputy chief of staff of the presidential administration and the chairman of the board of directors at Manas International Airport. Ibraimov finally became the mayor of Bishkek in 2016. Soon after, journalists found out that his declaration of income was not true and that he did not mention about several of his assets in his income declaration.¹⁴ Another example was Atambayev’s former chauffeur Ikramjan Ilmiyanov, who served as a presidential advisor and made a fortune during his term of service. He even entered to the list of richest persons of Kyrgyzstan (Aidar, 2018).¹⁵

As mentioned earlier, the Atambayev family has never dominated the Kyrgyz politics and economy. The president chose to redistribute the economic resources of the state more equally and carefully among the competing elites, since he had learned from what happened to two of his predecessors (Kamphuis, 2017, p. 62). The new system of sharing of the resources provided economic gain for a broader group of elites made up of party clans instead of family clans (International Crisis Group, 2015, p. 5). Political parties were now dominated by personal interests instead of political ideology or doctrine. As a result, the parliament and the government continued their role of protecting individual interests (Kamphuis, 2017, p. 62). This situation was also the same at the local level. Since local politicians were selected by their party’s center, they worked for gaining political seats, power

¹⁴ In 2018, during the era of Jeenbekov, he was arrested on charges of corruption.

¹⁵ In 2018, during the era of Jeenbekov, he too was accused on corruption in construction sector.

and positions for themselves and not for the local people. As a result, local infrastructure did not develop (International Crisis Group, 2015, p. 6).

Although the Atambayev family has never dominated the Kyrgyz politics and economy, it does not mean that they did not engage in corrupt deals. While his official income was US\$5,944 in 2010, which was quite modest, the accumulation of Atambayev, together with his wife Raisa Atambayeva reached to US\$692,065 in total in 2015. Moreover, the value of their properties showed that the president and the first lady ruled even larger financial resources. Although Atambayev was living in a quite modest house before the presidency, he built an ultra-lux three-story palace in 2016 and a summer house in 2018. The construction of the summer house cost 89.3 million Kyrgyz som (approximately US\$1.3 million) in total. However, the sources of 11.5 million out of 89.3 million Kyrgyz som is unknown (Aidar, 2018).

As was the case during the earlier years, political corruption continued to affect the country during Atambayev's era. First, due to high levels of corruption, the disappearance of money allocated for various investments would result in less amounts of investments with lower quality. Moreover, investments target politically significant regions and communities, and skip others. As a result of these preferences, many people in Kyrgyzstan could not get proper basic public services such as construction of roads and streets, and availability of drinking water during Atambayev's term (Putz, 2017a). Second, as a result of the failure of the state in issues such as the fight against corruption and provision of basic public services, especially the young people lost their faith to the state, making them susceptible to extreme ideologies such as ultra-nationalism and religious radicalism (International Crisis Group, 2015).

At his last press conference as the president of Kyrgyzstan, Atambayev said that "Corruption is ineradicable, unfortunately." (Bengard, 2017). His failure in the fight against corruption can be explained by three reasons. First, his anti-corruption campaign did not try to win the trust of the people to the state, especially to the judicial institutions. Second, he did not reform the corrupt and weak state apparatus,

especially the legislative, which prevented the adoption of effective measures. Third, as mentioned, Atambayev's campaign focused mostly on individuals rather than the system in general (Ramani, 2015).

2.5. Jeenbekov's Term

Sooronbay Jeenbekov came to power by defeating 10 other candidates and taking 54 per cent of the total votes in the presidential elections of October 15, 2017 (Freedom House, 2019, p. 1). The elections were generally evaluated as competitive and well organized. However, the inappropriate use of administrative resources to support Jeenbekov, imprisonment of leading opposition figures and cases opened against them earlier in the year have been also pointed out by the international organizations (Freedom House, 2018, p. 4). Moreover, intimidation of voters, including the public sector employees, was also observed and reported (Freedom House, 2019, p. 1).

President Jeenbekov declared that fight against corruption was one of his priorities as Atambayev did (Dzhuraev, 2019, p. 4). He stated that politicians should hear peoples' concern on widespread corruption and underlined that the fight against corruption should be a national matter. In other words, Kyrgyzstan should eradicate corruption from its top offices to its local administrations (Busby, 2018).

In the first days of his presidency, Jeenbekov had to deal with the effects of the Bishkek power station corruption scandal which emerged after an accident at the station in 2018. Thousands of households in the capital city were left without heat for several days in the month of January. A lawsuit was launched against the responsible people and many of whom were punished. First, prime minister Sapar Isakov, whose government could not get a confidence vote in April 2018, was jailed on June 5 of the same year. Besides him, Kubanychbek Kulmatov, who was the mayor of Bishkek between 2014 and 2016, was jailed on the same day. Osmonbek Artykbaev, the energy minister between 2013 and 2014, and Jantoro Satybaldiev, the prime minister between 2012 and 2014, were also arrested on June 18, 2018.

These officials were accused of abusing their political power in the selection process of the contractor for the modernization of the power plant as well as lobbying for the interests of a Chinese company TBEA, the firm which was the winner of the tender (RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service, 2018b).

However, in a short time, Jeenbekov's fight against corruption also turned into an instrument of oppression of the opposition (Dzhuraev, 2019, p. 4). As such, the Bishkek scandal became a tool of Jeenbekov in his own fight against the former president Atambayev (Umarov, 2019). Atambayev had considered Jeenbekov as a reliable political ally who could succeed him. In fact, Jeenbekov had served as the minister of agriculture and the prime minister during the Atambayev era. In the 2017 presidential elections, Atambayev supported Jeenbekov by using state resources. Soon after Jeenbekov's election as the new president however, certain disagreements between these two figures started to become deeper. Atambayev started to criticize Jeenbekov by accusing him with fraud and vote stealing in the presidential elections. As a response, Jeenbekov started to dismiss pro-Atambayev officials from the state apparatus (Umarov, 2019).

However, the real reason behind of the disagreement between Atambayev and Jeenbekov was about the share of the state resources. As mentioned earlier, the network of Atambayev was based on his close party members, friends and advisers. Moreover, he placed those people who were loyal to him to key positions before his term ended as a president. However, Jeenbekov decided to establish his own informal governance network when he came to the power. Unlike his predecessor, he established his network once again on kinship ties. Consequently, these two groups became rivals: on the one side, pro-Atambayev people who wanted to protect the status quo; on the other side, the members of the Jeenbekov clan who wanted to establish control over political power and economic resources (Putz, 2019c).

As mentioned earlier, what Jeenbekov needed in his struggle against the former President Almazbek Atambayev was to opportunity provided to him by the corruption scandal around the Bishkek power station. Investigations eventually

reached to Atambayev. In addition to the Bishkek power station scandal, he was accused of five more crimes between the years of 2011 and 2017, including the illegal acquisition of land in order to build a residential house and helping to the release of the Chechen criminal Aziz Batukayev (Xuequan, 2019).

Jeenbekov launched an operation in order to capture the former president Atambayev on August 7, 2019. However, the operation was a total failure. One of the members of special forces was killed by the supporters of Atambayev and a half a dozen of them was held as hostages overnight. Next day, however, Atambayev was captured by the second operation in his compound. In the process following the operation, Atambayev was faced with other accusations of using violence against the representatives of state authorities, organizing mass unrest, illegal weapons possession, kidnapping and masterminding a murder attempt. According to Orozbek Opumbayev, the head of the State National Security Committee, Atambayev ignored state summons and gave money to the local people in exchange of protection. Moreover, he was planning a coup and he needed a bloody incident to start it (Putz, 2019b).

Another important corruption scandal was revealed by the independent media outlets of RFE/RL's Radio Azattyk, OCCRP and Kloop. This scandal was about the customs services of Kyrgyzstan and included money laundering activities as well as the transfer of US\$700 million out of the country. It has been suggested that high levels of government connections and bribery were necessity to work this kind of corruption. Individuals and families, who were involved in this scandal, launched lawsuits against the media outlets as a result of which the assets of these media corporations were frozen by court decisions. However, when the international discontent increased, the courts withdrew their decision of freezing assets. In the meantime, Jeenbekov maintained his silence arguing that he was doing this so as not to affect the legal process (Putz, 2019d). However, it has been suggested that Jeenbekov's attitude was a signal of protection to his loyalists (Kutmanaliev & Baialieva, 2019).

As was the case in the previous presidential terms, political corruption continued to affect the Kyrgyz people and the political system. In Jeenbekov's era, three noteworthy protests took place in the country against corruption. First, on March 5, 2018, on the day of the Workers of the Judicial System in Kyrgyzstan, at least 200 people gathered in front of the Supreme Court and marched to the parliament in order to protest the corrupt judiciary and politically motivated arrests (RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service, 2018a). The exposure of corruption in the customs services and court decisions for the media outlets caused two other protests. In the first protest a crowd of 1,200 people gathered in central Bishkek on November 25, 2019 in order to demand a reform on the judicial system. (Wood, 2019). In the second protest, around 1,000 people gathered to defend independent media in front of the White House in Bishkek on December 18, 2019 (Kutmanaliev & Baialieva, 2019).

When we make a general evaluation of political corruption in Kyrgyzstan, it is possible to argue that from independence to the present, the issue has always been one of the major problems of the country. At the point reached, politics is under the control of a small group of elites who compete in order to control power and resources. Political parties are just tools for these strong elites rather than mass organizations with clear political programs. Political corruption is widespread and is just another tool for the ruling elite both as a useful to reward for their loyalists and as an effective mechanism to punish opposition figures. The system is not effective in terms of political accountability. Strong politicians are rarely investigated for their questionable wealth. Minorities are excluded from politics. Moreover, media is also divided along ethnic lines and racist articles are common. Being a journalist is dangerous. Finally, judiciary is under influence of the executive branch and corruption is also widespread among judges (Freedom House, 2019).

After the Akayev administration, all succeeding presidents gave promises regarding the fight against widespread corruption in the country. Indeed, several investigations and imprisonments took place through the years as a result of these campaigns, however political corruption continues to be one of the major problems of the

country. One of the main reasons of this failure is related to the fact that during the terms of all presidents, except Roza Otunbayeva, anti-corruption campaigns turned into an instrument of oppression of the opposition in order to preserve the economic wealth and political power of the ruling elite. Naturally, all of their campaigns failed to reduce corruption in the country since the campaigns themselves became politically motivated and corrupt. Second, anti-corruption campaigns targeted individuals rather than the system and none of these presidents implemented the necessary reforms in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the state. After independence, Akayev could not establish an effective political structure which resulted in an ineffective, weak and distrusted state. Third, the structure of the Kyrgyz society makes fight against corruption difficult. Due to the importance of the kinship and clan ties, political corruption has always occurred as in the form of clannism and nepotism in the country. On the one side, politicians gain and preserve their political power and economic wealth through the kinship ties. On the other side, the people get access to economic resources through the clans in the poor regions of the country. So, under these circumstances, clans and kinship ties are indispensable for both the Kyrgyz people and the elites. As Jeenbekov stated, everyone is someone's brother, relative or in-law and that's why when some official or politician is accused of corruption, his people rush to defend him. He underlined that in Kyrgyzstan everybody is against corruption, but in reality, everything works in a different way that involves corruption (Wood, 2019).

The next chapter provides the general framework on the relations between Kyrgyzstan and China and underlines the important points related to the issues of Sinophobia and political corruption which are critical for the purposes of this thesis. As will be elaborated in Chapter 4, political corruption within the framework of the relations between these two countries is one of the main factors contributing to Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan.

CHAPTER 3

THE RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND KYRGYZSTAN

On August 31, 1991, Kyrgyzstan called the international community to recognize its independence by the Declaration of Independence of the Kyrgyz Republic. On December 27, 1991, China became one of the first countries that recognized the sovereignty of the newly independent Kyrgyz Republic (Toktomushev, 2014, p. 99). In May 1992, during an official visit of President Akayev to China, the two countries agreed on conducting relations at an ambassadorial level. Whereas the Chinese Embassy in Bishkek was opened in May 1992, the Kyrgyz Embassy in Beijing started to function on August 31, 1993, at the second anniversary of the independence of Kyrgyzstan (Toktomushev, 2014, p. 100).

Since then, the relations between China and Kyrgyzstan have developing in line with several principles and mutual expectations. According to the Chinese official discourse, China's policies toward the region in general and Kyrgyzstan in particular are based on "The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" which was revealed in 1954.¹⁶ These principles are: "respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence." The core idea of these principles is sovereignty

¹⁶ These principles were jointly revealed by China, India and Myanmar, and guided China's relations with its neighbors since then ("The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence", 2014).

which means that states should not interfere in other states' political, economic and social issues as well as their ways of handling those issues. So, according to China, each state should be considered by its own national conditions. By these principles and the idea of sovereignty, China underlines that it does not look for any hegemony over neighboring countries, and presents itself as a state that does not want to force its will on neighboring countries' internal and external policies (Mariani, 2013, p. 3-4).

After 1991, under the guidance of these principles, China began to develop its relations with the Central Asian countries through the understanding of "good neighborliness", which involves friendly relations, secure environment and assistance for economic development (Kassenova, 2009, p. 11). According to the concept of "the harmonious society", which was developed by the China's former President Hu Jintao, security and development are intertwined concepts which means that a stable and secure environment is a necessity for development. Furthermore, without development, states cannot ensure stability and security. In this regard, the issues of security and economic development of the region countries have always been priorities of the Chinese foreign policy makers, especially regarding the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Mariani, 2013, p. 4).

On the other hand, Kyrgyz foreign policy is based on the concept of multivector foreign policy which was introduced by Akayev. The concept emphasizes the importance of stability and security in Central Asia, and friendly relations with neighboring countries as well as outside powers from the West and the East. According to the concept, Kyrgyzstan should converge interests of foreign powers such as China, Russia and the United States for its own benefit (Toktomushev, 2014, p. 121). Thus, stability and avoiding excessive dependence to foreign powers became cornerstones of the Kyrgyz foreign policy (Kuchins et al., 2015, p. 1). Since then, Kyrgyzstan maintains a relatively passive foreign policy and tries to balance competing interests of outside powers and neighboring countries in the pursuit of stability and security (Kuchins et al., 2015, p. 4).

In this regard, the non-interference approach of China was seen as a stabilization factor and was welcomed by Kyrgyzstan as well as other Central Asian countries (Jarosiewicz & Strachota, 2013, p. 14), especially because they believed that Russia and the United States were trying to impose their wills in the region. For instance, the Central Asian political elites accused the United States for the Tulip Revolution and Russia for the 2010 Revolution (Jarosiewicz & Strachota, 2013, p. 26). In fact, the Kyrgyz ruling elite established closer relations with China after the Tulip Revolution (Toktomushev, 2014, p. 106). As expressed by the Kyrgyz officials, they prefer China as a partner over Russia and the United States due to China's attitude of "not dictating" (Kuchins et al., 2015, p. 17).¹⁷

In this chapter, the purpose is to give an overview of the Chinese-Kyrgyz relations, which is based on stability and security through economic development, as well as those factors that provide appropriate environment for political corruption and Sinophobia in the Kyrgyz Republic. In this regard, the relations between these two countries are presented in four sections. In the first section, the border security and delimitation issues are evaluated. In the second section, the regional security issues and the Uyghur issue are examined. In the third section, Chinese economic activities in Kyrgyzstan in the fields of trade and foreign direct investment, and the Chinese merchant and labor migration into Kyrgyzstan are analyzed. In the fourth section, China's cultural soft power policies that aim to diminish the perception of Chinese threat among the Kyrgyz people are presented.

3.1. The Border Security and Delimitation

As mentioned earlier, when the Soviet Union collapsed and the Central Asian states became independent in 1991, the initial priority of China was border security and delimitation which led to establishment of the Shanghai Five in April 1996 by China,

¹⁷ As will be elaborated in the next chapter, in the aim of avoiding excessive dependence to foreign powers, China-Kyrgyzstan relations resulted in China's leverage over Kyrgyzstan due to the enthusiastic attitude of the Kyrgyz leaders who used China's financial and investment capacity both as a source of personal enrichment and a way to patch the state budget (Toktomushev, 2014, p. 117).

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. One of the main goals of this organization was to secure borders and solve the border disputes (Kassenova, 2009, p. 11).

In the issue of border security, in 1996 and 1997, all sides agreed on the establishment of confidence in the border areas and reduction of troops within the range of 100 km on both sides of borders (Cheng, 2011, p. 635). In fact, the agreement, which was about the reduction of troops, was the first border disarmament agreement in the Asia-Pacific region (Sun, 2007, p. 54). Besides the Shanghai Five, between the years of 1991 and 1997, China and the Central Asian countries signed important bilateral agreements on the issue of security. Both sides agreed on not involving in hostile actions directed against the other parties and not allowing third countries use to their territories threatening each others' sovereignty and security interests (Cheng, 2011, p. 634).

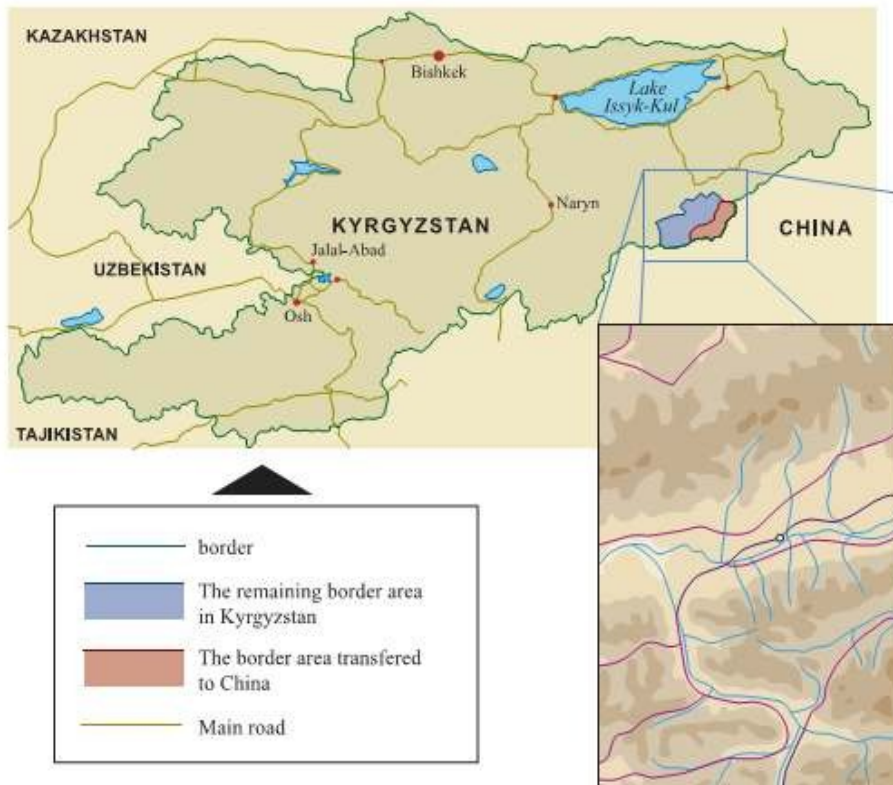
In the issue of border delimitation, China viewed the issue as one of the important components of its foreign policy toward Central Asia (Cheng, 2011, p. 635). However, agreements on the border disputes took several years since the Central Asian governments were afraid of their own people's potential negative reactions to possible solutions (Jarosiewicz & Strachota, 2013, p. 18). The issue of border disputes goes back to the latter half of the 19th century when the Russian Empire and the Qing Dynasty signed several agreements to determine borders between the Turkestan Governor-Generalship and China without any involvement of the Turkic people of the region. However, the descriptions of border delimitation were vague due to the ignorance of the people back then who prepared the agreements about the complicated landscape of the region. This situation resulted in de-facto borders between the Soviet Union and China. These de-facto borders were not a problem for both sides until the mid-1950s when the relations between China and the Soviet Union started to become tense (Kerimbekova & Galitskiy, 2002). During the 1960s, the Soviet Union was making broadcasts across the Chinese border that extolled the Soviet Union in Uyghur language through the radio Free Sinkiang (Xinjiang).

