

CLASSICAL TEXTS OF THE GEOPOLITICS AND THE “HEART OF EURASIA”

Jeopolitiğin Klasik Metinleri ve “Avrasya’nın Kalbi”

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ABSTRACT

In the first part of the article, dehumanizing character of Western-centric approaches is discussed by focusing on the relations between the emergence period of geopolitics and the Central Asia. Beginning from Mackinder, the Western "subject" is described as based on a highly vivid design of identity; on the other hand, the societies living in the studied region are transformed into shadows under the decisiveness of geography. In the second part of the article, the factors which has forced this false image to change is showed by making references to cultural/historiographic debates on Turkestan. Also, an alternative approach to geopolitics which underlines the region’s rich historical and cultural heritage is offered through the analysis of Orkhon Inscriptions.

Anahtar kelimeler; Geopolitics, Geoculture, Central Asia, Orkhon Inscriptions.

ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın ilk bölümünde Batı-merkezli yaklaşımların ‘insanisizleştirici’ karakteri, jeopolitiğin ortaya çıkışı ile Orta Asya arasındaki ilişkilere odaklanarak tartışılmaktadır. Batı ‘öznesi’, Mackinder’den başlayarak son derece canlı bir kimlik tasarımına dayalı olarak tanımlanmakta; öte yandan çalışmaya konu olan bölgede yaşayan toplumlar coğrafyanın belirleyiciliği altında birer gölgeye dönüşürmektedir. Çalışmanın ikinci bölümünde bu yanlış resmi değişime zorlayan faktörler, Türkistan üzerine kültürel/tarihsel tartışmalara referanslar yaparak gösterilmektedir. Ayrıca bölgenin zengin tarihsel ve kültürel mirasına vurgu yapan jeopolitiğe, Orhun Âbideleri’nin analizi vasıtasıyla alternatif bir yaklaşım sunulmaktadır.

Key Words; Jeopolitik, Jeokültür, Orta Asya, Orhun Âbideleri.

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In some sense, geopolitics can be seen as a prism of thought. This prism, which has the ability of shaping places, actors and thought reflected on it, does its job with such an artfulness that the figures which it reflects by transforming are mostly preferred to the reality because of the trust felt in it. The fact that one of the crystal-clear examples of the fatal results brought by such a shortcut is the way of dealing with Central Asia should not be a surprise for anybody. In fact, the place occupied by Central Asia coincides with the centre of the region on which the discipline of geopolitics has focused since it emerged. Moreover, the founding fathers of geopolitics demonstrated with their writings that they were brought up within a circle of meaning which compelled them to approach the inhabitants of the region with extremely harsh prejudices.

Therefore, we devoted the first part of our study to the criticism of the patterns inherited from Western geopoliticians. After tracing the footprints of this tradition of thought, which erected the obstacles between us and the reality instead of helping us to understand the reality, we will introduce our viewpoint. In the second part, we will suggest an approach focusing on relations of agents/actors with the space instead of a Western-centric conceptual structure of classical geopolitics. Then, we will embark on a short journey in the history of the region, which will make the framework we outline more functional.

But firstly, I would like to mention the basic geographical terminology which will be used throughout the text. When the literature on Central Asia is examined, the two basic approaches are detected. They have largely similar views on the issue of boundaries of the region, but they disagree on some points. Those who rest on the political geography analyzed from a historical perspective are of the opinion that the concept of Central Asia can be used in such a way as to include all the Outer Asia and even to surround Central Asia.¹ However, the other approach has gained more reception. Although it does not reject altogether the historical and political references used by the previous approach, it defends that the basic factor determining the boundaries of the region should be geo-culture. One of the criteria used in searching which geographical places are geo-culturally part of Central Asia is the areas of influence of the agro-societies in the surrounding region.² This criterion is complemented by other ecological elements, linguistics and ethnology, which help us to follow transactions among neighbors. Using such concepts as Western, Eastern and Southern Turkestans or Russian, Chinese and Afghan Turkestans is also a product of such an approach.³

¹ Samuel Adrian Miles Adshead, **Central Asia in World History**, Macmillan Press, 1993, p. 3. Adshead categorizes these regions according to their importance. In his opinion, the centre of the region is the Western Turkestan which is also called as Transoxiana (Maveraunnehir). Its second important part is the Eastern Turkestan. The Afghan Turkestan comes as third. *Ibid*, pp. 8, 9, 10.

² Michael Clarke, "The 'Centrality' of Central Asia in World History, 1700–2008". Colin Mackerras and Michael Clarke (eds.), **China, Xinjiang and Central Asia: History, Transition and Crossborder Interaction Into the 21st Century**, Routledge, USA and Canada 2009, p. 21; Denis Sinor, **Inner Asia**, RoutledgeCurzon, Great Britain 1997, p. 2.

³ Adshead, **Central Asia in...**, p. 3.

It is seen in the UNESCO's "Central Asian Civilizations" project that a similar answer is given to the question 'where the region begins and where it ends'. According to this work prepared by an international scientific team, Central Asia comprises Afghanistan, the north-eastern part of today's Iran, Pakistan, northern India, Western China, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Qinghai in China and Inner Mongolia as well as Eastern Turkestan are accepted as part of Central Asia and such places as Sistan and Belucistan are considered as part of Horasan.⁴ Moreover, contemporary geopolitical expectations and equations also have influence on the way of describing Central Asia. For example, with the discussions about the projects of Greater Middle East and Broader Middle East and North Africa in 2004, some studies labeled the places within the boundaries drawn by UNESCO as "Greater Central Asia".⁵ That geographical place is even considered in some studies as the direct extension of the Greater Middle East.⁶

In short, the discussions mentioned above prove that we should take various parameters into consideration while describing the region which will be studied. But we will prefer a simpler and uniform terminology because of the nature of our study. In fact, giving place to the assessments related to both the present and the future creates the possibility of complications. The intention of preventing the chaos leads to being ignored some nuances. In this context, the concepts of Central Asia and Turkestan will refer to the region described above when the period until the Russian invasion is studied. When the intention is to refer to all of the republics established in some part of this geographical place in the post-Soviet Union period, additional titles such as "Western Turkestan and the west of Central Asia" will not be used.

1. Western Geopoliticians and Turkestan: The Legacy of the Discipline Emerged Under the Influence of "Great Game"

Rudolf Kjellen, who used "geopolitics" in 1899 for the first time, is considered as the godfather of geopolitics. This new discipline offered by Kjellen was based on the criticism of the classical approach which had considered state as a legal entity. In the eyes of the Swedish professor, who was influenced by the German idealism and the Social Darwinism, the state was something like an organism which sought the right to life in its foreign policy. Country/geography and sources were among the elements determining the fate of that fight of existence. Geopolitics would provide scientific knowledge on the nature of these elements.⁷

⁴ Chahryar Adle and Irfan Habib, "Introduction", **History of Civilizations of Central Asia**, Volume V, UNESCO, Paris 2003, p. 30.

⁵ Robert M. Cutler, "US-Russian Strategic Relations and the Structuration of Central Asia", M. Parvizi Amineh (ed.), **The Greater Middle East in Global Politics, Social Science Perspectives on the Changing Geography of the World Politics**, BRILL, The Netherlands 2007, p. 97.

⁶ Mehdi Parvizi Amineh, "Introduction: Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Study of the Greater Middle East", M. Parvizi Amineh (ed.), **The Greater Middle East in Global Politics, Social Science Perspectives on the Changing Geography of the World Politics**, BRILL, The Netherlands 2007, p. 1.

⁷ Bert Chapman, **Geopolitics: A Guide to the Issues**, ABC-CLIO, LLC, USA 2011, pp. 16-17.

In fact, the type of thinking described by geopolitics was not new at all. The intellectual patterns which had dominated the administrative practices of state rulers for a long time were now transferred to the academic world with some clarifications around concepts. The relationship was bilateral. In the golden age of imperialism, geopolitics brought universities and scientific institutions together with the practical needs of the state. Through geopolitics, the academic world painted a world picture to the extent of simplicity and certainty which would enable the state rulers to mobilize the masses and proposed certain goals for them.⁸ Geographical depictions, metaphors, and stereotyped expressions made the job of state authorities easier in persuading their nations for imperial adventures.

Given these characteristics of geopolitics, it was no surprise that the place where geopolitics gained more acceptance at the beginning of the 20th century was London. In fact, the reasons for the apprehensive mood dominating the empire, on which the sun never set, in the late Victorian age and the remedies of salvation produced by these reasons to encourage a new wave of expansionism were uttered through the language of geopolitics. In the source of the worries lay the need to counter the challenge of the countries which were industrialized after Britain to the British hegemony. The uneasy area of this competition, which was close to “the pearl of the crown”, was Central Asia where a fierce competition was going on with Russia.⁹ The arm wrestling between Britain and Russia, which was depicted with the metaphor of “Great Game”¹⁰, constituted the context in which the important classical works of geopolitics were produced. In other words, geopolitics gained a systematic nature with the works of the pioneering scholars, who focused their attention on the centre of the Asian map.

The article of Halford Mackinder, which was published in 1904 (Mackinder 1904), was the first important example of these works. Mackinder concentrated on the following

⁸ For general characteristics of the geopolitical language see, Klaus Dodds, **Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction**, Oxford University Press, Great Britain 2007, p. 4.

⁹ Charles Thomas Marvin affected the British public opinion considerably with his writings on the Russian expansionism in Central Asia. His words he wrote when Merv was captured by the Russians demonstrate the place of the India-Central Asia connection in the strategic evaluations in that period: “Herat, the Key of India, is placed in peril. The Cossack is brought into actual contact with the Afghan, and England is compelled to decide, and to decide at once, whether the future frontier separating the two empires in Asia shall be left to the exclusive selection of Russia, or whether she shall take instant measures to render the annexation of Merv the final step in the Russian advance in the direction of India.” Charles Thomas Marvin, **The Region of the Eternal Fire; an Account of a Journey to the Petroleum Region of the Caspian in 1883**, W. H. Allen & Co., London 1891, p. 389.

¹⁰ This expression was used for the first time in Arthur Connolly’s “Narrative of an Overland Journey to the North of India”, published in 1835. The person who made this expression popular was Rudyard Kipling. Kipling explains the fierce British-Russian struggle in Asia in the background of his novel, “Kim”, which he began to publish in 1900. Jennifer L. Siegel, **Endgame: Britain, Russia and the Final Struggle for Central Asia**, I. B. Tauris, London and New York 2002, pp. XV-XVI.

basic question, which would be later shared by German geopoliticians such as Ratzel and Haushofer:

Would medium powers such as Britain and Germany be able to compete with the continental-scale powers represented by the United States and Russia in the future?¹¹

The number of people who gave pessimistic answers to this question in London where Mackinder wrote his books increased in the last quarter of the 19th century. The stories told by the travelers and state officials who brought news from Central Asia and Caucasus fed this pessimism in the British public opinion. The reason for the worries about the Russian advance in Turkestan was not only that it would threaten India. The rich sources of the region would also be captured by this state. In addition, its network of railways, which was increasingly expanded, would provide Russia the advantages, which its giant navy provided to Britain.¹²

These developments, which were interpreted as the sign of the fact that the future of the empire would not be bright, increased the interest in Central Asia.¹³ However, it should be said that that interest did not include any sympathy, but had an instrumental nature. Beginning from the birth of geopolitics, a cold rationale based on imperial interests determined the parameters of the Western approach toward Central Asia. The region was considered only as the ground of competition between the major powers. The humanely features which give meaning to geography were adapted to the orientalist patterns through distortion or were reduced to pawns in the chessboard through total abstraction. This attitude,

¹¹ Mark Polelle, **Raising Cartographic Consciousness: the Social and Foreign Policy Vision of Geopolitics in the Twentieth Century**, Lexington Books, USA 1999, pp. 97-99. The history of the 20th century is the proof of how meaningful this problem was. At first glance, the world wars seemed to be made between the coalitions which were shaped around the two countries having similar structural restrictions. However, the face which the world system gained from the mid-20th century represented that the fearful dream which began to be seen at the end of the 1800s came true not only for the losers, but also for the winners. Although Britain sat at the lodge of the winners, it lost its empire and had to accept a marginal place in the new order in comparison with the past by transferring the hegemonic wand to the United States. It was now the time for a new period in which the hegemonic struggle was seen between the continental powers as it had been predicted by the geo-politicians at the beginning of the century. Considering these developments from this perspective, it seems meaningful that the construction of the European Union was initiated in the same period. It can be said that the desire to overcome that structural deficiency was among the motivations which made the EU project possible.

¹² Sarah O'Hara and Michael Hefferman, "From Geo-Strategy to Geo-Economics: The 'Heartland' and British Imperialism Before and After MacKinder", **Geopolitics**, 11:1, 2006, pp. 60, 61, 67.

¹³ Sarah O'Hara, Michael Heffernan and Georgina Endfield, "Halford Mackinder, 'The Geographical Pivot' and British Perceptions of Central Asia", Brian W. Blouet (ed.), **Global Geostategy: Mackinder and the Defence of the West**, Frank Cass, USA and Canada 2005, pp. 90-91.

which continued to be influential in the Western Central Asian studies in the following periods, was summarized sententiously by Lord Curzon, who had been the viceroy of India during the Great Game:

“Turkestan, Afghanistan, Transcaspia, Persia – to many these words breathe only a sense of utter remoteness or a memory of strange vicissitudes and of moribund romance. To me, I confess, they are the pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a game played for the domination of the world.”¹⁴

Both types of thought, which are seen in the works of Mackinder and in the words of Lord Curzon, appear in the form of scholarly opinions. The first of them is the methodological attitude in the form of the desire to transform social realities into measurable and provable things, which are expressed with the metaphor of chess pieces.¹⁵ There is an analogy between that desire and the semi-determinist relationship, which was considered by Mackinder to exist between the will of individual and the nature. Mackinder’s explained goal was to produce a formula on “geographic causality”. Mackinder accepts that the action starts with the free will of the individual, but he also says that the nature restricts and controls this will considerably.¹⁶

If it is acted on this approach, it is understood that Mackinder built geopolitics upon the patterns of positivism, the dominant scientific paradigm of that period, while he tried to give a scholarly outlook to it. When he mentioned the need to bring geographic determinism and philosophy together by going one step further,¹⁷ Mackinder evoked the irrational images on the “East”, which are reflected in the first part of Curzon’s statement. Although they are different from the statement of Curzon full of exotic connotations in terms of content, they were produced by the same Orientalist mind. The “other” in the geopolitics of Mackinder is the real factor which provides the dynamics of history and builds the agent. Therefore, evoking the fear of the “barbarians” through the historical memory plays a central role in supporting the argument he defended.

In fact, Mackinder appeals exactly to these fears while he tries to prove with his references to history that outside threats and enforcements rather than internal energy are needed in building civilizations. The European civilization was created under the pressure of barbarians. Therefore, Europe and European history should be considered as the derivatives of Asia and Asian history. It should be remembered that the European civilization was a product of the struggle against Asian invaders.¹⁸

¹⁴ George N. Curzon, **Persia and the Persian Question**, Longman & Co, London 1892, p. 3.

¹⁵ One of the most important criticisms directed at geopoliticians is that they strengthen the approach trying to explain international relations through the movements of billiard balls by excluding history and culture from their analyses. Polelle, **Raising Cartographic Consciousness...**, p. 120.

¹⁶ Halford John Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History”, **The Geographical Journal**, Vol. 23, No. 4, 1904, pp. 422-423.

¹⁷ **Ibid**, p. 421.

¹⁸ **Ibid**, pp. 422-423.