Moreover, the Soviets were involved in an anti-Chinese propaganda throughout the Central Asian region which greatly shaped the perceptions of the local people about China and the Chinese people. Consequently, China started to worry about its territorial integrity and began to militarize the Xinjiang province (Owen, 2017, p. 107-108).

The two countries started to organize meetings in order to discuss the border issue in 1964 and determined 25 disputed areas, five of which were in the Kyrgyz border. China and the Soviets discussed the issue over 20 years and could not agree on anything until 1987. In that year the two sides agreed on the border demarcation according to “international law, mutual understanding and readiness to mutual concessions” (Kerimbekova & Galitskiy, 2002). When Kyrgyzstan gained its independence and started its own negotiations with China on the issue of border demarcation, the Kyrgyz leadership accepted these principles as early as May 1992. Between the years of 1992 and 1996, the two countries reached an agreement on four disputed areas out of five. The Kyrgyz diplomats managed to increase their lands four times at the Khan-Tengri Peak and could continue to hold the Victory Peak in their lands. Other two disputed areas were also resolved with mutual population exchange between the two countries’ citizens. On July 4, 1996, Kyrgyz President Akayev and Chinese President Jiang Zemin signed an agreement on the border between the two countries (Kerimbekova & Galitskiy, 2002). According to this agreement, the sides agreed on the transfer of 30,000 hectares of land from Kyrgyzstan to China (Dwivedi, 2006, p. 147) and to postpone the issue of the status of the fifth disputed area, the west of the Bedel Pass. The status of this area was solved three years later with another agreement, which was signed on August 26, 1999 by the same presidents (Kerimbekova & Galitskiy, 2002). According to this agreement, Kyrgyzstan gave an additional 90,000 hectares of land from the regions of Naryn and Issyk-Kul, including the river in the Bedel area. By taking these lands, China gained an access to a watershed and glacier water resources, which was very important for water starved China (Omuralieva, 2014, p. 57). While the first agreement was approved by the Kyrgyz parliament in 1998 and the second one was

approved in 2002 (Dwivedi, 2006, p. 147), Beijing and Bishkek eventually could end a dispute that lasted around 150 years (Kerimbekova & Galitskiy, 2002). Table 1 shows those territories given to China.

Table 1: Territory that was given to China (Omuralieva, 2014, p. 57)



From the perspective of China, the Shanghai Five achieved its initial purposes of securing borders and settling down the border disputes (Azarkan, 2010, p. 397). However, from the perspective of Kyrgyzstan, these agreements resulted in rise of political tensions in the country. Although Kyrgyzstan received 70 per cent of the disputed areas (Kerimbekova & Galitskiy, 2002), and the Kyrgyz authorities and experts tried to enlighten the people about the historical background and solution of the border disputes through the media, these agreements were not welcomed by the Kyrgyz people and caused the Askya events in 2002 (Omuralieva, 2014, p. 58-59). As will be elaborated in the fourth chapter, this showed that the fear of China among

the people could result in public protests due to the country's clientelistic political system.

3.2. The Regional Security and the Uyghur Issue

When the Central Asian states became independent in 1991, the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) believed that the security vacuum in Central Asia, which emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the ongoing war in Afghanistan could result in rise of the radical Islam in the region. Such a development in the region could become a danger for the stability of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, which had already become a potential political problem for China (Cheng, 2011, p. 634). Thus, after the solution of border disputes and border security, China began to focus on other security issues which are religious extremists and the Uyghur separatist movements (Kassenova, 2009, p. 11). From the Chinese perspective, such issues also necessitated collaboration with the Central Asian countries (Doyon, 2011, p. 3).

Indeed, that was the case as the Central Asian republics also have common security concerns with China regarding terrorist activities of Islamist extremists and Uyghur separatists in the region. Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan suffered from Islamist terrorism during the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s. While Tashkent witnessed terrorist attacks of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in the years of 1999, 2004 and 2005, Bishkek and Osh witnessed similar attacks in the years of 2002 and 2003, respectively (Bolonina, 2019, p. 14). Besides, Afghanistan has always been a source of instability and insecurity for the Central Asian states for decades since the country is center of "militant Islam" and it provides shelter and opportunities of cooperation to the Islamic terror organizations that operate both in Central Asia and China. Among these organizations there are the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Islamic Jihad Union, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement and the Turkestan Islamic Party (Jarosiewicz & Strachota, 2013, p. 11). Thus, the Central Asian states shared China's fundamental security concerns regarding the religious extremists and the Uyghur separatists (Jarosiewicz & Strachota, 2013, p. 28), and actively

participated to the formulation of regional security policies (Jarosiewicz & Strachota, 2013, p. 18).

In this regard, upon the suggestion of China, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was established in Shanghai on June 15, 2001 by the Shanghai Five countries and with the inclusion of Uzbekistan (Cheng, 2011, p. 637). The SCO had the purpose of fighting the “three evils”, which are terrorism, separatism and extremism, and it became one of the first organizations that fights against these issues. On the same day, presidents of the six countries concluded the “Shanghai Convention on the Combat of Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism” (Sun, 2007, p. 58) which underlined cooperation on issues such as mutual trust, good neighborliness, and regional security, stability and peace (Azarkan, 2010, p. 396), and defined the three evils clearly for the first time in the international arena (Sun, 2007, p. 58). In 2003, the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) has been established under the SCO umbrella with the purpose of fighting these three evils (Azarkan, 2010, p. 405). The armed forces of the SCO countries exercised the first multilateral military operation in August 2003. Until 2018, 24 military drills were held among the SCO countries, including 8 naval drills and 2 anti-cyber terrorism military drills (“A quick guide to SCO”, 2018). However, when it comes to promotion of the military security, the SCO has been a very passive organization because of the mutual suspicions of the Russia and China against each other (Swanström, 2015, p. 6).

With the solution of border disputes and the foundation of the SCO, relations between China and the Central Asian states evolved into protecting the well-established “status quo” in the region. The Chinese authorities maintained their non-interference approach and did not take any political stance which could raise political concerns in the region (Jarosiewicz & Strachota, 2013, p. 28). In return, the Central Asian states did not allow any tensions based on the Uyghur issue and suppressed the anti-Chinese Uyghur organizations in spite of the presence of significant number of the Uyghurs in the region¹⁸ and support from the public to the

Uyghur cause, especially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (Jarosiewicz & Strachota, 2013, p. 18-19). Indeed, Kyrgyzstan is a home for more than 50 thousand Uyghur people who mainly live in southern part of the country, near the city of Osh. Several Uyghur organizations including the Uyghur Freedom Organization and the Kyrgyzstan Uyghur Association (*Ittipak*) operating in the country (Research Directorate of the IRB, 2013) have been kept under close watch. Despite that and although most of these organizations are working for the Uyghur cause in a peaceful way, several violent incidents have happened in Kyrgyzstan throughout the years. In 2002, a Chinese diplomat was assassinated in the capital Bishkek. In 2004, two Chinese authorities were killed during their visit to Kyrgyzstan (Chung, 2004, p. 1000).

Regardless of such problems and tensions however, both Chinese and Kyrgyz leaders are aware of the necessity of establishing good relations. Kyrgyzstan has always been strategically important in the issue of security for China due to its geographic position as it is an entry point to the Xinjiang region. As one Chinese scholar suggested “a threat for Kyrgyzstan is also a threat for the Xinjiang” (Bassan, 2011, p. 11). In this regard, China-Kyrgyzstan security relations developed both at the multilateral and bilateral levels. At the multilateral level, the SCO was also welcomed by the Kyrgyz leadership as they saw the organization as an opportunity to secure domestic regime stability. Moreover, the SCO provided Kyrgyzstan an opportunity to balance ambitions of China and Russia under the roof of the organization (Toktomushev, 2014, p. 157-158).

At the bilateral level, China and Kyrgyzstan signed agreements on joint law enforcement operations, police training, and intelligence sharing until 2004 (Weitz, 2008, p. 55) and exercised bilateral military operation in 2002 even before the RATS’ multilateral military exercises (Swanström, 2015, p. 8). Moreover, China has supplied military aid, training and technical help during many years. In 2008, for

¹⁸ Central Asia is a home for at least 300 thousand Uyghurs (Khan & Javaid, 2018, p. 160).

example, the Kyrgyz agency that is responsible from the border security received computers and motor vehicles (Scobell et al., 2014, p. 41). In 2014, China provided 100 million RMB¹⁹ military aid to the Kyrgyz armed forces and new apartment buildings to the officers (Swanström, 2015, p. 7). From the beginning of 2000s, Kyrgyzstan has been sending officers to China in increasing numbers with the purpose of getting a military training (Scobell et al., 2014, p. 41). In return, the Kyrgyz authorities have always supported the Chinese view regarding the Uyghur separatists as “terrorists” since the mid-1990s (Omuralieva, 2014, p. 68) and deported many of these alleged terrorists (Tian, 2018, p. 27). In addition, some of the Uyghur organizations were closed (Chung, 2004, p. 999).

The bilateral relations of China and Kyrgyzstan eventually reached the “comprehensive strategic level”²⁰ in the year of 2018, the year which was the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations. In accordance with this, both sides agreed on improving their cooperation in the issues of intelligence sharing and fight against terrorism, extremism and separatism including the East Turkestan Islamic Movement. Regarding this new level, President Jeenbekov stated that “Kyrgyzstan has been and will continue to be a most reliable neighbor, partner, and friend of China.” (Yan, 2018).

¹⁹ RMB (renminbi) is the official currency of China.

²⁰ After the Cold War, Chinese foreign policy makers developed the concept of “partnership” (Zhongping & Jing, 2014, p. 7). Through the years many partnership types emerged and one of them is comprehensive strategic partnership (Li, 2012, p. 59). Although this category does not have a clear definition and stay unexplored by academic circles, China’s former premier Wen Jiabao defined the meaning of “comprehensive strategic partnership” during his European trip in 2004 by referring to the Sino-European Union comprehensive strategic partnership. According to this definition, first, “comprehensive” refers to all-dimensional, wide-ranging and multi-layered cooperation at both bilateral and multilateral levels in the fields of economy, science, technology, politics and culture. Second, “strategic” refers to long-term and stable cooperation. Third, “partnership” refers to equal-footed, mutually beneficial and win-win cooperation. However, in practice partnerships differentiate and the meaning of concept changes over time (Zhongping & Jing, 2014, p. 7-8).

3.3. The Economic Relations and the Chinese Migration

As mentioned earlier, in line with the concept of “the harmonious society”, economic development of the Central Asian countries has always been a priority of the Chinese foreign policy makers in order to create a secure and stable environment for the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. From the point of view of Chinese leaders, if they can provide economic conditions that meet needs of the people of the region, radical and extremist movements cannot find an environment in which they can spread (Bolonina, 2019, p. 15). In this regard, trade between the Central Asian countries and China was considered to be very important for the Xinjiang economy (Jarosiewicz & Strachota, 2013, p. 31). Likewise, economic development of the Central Asian countries was seen as vital for the provision of prosperity and stability in Xinjiang (Mehta, 2018, p. 7), a region that has always remained underdeveloped.²¹

In order to achieve its economic development and stability purposes in the region, China conducted its economic relations with the regional countries both at the multilateral and bilateral levels. At the multilateral level, China has used the SCO as an economic cooperation instrument for its relations with the Central Asian countries (Cheng, 2011, p. 647). On September 14, 2001, all six members of the SCO signed “the Memorandum between the Governments of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on the Basic Objectives and Orientation of Regional Economic Cooperation and the Launching of a Process of Trade and Investment Facilitation” in Almaty. In 2002, economic mechanisms of the organization were established and began to operate in trade, investment, transportation, energy and other several sectors (Sun, 2007, p. 59). However, the

²¹ The western provinces of China, including the Xinjiang, have always remained underdeveloped due to Sinocentric policies of the CPC and their distance to sea trading routes. This situation created significant income differences between the Western and the coastal provinces (Mehta, 2018, p. 11). In order to develop the Western part of the country, the “Go West” campaign was launched by the CPC in 2001 (Scobell et al., 2014, p. 15). However, the income difference is still vast. In the year of 2017, the Xinjiang’s average GDP per capita was US\$7,194 whereas the Beijing’s was US\$20,356 (Mehta, 2018, p. 11).

SCO has never turned into an effective economic cooperation organization in the long run because of Russia's resistance. Thus, China decided to improve its economic relations through bilateral relations with the Central Asian states (Jarosiewicz & Strachota, 2013, p. 68).

At this level, China had already been providing small loans and grants to the newly independent states during the 1990s. By the beginning of the new millennium, China started to focus on financing and construction of infrastructure projects, and this focus reached its peak level in 2013, when Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)²² as well as a US\$48 billion worth investment and loan agreements mainly for the energy, trade and infrastructure sectors in Central Asia under the BRI umbrella (Bossuyt, 2019, p. 11) while Kyrgyzstan received US\$3 billion worth of soft loan (Horta, 2013). The CPC prioritized infrastructure investments since the beginning of 2000s for several reasons. First, because of increased competition on energy sources around the world and instability in the Middle East, China started to see Central Asia as the "new storehouse" for the energy resources and began to make investments to infrastructure projects in the region in order to diversify and secure its energy supplies (Bassan, 2011, p. 11). Second, China has production surplus, especially in the steel industry. They manage this production surplus by infrastructure projects and one of the locations for these projects is the region of Central Asia (Bolonina, 2019, p. 5). Third, China creates economic bonds between the Central Asian countries and the Xinjiang province by roads and pipelines (International Crisis Group, 2013, p. 4).

Chinese economic initiatives and advancement in the region were welcomed by the ruling elites of the Central Asian countries (Bolonina, 2019, p. 4) for two reasons.

²² The Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to connect Asia, Europe and Africa through five routes including connection of China to the Middle East through Central Asia (HKTDC Research, 2016, p. 1), is the single largest investment project in the history with its estimated total cost between US\$1.4 trillion to US\$8 trillion. Almost US\$1 trillion of the total amount will come from the China Development Bank (Swanström & Nyrén, 2017, p. 1). This project is presented as one which will increase economic growth, and private enterprise and employment (Bossuyt, 2019, p. 11). However, so far it has not produced such a result in Kyrgyzstan, especially in terms of creating employment.

First, Chinese development assistance does not involve any political conditions or requests in issues such as good governance, human rights performance and environmental issues as is the case for the European Union or other Western donors. Second, Chinese economic assistance gives quick and effective results which improves infrastructure facilities and quality of people's daily life (Bossuyt, 2019, p. 17).

In Chinese economic policies toward Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan stand out with two roles, even though developments in trade and infrastructure between China and Kazakhstan has weakened the role of Kyrgyzstan (Jarosiewicz & Strachota, 2013, p. 32). First, its geographic location makes the Kyrgyz Republic entrance port for the Uzbek and Turkmen oil to China (Bassan, 2011, p. 11). Second, Kyrgyzstan's early membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO) provided trade advantage with China and thus, the country became a regional hub for redistribution of Chinese goods (Jarosiewicz & Strachota, 2013, p. 61).

The economic relations of China and Kyrgyzstan developed around the fields of trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) (Laitinen, 2018, p. 52). After the independence of Kyrgyzstan, China established trade relations with this country since its geographic location makes it the fastest route to export Chinese goods to other Central Asian countries and Russia. The trade between China and Kyrgyzstan rapidly developed after their becoming members to the World Trade Organization in the years of 2001 and 1998 respectively (Omuralieva, 2014, p. 80-81). While the bilateral trade volume was just US\$35,84 million in 1992 (Kassenova, 2009, p. 11), it reached the level of US\$5,65 billion in the year of 2013 and started to constitute approximately half of the total Kyrgyz trade (Kuchins et al., 2015, p. 17).

The increased trade with China put an end to the Soviet economic heritage in Kyrgyzstan with an economic base built on agriculture and some industry. The Kyrgyz economy is now transformed into a more service and export oriented one (Toktomushev, 2014, p. 114-115). Two of the largest retail markets of Central Asia, which are Dordoi and Karasuu Bazaars, have been established in the Kyrgyz cities

of Bishkek and Osh respectively (Toktomushev, 2014, p. 116). In Dordoi Bazaar, Chinese goods constitute 75 per cent of total goods whereas in Karasuu Bazaar 85 per cent of goods are from China (Rickleton, 2011). These Chinese goods come to these bazaars to be sold to the Russia and other Central Asian countries (Toktomushev, 2014, p. 116). In 2008, the Dordoi Bazaar's annual turnover almost reached worth of US\$3 billion and provided job opportunities to around 55,000 people, whereas the annual turnover of the Karasuu Bazaar reached worth of US\$684 million (Pomfret, 2019, p. 173). However, there is no way to estimate the real annual turnover in those bazaars because of the non-transparent trade relations with China and its contribution to the shadow economy in Kyrgyzstan (Toktomushev, 2014, p. 116).

In the field of FDI, the economic relations between China and Kyrgyzstan began with small loans and grants which were given by China during the 1990s and the 2000s. For instance, between the years of 2000 and 2004, Kyrgyzstan received around US\$9 million worth of technical assistance from China (Omuralieva, 2014, p. 89). These economic contributions, including the soft loans,²³ reached enormous levels after 2011, and by the announcement of the BRI in 2013, it reached its peak level. In the years between 2011 and 2017, China committed US\$4,1 billion direct investment to Kyrgyzstan (Mogilevskii, 2019, p. 11). These multi-billion dollar investments took place especially in the energy sector (Taldybayeva, 2016). For instance, the Datka-Kemin transmission line was financed by Chinese Eximbank loan of US\$390 million and constructed by the Chinese firm TBEA between the years 2012 and 2015. The project saved Kyrgyzstan being dependent to Uzbekistan for transmission of electricity from one corner of the country to other one because of the old Soviet infrastrucute (Putz, 2015). Another example is the reconstruction of the Bishkek Power Station, which was constructed by the Chinese company

²³ The loans that Central Asian states receive are often called as soft loans. The difference between hard and soft loans are their terms of payment and interest rates. The soft loans provide more flexible payment terms and lower interest rates in comparison with the hard loans (Gurbanmyradova, 2015, p. 35).

TBEA with a cost of US\$386 million (Taldybayeva, 2016), although as mentioned earlier, resulted in a corruption scandal.

Besides the sector of electricity, China has been assisting the construction of mobile and internet networks, Osh-Batken-Isfana highway, oil refineries, school and hospital buildings (Bossuyt, 2019, p. 13), and gold mining (Taldybayeva, 2016). While the annual production level makes the Kyrgyz Republic 18th biggest producer of gold, its gold reserves makes the country 13th in the world. Naturally, this richness in mines of gold attracts the attention of China. In 2011, two Chinese companies began their operations in the country. While the Zijing Mining, one of the leading Chinese mining company, purchased a mine in Talas province in Taldy-Bulak region for US\$660 million, the Chinese Full Gold Mine Company began its operations at the Ishtamberdy mine in the Jalal-Abad province (Omuralieva, 2014, p. 90-91).

As for the Kyrgyz authorities, they have always seen China as one of the main donors of the country and actively supported the Chinese economic activities (Omuralieva, 2014, p. 91). When the BRI was announced, the Kyrgyz authorities welcomed the initiative and claimed that Chinese funds under the BRI umbrella will contribute to the prosperity of Kyrgyzstan (Frolovskiy, 2016). In 2017, President Atambayev underlined that the BRI would bring new economic opportunities into the region (Putz, 2017b). Moreover, in the year 2019, China and Kyrgyzstan agreed on cooperation in order to develop common aspects of the BRI and Kyrgyzstan's National Development Strategy 2018-2040²⁴ (Xiang, 2019).