When these kinds of opinions of Mackinder are taken into consideration, he can be considered as a part of the understanding of history, which is traced in the Anglo-Saxon social science tradition from Toynbee to Huntington and which was shaped around the challenge-response dialectic between the civilizations. According to Mackinder, who put the struggle against the other on the basis of geopolitics, Europe discovered its identity thanks to the invaders coming from Asia and reacted to this challenge by "Europeanizing" the world. With this expression, Mackinder means the Western expansionism creating New Europes "in the vacant lands discovered in the midst of the waters".

In the response period, which was called the Columbian age by Mackinder, the Christian Europe, which was under the barbarian threat, managed to go out of the area where it had been cornered and expanded nearly without facing any serious resistance.¹⁹ Thus, America, Australia and Sub-Saharan Africa had become "Euro-Asia". By the beginning of the 20th century, as a result of the response, Britain, the United States, South Africa and Australia had had bases, sea power and trade which the land power could not reach.²⁰

The thing which turned the eyes of Mackinder to Asia was the belief that the Columbian era, which was a period of expansion for the West, ended and that a new threat was getting bigger in the area where a big challenge had appeared against the West once upon a time. Even if the actors changed and the Turks and Mongols were replaced by the Russians, the geography which gave birth to competitors was the same. "The hordes which ultimately fell upon Europe in the middle of the fourteenth century gathered their first force 3000 miles away on the high steppes of Mongolia".²¹ "...Russia replaces the Mongol Empire..".²²

Russian pressures on Finland, Scandinavia, Poland, Persia, India, and China, could be compared with the raids of the invaders which had expanded from the steppes centuries ago. Russia, which dominated Central Asia, grasped the opportunity of breaking the balance, which had been functioning in favor of sea-powers since Colomb, to turn it to the favor of the powers dominating the lands. In fact, it was also possible to establish a sea power by using the resources of the "the geographical pivot of history". This meant the emergence of a world empire in the horizon.²³ In the post-First World War period, when the boundaries were redrawn, Mackinder repeated his warning by publishing his famous work that the real threat in the east should not be ignored. The heart of his book was the following sentence which pointed to Germany and Russia: "Whoever rules East Europe commands the Heartland; whoever rules the Heartland commands the World Island, and whoever rules the World Island commands the World".²⁴

¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 421-422.

²⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 432-433.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 430.

²² *Ibid*, p. 436.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 436.

²⁴ Halford John Mackinder, **Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction**, Constable and Company Ltd., London 1919, p. 194.

This geopolitical design of Mackinder, which, according to him, was supported by technological developments and historical examples, harbored a deep irony, which would later be underlined in the objections directed by the critical geopoliticians against the “classic ones”.²⁵ The identities through which Mackinder and his followers interpreted “objective” realities and on which they based the distinction of friend-enemy were a bunch of surprises. For example, the Russian advance in Central Asia, which was seen from London’s perspective as a preparation for a challenge against the Western civilization, was nothing more than the steps which would Europeanize their countries in the eyes of those who captured Bukhara and Khive. They were thinking that they had the mission of educating and transforming the inhabitants of Central Asia, while insulting them as representatives of the European civilization.

The commanders of the invading forces in the region and civilian people who supported the Russian expansion such as famous novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky were of the opinion that the competence for being member of the European family of nations would be proved in the oases and deserts of Central Asia. According to them, like the other “Eastern” nations, those who were living in Transoxiana (Maveraunnehir) were lazy, abusive and oppressors. They were underdeveloped because of their climate, races and religions.²⁶

This arrogance created by the claim of representing the superior civilization was the distinctive character of all actions of imperialist expansion, carried out by the Western states in that period. When no place was left in the places outside the West to expand easily, the biggest intra-civilizational conflict of history erupted. During the world wars which brought ineffable pains for the humanity, the theses connected to geopolitics were highly popular. On the one side, the idea of lebensraum, which was put forward by Friedrich Ratzel and Karl Haushofer, was among the ideological sources of motivations of the Nazi expansionism.²⁷ On the other side, there was a growing interest in the opinions of American geopoliticians who adopted the approach of the English school, based on the land-sea dichotomy.

Mahan, who was considered as the founding father of geopolitics in the United States, saw the same scene seen by Mackinder when he looked at Asia. In his opinion, too, the question of Asia was a question of Russia. If Russia, which was a land power, reached the Asian lands close to sea, it could become an important sea power. That meant danger.²⁸ Ma-

²⁵ Critical geopolitics synthesizes traditional perceptions of geopolitics, global political economy and geo-economic rhetoric. Moreover, it points to the relationship of identities with geographical representations and to the need to solve diversification between the meanings attributed to spaces and actions by analyzing identities. Amineh, “Introduction: Theoretical and Methodological...”, pp. 10-11. Dodds, **Geopolitics: A Very Short...**, p. 11.

²⁶ Robert D. Crews, **For Prophet and Tsar, Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia**, Harvard University Press, USA 2006, p. 246.

²⁷ Francis P. Sempa, **Geopolitics: From the Cold War to the 21st Century**, Transaction Publishers, Canada 2002, p. 32.

²⁸ Alfred Thayer Mahan, **The Problem of Asia: Its Effect upon International Politics** (with Preface by Francis P. Sempa), Transaction Publishers, USA 2003, pp. 28-29.

han, who lost his life at the beginning of the First World War, could not find opportunity to assess the extent to which his predictions proved to be true. However, this opportunity was granted to Mackinder during the Second World War years. When he was asked to write his opinions regarding geopolitics for Foreign Affairs in 1943, he repeated his main theses by expanding the space of the heartland.²⁹

In the popular journals belonging to the same period, geopolitics was introduced as "The lurid career of a scientific system which a Briton invented, the Germans used and Americans needed to study."³⁰ Geopolitics found some new students such as Spykman toward the end of the war. Spykman, who prepared an intellectual basis for the policy of containing the Soviet Union with his rimland theory, was telling exactly the opposite of Mackinder's basic assumptions. In his opinion, the heartland was the place which was affected by the outside, not the one affecting it. The coastal regions of Eurasia, which he called "Rimland", had the vital importance in many aspects including their population and rich natural resources for the domination of the world. The sentence which was constructed by him by getting inspiration from Mackinder summarized his geopolitical vision: "Whoever controls the rimland rules Eurasia; whoever rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world."³¹

Given that the physical geography of the earth remained unchanged, what gave Spykman the courage and motivation to oppose the established geopolitical perception should be the change in the political balances. In fact, if we interpret the writings of Mackinder since 1904 as a call for vigilance against threat which appeared in the horizon with the rise of Russia, we can say that the theses of Spykman, which seemed to reverse his theory at first glance, are a strategy of struggle developed against the threat which became a reality. Claiming that such a development would make Moscow gain the world domination before capturing the whole of the heartland was something of a warning calling the Western public opinion and rulers for action so that they would not allow the flow of history in the undesired direction. However, insisting on the same theses after the thing which had been feared occurred meant demanding the West to surrender. But the thing which was needed was to persuade the elites and masses that the force which dominated the heartland could be defeated. The fact that Mackinder's theory gained popularity in Russia from the fall of the iron curtain up to the post-Soviet period confirms the scene which we try to draw.³²

All these discussions demonstrate that the war years were the period in which the attentions were focused on geopolitics at the highest level. However, immediately after its

²⁹ Halford John Mackinder, "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace", **Foreign Affairs**, Vol. 21, No. 4, 1943.

³⁰ Joseph J. Thorndike jr., "Geopolitics, The Lurid Career of a Scientific System Which A Briton Invented, The Germans Used and Americans Need to Study", **Life**, 21 December, 1942, pp. 106-115.

³¹ Nicholas John Spykman, **The Geography of the Peace**, Helen R Nicholl (ed.), Yale University, Institute of International Studies, Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York 1944, p. 43.