However, developments in the fields of trade and investment resulted in an unregulated migration flow from China to Kyrgyzstan which took place throughout the 1990s and the 2000s (Garibov, 2018, p. 144). On the one hand, throughout the 1990s there was the merchant flow (Sadovskaya & Utyasheva, 2018, p. 114). The

²⁴ The development strategy that was launched on November 1, 2018 and aims the creation of "politically stable, economically strong and socially responsible state" ("National Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2018-2040", 2018, p. 3).

population of merchants from China residing in Kyrgyzstan reached around 10,000 people by the mid-2000s and began to dominate the bazaars in Kyrgyzstan. For instance, Chinese merchants started to constitute one-fourth of the all merchants of the Karasuu Bazaar (Marat, 2008). On the other hand, the Han Chinese labor migration started after the year 2000 (Sadovskaya & Utyasheva, 2018, p. 115) and their numbers reached enormous levels when China became one of the main investors and creditors of the region, after the global financial crisis of 2008 and 2009 (Garibov, 2018, p. 144).

The Kyrgyz authorities decided to limit labor migration and set a quota of 13,000 for new foreign workers in 2010 while 70 per cent of the quota was claimed by the Chinese citizens. In the following years, the quota for new foreign workers remained at the same level however, the percentage that was given to the Chinese citizens increased to 80 per cent in 2015 and 85 per cent in 2016. Thus, the ratio of Chinese workers in total foreign workers reached the level of 77 per cent in 2016 whereas it was 67.8 per cent in 2013 (Garibov, 2018, p. 146). However, the Kyrgyz state's weak border control and unregulated visa processes resulted in huge numbers of illegal border crossings from China (Steiner, 2013, p. 35). This situation makes it difficult to estimate real numbers of the Chinese permanently living in Kyrgyzstan. In 2014, the Kyrgyz migration authorities expressed that around 28,000 Chinese people were living in the country. However, they later admitted that this number might be around 40,000. On the other hand, the Chinese Embassy in Bishkek claimed that around 20,000 Chinese permanently live in Kyrgyzstan. However, independent groups in Kyrgyzstan give different numbers on Chinese immigrants in the country. While some of them suggest that around 50,000 Chinese citizens are living in the country, others with a more nationalistic attitude claim that approximately 300,000 illegal immigrants came from China (Garibov, 2018, p. 146).

3.4. The Cultural Soft Power

The rapid development of China in economic and military fields resulted in an increasing perception of the Chinese threat, especially in the neighboring countries.

In order to prevent such a perception and improve the image of China, the CPC and the Chinese academicians started to focus on the soft power concept (Gurbanmyradova, 2015, p. 14).

During the 1990s, Chinese scholars and policy makers developed Chinese understanding of soft power according to Joseph Nye's "simple dichotomy of defining coercive power as hard power while attractive power as soft power" which underlines the role of culture in post-Cold War international relations. In 1993, with the publication of Wang Huning's²⁵ "Culture as National Power: Soft Power", culture became main source of the soft power. In the following years, Chinese scholars increasingly started to use the term "cultural soft power" instead of soft power. Eventually, "cultural soft power" was included in the official state document in 2007, which is known as the report of the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China (Wu, 2018, p. 764).

In defining cultural soft power, the traditional Chinese culture emerged as a valuable source for Chinese scholars for several reasons. First, this culture underlines "gaining respects through virtue" and "giving priority to human beings". According to the Analects of Confucius (*Lunyu*), the rule should rely on moral rather than physical force. In other words, benevolent governance (*Wangdao*) should be the ruling way instead of hegemonic governance (*Badao*). Second, the traditional Chinese culture also underlines "the value of equilibrium" in Chinese thinking and statecraft by the concept of Golden Mean (*Zhongyong*). By the wisdom of this concept, the Chinese authorities could develop an "intellectual capacity to approach major international issues in a balanced way" and contribute to stability and prosperity in the world. These values of the traditional Chinese culture emphasize "the inclusiveness of Chinese soft power" in the era of cultural diversification and globalization (Wu, 2018, p. 766). Thus, the traditional Chinese culture, which is about "the benevolent governance, peace and harmony, and respect for differences",

²⁵ A Chinese scholar and politician who was then professor at Fudan University and now serves as a head of the China Central Policy Research Office.

became main corner of the Chinese cultural soft power (Gurbanmyradova, 2015, p. 15).

Wang Huning defined culture as a power that can influence other countries' public (Wu, 2018, p. 765). To that end, China significantly improved its cultural soft power after 2010 by the internationalized Chinese media outlets, cultural and educational exchange programs, and Confucius Institutes in order to spread the Chinese culture (Gurbanmyradova, 2015, p. 16-17). With these attempts, the country aimed to provide a solution to the problem of lack of information on Chinese culture and traditions around the world in general, and Central Asia and Kyrgyzstan in particular. For instance, according to a survey carried out in 2012, only 9 per cent of the Kyrgyz population was familiar with the Chinese culture and history (Garibov, 2018, p. 151).

China's cultural soft power in Central Asian countries began to develop through the framework of the SCO. On August 16, 2007, the member states signed the "Intergovernmental Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Culture" and began to organize events for more cultural interaction in the region (Wu, 2018, p. 772). Moreover, upon the suggestion of Russian President Vladimir Putin, the SCO University was established, which now works as a network between the member states' universities, with the aim of cultural and educational exchange ("The SCO University", 2014). In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared that China will provide scholarships to 30,000 students from the SCO member states in the next ten years (Kennedy, 2016, p. 33). As of 2018, more than 20 Chinese universities became a part of this network (Wu, 2018, p. 772).

Besides the SCO framework, China promotes its culture also through the Confucius Institutes in Central Asia. As of 2019, China has thirteen Confucius Institutes in these countries (Aliyev, 2019b). The goal of these institutions is "winning the hearts and minds" of Central Asians by teaching the Chinese culture and traditions as well as the Chinese language (Nursha, 2018, p. 139). However, Islamic culture, Russian cultural influence and the local folk traditions leave a very limited space for the Chinese culture and traditions in Central Asia (Kennedy, 2016, p. 43). As a result, the

imbalance between the Chinese economic presence and the soft power is continued. There are only few think tanks and research centers on China in Central Asia and the people still do not know much about China. As one Chinese scholar suggested, China has to work harder to create a favorable image in the region (Vakulchuk & Overland, 2019, p. 118).

In Kyrgyzstan, the overall situation and impact of the China's cultural soft power are no different from rest of the Central Asia. China promotes its culture in the country via educational exchange programs and Confucius Institutes. In 2013, Kyrgyz students who studied in China reached 2,000 whereas 1,000 Chinese students came to Kyrgyzstan to study (Vakulchuk & Overland, 2019, p. 123). Also, China opened four Confucius Institutes in the country (Aliyev, 2019b). However, according to a field study conducted in Bishkek in 2017, the Kyrgyz students who attend Confucius Institutes' classes want to learn the Chinese language but not the Chinese culture and tradition (Nursha, 2018, p. 139). In Kyrgyzstan, because of the fear among the people on the potential flood of Chinese immigrants, the perception of the people toward China's cultural expansion is also generally negative (Vakulchuk & Overland, 2019, p. 123).

China began to its relations with the Central Asian countries with the motivation of securing stability of the region and the Xinjiang province by economic development. In this regard, Kyrgyzstan became one of the major partners of China in both fields of security and economy in the region due to its strategically important geographic location and membership to the WTO. While economic relations were developing through trade and foreign direct investments, China tried to present itself as a good friendly neighbor by "not dictating" attitude and the cultural soft power policies. However, certain issues of the relations of China and Kyrgyzstan, such as the border disputes, the Uyghur issue, the increasing Chinese economic presence and the Chinese labor migration, resulted in discontent among the Kyrgyz people and contributed to rise of Sinophobia along with several other reasons as will be elaborated in the next chapter. The role of political corruption in China-Kyrgyzstan

relations and rising Sinophobia will also be analyzed by referring to the impact of political corruption in anti-Chinese public demonstrations in Kyrgyzstan.

CHAPTER 4

POLITICAL CORRUPTION AND SINOPHOBIA

Although China became one of the main partners of the Central Asian countries in the issues of security and economy, the “Chinese question” also caused public discontent in political lives of the Central Asian countries, especially Kyrgyzstan. According to many surveys carried out in this country between the years of 2006 and 2016, the Kyrgyz people perceive China as a “challenge” (Peyrouse, 2016, p. 18).

This perception is fed by several issues which are connected to both the relations between China and Kyrgyzstan and political corruption. This chapter, which has two parts, aims to understand rising Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan and the role of political corruption in this phenomenon. In the first part, the reasons of Sinophobia among the Kyrgyz people are presented under four topics which are closely related with each other. These topics are lack of sufficient knowledge on China; immense economic and demographic differences between China and Kyrgyzstan; increasing Chinese economic presence and migration; and cultural and religious differences. In the second part, in order to understand the role of political corruption in rising Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan, first, political corruption in economic relations with China is presented. Then, the impact of political corruption in anti-Chinese public demonstrations in Kyrgyzstan is analyzed.

4.1. The Reasons of Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan

On August 30, 2016, a car bombing targeted the Chinese Embassy in Bishkek, as a result of which only the Uyghur driver of the car who had a Tajik passport died (Putz, 2017c). While the East Turkestan Islamic Movement have been accused for the attack by the Kyrgyz authorities, this event also raised questions on anti-Chinese sentiment in Kyrgyzstan (Swanström & Nyrén, 2017, p. 1). Although the issue of Sinophobia seems to increase in this country only in recent years, in fact, this phenomenon has always existed among the Kyrgyz people. In this part of the chapter, both the long-standing and recently emerged reasons of this Sinophobia are analyzed.

4.1.1. Lack of Sufficient Knowledge on China

The first main reason of Sinophobia among the Kyrgyz people is the lack of sufficient knowledge on China's foreign policy goals, its cultural values and way of life (Owen, 2017, p. 111), and China's economic activities in general and the BRI in particular (Vakulchuk & Overland, 2019, p. 118). There are several reasons of this situation and the first one is the Kyrgyz perception toward China which was shaped by the local Kyrgyz traditions, the attitude of the Soviet administration and Chinese immigrants' choice of self-exclusion from the Central Asian societies. Centuries-old oral epics of the Kyrgyz have always presented China as the enemy of the Turkic people as well as the historical opponent of Islam (Peyrouse, 2016, p. 14). This perception of the Kyrgyz people was strengthened by the Soviets, especially after 1960 in line with two issues. First, as mentioned earlier, upon the border disputes with China, the Soviet Union made an anti-Chinese propaganda regarding the Uyghur issue which negatively shaped views of the Central Asian people. For instance, during the 1960s, the Soviet press in Central Asia was making propaganda about "the happy life of the Uyghurs" in the Soviet Union by comparing them with the Uyghurs in China (Owen, 2017, p. 107). Second, the Soviet education system has taught Central Asian youth to fear the Chinese for years (Tian, 2018, p. 29). As indicated in an interview series with Uyghur immigrants who migrated from China to the Soviet Central Asia during the 1960s and the 1970s, there was an

“atmosphere of extreme Sinophobia” in the region. The interviewees suggested that they were afraid of Chinese invasion. One of them said that at the school, they were praying for Brezhnev²⁶ would not die so that he could lead them in the war against China. The same interviewee also suggested that, during the 1980s, as college students they were singing songs on killing Chinese soldiers although it was just for drinking games (Nazarova, 2020).²⁷ The impact of these oral epics, propaganda and education is still valid in the minds of the Kyrgyz people (Vakulchuk & Overland, 2019, p. 118) and causes biased information and a prejudiced attitude toward China and the Chinese people. For instance, one popular Kyrgyz saying that is still widespread among the people says that “When the black-haired Chinese turns up, the ginger-bearded Russian will become dearer than your own father.” (Owen, 2017, p. 103).²⁸ In addition to the local Kyrgyz traditions and the attitude of the Soviet administration, Chinese immigrants’ choice of self-exclusion from the Central Asia societies, their speaking only Chinese and keeping their connection with the locals at a minimal level (Owen, 2017, p. 111) also contributed to bias and prejudice among the Kyrgyz. Moreover, the Kyrgyz mass media regularly serves news about how some parts of Bishkek are rapidly turning into “Chinatowns” (Alff, 2016, p. 13). The Kyrgyz people see these Chinese ghettos as a reason of increased criminality in the urban zones (Peyrouse, 2016, p. 21).

The second reason of the lack of sufficient knowledge on China among the Kyrgyz people is the failure of China’s policy of “people-to-people bonds” which is one of

²⁶ Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev was the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union between 1964-1982.

²⁷ English translation of one of these songs: “One hundred Chinese regiments approaching me/Well, let them draw near, my machine gun is ready/I pull the trigger, and all the Chinese will be dead/You can drink a small glass or you can drink even five/A Hunweibin (from Chinese *hongweibing*, which means “red guards”) is coming at me from the bushes/Well, let him come, I have a carbine/I pull the trigger [and the bullet will go] into the hunweibin’s ribs/You can drink a small shot or you can drink a bucket” (Nazarova, 2020).

²⁸ It has been suggested that the Kyrgyz are one of the most Russified nations in the post-Soviet era since the impact of Russian language and culture is still strong in the country. For instance, Russian is an official language of the country along with the Kyrgyz language. Also, Russian visual and written media are widely consumed by the Kyrgyz people (Owen, 2018, p. 463).

the five major goals of the Belt and Road Initiative. President Xi Jinping, in his speech at the World Economic Forum in 2017, underlined the importance of the human factor in development by stating that “Development is of the people, by the people, and for the people”. This policy aims to realize mutual political trust, cultural exchanges and peaceful co-existence of different civilizations. (Sadovskaya & Utyasheva, 2018, p. 109). However, the policy of people-to-people bonds failed in two fields, which are China’s cultural soft power and economic policies toward the region. As mentioned earlier, China implements soft power policies, which is based on promotion of the Chinese culture and values, in order to prevent the perception of the Chinese threat. Yet, the impact of China’s cultural soft power is very limited in Central Asia (Gurbanmyradova, 2015, p. 26) due to two reasons. First, the main proponent of cultural soft power policies is the Chinese leadership, not the civil society organizations (Gurbanmyradova, 2015, p. 16-17). In other words, Chinese administration does not want to give up soft power mechanisms and as a result, China’s cultural soft power is seen as state propaganda by the local people in Central Asia who are not attracted to learning Chinese culture and traditions (Nursha, 2018, p. 142). In fact, the Kyrgyz students, who attend courses of the Confucius Institutes are mainly interested in learning the Chinese language rather than the Chinese culture and traditions.

Second, China’s cultural soft power policy also fails because of its policies at home regarding the Uyghurs (Gurbanmyradova, 2015, p. 38). As mentioned earlier, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region has always been politically problematic for China. This problematic situation became prominent with the several incidents led by the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Party during the 1980s and the 1990s. The violence between the Uyghurs and the Chinese authorities reached its peak level during the 2009 Urumqi ethnic riots (Mehta, 2018, p. 5-6) which ended with the death of 200 people (Gurbanmyradova, 2015, p. 38). In recent years, radical changes took place in Chinese policies toward the Uyghur people. China left the policy of targeting individuals for what they do and started to implement policies of collective detention and intensive ideological re-education. According to some calculations, 1 to 3

million people, including Kazakh and Kyrgyz minorities along with the Uyghurs, have been gathered in the newly constructed camps and have been subjected to forced re-education programs which aim substituting secular habits with the religious ones and promote loyalty to the CPC.²⁹ As a result of these policies and widely reported news on forced re-education camps, China's image in Central Asia was significantly damaged (Peyrouse, 2019, p. 3-4). Naturally, this situation has a negative impact on China's cultural soft power policies and reduces persuasiveness of the Chinese culture, which is presented to be about "the benevolent government, peace and harmony, and respect for differences" (Gurbanmyradova, 2015, p. 38).

China's policy of people-to-people bonds also failed due to China's government-to-government centered economic approach that bypassed the local communities and civil society in Central Asia (Tian, 2018, p. 28). As mentioned earlier, China's economic assistance was welcomed by the Central Asian ruling elites in general and the Kyrgyz ruling elites in particular due to its lack of political conditionality and its quick and effective results. However, the public discourse on this issue is different from the official one for two reasons. First, Chinese companies choose to develop relations with influential local political elites rather than the local communities since these people more beneficial for commercial purposes. This situation creates the opinion that China does not bring benefits to the local people, but to these influential elites (Garibov, 2018, p. 151). Second, the general public does not have a chance to learn about the Chinese economic activities in general and the BRI in particular due to lack of proper reporting mechanisms of the Kyrgyz state on Chinese investments and absence of systematic discussions on "possibilities and risks, opportunities and challenges" of the Chinese economic presence in the country. Eventually, the public discourse on Chinese economic activities have a tendency to move away from the reality (Wolters, 2018, p. 48).

²⁹ It has been indicated that there are 1200 such camps. On the CPC's policies toward the Muslim minorities in the Xinjiang region, see Greitens, S. C., Lee, M., & Yazici, E. (2020). Counterterrorism and Preventive Repression: China's Changing Strategy in Xinjiang. *International Security*, 44(3), 9-47. doi: 10.1162/isec_a_00368.

4.1.2. Immense Demographic and Economic Differences Between China and Kyrgyzstan

The second main reason of Sinophobia among the Kyrgyz people is the immense demographic and economic differences between their country and their giant neighbor China. These power differences make the Kyrgyz people anxious about future relations with China and the situation of their country (Laruelle, 2015, p. 3). The demographic and economic power differences increase Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan in two ways. First, China's population is approximately 1.5 billion whereas Kyrgyzstan's population is around 6 million. Moreover, China's population increases around 15 million each year which is approximately equivalent to twice of the total Kyrgyz population (Laruelle, 2015, p. 7). Besides, China cannot provide job opportunities to all of its labor force due to the rapid increase in its working age population between the years of 2000 and 2015. Almost 100 million people are unemployed in China and many of them are looking for job opportunities elsewhere. In fact, there are already 60 million Chinese who live abroad (Garibov, 2018, p. 143). This situation creates the fear of "migration invasion" (Laruelle, 2015, p. 7) and the fear of loss of collective identity among the Kyrgyz people (Laruelle, 2015, p. 2). As one local Kyrgyz newspaper expressed, "The enormous difference in the size of the two countries and peoples would mean that the Kyrgyz would soon drown in a Chinese sea" (Garibov, 2018, p. 147).

Second, as mentioned earlier, China became one of the most important foreign direct investment partners of the Kyrgyz Republic after the announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013 as mentioned earlier. The main financier of these Chinese investments is the Exim Bank of China. Between the years of 2011 and 2016, the Kyrgyz debt to the Exim Bank increased five-fold and reached the level of 38,1 per cent of the total external debt (Lain, 2018, p. 5). Furthermore, the total debt of Kyrgyzstan to China constitutes 45,3 per cent of the total external debt as of May 2019 (Kitade, 2019, p. 4). This situation creates the risk of a debt trap³⁰ (Emerson,

2019, p. 16) and dependence to China for the Kyrgyz Republic. Moreover, China is Kyrgyzstan's main trade partner and Kyrgyz bazaars are re-export centers of Chinese goods to other Central Asian countries and Russia. However, the trade between the two countries is imbalanced in favor of China. Kyrgyzstan's import-export ratio is nearly 100:1 (Kuchins et al., 2015, p. 17). Although the Kyrgyz officials expressed that they aim to improve the trade balance (Kuchins et al., 2015, p. 24), the people are afraid that if their government cannot close the trade deficit or repay its debt, the Chinese administration could undermine their sovereignty by putting pressure on their governments and intervening in their domestic policies (Garibov, 2018, p. 150).³¹ In fact, in an opinion poll carried out in 2017, it was revealed that only 38 per cent of the Kyrgyz people perceive China as an economic partner. By comparison, this number is 96 per cent for Russia (Center for Insights in Survey Research, 2018, p. 47).