³² Mark Bassina and Konstantin E. Aksenov, "Mackinder and the Heartland Theory in Post-Soviet Geopolitical Discourse", **Geopolitics**, Volume 11, Issue 1, 2006, pp. 99-118.

golden age, geopolitics began to be excluded from the academic circles since it had been so heavily intertwined with war. In the atmosphere of intellectual reckoning, which accelerated with the end of the war and lasted until the 1950s, and in which those responsible for the human cost paid were sought, geopolitics was considered as one of those who were to blame for the tragedy. Some people such as Richard Hartshorne and Isaiah Bowman, who served as geographical intelligence experts during the war, labeled geopolitics as “intellectual poison”. This gives an idea on the degree of the wave of criticism from the universities. The relationship of geopolitics with Nazism and Italian and Japanese Fascisms was emphasized. Geopolitics was also presented as a kind of intellectual fraud on the ground that it encouraged genocide, racism, expansionism and the will of dominating the space.³³

By discrediting geopolitics, the mission of producing strategic ideas on the geographical place comprising Central Asia was transferred to other disciplines, which maintained their prestige since they had not been shaken with the criticisms of orientalism yet. Although this situation created some differences in terms of the form of researches done, it did not cause any change in the compass guiding the process of producing knowledge. Like the previous ones, the Soviet period’s academic studies on Central Asia were conducted in the United States and Europe in their historical contexts by placing Western interests in the centre. In fact, the studies on the literature belonging to that period demonstrate that the context determined not only what was said, but also who said it and where it was said. The goal of reaching the soft belly of the Soviet Union through Central Asia remained unchanged until the fall of the Berlin Wall in spite of cyclical transformations and determined the course of scientific activities.³⁴

The first generation studies in line with this course appeared in the 1950s and a considerable revival was seen in Central Asian studies especially after the Suez Crisis. The basic question whose answer was sought in those years was how Central Asian policy of the Soviet Union would affect the Middle East. It was assumed that there was a connection between Central Asia and the Middle East and Turkestan which was considered as the showcase of the Soviet shop. It was highly probable that the new leftist governments in the Middle East and South Asia would decide on the promises of Moscow by looking at this showcase. With the researches which would be done in the field, it was hoped to collect the data which would damage the reliability of the Soviet propaganda. However, in spite of the common categorization in the form of friend / enemy, it was also possible to come across with some surprising signs of sympathy in the publications in the Western countries having colonial past. Although British and French condemned the Soviet methods, they also evaluated the Soviet targets and success in the region with some statements approving of them. Myer, who produced an important work on the issue, explains this sympathy with that "scholars who

³³ Dodds, **Geopolitics: A Very Short...**, p. 22.

³⁴ Will Myer, **Islam and Colonialism: Western Perspectives on Soviet Asia**, Routledge Curzon, USA and Canada 2002, p. 28.

themselves had experience of governing a non-European territory in the name of a European power."³⁵

With the 1960s, a change was seen in the basic question around which studies were conducted though the main course remained unchanged. Would the Soviet Union face the same fate in this period in which the disintegration of the British and French colonial empires was completed? The Soviet Union was labeled as an "empire" not only to emphasize the repressive character of its regime, but also to point to its similarities with the collapsing colonialist system. If the era was a period in which all empires were disintegrated, the Soviet Union would face the same fate inevitably. The colonial character of the power relationships within the Soviet Union could be observed in the clearest way in Turkestan. Therefore, the place in which the predictions on the end of the Soviet imperialism could be tested was here.³⁶

In the 1970s and 1980s, theses of Islamic fundamentalism were added to the equation established around colonialism. Would "Islamic revivalism", whose influence was felt in the Middle East, push Central Asian Muslims who became demographically powerful to revolt against their regimes? In those years, many experts on Central Asia predicted that a revolt which would be organized by underground sufi movements might erupt in the mid or long term. Although these predictions did not come true, the connection established by Western academicians between Central Asia and the dynamic which they coded as Islamic radicalism contributed later to the basis of their interventions especially in the south of the region.³⁷

Geo-politicians outside the academic world, too, supported the strategic goals stated in the Central Asian studies, whose course during the Cold War period was mentioned above. Geopolitics, which was excluded from the university circles because of the reasons mentioned above, did not experience a similar loss of prestige among policy makers and their advisors. Especially Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski sustained the American tradition of geopolitics with both theoretical and practical activities beginning from the period of struggle against the Soviets.

These two strategists are accepted as the extension of the Mahan-Mackinder line in that they attached importance to Eurasia and Central Asia.³⁸ The things which were said by

³⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 18-19, 28, 101-124. The strategic perception which attaches importance to the connection between the two regions was revived once more during the Greater Middle East / Broader Middle East and North Africa discussions. A literature which sees Central Asia as part of the Greater Middle East has emerged. In comparison with the 1950s, we see that the situation has been reversed this time and the Western activities in the Middle East constitute a showcase for Central Asia. The effects of the arrangements in the Middle East have become references for Central Asians in assessing the Western-oriented advises and promises.

³⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 125-161.

³⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 162-201.

³⁸ Kurt W. Radtke, "China and the Greater Middle East: Globalization No Longer Equals Westernization", M. Parvizi Amineh (ed.), **The Greater Middle East in Global Politics, Social Science Perspectives on the Changing Geography of the World Politics**, BRILL, The Netherlands 2007, p. 394.

Kissinger to the Chinese prime minister in July 1972 is a good example demonstrating how seriously the Asian issue was taken. During the meeting in Beijing, Kissinger conveyed to Chou Enlai the message that the United States was determined in using nuclear weapons in two cases. One of them was an attack on Europe and the other was an attack which would take the whole of Asia out of the Western control.³⁹ It is also possible to find important clues in Kissinger's memoirs regarding Central Asia and the Turkey-Turkestan connection.

One of them is related to Turkey's military intervention in Cyprus. While Kissinger explains his reasons for resisting the circles who demanded putting more pressure on Turkey, he mentions of the relationship between Turkey and Central Asia. In the opinion of Kissinger, Turkey was geopolitically more important than Greece. "Bordering the Middle East, Central Asia, the Soviet Union and Europe, Turkey was indispensable to American policy in each of these areas".⁴⁰

When the power dominating the heartland collapsed before the threats of Kissinger were tested, no academician or geopolitician had the chance to boast of having predicted the real reasons for this collapse. No revolt was seen in the Turkic republics of Central Asia as they had expected. Moreover, these republics including Kazakhstan did not act quickly to declare independence because they wanted the transition to the post-Soviet period to be painless. However, the picture of victory was so big that the criticisms regarding these details did not have an important place on the agenda. History had come to an end and the public opinion was busy listening to the geo-politicians, who were impatiently anticipated for their explanations, making statements that it was possible to eternalize this moment.

One of the strategists whose words were listened most carefully was, no doubt, Zbigniew Brzezinski. His book published in 1997 was read by people by assigning additional meanings to it because of the popularity of its author coming from the Cold War years. The title he chose for his book, "The Grand Chessboard", reminds the words of Lord Curzon, mentioned above. Brzezinski's book represents the continuity in the Anglo-Saxon geopolitical tradition in terms of the basic parameters on which its theses are based. You think that you hear the sound of Mackinder's typewriter when you look at Brzezinski's paragraphs in which he presents Eurasia as the area of the struggle for global supremacy.

Brzezinski, too, fixes his eyes on the heartland and says that the most important geopolitical present is Eurasia. The global supremacy of the United States depends on the longevity and effectiveness of its supremacy in Eurasia. In spite of the victory won against the Soviets, the future is still full of dangers. A challenger which is dominant in Eurasia might want to oust the USA from the region. Or this might be tried by a coalition similar to the Hitler-Stalin partnership in the 1940s.⁴¹

³⁹ **Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976 Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972**, Steven E. Philips (ed.), Department of State, Washington 2006, p. 926.