4.1.3. Increasing Chinese Economic Presence and Migration

The third main reason of Sinophobia among the Kyrgyz people is the increasing Chinese economic presence and migration. As mentioned earlier, China increased its presence in Kyrgyzstan in the field of FDI especially after the announcement of the BRI in 2013 and the Exim Bank of China is the main source of funds for these investments by the loans it provided. In fact, these Chinese loans have several features that contribute to Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan. As China sees itself as a developing country, it provides loans to recipient countries with two conditions in order to secure its own economic growth and interests. While the first condition is about securing the participation of Chinese companies to the financed projects, the

³⁰ A debt trap is a situation in which a loan borrower gets into a cycle of re-borrowing due to its incapability to afford the scheduled payments ("Debt Trap Definition", 2016).

³¹ The international community accuses China for its "debt-trap diplomacy" which is about providing loans for infrastructure projects and controlling borrower states when they cannot repay their debt ("How China's debt trap diplomacy works", 2019). For instance, in 2017, when Sri Lanka could not repay its debt to China, their government rented Hambantota port to China for ninety-nine years to cut its debt by US\$1.1 billion. In Central Asia, Tajikistan is already struggling to pay off its debts to China and the Tajik leadership is seeking ways out of the situation (Umarov, 2020).

second one is about gaining access to the recipient countries' natural resources (Kassenova, 2009, p. 8-9). Indeed, Jaborov (2018) suggested that China's lending policy is a "predatory lending" which means:

A bilateral credit deal between two countries that, in addition to the paying back of principal and interests, pushes a borrower country to make statements that are promissory in nature and/or ensure economic/political concessions in favor of a lender country or its agent/business company/representative (p. 34).

The first condition of the Chinese aid (the participation of Chinese companies to the financed projects) causes problems of Chinese labor migration and competition for the limited number of jobs in Kyrgyzstan, since these projects mainly rely on Chinese workers and do not meet local expectation of job creation (Hudec, 2018, p. 9). The BRI which aims to create connectivity between China and the Central Asian countries and develop the capacity of economic cooperation by improving energy and transportation infrastructures (Hudec, 2018, p. 4) can be given as an example. These infrastructure based Chinese investments do not provide competence and capacity building for the Kyrgyz economy. Therefore, Kyrgyzstan cannot experience sustainable growth or establish autonomous economy, and eventually becomes more dependent on Chinese loans which come along with Chinese companies. These companies bring their own technology and labor force in order to implement aid projects. Consequently, Kyrgyzstan cannot receive any technology transfer³² and job creation for the local communities remain limited (Bossuyt, 2019, p. 17).

Although Chinese labor migration contributes to Sinophobia among the Kyrgyz people by creating competition in the job market and fear of deprivation from local job opportunities (Garibov, 2018, p. 148), one official from the Kyrgyz Labor, Migration and Youth Ministry suggested that many Kyrgyz quit their jobs after working a few months at Chinese companies due to harsh working conditions and

³² In addition to technology and labor force, Chinese companies also bring their own engineers and monitors to operate their equipment (Garibov, 2018, p. 149).

low wages. In fact, he stated that Kyrgyz workers prefer jobs in Russia where they can make more money in a shorter period of time.³³ Consequently, Chinese companies end up bringing their own labor force (Garibov, 2018, p. 149) because Chinese laborers are hardworking, able to live and work in hard conditions and willing to accept low wages (International Crisis Group, 2013, p. 15). However, it has also been suggested that the Kyrgyz are willing to take jobs but Chinese companies do not hire them. On the other hand, it is hard for an ordinary Kyrgyz to understand why their governments issue work quotas for foreigners, while there is an already a job shortage in the country (Asanov & Najibullah, 2013).

The second condition of the Chinese aid, which is about access to the recipient countries' natural resources, raises questions and concerns about two main issues among the Kyrgyz people: colonialism and environment. The question of colonialism raises because of China's search for rare earth elements and precious metals in the region. For instance, in 2006, China proposed preferential loan worth of US\$1.2 million for the railway construction in exchange for access to mineral resources (Tian, 2018, p. 28). Moreover, two Chinese mining companies began to operate in Kyrgyzstan in 2011. After the announcement of the BRI, China significantly increased its access to natural resources in exchange of loans in Central Asia in general (Jaborov, 2018, p. 36-37) and its investments in energy and mining sectors in Kyrgyzstan in particular. While two Chinese companies built an oil processing plant worth of US\$250 million, several Chinese mining companies gained a right to explore and extract gold deposits in the country (Jaborov, 2018, p. 37-38). In fact, the Kyrgyz authorities have always wanted to increase Chinese investments in the mining sector because of Kyrgyzstan's lack of capacity to operate mines (Omuralieva, 2014, p. 91). Today, China mainly imports raw materials from the region for its industrial production while it mainly exports finished goods into the region, quite like the Soviet Russia (Jaborov, 2018, p. 40). This situation resulted

³³ Indeed, instead working at their home, every year 500 thousand Kyrgyz go to Russia for sessional jobs (Asanov & Najibullah, 2013) where they face with the Russian skinheads' assaults frequently (Marat, 2008).

in concerns about Kyrgyzstan being China's "personal" source of natural resources and raw materials. In other words, the Kyrgyz people claim that the economic relations with China would result in colonization of Kyrgyzstan (Toktomushev, 2018, p. 78).

Increasing Chinese mining activities also resulted in environmental concerns among the Kyrgyz people. Chinese companies fail to meet local concerns on environmental issues (Tian, 2018, p. 32) and poor communication between the local people and Chinese companies creates antipathy toward the Chinese presence in the mining sector (International Crisis Group, 2013, p. 13). The Kyrgyz people complain about health problems (Garibov, 2018, p. 149) and deaths of their livestock due to environmental damage (Putz, 2019a). In fact, according to a survey carried out in spring 2017, 70 per cent of the Kyrgyz people see Chinese investment as a source of environmental damage and pollution (Johec & Kyzy, 2018, p. 74). As a result of these concerns, the locals organized several meetings in order to protest ignored environmental safeguards by Chinese companies (International Crisis Group, 2017, p. 11), as will be elaborated in the second part of this chapter.

In addition to Chinese loans and investments, trade with China, which includes flow of the Chinese merchants and cheap consumer goods into Kyrgyzstan, is also a major source of Sinophobia among the Kyrgyz people. In fact, the presence of Chinese merchant migration and Chinese goods are most visible in Kyrgyzstan in comparison with other Central Asian countries (Steiner, 2013, p. 28). As mentioned earlier, migration for economic purposes from China to Kyrgyzstan started in the 1990s with the merchant flow. The population of Chinese merchants residing in Kyrgyzstan, mostly ethnic Uyghurs and Dungans,³⁴ reached around 10,000 by the mid-2000s and these people began to dominate the bazaars in Kyrgyzstan. After 2010, ethnic Dungans and Han Chinese began to replace ethnic Uyghurs as a result of China's security concerns and pressures toward the Uyghur people. For instance,

³⁴ The nation which shares similar religious and cultural values with the Central Asian people. Around 70,000 Dungan people live in Kyrgyzstan (Steiner, 2013, p. 30).

at the Dordoi Bazaar, increasing numbers of Han Chinese merchants started to change the demographic structure of the bazaar (Steiner, 2013, p. 30), whereas Dungans used their advantage of being Chinese speaking Muslims in order to improve their place in the bazaar sector. They established good relations with both the Kyrgyz and Chinese entrepreneurs and became intermediaries in supply and transport networks between China and Kyrgyzstan (Alff, 2016, p. 13). Due to their easy access to soft loans and cheap goods, Chinese merchant domination, including ethnic Hans, Uyghurs and Dungans, resulted in their control of almost all distribution networks in Kyrgyzstan (Steiner, 2013, p. 30) and created unfair competition for the local producers and traders (Jarosiewicz & Strachota, 2013, p. 72). This situation forced many Kyrgyz to move their businesses to countries like Russia and South Korea (Steiner, 2013, p. 30).

The changing demographic structure of bazaars is often met with Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan. Indeed, according to a research carried out by local university students, other than the nationalist groups Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan is most common among the traders (Battaglia, 2017). As a result of this situation, Chinese merchants, who do not want to confront the local traders, present a low-profile behavior and some of them move their business to Tajikistan (Alff, 2016, p. 13-14). This Chinese domination of markets also resulted in a flow of Chinese consumer goods which eventually reached the level of 80 per cent of all goods in the Kyrgyz bazaars. This situation led to a fear of turning into a dumping ground of cheap Chinese goods among many Kyrgyz (Tian, 2018, p. 32).

4.1.4. Cultural and Religious Differences

The fourth main reason of Sinophobia among the Kyrgyz people is cultural and religious differences between the Kyrgyz and the Chinese people. As mentioned earlier, centuries-old oral epics, and the Soviet propaganda and education represented China as the enemy of the Turkic people and Islam which is still a valid perception among the Central Asian people from various ideological backgrounds such as Western, Russophile, Pan-Turkic and Islamist. While Central Asian scholars

suggest that there is a “culture barrier” that exists between China and their countries as a result of religious and nationalist concerns of the Central Asian people toward China, Peyrouse (2016) defines this situation as a “civilizational difference”. Indeed, only a small group of Central Asian scholars admire the Chinese political system and cultural values, whereas majority of them suggest that this “culture barrier” is a necessity in order to prevent the Chinese cultural influence in the region because otherwise, the Central Asian people and their culture could be “sinicized”³⁵ (Peyrouse, 2016, p. 22). The reaction of the Kyrgyz observers to China’s presentation of the Kyrgyz epic poem *Manas* to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a Chinese contribution to world cultural heritage in 2010 is a good example of the Kyrgyz fear of “sinicization”. Chinese authorities claimed that they presented *Manas* to the UNESCO with the purpose of protecting cultural heritage of their Kyrgyz minority; however, the Kyrgyz observers and the media in general interpreted this as a reflection of China’s cultural takeover policy (Steiner, 2013, p. 32).

In addition to the intellectual circles’ concerns on the “civilizational difference”, religious differences contribute to Sinophobia among the general public. Despite their official policies toward the Uyghurs which are generally in line with China, the Central Asian governments still show some sympathy and tolerance for the Uyghur political activities (Scobell et al., 2014, p. 37). In fact, Kyrgyzstan’s more open political culture provides a more conducive environment for the Uyghur activists (Kuchins et al., 2015, p. 18). The sympathy among the governments toward the Uyghur people also exists among the people of Central Asia. The Chinese policies toward the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region create concern among the Muslim populations in the region due to their common religious and cultural bonds (Vakulchuk & Overland, 2019, p. 118). Islamists in Central Asia take advantage of this sympathy. In Kyrgyzstan, well-known public figures express Islamic

³⁵ The definition of term sinicize is “make Chinese in character or form” (Sinicize: Definition of Sinicize by Oxford Dictionary on Lexico.com. (2019, December 9). Retrieved June 4, 2020, from <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/sinicize>).

sensibilities and target China as an enemy of Islam by exemplifying the Chinese policies toward the Muslims in the Xinjiang (Laruelle, 2015, p. 5).

Cultural and religious differences also result in ethnicity based anti-Chinese sentiments among the Kyrgyz people. In fact, as mentioned earlier, Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan is most common among the nationalist groups along with the traders. For example, the traditional idea of “a Kyrgyz woman can only belong to a Kyrgyz man” is still widely accepted. In other words, a Kyrgyz woman cannot marry with a man from a different ethnicity, religion and culture. Therefore, marriages between the Kyrgyz women and the Chinese men increase anti-Chinese sentiments in the country (Eshaliyeva, 2019). In connection with interethnic marriages, the idea of “the Kyrgyz citizenship is only for the ethnic Kyrgyz” is also source of Sinophobia (“Kyrgyzstan: Another week”, 2019) since Chinese nationals acquire Kyrgyz citizenship through marriage (“Kyrgyzstan authorities”, 2019). Indeed, some Kyrgyz believe that Chinese labor migration is out of control and Chinese authorities encourage migration in order to “dilute” the region by marrying Chinese men with the local women. According to them, Kyrgyzstan will eventually become the most western province of China (Owen, 2017, p. 110-111).

4.2. The Role of Political Corruption in Rising Sinophobia

Since independence Kyrgyzstan has always been politically unstable due to various problems that are closely related such as poor governance, income inequality, unemployment, interclan rivalry, and of course, endemic political corruption (Sternberg et al., 2017, p. 8). In recent years, unrest related to Sinophobia increased and is added to the other problems of the country. Although many factors are affecting anti-Chinese sentiments among the Kyrgyz people, one of the major reasons of Sinophobia is political corruption in their country observed basically in economic relations with China.

4.2.1. Political Corruption in Economic Relations with China

As elaborated in the second chapter, political corruption has always been a major problem of the Kyrgyz Republic since independence. The ruling elites' enrichment through the corrupt ways resulted in fierce competition between the clans in order to control political power and scarce economic resources of the country. This situation eventually led to two revolutions and one interethnic clash in the country. However, political corruption is not only an issue that is related to domestic politics but it is also one of the defining features of relations with China and the Chinese economic presence in Kyrgyzstan.

Both Akayev and Bakiyev families used trade with China as a source of enrichment through their control on the state customs and their policy of the sale of public offices. One of the prominent state agencies that was an important source for the Akayev family was the customs service. As such, the position of the head of the state customs committee was one of the most important positions in the country. During the Akayev era, the head of the customs service ended up being one of the richest men in the country, thanks to the fortune he could make by controlling the cross-border trade with China. In fact, heads of the customs services were called as *kashel'ki* (purses) due to their contribution to the enrichment of the presidential families. For instance, the Akayev family received monthly payments in worth of around 20 per cent of the total revenue of the illegal trade from 1998 to 2003 (Engvall, 2011, p. 120).

As mentioned earlier, the sale of public offices was started by the Akayev family and continued under the Bakiyev administration. In Bakiyev's term, rumors appeared about the prices of positions of the state customs. According to allegations, the price of the position of deputy chief was US\$70,000 whereas the worth of chief inspector position was US\$30,000 (Engvall, 2011, p. 120) and of course, these positions were very lucrative for their owners. In 2010, a scheme that shows unofficial fees paid by businessmen to numerous officers in the state customs in order to transport goods from the Chinese border to Bishkek was presented by acting

Kyrgyz Minister of Finance Temir Sariyev. According to this scheme, businessmen needed to pay extra US\$3,500 unofficial fee to these people. Moreover, 2,000 trucks were crossing the Chinese-Kyrgyz border every week full of Chinese goods and in order to cross the border, they had to pass weight control and pay an unofficial fee of US\$3,000 to state customs officers. According to general estimations, they were receiving more than US\$150,000 bribes every month (Engvall, 2011, p. 189-190). This situation helps to understand differences between official statistics on trade between China and Kyrgyzstan. Indeed, it is very hard to estimate the real size of the trade between these countries due to such corruption and illegal trade (Khan & Javaid, 2018, p. 163). For instance, according to Chinese numbers, average Chinese export to Kyrgyzstan was US\$142 million per year in the years between 1998 and 2003 whereas it was US\$50 million per year on average according to Kyrgyz ones (Engvall, 2011, p. 190).

In addition to sale of public offices, members of the Bakiyev family also directly involved into trade with China. While one of the brothers of Bakiyev was working at the Kyrgyz Embassy in Beijing as a Special Trade Representative of the Kyrgyz Republic, Bakiyev's son Maksim Bakiyev played a major role in economic relations with China as a head of the State Investment and Development Agency and signed several opaque business deals (Aslam, 2011, p. 247).³⁶ He also played a major role in trade of Chinese goods such as drones, electricity meters and turbines (Laumulin, 2012, p. 59-60).

After Akayev and Bakiyev's terms, differences between official statistics on trade between China and Kyrgyzstan continued due to high level of political corruption and illegal trade. For instance, according to Chinese numbers, China exported around US\$42 billion worth of commercial product to Kyrgyzstan in the years between 2008 and 2015 whereas it was around US\$7.7 billion according to Kyrgyz

³⁶ In fact, Chinese side felt insulted when they had to negotiate state-to-state agreements with president's son Maksim Bakiyev who came to his position through nepotism (Toktomushev, 2014, p. 137).

numbers. This means that there was around 446 per cent difference between the statistics of China and Kyrgyzstan (Tazabekova, 2018, p. 253). The last major corruption scandal on trade with China was revealed in 2019 by independent media outlets of RFE/RL's Radio Azattyk, OCCRP and Kloop, and resulted in several public demonstrations in Bishkek. According to the award-winning investigation, the Chinese Uyghur family Abdukadyrs established a smuggling network between China and Kyrgyzstan by the support of corrupted state customs officials and high-level government connections. Through this network the Abdukadyr clan illegally transferred US\$700 million out of the country (Putz, 2019d). After the scandal, President Jeenbekov remained silent and his attitude was interpreted as a support to his loyalists by some circles.³⁷

Besides the trade with China, political corruption in Kyrgyzstan also hit the Chinese investments in the country. It has been suggested that Chinese officials expect 30 per cent of loss in their investments in Central Asia due to high level of corruption (Sternberg et al., 2017, p. 8). One Chinese investor pointed out that they have been in many places but they did not encounter with this level of corruption before. One analyst also suggested that dealing with the Central Asian governments is extremely difficult for China due to high level of political corruption (International Crisis Group, 2013, p. 13-14). For instance, 268 km long China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railroad project, which was projected in 1997 and would cost US\$4 billion, would bring US\$260 million annual income to Kyrgyzstan (Yu, 2014). However, Kyrgyzstan was deprived from this railway connectivity and annual income due to high cost of the project and of course, political corruption. As of 2018, eighteen feasibility studies have been enlisted through the years because each new Kyrgyz

³⁷ On June 2, 2020, Kyrgyzstan's state security service accused reporters of the RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service with taking US\$100,000 bribe from Chinese Uyghur businessmen Aierken Saimaiti who once worked for the Abdukadyr family. Later, he became the main source of reporters and was murdered in Istanbul on November 10, 2019, just few days after the scandal. In response, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service rejected accusations and called this situation as a "retaliation" against journalists while OCCRP stated that their investigation was "extensively and independently fact-checked". Moreover, they underlined that instead of investigating the corruption scandal, the Kyrgyz state security service attacks journalists without any evidence on bribe (Putz, 2020b).

prime minister ordered a new one in order to extort money from donors (Wolters, 2018, p. 49).

When the Belt and Road Initiative was announced by President Xi Jinping in 2013, it became a new target of rent-seeking activities of the Central Asian leaders and clans (Toktomushev, 2018, p. 77). For instance, Ferghana Valley news portal revealed a corruption scandal concerning the Atambayev era in June 2018. According to documents, the Kyrgyz authorities and the Chinese contractor China Road and Bridge Corporation embezzled funds by overpricing construction materials of a tunnel on the alternative North-South road. For example, while the market price of cement's kilogram was 7 cents, they paid US\$1.1 per kilogram for the construction of tunnel (Aidar, 2018).

However, it must also be emphasized that there are certain factors that are directly related to China itself in increasing political corruption in Kyrgyzstan. The first such factor contributing to political corruption is the lack of clarity and transparency of Chinese economic aid. China does not have an official definition of what constitutes the loans or an official institute responsible from the loans. Decisions regarding economic aids are given at the end of unclear decision-making processes which are conducted within a complex and top-down structure of several ministries and state institutions (Tian, 2018, p. 23). Thus, the non-transparent loan system of China became a convenient match for the opaque regulatory framework of the Kyrgyz state, which provides plenty of opportunity for political corruption (OSCE, 2005). In fact, private interests of government officials play an important role in Central Asian countries' tendency to non-transparent Chinese loans since they directly or indirectly involve into most profitable sectors of their countries' national economies (Tian, 2018, p. 30).