⁴⁰ Henry Kissinger, **Years of Renewal: The Concluding Volume of His Memoirs**, Touchstone: Simon and Schuster, USA 2000, p. 225.

⁴¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, **The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives**, Basic Books, USA 1997, pp. XIV, 30.

In the Grand Chessboard, Central Asia is included in the Eurasian Balkans. Brzezinski uses the concept of Eurasian Balkans by referring to the connotations of “Balkans” such as ethnic conflicts and the regional competition between global powers. In his opinion, Eurasia, too, has a Balkans, and Central Asia is a part of this region.⁴² By analyzing separately the situation of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, Brzezinski says that the future of Central Asia will be determined by the interaction between the interests of Russia, China, Iran, Turkey and the United States. The United States is too remote to the region to dominate it on its own and powerful enough to have interest in it. Therefore, the best choice is a “geopolitical pluralism” which will enable the global society to reach the region economically and financially without facing any obstacles.⁴³ In other words, no power should dominate the geographical centre of the heartland single-handedly.

An important group of followers among the American policy makers and advisors have adopted the parameters drawn by Brzezinski. In fact, it seems that the main perspective toward the region has been kept in the post-11 September period with some changes. For example, in an atmosphere in which the hottest item of the agenda was the American military operation in Afghanistan, S. Frederick Starr told the members of the Senate responsible for relations with Central Asia: “Bordered by nuclear states and formidable regional powers, all of which have close historic and cultural ties with the region, Central Asia cannot depend for its security on any one of them without imperiling the security of all the others.”⁴⁴ About three and half a year later, Starr came up with a design aiming to unify Central Asia with South Asia to create one region. He seems to deserve the title of the last American “organic” expert of the region who tries to revise the parameters of the approach toward the region after Brzezinski with his analyses.⁴⁵

2. Can Geopolitics Speak Region’s Language in Central Asia?

The opinions on the area compassing Central Asia, which are mentioned above, provide a basis which will enable us to make some generalizations. Considering the first-generation literature, which was produced in the centers accepted as the cradle of discipline, it should be said that, from the time it began to be used, geopolitics had focused mainly on the area of the “Great Game”. In addition, the need felt for geopolitics was created by the conditions of the late 19th century. The discipline carried the traces of its formation process throughout the long century in which it sometimes attracted intensive attention and it was sometimes subjected to heavy criticism.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 123.

⁴³ *Ibid*, pp. 148-150.

⁴⁴ S. Frederick Starr, **Contributions of Central Asian Nations to the Campaign Against Terrorism, Hearing Before The Subcommittee on Central Asia and South Caucasus of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate**, One Hundred Seventh Congress First Session, December 13, 2001, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington 2002, <http://ftp.resource.org/gpo.gov/hearings/107s/77602.txt>.

⁴⁵ S. Frederick Starr, **A ‘Greater Central Asia Partnership’ for Afghanistan and Its Neighbors**, Silk Road Paper, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program – A Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center, Johns Hopkins University-SAIS, Washington 2005.

The most important of those traces is the reductionist method which is masked by a formal objectivism and a Western-centric approach, sometimes even reaching the level of racism. Both are seen in the works studying the heartland, beginning from Mackinder. In the classical texts of geopolitics, the Western "subject" is described as based on a highly vivid design of identity; on the other hand, the societies living in the studied region are transformed into shadows under the decisiveness of geography. While "Christianity" or "free world" is the entities independent of geography and based on identity; Mongols, Turks, Russians... are objects of threat that possess a meaning just thanks to the heartland. Not only do they become shadows in the face of geography, but also the differences between cultural identities and civilization identifications become indistinct. They are almost identified with "barbarism".

The structure which is summarized feeds Western- centric thinking by making the perception of threat both powerful and weak. The threat is powerful, but the reason for it is not that the enemy has equal or superior virtues, cultures and civilizations, but it is the resources provided by the region on which it lives. Therefore, such a threat calls the Western subject, which supposedly represents the superior civilization, for a mobilization which will affirm its existence against the other by masking its internal contradictions. The target of mobilization is to prevent the geographical place, which will serve as the cradle of "world domination", from falling under the control of one "shadow" nation. Getting a lively response for the call depends on the level of reliability of the stories told about the geographical place. The task of proving that the region harbors all resources of the world domination belongs to the "discipline" of geopolitics.

All that has been said up to this point demonstrate that geopolitics is the product of the regions where it emerged to the extent that it is required to be used with the prefix "Western". Therefore, while political meanings of geography are contemplated, the mediation of an intellectual activity, which will localize the perspective guiding the process of producing concepts, is needed if the aim is to benefit from geopolitics. Synthesizing geopolitics with geoculture might help to overcome such problems handicapping classical theories by restructuring and relocating viewpoints dominating the discipline. An intellectual effort in the direction which we have described will show its influence especially on the studies on the geographical places such as Central Asia, which had remained at the centre of the discipline since it emerged. If this is realized and those which are in the shadow are invited to the sunshine in Turkish, it will be possible to look at the future of the region from the window of its own history. In the following part of this study, we will try to take a humble step in this direction.

2.1 Fading Images of Orientalism and Turkestan: From the Land of Barbarians to the Centre of the World History

Geopolitical designs which identify Central Asia with the features of the land it occupies by ignoring the history and culture produced by its inhabitants are fed by a tradition of historiography. The words of Denis Sinor seem to be the best summary of the viewpoint shaping that tradition. Sinor, who was accepted in the United States as one of the doyens of the Central Asian historiography, says in the introduction to his famous work that "the his-

tory of Central Eurasia is a history of the barbarian".⁴⁶ This attitude has been broken gradually in the last thirty years. While criticizing it in his study entitled as "The Centrality of Central Asia" at the beginning of the 1990s, Frank says that the region is almost a black hole for the world historiography. In his opinion, there are two reasons for it. The first is that the people of the region could not write their history because of various obstacles. The second reason is that the historians, who concentrated on the regions around Central Asia such as China, India and Russia, wrote little on the region.⁴⁷

The shortage of knowledge stemming from the fact that the history of Turkestan was not studied sufficiently created in the Western academic circles a tendency of marginalizing certain periods belonging to the past of Central Asia in the world history by coming together with ancient prejudices. One example of this attitude criticized by Frank is seen in the editions of the Cambridge History of Islam in the 1970s. By claiming that little was lived in the region, the editors told the history of Central Asia between 1400 and 1800 in a few pages and they almost totally neglected it.⁴⁸

The attitudes of Western/Indian/Chinese/Russian historians, who tell little about or totally neglect the ties of the region they studied with Turkestan, were overcome only with changes in the methodological level. The classical specialization which deals with certain parts of the earth as sovereign units whose history will be written was shaken by new approaches concentrating on the relationships and interactions between those units. When this happened, the central place of Central Asia in the world history appeared with a shining flash which was impossible not to see. One of the important developments, which made it possible to return the prestige of the region, was the disagreement between the world system theoreticians working in the field of political economy, stemmed from the question how long the history of capitalism was. The findings reached during this discussion in which the sources of the historiography of economics are mobilized depict a scene of world economy in which Turkestan had occupied the "heart of Eurasia" for long centuries.

When the words of Beckwith are compared with the words of Sinor, which are quoted at the beginning of the section, the striking change in the perception of Central Asia is seen clearly. "Central Eurasian peoples made fundamental, crucial contributions to the formation of world civilization, to the extent that understanding Eurasian history is impossible without including the relationship between Central Eurasians and the peoples around them."⁴⁹ There are those who went further than Beckwith did. For example, Clarke says

⁴⁶ Sinor, **Inner Asia**, p. 5.

⁴⁷ André Gunder Frank, **The Centrality of Central Asia**, VU University Press, Amsterdam 1992, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁸ André Gunder Frank, **ReOrient, Global Economy in the Asian Age**, University of California Press, USA 1998, p. 117.

⁴⁹ Christopher I. Beckwith, **Empires of the Silk Road: a History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present**, Princeton University Press, USA 2009, p. XX.

that Central Asia has a central importance not only for Eurasia, but also for understanding the whole world history.⁵⁰

The first source of this importance is the place of the region. In history, some shortages of Turkestan in terms of climate and natural sources were compensated by its unique advantages provided by its position in the crux of Eurasia. Gills and Frank point out that Central Asia became in the ancient times the intersection of a world system compassing China, India, Iran, Mesopotamia, Levant and the Mediterranean. Central Asia, which established connection between those regions, played a key role by bringing together China of Han, India of Gupta, Iran of Part and the Roman Empire within a common world system.⁵¹ The legacy of this interaction was observed in many fields including science, philosophy, literature, religion and urbanism.⁵²

The basic motivation behind the dynamics of interaction which had lasted for long centuries was trade. For example, it is known that an Indian settlement existed in the Bukhara of the 7th century in the form of a trade colony. Indian and Chinese goods were transported as far as Moscow and the Western Europe through this city.⁵³ Especially when a power integrating the city states and narrow sovereign areas in the region emerged, the size of intercontinental trade reached serious levels.⁵⁴

The Silk Road owed its existence to this economic mobility. The Silk Road, which was the name of not only one line but a network of roads extending from the East to the West, was the historical channel of transportation and communication of the world system mentioned above. Political and diplomatic relations developed in parallel with trade had been conducted through this network at the centre of which Central Asia existed.⁵⁵ When the

⁵⁰ Clarke, "The 'Centrality' of Central Asia...", p. 22.

⁵¹ Barry K. Gills and Andre Gunder Frank, "Kümülatif Birikim", Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills (eds.), **Dünya Sistemi, Beş Yüz Yıllık mı? Beş Bin Yıllık mı?**, translated by Esin Soğancılar, İmge Kitabevi, Ankara 2003, p. 185.

⁵² B. A. Litvinsky and Zhang Guang-da, "Historical Introduction", Litvinsky Zhang Guang-da and R. Shabani Samghabadi (eds.), **History of Civilizations of Central Asia, Volume III, The Crossroads of Civilizations: A. D. 250 to 750, B. A.**, UNESCO Publishing, Paris 1996, p. 24.

⁵³ M. Annanepesov, "Relations between the Khanates and with Other Powers", **History of Civilizations of Central Asia**, Volume V. UNESCO, Paris 2003, p. 84.

⁵⁴ Barry K. Gills and Andre Gunder Frank, "Dünya Sisteminde Çevrimler, Krizler ve Hegemonik Değişiklikler (MÖ 1700 - MS 1700)", Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills (eds.), **Dünya Sistemi, Beş Yüz Yıllık mı? Beş Bin Yıllık mı?**, translated by Esin Soğancılar, İmge Kitabevi, Ankara 2003, p. 332.

⁵⁵ B. A. Litvinsky and Zhang Guang-da, "Central Asia, The Crossroads Of Civilizations". Litvinsky Zhang Guang-da and R. Shabani Samghabadi (eds.), **History of Civilizations of Central Asia, Volume III, The Crossroads of Civilizations: A. D. 250 to 750, B. A.**, UNESCO Publishing, Paris 1996, p. 486.

Geographic Expeditions increased the prestige of maritime lines, the golden age of the Silk Road ended not only in terms of trade relations, but also militarily and politically.⁵⁶

The second factor which made Central Asia important in history was the internal energy it produced and its range of expansion. Its central position not only opened Turkestan to the influence of different civilizations which it brought together. It also made it the cradle of the eruptions shaking the whole world system in every period when energy was accumulated in the level which could destroy the boundaries of the region. The waves of immigration and invasion, which spread as eruptions, changed the ethnic composition of demographic structures of the neighboring civilizations as well as their economic, social, political and cultural lives.⁵⁷

Those tracing the tracks of those waves from 1700 B.C. say that the processes of energy accumulation were completed in five-century periods and the waves created by eruptions lasted about two centuries. The waves of invasion were seen in 1700-1500 B.C., 1200-1000 B.C., 500-0 B.C., 400-600, and 1000-1300. All waves were in contact with the remnants of the previous eruptions and they except the last one to push them further.⁵⁸

This basis of interaction in addition to other factors supports those who emphasize that the empire of the Genghis Khan, the most violent of the eruptions, was not born in vacuum, but was the part of the deep rooted heritage created by the history of Central Asia.⁵⁹ Following its first wave of invasion, the Mongol army gained the character of Turk-Mongol with participations from Turkic societies and later became completely a Turkic army. This is the clearest proof of the interaction mentioned.⁶⁰ The Mongol eruption became a super Central Asian eruption integrating Mongols and Turks while it passed through the lands of Turkestan.⁶¹

In some studies, the Empire of Genghis Khan, which was considered so far as the only power completely dominating the heartland of Mackinder⁶² was regarded as the start of the "World History".⁶³ This shows the level which the theses emphasizing the importance of Central Asia in Western academic circles have reached. For example, Adshead says that the Mongol invasion was the first true global event: "It deeply affected China, Persia, Russia and

⁵⁶ Adle and Habib, "Introduction", p. 28. However, the activities in the Silk Road did not stop altogether until the end of the 19th century. For example, in that period, Indians, Persians, Chinese, Tatars, Georgians and the migrants from Tashkent, Hive and Hokent were filling the streets of Bukhara to engage in trade. R. G. Mukminova, "The Janids (Astarkhanids)", **History of Civilizations of Central Asia**, Volume V. UNESCO, Paris 2003, p. 51.

⁵⁷ Gills and Frank, "Kümülatif Birikim", p. 186.

⁵⁸ **Ibid**, p. 185.

⁵⁹ Frank, **The Centrality of...**, p. 44.

⁶⁰ After this transformation occurred, the Mongolian language was protected by the conservative elite only for two generations. Adshead, **Central Asia in...**, p. 6.

⁶¹ **Ibid**, p. 53.

⁶² Brzezinski, **The Grand Chessboard:...**, p. 16.

⁶³ Adshead, **Central Asia in...**, p. 53.

eastern Europe. Indirectly, and at one remove, it affected India and Southeast Asia. Negatively, it affected Japan, Egypt and Western Europe, by not conquering them, and giving them their chance, so to speak, in their respective cultural areas. More remotely, it entered the causal network which led to Christian expansion in America, Moslem expansion in Africa and Southeast Asia.”⁶⁴

Some aspects of the image depicted in these and similar lines of praise and admiration arouse, though involuntarily, in minds the traditional views of the Central Asian historiography regarding "barbarians". In order to save the perceptions regarding the past of the region from the domination of the orientalist approach fed by those patterns, the unfair judgment that the lands of Turkestan produced only waves of invasion should be corrected. The studies demonstrate that Central Asia had hosted a lively urban life since the ancient times. Considerable improvements were achieved in the region in the fields of manufacture and mining in addition to agriculture and trade.⁶⁵ This economic foundation created the basis necessary to take the relations with the neighboring civilizations beyond the state of war. One of the examples going beyond the pattern of interaction between the nomads and the sedentary is that the Qin dynasty was able to establish the first central state in China thanks to its trade with Central Asia. The Qin dynasty used the revenue it obtained from trade to finance the wars at home and to establish the administrative structure of the empire.⁶⁶ By looking at similar relations repeated in different historical conjunctures, Frank claims that a common life form emerged between the Central Asian states and China.⁶⁷

2.2 Turkestan as a Subject, Making History: The Words of the Active Century to the Future

The above explanations and evaluations demonstrate that Central Asia has a reality outside the understanding of history adorned with orientalist clichés on which the first-generation geopolitical theories were based. The question which should be asked is the following: by using the language of the authentic reality, can we draw a historical picture which will enable us to understand today's geopolitical equations? Each "yes" answer, such as ours, which sees it possible to draw such a picture, will take along necessary "buts". A list comprising methodological difficulties to the drawbacks on the scope, time etc. of the study will be added to these "buts". However, the "yes" answer at the very beginning will mean that there are things which can be done in spite of all discouraging effects of the statements of caution. Keeping our restrictions in mind, we will look at the direction of the "yes" answer and will try to build a starting point which can be helpful for the first steps of the future researchers.