Moreover, non-transparent loans involve a non-competitive tender system which is related to China's policy of securing Chinese contractors for funded projects. The issue of non-competitive tender system was criticized by the opposition party Ata-Jurt's (Fatherland) member Ahmatbek Keldibekov, when the Datka-Kemin

transmission line was built in 2015 by the Chinese loans and the Chinese firm TBEA. While he admitted the importance of the project, Keldibekov also questioned the obligatory use of Chinese contractor in exchange of Chinese credit. He suggested that the Kyrgyz government must call other firms to the tender in order to get best market prices for the projects (Putz, 2015). Although Chinese and Kyrgyz governments claim that non-competitive tender system is efficient and effective, it causes mismanagement and corruption problems (International Crisis Group, 2017, p. 13). For instance, Kyrgyz Prime Minister Temir Sariyev resigned in 2016 due to corruption accusations in a road construction tender. According to the allegations, he manipulated the tender process in order to guarantee Chinese company's selection as a contractor without necessary license (Lain, 2018, p. 9). Another example is the modernization of the Bishkek power station which was mentioned earlier. After the incident at the power station and five-day blackout in the winter of 2018, it was revealed that many high-level Kyrgyz government officials were involved lobbying activities in order to guarantee the winner of the tender, which was the Chinese firm TBEA.

The second feature of Chinese loans contributing to political corruption is the absence of political conditionality in such issues of good governance,³⁸ human rights performance and environmental issues as a result of non-interference approach of China (Tian, 2018, p. 24). In recent times, increased presence of Chinese companies in Central Asia, and their impact on political landscape and economic development of the region resulted in growing concerns on governance standards of the Central Asian countries, which is already poor (Satke & De Pedro, 2018). Although China made statements on commitment to international governance standards (International Crisis Group, 2017, p. 13), Chinese investments exploit poor government practices in Central Asia in order to secure its interests and get best deals through the non-transparent loans (Lain, 2018, p. 9). As the head of

³⁸ The concept of "good governance" refers to honest, efficient and accountable bureaucratic system (Amundsen, 1999, p. 22).

the Chinese Chambers of Commerce in Kyrgyzstan admitted, Chinese companies are involved in dirty business in order to solve problems that they faced because of the complex and corrupt bureaucratic system. For instance, Chinese companies engage in bribery in the mining sector in order to get the required operation licenses (International Crisis Group, 2017, p. 13). However, this policy of China increases the risk of political corruption scandals involving Chinese firms and the Central Asian political elites. For instance, the Kyrgyz state is faced with US\$118 million arbitration lawsuit when one Chinese company tried to take over Canadian firm Stans Energy's producing and processing facility through corrupted government officials of Kyrgyzstan (Satke & De Pedro, 2018).

In fact, there is no law in China that bans Chinese companies from making unofficial payments to government officials in foreign countries in order to ensure their business and advance Chinese foreign direct investment. Indeed, political corruption is also widespread in China. In 2012, President Xi Jinping launched an anti-corruption campaign and arrested hundreds of high and low levels officials. The campaign showed that political corruption is also deeply rooted in China due to specific social norms and cultural customs and there is a lot to do on the issue of widespread political corruption. One of the social norms that contribute to political corruption in China itself is *Guanxi* which means "building and maintaining a personalized network of trustworthy and mutually beneficial relationships that can be used for personal and business purposes" (Toktomushev, 2018, p. 82). Since the Central Asian officials are in the pursuit of personal gain, Chinese companies use *Guanxi* in order to achieve their economic goals. For instance, the Chinese Consulate General gifted a new Toyota Land Cruiser to the mayor of Osh in November 2016. Many Kyrgyz believe that this gift was received in exchange of renewal of the road next to the Chinese Consulate and allocation of land for the construction of the Chinese hotel (Toktomushev, 2018, p. 83-84). As a result of these informal and personal connections, Chinese presence could not institutionalize in Central Asia. In fact, in Central Asia it is impossible to do any business without support from influential local political elites. Thus, Chinese companies choose

direct contact with those influential elites, as mentioned above, rather than state institutions with no real power (Umarov, 2020).

Various political corruption scandals around the Chinese economic activities, and the non-transparent attitude of Chinese and Kyrgyz authorities contribute to distrust of the Kyrgyz people toward both their government officials and Chinese companies. In fact, the Kyrgyz people believe that corrupt officials allow Chinese companies to act without being punished (Tian, 2018, p. 33). As a result of increasing concerns on China's economic presence in the country, the country witnessed many anti-Chinese public protests and violent assaults against the Chinese people. These protests can be interpreted as a very clear indicator of rising Sinophobia in the country.

4.2.2. Political Corruption and Anti-Chinese Public Demonstrations

Political corruption played major roles in two revolutions and the Osh events as elaborated in the second chapter. Besides these social unrests, political corruption also had an impact on anti-Chinese public demonstrations in Kyrgyzstan which occurred as a result of the fear of China and several other problems related with the Chinese economic presence in the country.

The fear of China and what it could cause in Kyrgyzstan surfaced for the first time widely and significantly in the Aksy events of 2002 in the form of “giving” land to China. When the Kyrgyz people did not welcome the second border agreement with China, in which Kyrgyzstan gave an additional 90,000 hectares of land, the opposition in general linked the border delimitation issue with general dissatisfaction toward the government regarding economic and social problems including widespread political corruption. Indeed, the opposition presented agreements on the border delimitation as a “transfer of Kyrgyz lands” and betrayal of “corrupted politicians” who disregarded national interests (Kerimbekova & Galitskiy, 2002).

The tension between the opposition and government reached its peak in March 2002 after Beknazarov's arrest in early 2002.³⁹ It was no coincidence that events took place in the Aksy district of the southern Jalal-Abad region because Beknazarov's home village was here and he was a powerful political figure there (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2009, p. 83). Thus, one can say that the opposition in general and Azimbek Beknazarov in particular successfully exploited the clientelist system of the Kyrgyz politics since they successfully canalized general dissatisfaction of the people, who were from their home towns, toward the Akayev administration for their cause by using the "Chinese question" (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2009, p. 85). Even though they could not achieve anything about the "Chinese question" and the second border agreement was approved by the parliament in May 2002, this development ignited the first sparks of the Tulip Revolution. Moreover, the issue of border disputes resulted in conspiracy theories regarding China which were fed by the lack of public disclosure of these agreements and evolved around the fear of China's "takeover" of Central Asia (Owen, 2017, p. 110). Many Kyrgyz believed that these agreements involved secret clauses in favor of China and that China would have additional claims in the future such as renegotiation of the border disputes, as a result of which further damage would emerge for Kyrgyzstan (Peyrouse, 2016, p. 19).

In addition to the fear of "giving" land to China, increased Chinese presence in the country and problems related with this situation also resulted in demonstrations and interethnic clashes in the country. During the 2000s, Kyrgyzstan witnessed trade-related anti-Chinese public demonstrations due to different attitudes of Kyrgyz sellers and political elites, especially on the issue of flow of Chinese merchants and goods. On the one hand, the Dordoi association, which represented 1,500 sellers from the Dordoi bazaar, and the Ishker association, which represented 10,000 entrepreneurs and sellers from the Karasuu bazaar, complained about unfair

³⁹ As mentioned in the second chapter, Azimbek Beknazarov, who was the president of the Parliamentary Committee for Judiciary Affairs and Constitutional Reform, played an important role in this process.

competition between Chinese and local traders due to Chinese merchants' access to cheap products. Moreover, the Dordoi association claimed that workers and designers working in fashion related jobs got sick because of the poor quality of the Chinese fabrics. Therefore, these two powerful associations were in favor of limiting certain sectors only to the Kyrgyz citizens (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2009, p. 88).

On the other hand, Kyrgyz political elites were not in favor of any limitations on trade with China. They suggested that trade with China provided significant economic gain for the Kyrgyz people and Kyrgyzstan. According to them, in case of any restrictions on trade with China, Kyrgyzstan's feature of being a re-exportation center of Chinese goods to other Central Asian countries and Russia would shift to Kazakhstan and income levels of the Kyrgyz citizens would decrease (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2009, p. 88-89). However, it can be suggested that the real reason of Kyrgyz politicians' objection is the financial benefit that comes from their direct or indirect control over the trade with China (Kassenova, 2009, p. 20) which is often gained by corrupt methods. As mentioned earlier, the non-transparent nature of trade relations with China contributed to the development of a shadow economy in Kyrgyzstan. In fact, there is no way to estimate the real annual turnover in those bazaars due to illegal trade and smuggling activities. Naturally, the wealth that comes from the shadow economy attracted politicians into the bazaar sector (Toktomushev, 2014, p. 116) and thus, a corrupt set of relations between the traders and politicians emerged in Kyrgyzstan.

As a result of these different attitudes, the Ishker association organized several anti-Chinese protests throughout the years (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2009, p. 88). For instance, approximately 300 Kyrgyz traders from the Karasuu bazaar gathered in front of the local government office and demanded quotas for Chinese traders in January 2007 (Marat, 2008). Upon the demands of Kyrgyz traders, the government announced quotas in order to calm them; however, never introduced these quotas (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2009, p. 90). This anti-Chinese attitude related with trade occurred also during the social unrest which ended with the 2010 revolution.

Numerous attacks took place against the Chinese commercial centers in Bishkek. While victims of the violent attacks were mainly the Han Chinese people, at least one Uyghur restaurant was attacked and one ethnic Uyghur was killed (Steiner, 2013, p. 33).

During the 2010s, Kyrgyzstan also witnessed numerous anti-Chinese public demonstrations and racist violent attacks against Chinese people due to problems related with increasing Chinese direct investments in the country. These demonstrations had different reasons such as environmental damage that Chinese companies caused, increased Chinese labor migration, poor working conditions of Chinese companies, and fear of Chinese expansion and once again “giving” land to China.

One such demonstration took place on August 26, 2011, in which around 300 local people gathered in front of the headquarter of a Chinese company that operated Solton-Sary gold mine in Naryn. They protested poor working conditions and the environmental damage that was caused by the mine. Moreover, some protestors demanded cancellation of the firm’s license. When the Kyrgyz police asked the protesters to disperse, they attacked the police officers and then, beat up three Chinese workers. After the incident, President Atambayev said that they would take the necessary steps in issuing licenses so as to make the process more transparent. However, according to the China’s ambassador to Kyrgyzstan Wang Kaiwen, that was not the issue and political groups were behind this incident (“Kyrgyz Officials”, 2011).

In 2012, US\$300 million worth of Chinese cement plant in Aravan suspended its operation due to environmental protests. As one local Kyrgyz suggested, while the cement plant was operating, their health expenses exponentially increased due to air pollution which was produced by the refinery. When the cement plant restarted its operations four years later, same complaints on environmental pollution and human health were made again (International Crisis Group, 2017, p. 13-14). Likewise in 2012, the local people in Taldy-Bulak, upon the death of a horse, burned down the

headquarter of the Chinese Zijin mining group. They claimed that the horse was dead because of the poisonous materials used by the company (Garibov, 2018, p. 149-150). Same year yet another fight broke out between Chinese and Kyrgyz workers who were working at a construction site at the Altynken gold mine in Orlovka. The next day, more than 200 local people gathered in front of the Chinese firm's headquarter and demanded the closure of operations at the mines. Consequently, operations suspended and more than 250 Chinese workers were relocated to another place (RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service, 2012).

On January 8, 2013, during the building of an electricity transmission line, which aimed to connect northern and southern parts of the country, a fight broke out between the Kyrgyz locals and the Chinese laborers in the Kurshab village of the Osh region. According to a police report, a Chinese citizen accused a local man by stealing his mobile phone. Upon this, a fight broke out and a group of Kyrgyz people was taken hostage by Chinese workers. According to the witnesses, more than 100 people, including police officers and the local people, became involved in the incident as a result of which 28 people were injured (Trilling, 2013). 18 of these were Chinese citizens and 2 were admitted to intensive care unit at an Osh hospital; others were moved by the Kyrgyz authorities to the city of Osh for their safety ("18 Chinese workers injured", 2013). Although this huge fight caused delay in the project (Trilling, 2013), Chinese and Kyrgyz authorities decided to solve the problem in peace and to maintain friendly relations between the two countries ("18 Chinese workers injured", 2013).

In 2014, activists from the movement "New Generation Coalition" organized a public demonstration in order to protest Kyrgyzstan's immigration policies which according to them failed in preventing illegal border crossings from China. Moreover, they complained about wages that Chinese companies offer to the local labor force. According to their claims, the local labor force was earning lower wages in comparison with their Chinese colleagues (Orozobekova, 2016). Again in 2014, protests regarding Kara-Balta oil refinery, which was one of the China's most

important investments in Kyrgyzstan, started. In the first wave of the protests, the local people raised their voices due to environmental pollution. Although the company was successful to address the local peoples' concerns and continued its operation, in 2015, the second wave of the protests began due to labor conditions. A local labor union claimed that the Chinese firm violated labor rights by not providing them personal protective equipment. At the time of the protests, they were 1,100 employees working at the firm out of which only 450 were local Kyrgyz, although this firm had promised before to open up 2,000 new employment opportunities (Garibov, 2018, p. 150).

At the end of 2018 and at the beginning of 2019, three successive demonstrations took place in the Kyrgyz capital city Bishkek. These demonstrations were organized by a nationalist and conservative group called Kyrgyz *Choroloru* (Kyrgyz Knights), which is also known as *Kyrk Choro* (Forty Knights) (“Kyrgyzstan: Another week”, 2019).⁴⁰ On December 20, 2018, their first demonstration was held in front of the Chinese Embassy in Bishkek. Several dozen activists gathered in order to protest the “persecution” of the Muslim minority in the Xinjiang region, including ethnic Kyrgyz, Kazakhs and Uyghurs. The protestors shouted slogans like “No to Chinese fascism!” and demanded information on the situation of the Kyrgyz citizens at the re-education camps. Moreover, they demanded deportation of illegal immigrants in the country, including Chinese citizens, within 30 days (RFE/RL’s Kyrgyz Service, 2018c).

⁴⁰ The Kyrk Choro is one of the nationalist groups in the country which emerged after 2010 Osh events. It was originally founded in order to search out illegal Chinese immigrants in Kyrgyzstan (Lelik, 2015). This group gained its reputation in the country via its provocative nationalist actions and discourses (“Kyrgyzstan: Another week”, 2019). For instance, on December 28, 2014, the group raided a private karaoke club in Bishkek. They filmed their so called “audit” at the establishment. In the video, they extort a group of Chinese customers and blame them with “corrupting the morals of young Kyrgyz women” (Lelik, 2016). Moreover, in January 2015, Zamirbek Kochorbaev, the head of the organization, stated that ethnic Uyghur merchants in Kyrgyzstan’s important bazaars should be replaced by ethnic Kyrgyz. As of 2015, according to the members of the Kyrk Choro, their numbers reached 5,000 (Lelik, 2015). In addition, their name refers to forty knights which is mentioned in the Manas epic and who fought alongside with the Kyrgyz hero Manas in defense of the Kyrgyz nation (Chynybaeva & Najibullah, 2015).

On January 7, 2019, the second protest⁴¹ took place in Bishkek's central Ala-Too Square. Around 300 people gathered in order to protest the issues of Chinese migration, financial dependence to China and re-education camps in the Xinjiang region. They expressed that financial dependence to China as a result of loans taken without the knowledge of the people is unacceptable and demanded deportation of illegal Chinese immigrants in the country (RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service, 2019a). Moreover, they opposed to granting of citizenship to Chinese who marry Kyrgyz nationals and called for another protest on January 17 ("Kyrgyzstan: The Importance", 2019). Two days later, on January 9, President Jeenbekov stated that they will not allow any group to disturb their good relations with China. Moreover, he stated that the Kyrgyz people should be grateful to China for its economic support to Kyrgyzstan. On the same day, First Deputy Prime Minister Kubatbek Boronov complained about "information pollution" on China's economic activities in the country and denied the claim of possibility of "giving" land to China in the future, if the government would become incapable in repaying its debt to China ("Kyrgyzstan authorities", 2019).

On January 17, 2019, the third demonstration was held in central Bishkek with the participation of hundreds of people. While these people gathered in order to protest Beijing's growing influence in their country, it has been suggested that it was the biggest anti-Chinese public protest to date in Central Asia ("Anti-Chinese protesters arrested", 2019). Protestors expressed their demands on certain issues such as work permit control for the Chinese workers, lower quotas for foreign laborers, cancelation of the country's debt to China, and transparency regarding the conditions of Chinese loans and how they are being spent. Moreover, some protestors demanded a ban of Kyrgyz women from marrying Chinese men (Eshaliyeva, 2019; "Kyrgyzstan: Another week", 2019). This time the government decided to follow a more accommodating approach against the protestors and sent

⁴¹ Although representatives of the group stated that they did not participate into the second protest (Eshaliyeva, 2019), it was suggested that they were among the assembled ("Kyrgyzstan authorities", 2019).

Foreign Ministry official Almaz Imangaziev to meet with them. Imangaziev explained that all Chinese citizens who lived and worked in Kyrgyzstan were legal migrants (RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service, 2019b). However, his statements did not calm the crowd, and some protestors tried to enter the White House, an attempt that failed. Eventually the demonstration ended with the arrest of 21 protestors who blocked the traffic and used foul language against the police officers (Eshaliyeva, 2019). While those 21 people were fined to pay 3,000 Kyrgyz soms each on the day after the protest, (RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service, 2019b), one other protestor was arrested on January 23 and charged with inciting ethnic hatred (RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service, 2019c).

On August 5, 2019, the Solton-Sary gold mine witnessed another clash after eight years again due to environmental concerns. Around 400 local people gathered near the gold mine in order to protest the environmental pollution that killed their livestock and decreased the quality of air. During the protests, a fight broke out between the local people and Chinese workers which resulted in 20 Chinese workers being hospitalized (Putz, 2019a). After the scuffle, the remaining protestors demanded the operations to be stopped and the Chinese company and employees left the area (RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service, 2019e). Upon these developments, First Deputy Prime Minister Kubatbek Boronov and Interior Minister Kashkar Junushaliev came to the area in order to calm the protestors and asked them to disperse. However, the remaining protestors stated that if the government does not remove equipment of the firm, they would do that (RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service, 2019d). As a result, the Chinese mining company declared that they suspended their operation in the area (RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service, 2019e). Although the Chinese authorities usually do not express their concerns and complaints on such incidents, in this case the Chinese Embassy in Bishkek stated that attackers should be punished, and that Chinese investments and citizens in Kyrgyzstan should be secured ("China urges Kyrgyzstan", 2019).

The new decade also started with an anti-Chinese public demonstration. On February 17, 2020, many people,⁴² including riders on horseback carrying Kyrgyz flags, gathered in order to protest China's logistic center project that involved leasing of 200 hectares of land in At-Bashi district to the Chinese-Kyrgyz joint venture for 49 years. The main slogan of the demonstration was "No Kyrgyz land to China!" (Putz, 2020a). Amanbol Babakulov, a local activist, called Kyrgyz authorities to cancel the project on March 1 at the latest and threatened the Kyrgyz government in the name of protesters by announcing that they would take "real steps" if officials would not take an action regarding their demand ("Kyrgyzstan Protest", 2020). Upon the protests, Artur Baiterekov, the head of Naryn Free Economic Zone, said that they understood people's fear of losing lands to China and declared that the US\$275 million worth project has been cancelled (Putz, 2020a).

As can be seen, problems related with increasing Chinese direct investments in the country resulted in numerous public demonstrations and violent acts in several different places of the country. Many Kyrgyz perceive these investments working to the benefit of China and not for the development of Kyrgyzstan (Seneviratne, 2019). Indeed, the Kyrgyz people believe that Chinese economic presence fosters poor governance and income inequality in their country (Toktomushev, 2018, p. 84). In fact, these types of problems are all closely related with the issue of political corruption.