A research study aiming to construct the meaning of the Turkestan geopolitics from "within" should concentrate firstly on the subject of the geopolitical vision whose parameters we try to understand. Unlike the Western geopolitical approaches, the subject which

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Frank, *The Centrality of...*, p. 27.

⁶⁶ Gills and Frank, "Kümülatif Birikim", p. 182.

⁶⁷ Frank, *The Centrality of...*, p. 17.

look at its home, the geography of Central Asia, from within resorts to an identity while formulating its relationship with the “outside”. This identity was constructed jointly within the process that lasted for centuries by material and spiritual ties such as language, religion, customs, tradition, politics, government and geography, which resist to time.

Identity is neither static nor uniform. Especially modern societies have dynamic and diversified identities in an atmosphere where the change has the character of continuity. However, this does not go as far as the disintegration of the subject through a complete alienation. Regardless of its degree, the subject tries to keep the change in the speed and level which will ensure its psychological integrity and continuity and thus to protect “the perception of I”.⁶⁸ The geographical place is the space where the process of the subject’s existence is functioning and where all its adventures including the formation of its identity are realized. Therefore, there is a two-way affecting/affected relationship and a bond of meaning between the geographical place and identity. “Geoculture” arises from that bond. While identity constructs itself in interaction with a geographical place having certain characteristics, the cultural forms related to identity become concrete objects in the same space. Geoculture, which is not composed of only material objects, strengthens the feeling of belonging with the help of these manifestations, feeds the feeling of continuity and helps the agent to recreate itself.

This complex created by the subject-space unity is the actor of the geopolitical struggle in a given period. It is surrounded by other subject-space complexes. These actors face each other or come together according to a geopolitical equation existent in a certain geographical place. There is also a reflexive relationship between the actors that interact with each other in the context of friendship-enemy relations. They are both the affecting and the affected sides of the interaction.

The lifetime of geopolitical equations whose features we try to describe is limited to a certain conjuncture. Conjunctures change for various reasons. Every change brings about a new equation. In order to be able to decode the codes of geopolitical attitude of a subject-space complex, firstly the equation characterizing a historical conjuncture and the position of the actor studied at that moment should be analyzed. Then, the answer produced in facing hundreds of challenges should be described systematically. This description, which should not be composed of only the list of elements, should aim at explaining the main dynamics and developments of that period around cause-and-effect relationships. Later, the pictures belonging to different conjunctures should be aligned the time arrow and they should be explained with an analysis concentrated on continuities / diversifications among them.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Erol Güngör, **Kültür Değişmesi ve Milliyetçilik**, Ötüken Neşriyat, İstanbul 1996; Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Medeniyetlerin Ben-idraki”, **Dîvân, Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi**. 1997/1.

⁶⁹ For the opinions of Robert W. Cox used while this framework is prepared see Robert W. Cox and Michael G. Schechter, **The Political Economy of a Plural World: Critical Reflections on Power, Morals and Civilization**, Routledge, USA and Canada 2002, pp. 77-78.

Such a comprehensive study that requires benefiting from the accumulation and methods of various social science branches go much beyond the limits of our study. However, we are also concerned that our above assessments regarding method will be too abstract for readers. Therefore, we want to summarize the geopolitical equation belonging to the historical conjuncture extending from the second part of the 7th century to the 8th century.

The existence of a text from Orkhon Inscriptions which enables us to comprehend the geopolitical thinking of the “agent/actor” through its own statements makes the period chosen special. The basic characteristic of that historical conjuncture is the competition between the states, which emerged almost simultaneously in the geographical places neighboring Turkestan.⁷⁰ The great powers which were influential during the period were the Tang dynasty in China, Kok Turks, Tibetans and Muslim Arabs. Those actors which were in interaction with a wide range of issues extending from alliance to war had important trade and cultural ties with each other.

In the sixth century, the Kok Turks united Turkestan under their rule. They had diplomatic and trade relations not only with Asiatic nations, but also with powers such as the Byzantium Empire. These relations reached the level of fighting against the Persia of Sasanis with Istanbul to obtain share from the Silk Road trade. Their historical neighborhood with China, which geography made their fate, continued in the cycle of trade and war. They not only received share from the transit trade, but also sold a lot of needed goods to China.⁷¹ Horses exported in return for silk continued to be among the important trade items of the region. In the periods prior to the application of steam power to machines, horses were an important source of energy needed in every field of civilian life and economy in addition to their military functions. The statistical estimations based on the archives demonstrate that Central Asia was highly lucky in terms of this source of energy.⁷²

The Kok Turks exported culture in addition to energy. Historical sources point out that, during the first period of the Tang dynasty known for its cosmopolitan character, there was a widespread admiration among the Chinese aristocracy toward the Turks. It was possible to see the attitudes, on which Bilge Kagan would complain one and half century later from his own perspective, in the palace of the Tangy dynasty, where wearing trousers (like Turks who were famous for horse riding) and speaking Turkish instead of Chinese were preferred. There were even princes who began to live in the Turkish tents (yurts) they built.

⁷⁰ Gills and Frank, “Dünya Sisteminde Çevrimler...”, pp. 334-335.

⁷¹ Harold Miles Tanner, **China: A History**, Hackett Publishing, USA 2009, p. 164.

⁷² For example, the estimations which were made for the period of Genghis Khan, enables us to have an idea on the age of the Kok Turks as well. According to them, with its population of 20 million, Central Asia hosted the half of the world population. Adshead, **Central Asia in...**, p. 61. After the Kok Turks, the trade of horse for silk continued to be one of the basic elements of the relationship between China and the Uighurs. For an important work on the issue see Christopher I. Beckwith, “The Impact of the Horse and Silk Trade on the Economies of T’ang China and the Uighur Empire: On the Importance of International Commerce in the Early Middle Ages”, **Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient**, Vol. 34, No. 3, 1991, pp. 183-198.

Some historians see the reason for the military / political success of the Tang dynasty against the Göktürks in that they copied the Turks at high level. In fact, the commander of the Chinese army, which entered Turfan only ten years after the historical defeat of the Eastern Kok Turk Empire in 630, was a Turk named as Ashina.⁷³

China of the Tang dynasty defeated also Western Kok Turks on the edge of Lake Issyk in 657. But the rulers appointed by the empire could not govern the region and lost their power as a result of the revolts that broke out. The Turks, who were trying to restore their state, unified their forces with Tibetans who fought against the Chinese at that time.⁷⁴ The new allies recaptured Kashgar and Hoten from China in the early 660s.⁷⁵ There was a new state of Kok Turks from 680. In 692, the Tang dynasty managed to defeat Tibet.⁷⁶ Advancing China made expeditions again to Lake Issyk and Fergana. Right after these expeditions, the Turks established alliances with Tibetans and Muslim Arabs who had just come to Central Asia and entered Aksu and Three Turfans with them.⁷⁷

However, the coalitions were not stable. For example, Bilge Kagan refused to act together with Tibetans in 727. In response, China increased its border trade with the Kok Turks and began to send silk to them regularly.⁷⁸ In the War of Talas in 751, China faced the alliance of the Turks and Muslim Arabs once again. The Karluks in the Chinese army were left to the other side. The Tang dynasty, which withdrew from Central Asia after the defeat, was shaken by a big domestic revolt. The leader of the revolt, which continued from 755 to 763, was Chinese General An Lu-shan with a Turkic origin. The Tang dynasty invited some other Turks (Uighurs) to their country to suppress the revolt.⁷⁹

The story of some part of the period was told in the Orkhon Inscriptions⁸⁰ from the eyes of the subject in a kingly manner. Those written on the stones of the inscriptions were

⁷³ James A. Millward, **Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang**, Columbia University Press, United Kingdom 2007, p. 32. While thinking about the motivations of this cultural interaction, it will be useful to take into consideration the psychological differences between shepherds and the sedentary, which are underlined by Adshead. Adshead, **Central Asia in...**, p. 24.