Reactions of Kyrgyz authorities to anti-Chinese public demonstrations were mainly not in line with the expectations of the protestors. Although the protestors could succeed in the suspension of operations at the Solton-Sary gold mine and the cancellation of China's logistic center in the Naryn region, Kyrgyz authorities continue to give the message that they are going to maintain friendly relations with China. In fact, this attitude of the Kyrgyz political elite is not surprising since China has been successful in establishing good relations with political elites of the Central

⁴² According to the organizers, around 2,000 people came together whereas the officials claimed that 700 to 800 people participated to the protest (Putz, 2020a).

Asian countries (Uran Kyzy, 2019). Indeed, it has been suggested that Kyrgyz government officials like to go to China in order to solve their problems with grants and funds that they receive (Kassenova, 2009, p. 20). By these Chinese loans, the Kyrgyz ruling elite consolidates its power in two ways. First, financial resources that come from Chinese loans sustain the corrupted political and bureaucratic system. In other words, it indirectly contributes to the survival of the system in which political corruption plays an important role. Second, to a certain extent Chinese investments in infrastructure create a sense of progress among the people and the Kyrgyz governments by using this perception consolidate their rule (Tian, 2018, p. 28-29). Kassenova (2009) suggested that “China starts playing the role of a patron for Kyrgyz politicians” (p. 20). It can be easily suggested that today there is a patron-client relationship between the Chinese and Kyrgyz authorities because of China’s role as a source of wealth and as a source of political power.

Although this patron-client relationship contributes to the survival of the corrupt political and bureaucratic system in Kyrgyzstan, at the same time, it also creates dependency for the Kyrgyz political elites on China, another reason of social unrest in the country. In other words, while the Kyrgyz ruling elites cannot abandon China’s economic assistance as another means to consolidate their power, at the same time, political corruption scandals around China’s economic activities weaken their legitimacy in the eyes of the Kyrgyz people. As a result of this situation, the Kyrgyz people start to question the benefits of the Chinese economic presence in their country and raises the question of who really gets rich from China’s economic activities (Putz, 2019a). In the light of the numerous political corruption scandals related to the Chinese economic presence in Kyrgyzstan and Chinese firms’ creation of limited number of jobs with low wages and poor working conditions for the local people, it can be suggested that concerns of the Kyrgyz people about the Chinese economic presence are not without reason. Moreover, Chinese companies abuse the corrupt political and bureaucratic system of Kyrgyzstan in order to realize their economic goals, especially in the mining sector. In other words, these firms do not hesitate to exploit the poor governance practices of Kyrgyzstan, which result in

violation of environmental safeguards at the mining sites. In this regard, anti-Chinese public demonstrations can be interpreted as the Kyrgyz people's attempts of securing the social justice in their country.

In addition to patron-client relationship between China and Kyrgyzstan, political corruption also shows itself as a clientelist system within Kyrgyzstan which plays significant role in the rise of Sinophobia among the Kyrgyz people. The opposition in general and Azimbek Beknazarov in particular successfully exploited the clientelist system of the Kyrgyz politics in 2002 by using the "Chinese question". Although the Kyrgyz ruling elite never mentioned about the border delimitation after the Tulip Revolution and maintained their good relations with China (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2009, p. 84), opposition parties and figures are still trying to use Sinophobia among the people in order to gain support. For instance, the Ata-Jurt Party's electoral manifesto for the 2010 parliamentary elections involved the issue of protecting Kyrgyzstan from Chinese domination (Jarosiewicz & Strachota, 2013, p. 73). As mentioned earlier, in 2011, Wang Kaiwen, China's ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, pointed out political groups as a reason of the Solton-Sary gold mine protests. Also, Omurbek Tekebayev, the leader of the Ata Meken Socialist Party, took part in an anti-Chinese rally in Kara-Balta in 2014 in order to use the local discontent to discredit the Atambayev administration (Garibov, 2018, p. 151). However, political groups and local elites' exploitation of anti-Chinese sentiments of the Kyrgyz people in order to gain political support often reach extreme ideological levels such as ultra-nationalism. Demands like Kyrgyz citizenship to be given only to ethnic Kyrgyz and the ban of Kyrgyz women from marrying Chinese men can be given as examples. As mentioned in the second chapter, political corruption decreases the trust of the Kyrgyz people toward their state which creates a conducive environment for the development of extreme ideologies. Considering political instabilities of the country in the past, this situation could lead to more significant problems for the Kyrgyz people and the elites. As such, anti-Chinese public demonstrations can be also interpreted as consequences of the exploitation of

the clientelist system by the opposition figures in order to get what they want: it could be political power, economic wealth or both.

Political corruption also plays an important role considering the lack of precise information among the Kyrgyz people regarding the Chinese economic presence in their country. As mentioned earlier, after January 7, 2019 protests, the Kyrgyz authorities complained about information pollution on China's economic activities. However, the main reason of this situation is the lack of transparency on the part of Kyrgyz governments regarding economic relations with China. As mentioned above, lack of proper reporting mechanisms of the Kyrgyz state on Chinese investments and absence of systematic discussions on the Chinese economic presence in the country result in alienation of the local people from facts. For instance, although the Kyrgyz people are afraid of Chinese demographic expansion as a result of the increasing Chinese economic activities, some studies (Garibov, 2018; Sadovskaya, 2019) suggest that Chinese labor migration into Kyrgyzstan is not excessive. One can suggest that the Kyrgyz state could solve this issue by implementing necessary policies in order to establish a transparent system of information. However, high level of political corruption in economic relations with China is the biggest obstacle in front of the provision of transparency. Since it is impossible to do business in Kyrgyzstan without the support of influential local political elites, Chinese companies choose direct relations with these influential elites rather than the local communities in order to realize their economic goals in the country. This causes two problems. First, Chinese companies' choice of establishing direct relations with these influential elites rather than the local community results in failure in people-to-people bonds and contributes to the local peoples' unawareness about the Chinese economic presence. Second, it contributes to political corruption in Kyrgyzstan since local authorities pursue their own private interests and realize their aim of enrichment through non-transparent Chinese loans, investments and trade. So, it can be suggested that the protestors' demand of transparency on economic relations with China is hard to be met.

This non-transparent attitude of the Kyrgyz officials further lowers the level of confidence of the Kyrgyz people toward government officials (Kitade, 2019, p. 5). When this low confidence is combined with lack of precise information on the Chinese economic presence in the country, the situation becomes even more problematic. Different claims derived from the state statistics on the one hand, and popular discourses on the other create confusion and eventually lead to anti-Chinese public demonstrations. For instance, as mentioned earlier, the Kyrgyz migration authorities explained that around 40,000 Chinese were permanently living in the country. However, in January 2019 protests, people claimed without any evidence that the number of illegal Chinese in their country alone is 55,000 (Eshaliyeva, 2019). Another example is about marriages between Chinese men and Kyrgyz women, and the Chinese gaining Kyrgyz citizenship through these marriages. Although the official statistics show that from 2010 to 2018 only 268 Chinese citizens received Kyrgyz citizenship (171 ethnic Kyrgyz, 72 Uyghurs, 9 Uzbeks, 6 Han, 9 Dungans and 1 Kazakh) and only 60 marriages took place between the Kyrgyz and Chinese people (Aliyev, 2019a), Kyrgyz nationalist groups believe that the number of marriages between Chinese men with the local women is much higher and they need to be stopped as such marriages will dilute their country.

When the role of political corruption combined with other reasons of Sinophobia, it creates a serious potential for social unrests in Kyrgyzstan. As it is seen, numerous public demonstrations toward China's economic presence as well as violent acts against the Chinese people took place in Kyrgyzstan throughout the years. It should not be forgotten that these Sinophobia related protests and violent assaults may show a snowball effect and eventually lead to nationwide riots and interethnic clashes as had happened in the past during the two revolutions and one interethnic clash.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to analyze the relationship between political corruption in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan and rising Sinophobia among the Kyrgyz people by using the analytical framework of Inge Amundsen on political corruption. In this regard, the thesis aimed to answer the following main research question: “How does political corruption in Kyrgyzstan increase Sinophobia among the Kyrgyz people?”

In the first chapter, the unique situation of Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia in terms of political instabilities regarding political corruption and Sinophobia is explained. Then, a brief literature review on political corruption as well as Sinophobia is given with a specific emphasis on Kyrgyzstan. In this chapter, the analytical framework of Inge Amundsen on political corruption is also presented. In the second chapter, political corruption during the terms of all five presidents of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan is examined by presenting political corruption cases and their impact on both political instability in the country and the daily life of the Kyrgyz people. In this chapter, reasons of the failure of anti-corruption campaigns of Kyrgyz presidents are also analyzed. In the third chapter, the relations between China and Kyrgyzstan is evaluated in the fields of border security, regional security, economy and China’s cultural soft power, with the purpose of giving an overview of the Chinese-Kyrgyz relations to help us better understand political corruption and Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan. In the fourth chapter, reasons of Sinophobia among the Kyrgyz people,

political corruption schemes and scandals regarding economic relations with China, and the role of political corruption in rising Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan are presented by analyzing anti-Chinese public demonstrations and violent acts against the Chinese citizens living and working in Kyrgyzstan. In this chapter, the impact of political corruption on these incidents is also described.

As mentioned above, this thesis aimed to use the analytical framework of Inge Amundsen on political corruption. As Amundsen suggested in his general analysis on corruption, presidents of Kyrgyzstan, with the exception of Roza Otunbayeva, were involved in political corruption to maintain their political power, status and economic wealth by using their authority and power of making laws. This situation can be observed especially in Akayev's and Bakiyev's terms. Both presidents increased their presidential powers by the 1996, 1998, 2000, 2006 and 2007 constitutional amendments. As a result, the role of parliament in politics decreased and the power of presidential families increased. These families became the major determining factor of public policies and the whole state apparatus was built in order to preserve the economic wealth and political power of presidential families.

According to Amundsen, political corruption creates an ineffective legal system in which there is weak accountability, as also seen in the case of Kyrgyzstan. As a result of Akayev family's policy of maintaining dominance on the state apparatus, the judiciary was significantly affected and it became one of the most corrupted branches of the state. Later, law enforcement agencies became instruments of putting pressure on the opposition and maintaining political power, status and economic wealth which can be observed in tenures of Bakiyev, Atambayev and Jeenbekov. Omurbek Tekebayev, Alikbek Jekshenkulov and Ismail Isakov, who were the leading opposition figures at the time of Bakiyev's era, had to deal with several accusations directed against them before the presidential election in 2009. In Atambayev's term, Omurbek Babanov, who challenged Atambayev's political ally Jeenbekov in the 2017 presidential elections, was faced with several accusations and his companies' assets were frozen. Just a few years later, Atambayev found

himself in Babanov's place when he would fall into conflict with President Jeenbekov in the share of the state resources. On August 8, 2019, he was arrested in a police operation and was faced with several accusations, including political corruption.

The type of political corruption that the Kyrgyz ruling elites are involved in is what Amundsen calls as "extractive corruption" in which the ruling elites are the strong side and the state apparatus is a tool for the extraction of sources from society for their benefit. This form of political corruption exists in the neo-patrimonial political systems in which the incumbent holds public office through personal patronage, rather than a political ideology or rule of law. This situation makes nepotism and clientelism important components of the political system, as in the case of Kyrgyzstan. Amundsen's political corruption definition also includes bureaucrats since they also at the top levels of the political system due to their role in the implementation of public policies. In Kyrgyzstan, public offices in the state apparatus also became targets of the ruling elites.

While President Akayev ruled the country for 14 years, President Bakiyev ruled only for 5 years. However, during their tenures, they both established "mega clans" around their families in order to control the economic resources of the country. While Akayev made this with the northern clans, Bakiyev accomplished it with the southern clans. In other words, since their rule was based on personal patronage, they exploited the clientelist political system of the country, took advantage of the north-south division and gained the support of clans from their own regions. As a result, nepotism played an important role in how these two presidents made their appointments to top level positions in bureaucracy. Moreover, both presidents sold public offices for high fees. Later, owners of these positions gained huge amounts of money, even millions of American dollars in some cases. A similar tendency was also observed in the private sector where people close to the presidential families became important actors.

Although this neo-patrimonial political system provided significant political power and economic wealth to both presidents, it also contributed to their tenures' coming to an end. As mentioned earlier, Kyrgyzstan has centralized but competitive political system in which the competing elites have some room to maneuver in “a corrupt game of buying patronage” (Kupatadze, 2015, p. 207). In 2005 and 2010, the opposition could successfully manage to overthrow Akayev and Bakiyev respectively. While Akayev was overthrown by the excluded southern clans, Bakiyev's era was ended by the excluded northern clans.

During Otunbayeva's era, competing political elites tried to take advantage of the power vacuum which occurred after the 2010 Revolution. They even threatened the interim government with “the third revolution” by the support of their own local people. So, they tried to exploit clientelist system of the country in order to get political power and economic wealth. In Atambayev's term, the role of family clans in extractive corruption was replaced by party clans and nepotist practices included close friends and advisers. He placed those people who were loyal to him to key positions before his term ended as a president. However, President Jeenbekov wanted to establish his network based on kinship ties. As a result, a rivalry began between pro-Atambayev people and the members of the Jeenbekov clan. President Jeenbekov started to dismiss pro-Atambayev figures from public offices which ended with arrest of Atambayev as mentioned earlier.

As Atambayev-Jeenbekov rivalry showed that the state is still a source of political power and economic wealth in Kyrgyzstan. That is why competing elites try to penetrate into the state apparatus and once they succeeded in, they establish networks based on family clans or party clans. This situation makes nepotism and clientelism inseparable parts of the Kyrgyz political and bureaucratic system since the ruling elites do not govern through political ideology or rule of law. Instead, as Amundsen suggested, they secure their power by appointing loyal people from their families or close circles to important political, economic and security positions in the state apparatus.

However, at the same time clientelist political system creates a danger for office holders in the issue of Sinophobia. According to Amundsen, people, who are involved in political corruption seek political power, economic wealth or both. In Kyrgyzstan, competing elites, who are excluded from the corrupt networks used clientelist system several times in order to gain access to political power and economic resources of the country. Furthermore, anti-Chinese sentiments of the local people were exploited by the actors of the patron-client networks in order to gain public support. As for political corruption scandals, it can be suggested that economic relations with China is a tool for the Kyrgyz ruling elites to extract, amass and consume the resources of the state since the regime is not development-oriented. So, both extractive corruption and neo-patrimonial system contribute to rising Sinophobia in Kyrgyzstan.

Political corruption in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan during the terms of all presidents (except Roza Otunbayeva) had various manifestations similarly Sinophobia too has been on the agenda of the country in the post-Soviet era due to several different reasons. Political corruption had its unique impact on Sinophobia as well. In terms of the relation between political corruption and Sinophobia what we see is that they may actually very much influence and reinforce each other. The negative consequences of political corruption increase the resentment toward China and the Chinese people living and working in Kyrgyzstan, hence contributing to rising Sinophobia.

Nowadays, Kyrgyzstan suffers from COVID-19 pandemic like rest of the world. However, political corruption hit the pandemic process as well. The government failed in fixing prices of medical equipment and drugs during the emergency in April 2020. During this time, pharmaceutical oligarchs made huge profits since they sold the necessary supplies at inflated prices. The Ministry of Finance of Kyrgyzstan has created a special account to raise funds as part of the economic recovery package. Donations from citizens as well as loans and donations from international organizations were collected in this account. However, there is no transparent

system that does provide precise data on where these funds are used. This situation created frustration among the Kyrgyz people and lowered public trust to the government (Uran Kyzy, 2020).

In this process, because the Kyrgyz economy suffered heavily, the country may become even more dependent on China. However, this situation may also increase Sinophobia among the Kyrgyz people. In fact, one of the main concerns of the Kyrgyz people, that is government's incapability to pay its debt to China, have already become real, at least for the pandemic process. On April 14, 2020, President Jeenbekov called his counterpart Xi Jinping to ask about "easing and prolonging payments on Kyrgyzstan's external debt to China." However, President Xi Jinping's answer is unknown ("Kyrgyzstan Asks China", 2020).

As for future research, same topic can be elaborated for other Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan which also witnessed several anti-Chinese public demonstrations in recent years. Second, a research on of how other global and regional powers can take advantage of Sinophobia in Central Asia and how they can increase their influence in the region can be conducted. With such comparative studies, political corruption as well as Sinophobia can be better understood.

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APPENDICES

A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKE ÖZET

Bu tez Inge Amundsen'in siyasi yolsuzluk üzerine geliřtirdiđi analitik çerçeyi kullanarak Sovyet sonrası Kırgızistan'da siyasi yolsuzluk ve Çin düşmanlıđını⁴³ incelemekte; "Siyasi yolsuzluk Kırgız halkı arasında Çin düşmanlıđını nasıl artırmaktadır?" sorusuna cevap vermeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Tezin ilk bölümünde Kırgızistan'ın araştırılmaya deđer özel durumu açıklanmış ve ilgili literatür taraması yapılmıştır. Orta Asya genelinde siyasi yolsuzluk her zaman önemli bir sorun olmuştur. Ancak, Kırgızistan'da önemli siyasi istikrarsızlıklara sebep olmuştur. Çin düşmanlıđı da Orta Asya halkları arasında her zaman yaygın bir olgu olmuştur. Kırgızistan özelinde ise yerel halk giderek artan Çin göçünden rahatsız olmakta ve ileride Çin'in en batıdaki bölgesi olmaktan korkmaktadır. Kırgız halkı ayrıca ülkelerinde artan Çin ekonomik varlıđını siyasi yolsuzluk ile bağdařtırmakta ve protestolar düzenlemektedir. Kırgızistan diđer Orta Asya ülkelerine kıyasla her zaman daha az otoriter olduđundan bu tarz protestolar görülebilmektedir. Hem Kırgızistan'ın siyasi yolsuzluk ve Çin düşmanlıđı konularındaki özel durumu hem de bu iki olgunun birbirleri ile olan iliřkisi bu tezin konusunu ilginç ve arařtırmaya deđer kılmaktadır.

Orta Asya genelinde ve Kırgızistan özelinde siyasi yolsuzluk üzerine çalışmalarını iki ana başlık altında toplayabiliriz: nedenleri ve sonuçları. Bu çalışmalarda ilk neden olarak yapısal problemler gösterilmiştir. Sovyetler Birliđi'nden miras kalan problemler bađımsızlıktan sonraki demokratik devlet inşası sürecinde

⁴³ "Sinophobia" kelimesinin Türk Dil Kurumu sözlüğünde karşılıđı bulunmamaktadır. Bu kelimenin tezde kullanım amacına istinaden "Öz" ve "Türkçe Özet" kısımlarında Türkçe karşılıđı olarak "Çin düşmanlıđı" ifadesi kullanılmıştır.

çözülemedi. Bu süreç merkezi ve rekabetçi bir siyasi sistem ile sonuçlanmıştır. Bu sistemde devlet baskın rolde olsa da rekabet içerisindeki siyasi elitler manevra alanı bulabilmektedir. Bu rekabet ise Sovyet sonrası Kırgızistan’da patron-müşteri sisteminin ortaya çıkmasına neden olmuştur.

İkinci neden olarak ise ülkenin ekonomik durumu ve siyasilerin ekonomi politikaları gösterilmiştir. Ekonomik problemlerle mücadele amacıyla yapılan reformlardan olan özelleştirme süreci yönetici elitin zenginleşmesi için bir araç haline dönüşmüştür. Üçüncü neden olarak ise ülkedeki sosyal yapı gösterilmiştir. Toplum yapısı akrabalık bağlarına dayanan aşiretlerden oluşmaktadır. Bu aşiretler ekonomik zorluklarda ihtiyaç duyulan tüketim mallarını sağlayarak sosyal bir organizasyon görevi görürler. Kırgız siyasetinde siyasi ve ekonomik güç için rekabet aşiretler üzerinden gerçekleşmektedir. Dördüncü ve son sebep olarak ise yerel halkın siyasi yolsuzluğa bakış açısı ve kültürü gösterilmiştir. Bölgede siyasi yolsuzluğun önlenemez olduğu düşüncesi yaygındır. Bu durumdan ötürü bölge insanı kendini “herkes yapıyor” düşüncesiyle motive eder ve yolsuzluğa karışır.

Literatürde Kırgızistan’da siyasi yolsuzluğun sonuçları ise üç ana başlıkta sunulmuştur. Bunlardan birincisi ülkedeki siyasi istikrarsızlıkta oynadığı roldür. 2005 ve 2010 devrimleri ile 2010 Oş olaylarının en önemli sebepleri arasında gösterilmiştir. İkinci olarak ise Kırgız halkının yaşam standardını olumsuz yönde etkilemesi gösterilmiştir. Kamu hizmetlerinin aksamasına sebep olmuş ve gelir eşitsizliğini artırmıştır. Üçüncü sonuç olarak ise devlet yapısının ve siyasi sistemin kriminalizasyonu gösterilmiştir. Bu durum özellikle Bakiyev döneminde artmış ve 2010 Oş olaylarında önemli rol oynamıştır.

Siyasi yolsuzlukta olduğu gibi Çin düşmanlığı konusunda da çalışmalar iki ana başlıkta toplanabilir: nedenleri ve sonuçları. İlk neden olarak Çin, Çin halkı ve kültürü hakkında yeterli bilgi eksikliği gösterilmiştir. İkinci neden olarak ise Çin-Kırgızistan ilişkilerine konu olan olaylar gösterilmiştir. Bunlardan ilki Uygur sorunudur. Orta Asya halklarının Uygurlar ile ortak kültürel ve dini bağlara sahip olmasından ötürü Çin’in Uygurlara karşı yürüttüğü politikalar bölgede Çin düşmanlığını artırmaktadır. İkinci konu ise Kuşak ve Yol Girişimi’dir. Bu proje ile

Kırgızistan'da Çin varlığı çok daha görünür hale gelmiştir. Çin düşmanlığının üçüncü nedeni olarak Çinli tüccar ve işçi göçü gösterilmiştir. Çinli tüccarlar ucuz Çin mallarına ve Çin devletinin sağladığı yumuşak kredilere kolaylıkla ulaşabilmektedir. Bu durum Kırgız tüccarlara göre ticarete haksız rekabet yaratmaktadır. Öte yandan Çinli işçi göçü ise zaten işsizliğin yüksek olduğu ülkede iş piyasasında rekabete sebep olacağı korkusundan ötürü huzursuzluk yaratmaktadır. Çin düşmanlığının dördüncü nedeni olarak ise dini ve kültürel farklılıklar verilmiştir. Bu farklılıklar milliyetçi ve muhafazakâr kişiler ve kesimler tarafından sömürülmektedir. Beşinci neden olarak ise komplo teorileri gösterilmiştir. Genelde Orta Asya halkları özelde Kırgız halkı Çin'in bölgeye yönelik gizli planları olduğuna inanmaktadır.

Kırgızistan'da Çin düşmanlığının sonuçları ise genel olarak Kırgız halkının Çin'e ve Çinlilere karşı tutumu üzerine ele alınmıştır. Kırgızistan'da sayısız kez Çin karşıtı protestolar ve Çinlilere karşı çeşitli şiddet olayları gerçekleşmiştir.

Yukarıda da bahsedildiği üzere bu tez Inge Amundsen'in siyasi yolsuzluk üzerine geliştirdiği analitik çerçeveyi kullanacaktır. Ona göre siyasi yolsuzluk hem siyasileri hem de bürokratları kapsar. Kanun yapma gücü olan siyasiler siyasi güçlerini, statülerini ve ekonomik zenginliklerini sürdürülebilmek için yolsuzluğa karışırlar. Bu durum kaynakların yanlış tahsisi, kurumsal çürüme ve hesap verilebilirliğin zayıf olduğu etkisiz bir hukuk sistemi ile sonuçlanır.

Amundsen'e göre siyasi yolsuzluğun amaçları siyasi güç ve ekonomik zenginliktir. Bunların paylaşımı ise iki şekilde gerçekleşebilir. Güçlü taraf devlet dışı çıkar grupları ise kaynaklar devletten topluma akar. Eğer güçlü taraf devlete sahip olan yönetici elitse, Kırgızistan'da olduğu gibi, kaynaklar toplumdan devlete akar. Bu durumda devlet mekanizması yönetici elitin zenginleşmesi için bir araçtır. Üstelik bu siyasi yolsuzluk biçiminde bireyler kamu görevini siyasi ideoloji veya hukukun üstünlüğü yerine kişisel himaye yoluyla üstlenir. Bu durumdan ötürü nepotizm ve patron-müşteri olguları bu sistemin önemli bileşenlerindedir.

Görüldüğü üzere Orta Asya genelinde ve Kırgızistan özelinde siyasi yolsuzluk ve Çin düşmanlığı üzerine çok sayıda kaynak ve çalışma yer almaktadır. Ancak bu çalışmalar, bu iki olgunun birbirleri ile olan ilişkisine odaklanmamıştır. Bu tez hem bunu yaparak hem de Inge Amundsen'in siyasi yolsuzluk üzerine geliştirdiği analitik çerçeveyi Kırgızistan'da siyasi yolsuzluk ve bunun Çin düşmanlığına etkisini açıklamak için bir ilk olarak kullanarak literatüre katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Tezin ikinci bölümünde Sovyet sonrası Kırgızistan'da siyasi yolsuzluk incelenmiştir. Cumhurbaşkanı Askar Akayev 1990'ların ikinci yarısında yaptığı anayasa değişiklikleri ile gücünü ve yetkilerini artırmıştır. Bu durum sonucunda parlamentonun gücü azalmış ve Akayev ailesinin siyasetteki etkisi artmıştır. Akayev ailesi zamanla kamu politikalarını belirleyen baş aktöre dönüşmüş ve devlet aygıtını siyasi ve ekonomik güçlerini sürdüreceği ve koruyacak şekilde inşa etmişlerdir.

Akayev döneminde siyasete ve devlete nepotizm ve aşiretçilikle egemen olunmuştur. Kuzeyli Akayev ailesi etrafında güneyli aşiretlerin dışlandığı siyasete ve devlete egemen büyük bir aşiret kurulmuştur. Bu aşiretin üyeleri devlette ve özel sektörde önemli görevlerde yer almışlardır. Bunun yanında kamu pozisyonları yüksek meblağlara satışa çıkarılmıştır. Devlet üzerinde bu kapsamlı etki yozlaşmış yargıyla sonuçlanmıştır. Mahkemeler siyasi ve taraflı kararlar vermiştir. Kolluk kuvvetleri ise muhalefet üzerinde baskı unsuru oluşturmuştur. Devlet ve siyaset üzerindeki egemenlik, ülkenin ekonomik kaynakları üzerinde kurulan egemenlik ile pekiştirilmiştir. Akayev ailesi özellikle altın madenciliği ve özelleştirme sürecinde yolsuzluklar gerçekleştirmiştir.

Yüksek düzeyde siyasi yolsuzluk devleti işlevsizleştirmiş ve gölge ekonomisinin gelişmesine sebep olmuştur. Kamu hizmetleri sağlamada yetersiz kalan devlete güveni azalan insanlar ihtiyaçlarını karşılayabilmek için alternatif kaynaklara yönelmiştir. Bu durumdan ötürü vergiler azalmıştır. Vergilerin azalması ise eğitim ve sağlık gibi kamu hizmetlerinin kalitesini düşürmüştür. Gölge ekonomisi organize suçun gelişmesine de neden olmuştur. Bu durum suç dünyasından figürlerin siyasete dahil olmasıyla sonuçlanmıştır. İnsan ve silah kaçakçılıklarından elde edilen

zenginlik bu kimselere Akayev'e rakip olabilecekleri güç sağlamıştır. Devletin kamu hizmetlerini yerine getirememesinden faydalanarak halka çeşitli hizmetler götürmüşler ve halkın desteğini almışlardır.

Yüksek düzeyde siyasi yolsuzluk ve sebep olduğu sonuçlar 2002 yılında Aksı olaylarının, 2005 yılında ise Lale devriminin en önemli sebepleri arasında gösterilmiştir. Siyasetten ve ekonomiden dışlanan güneyli aşiretlerin başlattığı 2005 devrimi Akayev'in iktidardan düşmesiyle son bulmuştur.

Devrimden sonra iktidara gelen Kurmanbek Bakiyev de anayasa değişiklikleri ile gücünü ve yetkilerini artırmıştır. Nepotizm ve aşiretçilik ile de devlet aygıtını ele geçirmiştir. Güneyli Bakiyev ailesinin etrafında kurulan büyük aşiretin mensupları bürokrasi ve özel sektörde önemli görevlerde yer almışlardır. Kamu pozisyonlarının satışı uygulaması ve yozlaşmış hukuk düzeni de devam etmiştir. Bakiyev'in iktidara gelirken söz verdiği yolsuzlukla mücadele kampanyası hedefinden şaşmış ve kampanyanın kendisi muhalefeti hedef almak suretiyle yozlaşmıştır. Bakiyev ailesinin en önemli zenginlik kaynakları ise Kırgız devletinin de en önemli ekonomik kaynakları olan altın madenciliği ve hidrolik güç olmuştur.

Yüksek düzeyde siyasi yolsuzluk ülkedeki Özbek topluluğunu oldukça olumsuz etkilemiştir. Etnik Kırgız olan güneyli Bakiyev taraftarı gruplar Özbekler üzerinde haraç ve kamulaştırma benzeri yöntemlerle baskı kurmuşlardır. Yüksek düzeyde siyasi yolsuzluk ayrıca suç dünyası ile politika arasındaki bağları kuvvetlendirmiştir. Bu durumla beraber ülkedeki siyasi şiddet de artmıştır.

Bakiyev de selefi gibi iktidardan devrim ile düşmüştür. Ancak, 2010 devriminde 2005 yılındakinin aksine çeşitli şehirlerde önemli şiddet olayları gerçekleşmiştir. Kuzeyli aşiretlerin başlattığı olaylarda polisin şiddetli cevabı sonrasında 83 kişi hayatını kaybetmiş ve 1,500'ü yaralanmıştır. Bakiyev ve ailesi ise Belarus'a sığınmacı olarak kaçmıştır.

Roza Otunbayeva geçici süreliğine iktidara gelse de onun döneminde de önemli olaylar olmuştur. Bakiyev devrilince ülkenin güneyinde siyasi ve ekonomik güç için yeni bir rekabet başlamıştır. Bu yeni mücadelede Bakiyev döneminde siyasi

yolsuzluk sonucu güç kazanan suç dünyasından kişiler ve gruplar geçici hükümet yanlısı Özbekleri rakip olarak görmüş ve iki grup arasında gerginlik giderek büyümüştür. Bu durum 2010 haziranında ülkenin güneyinde etnik çatışmaya dönüşmüştür. Olaylar Otunbayeva hükümetinin olağanüstü hal ilan etmesiyle son bulsa da yüzbinlerce Özbek yurtlarından olmuştur.

Otunbayeva'nın yolsuzlukla mücadele kampanyası siyasi yolsuzluğun önüne geçememiştir. Siyasi ve ekonomik güç için mücadele eden aşiretler yerel düzeydeki desteklerini kullanarak çıkarlarını maksimize etmeye çalışmış ve kamu pozisyonlarının satışı gibi uygulamalar Otunbayeva'nın otorite eksikliğinden dolayı devam etmiştir.

2011'de göreve gelen Almazbek Atambayev iktidara geldiğinde siyasi yolsuzlukla mücadele sözü verse de bu politikası kısa sürede muhalefeti baskılayan bir araç haline gelmiştir. Akayev ve Bakiyev ailelerinin aksine Atambayev ailesi Kırgız siyasetine ve ekonomisine hükmetmemiştir. Aksine ülkenin kaynaklarını daha dikkatli ve eşit bir şekilde rekabet içerisindeki siyasi elitler arasında paylaşmıştır. Atambayev, 2017 cumhurbaşkanlığı seçimlerinde halefi olarak gördüğü Sooronbay Jeenbekov'un kazanmasını devlet kaynaklarının uygunsuz kullanımı gibi yozlaşmış yöntemlerle sağlamıştır. İktidarı sırasında ise hatırı sayılır miktarda bir servet edinmiş ve kendine lüks villalar yaptırmıştır.

Görevi bırakmadan önce devlet içerisinde önemli pozisyonlara kendine sadık kişileri göreve getiren Atambayev, cumhurbaşkanlığı görevinden sonra da siyasette aktif kalmayı amaçlamıştır. Ancak, Jeenbekov'un kendi aşiretinden kişileri devlet kadrolarına sokma hedefi ile Atambayev'in mevcut statüyü koruma çabaları ters düşmüştür. 2018 yılının ocak ayında Bişkek elektrik santralinde gerçekleşen kaza sonucu ortaya çıkan siyasi yolsuzluk skandalı Jeenbekov'a aradığı fırsatı sağlamıştır. Soruşturma süreci Atambayev'in polis operasyonu ile tutuklanması ile sonuçlanmıştır.

Atambayev ve Jeenbekov dönemlerinde siyasi yolsuzluk ve muhalefetin yolsuzluk karşıtı kampanyalar ile hedef alınması birçok protestoya sebep olmuştur. Yüksek

düzyeyde siyasi yolsuzluktan dolayı devletin kamu hizmetlerini sağlamada işlevsizliđi devam etmiş ve halkın devlete olan güveni daha da azalmıştır. Bu durum ülkede radikal ideolojilerin yayılması için fırsat yaratmaktadır.

Tezin üçüncü bölümünde Çin-Kırgızistan ilişkileri incelenmiştir. Bu iki ülke arasındaki ilişki hakkında fikir sahibi olmak, Kırgızistan'da Çin düşmanlığını anlamak ve ekonomik ilişkilerin siyasi yolsuzluk için uygun ortamı nasıl sağladığını görmek açısından önemlidir. İki ülke arasındaki ilişkiler belli ilkeler ve beklentiler çerçevesinde gelişmiştir. Çin, en azından resmi söylemde, egemen ülkelerin iç işlerine karışmama ilkesi çerçevesinde dostane ilişkiler, güvenlik ve istikrar ile ekonomik kalkınmayı amaçlamıştır. Kırgız yetkililer ise Çin'in iç işlerine karışmama tutumunu takdirle karşılamış ve ekonomik yardımları hevesle kabul etmişlerdir.

1991 yılında Sovyetler Birliđi'nin dağılması ile birlikte Çin, Orta Asya'da otorite eksikliğinden kaynaklı güvenlik sorunları olacağından endişe duymuş ve bunun zaten politik olarak problemlili olan Sincan Uygur Özerk Bölgesi için tehdit oluşturabileceğini düşünmüştür. Bu sebepten ötürü bölgeye yönelik güvenlik politikalarını öncelik haline getirmiştir. Bu amaç doğrultusunda ilk olarak sınır anlaşmazlıklarını çözmek ve sınırların güvenliğini sağlamak için harekete geçmiştir. 1996 ve 1997 yıllarında Şanghay Beşlisi çatısı altında imzalanan anlaşmalarla sınır güvenliği sağlanmıştır. Çin ile Kırgızistan arasındaki sınır anlaşmazlıkları sorunu ise 1996 ve 1999 yıllarında imzalanan anlaşmalarla çözülmüştür.

Çin'in bölgeye yönelik güvenlik politikalarının ikinci aşamasını ise hem Orta Asya ülkelerini hem de Çin'in özellikle Sincan Uygur Özerk Bölgesi'ni tehdit eden "terörizm, ayrılıkçılık ve aşırılık" ile mücadele oluşturmuştur. 2001 yılında Çin'in önerisi ile Şanghay İşbirliği Örgütü kurulmuş ve örgüt çatısı altındaki çalışmalara Kırgızistan aktif olarak katılmıştır. İkili düzeyde ise Çin, Kırgızistan'a çeşitli askeri yardımlarda bulunmuştur. Buna karşılık Kırgızistan ise Uygur sorununda Çin'i desteklemiştir.

Çin yönetimi, Sincan Uygur Özerk Bölgesi'nin ekonomik olarak kalkınması durumunda bölgede istikrar ve güvenliğin tesis edileceğini düşünmektedir. Sincan Uygur Özerk Bölgesi'nin dış ticaretinin önemli bir bölümü Orta Asya ile gerçekleştiğinden bu politikada Orta Asya önemli bir yer tutmaktadır. Üstelik ekonomik olarak kalkınmış bir Orta Asya, Çin için istikrarsızlık unsuru veya güvenlik tehdidi oluşturmayacaktır. Çin'in bölgeyle olan ekonomik ilişkileri 1990'larda küçük hibeler ve krediler ile başlamıştır. 2000'den sonra Çin, altyapı projelerinin finansmanı ve inşaatına odaklanmıştır. 2013'te açıklanan Kuşak ve Yol Projesi ile de Çin'in bölgedeki ekonomik varlığı zirve yapmıştır.

Kırgızistan ise hem stratejik konumu hem de Dünya Ticaret Örgütü'ne erken üyeliği ile Çin'in bölgeye yönelik ekonomik politikalarında önemli yer tutmuştur. Çin-Kırgız ekonomik ilişkileri ticaretle ve Çin'in doğrudan yatırımlarıyla gelişmiştir. 2013 itibariyle Çin ile ticaret Kırgızistan'ın toplam ticaret hacminin yüzde 50'sine ulaşmıştır. Orta Asya'nın en büyük perakende pazarları Kırgız şehirleri Bişkek ve Oş'ta bulunmaktadır. Buradaki ürünlerin yaklaşık yüzde 80'ini Çin malları oluşturmakta ve bu mallar diğer Orta Asya ülkeleri ile Rusya'ya ihraç edilmektedir. Kırgızistan'da Çin'in doğrudan yatırımları özellikle 2011 sonrasında hızlanmış ve 2013'te Kuşak ve Yol Projesi ile zirveye ulaşmıştır. Yatırımların büyük çoğunluğu ise enerji sektöründe gerçekleşmiştir.

Çin'in yıllar içinde artan ekonomik varlığı Çinli tüccar ve işçi göçüne sebep olmuştur. 1990'lar ve 2000'lerin ilk yarısında gerçekleşen yoğun Çinli tüccar göçü sonucu pazarlarda Çinliler önemli aktörler haline gelmişlerdir. 2010'dan sonra artan doğrudan yatırımlar ile ise önemli miktarda Çinli işçi göçü gerçekleşmiştir. 1990'lar ve 2000'lerde kontrolsüz bir şekilde gerçekleşen Çinli göçüne yönelik Kırgız devleti 2010 yılında düzenlemeler getirmiştir. Ancak, Kırgız devletinin sınırlardaki zayıf kontrolü neticesinde sınırdan yasa dışı geçişler engellenememiştir. Bu durumdan kaynaklı olarak Kırgızistan'da ikamet eden Çinli sayısı üzerine farklı iddialar ortaya atılmaktadır.

Çin-Kırgızistan ilişkilerinin bir diğer boyutu ise Çin'in Kırgızistan'da uyguladığı yumuşak güç politikalarıdır. Çin'in ekonomik ve askeri anlamda hızlı büyümesi

komşu ülkeleri tedirgin etmiş ve Çin'i tehdit olarak algılamalarına sebep olmuştur. Çin yönetimi bu olumsuz algıyı değiştirmek ve Çin kültürü ile dilini dünyaya tanıtmak amacıyla 1990'larda çalışmalar başlatmıştır. "İyiliksever yönetim", "barış ve uyum" ve "farklılıklara saygı" üzerine kurdukları Çin kültürü temelli yumuşak güç politikaları 2010'dan sonra hız kazanmıştır. Ancak, Kırgızistan'da İslami kültür, Rus kültürel etkisi ve yerel gelenekler Çin kültürüne sınırlı bir alan bırakmaktadır. Bu durumdan kaynaklı olarak Çin ekonomik varlığı ile Çin kültürel varlığı arasındaki uçurum sürmektedir.

Çin'in Kırgızistan'ın iç işlerine karışmama tutumu ve ekonomik kaynaklar sağlaması Kırgız yetkililer tarafından olumlu karşılanırsa da Çin ile ilişkiler bazı alanlarda Kırgız halkı arasında huzursuzluklara sebep olmaktadır. Sınır anlaşmazlıkları sonucunda Çin'e toprak verilmesi halk tarafından hoş karşılanmamış ve ülkede 2002 yılında Aksı olaylarına sebep olmuştur. Her ne kadar Kırgız hükümeti Uygur sorununda Çin ile aynı çizgide dursa da Çin'in Sincan Uygur Özerk Bölgesi'nde Müslüman azınlıklara karşı uyguladığı politikalar benzer kültürel ve dini yapıya sahip olan Kırgız halkı arasında Çin düşmanlığını artıran faktörlerdendir. Çin ekonomik varlığı ile birlikte artan göçler ise Kırgız halkında çeşitli endişelere sebep olmakta ve Çin düşmanlığını artırmaktadır. Çin'in kültürel yumuşak güç politikaları ise Çin düşmanlığını azaltma konusunda yetersiz kalmaktadır.

Tezin dördüncü bölümünde Kırgızistan'da Çin düşmanlığının sebepleri ve siyasi yolsuzluğun rolü incelenmiştir. Kırgızistan'da Çin düşmanlığının nedenlerinden ilki Kırgız milletinin Çin hakkında yeterli bilgiye sahip olmamasıdır. Bu durumun ise birkaç sebebi vardır. İlk olarak tarihsel açıdan Çin her zaman Türki ulusların ve Müslümanların düşmanı olarak görülmüştür. Kırgızların bu bakış açısı Sovyetler Birliği döneminde Çin karşıtı eğitim ve propagandayla güçlendirilmiştir. Ayrıca, günümüzde Çinli göçmenlerin kendilerini toplumdan soyutlamaları Çin hakkında bilgi yetersizliğine katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Çin hakkında yetersiz bilginin ikinci sebebi ise Çin hükümetinin ve Çinli şirketlerin yerel halkla iletişim kurmakta başarısız olmasıdır. Çin'in yumuşak güç politikaları

devlet eliyle yapıldığından bu politikalar propaganda olarak görülmektedir. Bu sebepten ötürü Kırgız halkı Çin kültürünü öğrenme isteği göstermemektedir. Ayrıca, Çin'in Sincan Uygur Özerk Bölgesi'nde uyguladığı politikalar kültürel yumuşak gücüyle çelişmekte ve halkın tepkisini çekmektedir. Çinli firmalar ise yerel halkla iletişim kurmak yerine güçlü ve etki sahibi yerel siyasi elitlerle ilişki kurmayı tercih etmektedir. Bu durum Kırgız halkını Çin yatırımları konusunda bilgisiz bırakmaktadır. Kırgız halkı ayrıca kendi devleti tarafından da Çin ekonomik varlığı ile ilgili düzgün olarak bilgilendirilmemektedir.

Çin düşmanlığının ikinci nedeni ise Çin ile Kırgızistan arasındaki büyük demografik ve ekonomik farklılıklardır. Çin nüfusu 1,5 milyar civarındadır ve bunun yaklaşık 100 milyonu işsizdir. Bu insanlar ülke dışında iş aramaktadır. Göç ettikleri ülkelerden biri ise Kırgızistan'dır. Kırgızistan ise yaklaşık 6 milyon nüfusuyla demografik anlamda küçük bir ülkedir. Bu durumdan ötürü Kırgız halkı Çinli "göç işgali" olmasından korkmaktadır.

İki ülkenin ekonomik ilişkilerinde de büyük bir dengesizlik görülmektedir. Çin, Kırgızistan'da birçok projeyi finanse etmektedir. Bunun sonucu olarak Kırgızistan'ın toplam dış borcunun yaklaşık yarısını Çin'e olan borçları oluşturmaktadır. Ticaretle de Çin lehine büyük bir dengesizlik vardır. Çin ile ekonomik ilişkilerdeki bu dengesizliklerden ötürü Kırgız halkı devletlerinin Çin'e olan borçlarını ödeyemeyeceğinden ve Çin'in bu durumdan faydalanarak egemenliklerini ihlal edeceğinden korkmaktadır.

Çin düşmanlığının üçüncü sebebi ise artan Çin ekonomik varlığı ve Çinli göçüdür. Çin, Kırgızistan'da projeleri finanse ederken belli şartlar öne sürmektedir. Bu şartlar ise ülkedeki Çin düşmanlığını artırmaktadır. İlk şart finanse ettiği projelerin Çinli firmalar tarafından yapılmasının garantisidir. Çinli firmalar ise beraberlerinde Çinli işçileri getirmektedirler. Bunun sonucu olarak Çinli firmalar yeni iş imkânları yaratmada yetersiz kalmakta ve işsizliğin zaten yüksek olduğu Kırgızistan'da halkın tepkisini çekmektedirler. Çin finansmanının şartlarından ikincisi ise doğal kaynaklara erişim hakkıdır. Son yıllarda Kırgızistan'da Çin'in madencilik faaliyetleri artış göstermiştir. Bunun yanında Çin, geçmişte Sovyet Rusya'nın

yaptığı gibi Kırgızistan'dan ağırlıklı olarak ham madde ithal etmekte ve bu ülkeye nihai mal ihraç etmektedir. Bu da ülkede Çin'in kolonisi olma korkusu yaratmaktadır.

Çin'in ticarete artan varlığı da Çin düşmanlığına katkıda bulunmaktadır. Daha önce bahsedildiği üzere Çinliler, Kırgız pazarlarında önemli aktörler haline gelmiştir. Çin devletinin sağladığı yumuşak kredilere ve ucuz Çin mallarına ulaşım kolaylığını avantajlarına kullanan Çinli tüccarlar Kırgızistan'daki ticaret ağlarına hâkim olmuşlardır. Kırgız tüccarlar bunu haksız rekabet olarak görmekte ve durumdan şikâyet etmektedirler.

Çin düşmanlığının dördüncü sebebi ise kültürel ve dini farklılıklardır. Kırgızistan'da halk arasında Çin kültürü ve etkisi hoş karşılanmamaktadır. Bu durum hem din temelli hem de ırk temelli Çin düşmanlıklarına sebep olmaktadır. İslamcılar, Çin'in Uygurlara yönelik politikalarına referans yaparak Çin düşmanlığını körüklemektedir. Öte yandan milliyetçi gruplar ise Çinli erkekler ve Kırgız kadınların evlenmelerine ve Çinlilerin bu evlilikler vasıtasıyla vatandaşlık almalarına karşı çıkmaktadır.

Tezin ikinci bölümünde siyasi yolsuzluğun Kırgızistan'ın en büyük problemlerinden biri olduğu incelenmişti. Ancak, siyasi yolsuzluk aynı zamanda Çin ile olan ekonomik ilişkilerde ve Çin'in Kırgızistan'daki ekonomik varlığında da önemli rol oynamaktadır. Çin ve Kırgızistan'ın paylaştığı ticaret rakamları Akayev döneminden beri hep farklı olmuştur. Kırgızistan'ın paylaştığı rakamlar çok daha düşüktür. Bu farkın sebebi ise yolsuzluk ve yasadışı ticarettir. 1998 ile 2003 yılları arasında sınırdaki yasadışı ticaretin yüzde 20'sinin doğrudan Akayev ailesine gittiği tespit edilmiştir. Öte yandan Bakiyev ailesi ise doğrudan Çin ile ticaretin içinde yer almış ve çeşitli şeffaf olmayan anlaşmalar yapmışlardır. Çin ile ticarete son büyük yolsuzluk skandalı 2019'da bağımsız medya kuruluşları tarafından ortaya çıkarılmıştır. Süreç devam etmekte olup Cumhurbaşkanı Jeenbekov'un sessizliği yolsuzluk skandalına karışanlara destek olarak yorumlanmıştır.

Ticaretin yanında Çin'in yapmış olduğu doğrudan yatırımlar da siyasi yolsuzluğun hedefi olmuştur. 2013'te Kuşak ve Yol Projesinin açıklanmasıyla bu durum daha da artmıştır. Çin ekonomik desteğinin Kırgız halkı arasında Çin düşmanlığını artıran koşulları olduğundan yukarıda bahsedilmişti. Bu desteğin aynı zamanda Kırgızistan'da siyasi yolsuzluğa katkıda bulunan yanları da vardır. İlk olarak Çin'in bir ekonomik yardım tanımı yoktur. Bu yardımlar şeffaf olmayan ve kompleks süreçlerden geçer. Kırgızistan'ın ekonomik politikalarında hükümet yetkililerinin kişisel çıkarları önemli rol oynadığından Çin'in şeffaf olmayan ekonomik yardımları Kırgızistan'daki yozlaşmış siyasi ve bürokratik yapı için çok uygundur. Bu şeffaf olmayan düzen aynı zamanda rekabetçi olmayan ihale sistemi de içermektedir. Daha önce bahsedildiği üzere Çin devleti finanse ettiği projelerde Çinli firmaların yer almasını istemektedir. Ancak bu durum Çinli firmaların ihaleleri kazanması için yapılan çeşitli yolsuzluklarla sonuçlanmaktadır.

Çin'in Kırgızistan'da siyasi yolsuzluğa katkıda bulunan ikinci ekonomik yardım şartı ise Çin yardımlarının iyi yönetim, insan hakları performansı ve çevre sorunları gibi konularda herhangi bir talepte bulunmamasıdır. Çinli firmalar ekonomik amaçlarına ulaşmak için Kırgızistan'daki yozlaşmış siyasi ve bürokratik sistemden faydalanma konusunda tereddüt etmemektedir. Örneğin, Çinli firmalar madencilik sektöründe gerekli lisansları alabilmek için rüşvet vermektedirler.

Kırgızistan'da Çin düşmanlığı sayısız kez Çin karşıtı gösterilere ve şiddet olaylarına sebep olmuştur. 2002 yılında muhalefet Çin düşmanlığını kullanarak destekçilerinin bulunduğu güney bölgesinde Aksı olaylarına sebep olmuştur. Bu olaylar daha sonra Lale devriminin ilk adımı olarak kabul edilmiştir. Ayrıca 2000'lerde Çinlilerin ticarete hâkim olmaya başlamasıyla Kırgız tüccarlar rahatsızlıklarını dile getirmeye başlamış ve çeşitli protestolar düzenlemişlerdir. Bu protestolarda ticarete Çinlilere yönelik kısıtlamalar talep edilse de Çin ile ticareti doğrudan ya da dolaylı olarak kontrol eden Kırgız siyasi eliti tarafından talepleri yerine getirilmemiştir. 2010 devriminde Çinlilere ait çeşitli ticari merkezler saldırıya uğramıştır.

2010'dan sonra önemli ölçüde artan Çin doğrudan yatırımlarının sebep olduğu sorunlar çeşitli gösterilere sebep olmuştur. Çin yatırımlarının çevre ile insan ve

hayvan sađlıđına verdiđi zararlar, Çinli firmaların yerlilere yeterli iş imkânı yaratmaması ve sundukları kötü çalışma şartları, Çinli göçü, Çin'in genişlemesinden ve Çin'e toprak verilmesinden duyulan korkular bu olayların ana sebepleridir. Bunların yanında Çin'in Sincan Uygur Özerk Bölgesi'nde uyguladıđı politikalar ile Çinlilere vatandaşlık verilmesi gibi aşırı milliyetçi grupları rahatsız eden politikalar da protesto edilmiştir. Bu olaylarda çok sayıda Çinli yaralansa ve Çin'in iki önemli yatırımı engellense de genel olarak Kırgız protestocuların beklentileri doğrutusunda sonuçlanmamıştır. Kırgız ve Çinli yetkililer iki ülke arasındaki dostane ilişkilerin devam edeceğini belirtmişlerdir.

Bu açıklamalar aslında tesadüf değildir. Çin, Kırgız siyasi eliti ile iyi ilişkilere sahiptir. Kırgızistan'a sağladıkları şeffaf olmayan ekonomik finansman, yozlaşmış siyasi ve bürokratik yapı için kaynak sağlamak ve düzenin devam etmesine katkıda bulunmaktadır. Bundan dolayı da Çin ile Kırgızistan arasında patron-müşteri ilişkisi olduğu söylenebilir. Ancak, Çin yatırımları etrafındaki siyasi yolsuzluk skandalları halkın gözünde yönetici elitin meşruiyetini zedelemektedir. Halk, Çin ekonomik varlığının faydalarını sorgulamakta ve belli bir zümrenin zenginleşmesinden şikâyet etmektedir. Çinli firmaların yerel halk için yeterince iş imkânı yaratmadığını ve kötü çalışma şartları ile düşük maaşlar sunduğunu düşünürsek halkın hoşnutsuzluğunun temelsiz olmadığını görebiliriz. Çinli firmaların Kırgızistan'daki yozlaşmış siyasi ve bürokratik sistemi kendi ekonomik hedefleri için kullanması da unutulmamalıdır. Bu durumda Çin karşıtı gösterileri ve şiddet olaylarını halkın sosyal adaleti sağlama çabası olarak yorumlayabiliriz.

Siyasi yolsuzluk Kırgızistan siyasi sistemi içinde yer alan patron-müşteri ilişkileri vasıtasıyla da halk arasında Çin düşmanlığını artırmaktadır. Yıllar boyunca birçok defa muhalif figürler halkın Çin karşıtı duygularını iktidarlara karşı kullanmışlardır. Bu durum aşırı milliyetçilik gibi radikal ideolojilerin yayılmasına sebep olmaktadır. Çinli erkekler ve Kırgız kadınların evlenmesine karşı çıkan gruplar buna örnek verilebilir. Ülkenin istikrarsız siyasi geçmişi göz önüne alındığında günümüzde Çin düşmanlığı olarak kendini gösteren radikallik siyasi elit ve halk için önemli problemlere sebep olabilir. Bu durumda Çin karşıtı gösterileri ve şiddet olaylarını

muhalif figürlerin siyasi güç ve ekonomik zenginliğe ulaşmak için Çin düşmanlığını kullanmalarının bir sonucu olarak yorumlayabiliriz.

Siyasi yolsuzluk aynı zamanda Çin ekonomik varlığı hakkında doğru bilgi eksikliğine sebep olarak da Çin düşmanlığını artırmaktadır. Daha önce bahsedildiği üzere Kırgız devleti kendi halkını Çin ekonomik faaliyetleri hakkında düzgün bir biçimde bilgilendirmemektedir. Kırgız devletinin şeffaf bir sistem kuramamasının önündeki en büyük engel Çin ile ekonomik ilişkilerdeki siyasi yolsuzluktur. Etki sahibi yerel siyasi elitlerin desteği olmadan Kırgızistan'da ekonomik faaliyetlerde bulunmak imkânsızdır ve bu yüzden Çinli firmalar yerel halk yerine bu elitlerle ilişki kurmayı tercih etmektedirler. Bu durum iki soruna sebep olmaktadır. İlk olarak yerel halkın Çin ekonomik faaliyetleri hakkında bilgisiz kalmasına sebep olmaktadır. İkinci olarak ise bu ilişkiler siyasi elitin bireysel olarak zenginleşmesine yani siyasi yolsuzluğa katkıda bulunmaktadır. Bu şeffaf olmayan yapı halkın hükümet yetkililerine olan güvenini azaltmaktadır. Bu durum Çin ekonomik varlığı ile ilgili doğru bilgi eksikliği ile birleşince problematik bir hâl almaktadır. Halk arasında resmi istatistiklerden farklı iddialar ve söylemler ortaya çıkmakta ve bunlar da Çin karşıtı protestolara sebep olmaktadır.

Tezin beşinci ve son bölümünde Amundsen'in siyasi yolsuzluk üzerine geliştirdiği analitik çerçeve kullanılarak Kırgızistan'da siyasi yolsuzluk ve bunun Çin düşmanlığına etkisi analiz edilmiştir. Amundsen'in belirttiği üzere Kırgızistan'da siyasetçiler siyasi güçlerini ve ekonomik zenginliklerini sürdürürebilmek için kanun yapma güçlerini kullanmışlardır. Bu durum özellikle Akayev ve Bakiyev dönemlerinde gözlemlenebilir. Yine Amundsen'in belirttiği üzere yüksek düzeyde siyasi yolsuzluktan dolayı Kırgızistan'da hukuk sistemi yozlaşmıştır. Atambayev ve Jeenbekov ise siyasi güçlerini ve ekonomik zenginliklerini sürdürürebilmek için bu hukuk sistemini kullanmışlardır.

Kırgız siyasi elitinin karıştığı siyasi yolsuzluk formu güçlü tarafın devlete sahip olan yönetici elitin olduğu ve kaynakların toplumdan devlete aktığı formdur. Amundsen'e göre bu tarz siyasi yolsuzluğun olduğu rejimlerde nepotizm ve patron-müşteri olguları görülmektedir. Akayev kuzeyli aşiretlerin desteğini almış ve onları

devlet yapısında önemli mevkilere getirmiştir. Bakiyev ise aynısını güneyli aşiretlerle yapmıştır. Ancak ikisi de patron-müşteri sistemi yüzünden koltuklarını kaybetmişlerdir. Akayev'i güneyli aşiretler, Bakiyev'i ise kuzeyli aşiretler iktidardan indirmiştir. Atambayev görevden ayrılırken kendine sadık kişileri devlet mekanizmasında önemli mevkilere getirmiştir. Jeenbekov ise göreve geldikten sonra kendi aşiretine mensup kişileri bu makamlara getirmek istemiştir. Bu durum neticesinde Atambayev ile arasında çatışma çıkmıştır. Bu çatışmanın sonucunda ise Atambayev tutuklanmıştır.

Atambayev-Jeenbekov rekabeti Kırgızistan'da devlet mekanizmasının siyasi güç ve ekonomik zenginliğin ana kaynağı olduğunu bir kez daha göstermiştir. Bu yüzden rekabet halindeki elitler devlet mekanizmasını ele geçirmeye çalışmaktadırlar. Bunu başardıklarında ise devlet mekanizmasını nepotizm ve patron-müşteri ilişki sistemi ile ele geçirmektedirler. Ancak, patron-müşteri ilişki sistemi aynı zamanda liderler için tehdit yaratmaktadır. Bu sistemi muhalif figürler birçok kez siyasi güç ve ekonomik zenginlik elde etmek için kullanmışlardır. Çin düşmanlığı ise birçok kez patron-müşteri ilişki sistemini kullanan aktörler tarafından kitleleri mobilize etmek için kullanılmıştır. Öte yandan Çin ekonomik faaliyetleri etrafında çıkan siyasi yolsuzluk skandalları göstermiştir ki Çin ile ekonomik ilişkiler Kırgız siyasi eliti için devlet kaynaklarının da kullanıldığı bir zenginleşme aracıdır. Kısaca, hem siyasilerin yer aldığı yolsuzluk tipi hem de rejim özellikleri ülkede artan Çin düşmanlığına katkıda bulunmaktadır.

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YAZARIN / AUTHOR

Soyadı / Surname : Baş
Adı / Name : Dođukan
Bölümü / Department : Avrasya Çalışmaları / Eurasian Studies

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