⁷⁴ Litvinsky and Guang-da, "Central Asia, The Crossroads...", pp. 474-475.

⁷⁵ Millward, **Eurasian Crossroads: A History...**, p. 33.

⁷⁶ Mu and Wang Yao Shun-ying, "The Western Regions (H S I -Yü) Under The T'ang Empire and The Kingdom of Tibet", Litvinsky Zhang Guang-da and R. Shabani Samghabadi (eds.), **History of Civilizations of Central Asia, Volume III, The Crossroads of Civilizations: A. D. 250 to 750, B. A.**, UNESCO Publishing, Paris 1996, p. 352.

⁷⁷ Millward, **Eurasian Crossroads: A History...**, p. 35.

⁷⁸ S. G. Klyashtorny, "The Second Türk Empire (682-745)", Litvinsky Zhang Guang-da and R. Shabani Samghabadi (eds.), **History of Civilizations of Central Asia, Volume III, The Crossroads of Civilizations: A. D. 250 to 750, B. A.**, UNESCO Publishing, Paris 1996, p. 341.

⁷⁹ Millward, **Eurasian Crossroads: A History...**, p. 36.

⁸⁰ All references and quotations regarding the Orkhon Inscriptions throughout the study see Talât Tekin, **A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic**, Bloomington: Indiana University, Mouton and Co., USA 1968.

the things which desired to be known by those people governing the wars, diplomacy and even trade of the period. When we read the inscriptions by keeping in mind the warnings made by the modern historiography in using such texts⁸¹, we see a strong consciousness of subject-space. A strong geopolitical actor speaks with the mouth of the Kagan of Kok Turks.

On the inscriptions, the physical existence of the subject and the formation of its identity are explained as successive processes which began with the creation of the world: "When the blue sky above and reddish-brown earth below were created, between the two human beings were created." God chose Bumin and Istemi Kagans as rulers of people whom He did not give free rein to after creating them. These two kagans "organized and ruled the state and institutions of the Turkish people." The whole ontological process comprising the humanly existence of the individual and the construction of the subject / nation together with the ruling power above it, having a mission, is explained with the authority of God.

The authority who granted power instructed the ruler to protect the identity of the subject and to meet its needs concerning its physical existence. Bilge Kagan, too, was brought to power for this reason: "Haven... which had granted ... the state, in order that the name and fame of the Turkish people would not perish enthroned (me)." Fulfilling this responsibility requires to protect the identity with all its aspects. It also necessitates protecting the Töre (old belief system of Turks) to carry the subject to the future with the help of the identity. When the Töre is left, the subject which loses its identity disappears though it seems to protect its physical existence for some time.⁸² Therefore, the father of Bilge Kagan, Ilteris Kagan, "organized and ordered the people... who had lost the Turkish institutions (Töre), in accordance with the rules (Töre) of my ancestors." while he reestablished the Kok Turk state by revolting against China.

The second aspect of the responsibility having a rather material nature was not ignored in the inscriptions. Bilge Kagan says "in order to nourish the people, I, with great armies, went on campaigns." He explains his success as follows: "I brought the people to life who were going to perish, and nourished them. I furnished the naked people with clothes and I made the poor people rich and few people numerous. I made them superior to the peoples who had great states (and esteemed rulers). I subjugated all the peoples who lived (in the four quarters of the world) and I made them harmless."

Geography plays a vital role in fulfilling these duties. As it has been stated previously, the relationship of identification, which is established by the subjects having identity with certain regions, results in the emergence of subject-space complexes granting them the characteristic of being a geopolitical actor. In fact, Bilge Kagan defends a geopolitical design in which Ötüken occupies the central place by repeating it on every occasion. The feeling of direction is strong in the inscriptions. Expeditions are launched continuously from Ötüken to the north, south, east and west. The value of Ötüken was tested with observations during

⁸¹ I. Togan, "The Epic Tradition and Historical Literature in Turkic", **History of Civilizations of Central Asia**, Volume V. UNESCO, Paris 2003, p. 740.

⁸² For an important work on the place of the concept "töre" in the Turkish culture see Sait Başer, **Kutadgu Bilig'de Kut ve Töre'den Sevgi Toplumuna**, Seyran Kitapevi, İstanbul 1995.

these expeditions: "I have led (the armies) up to all these places. A land better than the Ötüken mountains does not exist at all! The place from which the tribes can be (best) controlled is the Ötüken mountains." The subject, which had been disintegrated because Ötüken had been lost, began to restore itself when it regained its space. "(When) I (ascended the throne) the people who had gone (in almost all directions,) came back utterly exhausted, without horses and clothes."

Bilge Kagan found out weaknesses of the geopolitical actor he led against China and placed geographical distances and boundaries at the centre of the strategy which, according to him, would abolish these weaknesses. China was a powerful enemy with its big population, economic power and fine diplomacy. The Kok Turks faced the fiercest blow of this enemy when they were persuaded to migrate to the inner parts of China. They were subjected to massacres; they were enslaved and they were assimilated within the masses by losing their identity values: "You, people of the sacred Ötüken mountains, it was you who went away. In the places you went, your (only) profit was awaiting you: your blood ran like a river, and your bones were heaped up like a mountain; your sons worthy of becoming lords became slaves, and your sons worthy of becoming ladies became servants." "The Turkish lords abandoned their Turkish titles. Those lords who were in China held the Chinese titles and obeyed the Chinese emperor."

The Chinese success of decomposing the subject-space complex had been achieved with a masterful propaganda adorned with promises. "The words of the Chinese people have always been soft. Deceiving by means of (their) sweet words and soft materials, the Chinese are said to cause the remote peoples to come close in this manner. After such a people have settled close to them, (the Chinese) are said to plan their ill will there... Having been taken in by their sweet words and soft materials, you Turkish people, were killed in great numbers. O Turkish people, you will die! If you intend to settle at the Cogay mountains and on the Tögültün plain in the south, O Turkish people, you will die! There the ill-willed persons made harmful suggestions as follows: 'If people live afar (from them), they (i.e., the Chinese) give cheap materials (to them); but, if a people live close to them, then (the Chinese) give them valuable materials. Apparently such harmful suggestions made the ill-willed persons. Having heard these words, you unwise people went close (to the Chinese) and were (consequently) killed in great numbers. If you go toward those places, O Turkish people, you will die!'"

In order to dissuade people from migration which results in assimilation, Bilge Khan not only warns them, but also presents an alternative vision. According to this vision, these people might obtain material resources promised by China without being assimilated in this sea of people: "If you stay in the land of Ötüken, and send caravans from there, you will have no trouble. If you stay on the Ötüken mountains, you will live forever dominating the tribes!" "Having stayed in this place, I came to an amicable agreement with the Chinese people. They (i.e., the Chinese people) give (us) gold, silver and silk in abundance."

The ruler of Kok Turks, who was aware of the gap between his state and his rival in terms of population and economic infrastructure, wanted the frontiers to expand outwards only at times he chose and mostly for military purposes. One of the reasons for using really

bad titles for the Chinese people in the inscriptions should be the effort of protecting the subject against assimilation by sharpening the differences of identity: "Since... Chinese people were wily and deceitful, since they were tricky..." When the subject attains the shield of distance which gives it the feeling of security, it does not hesitate to have contacts with the enemy. Therefore, Bilge Kagan preferred a pragmatic realism caring about the balances between the great powers, which are enforced by the short-term volatile system of alliances, to demonizing the enemy. For example, he speaks in satisfaction of friendship relations he established with his big neighbor: "I asked (the Chinese) emperor, for painters and requested them to decorate (the mausoleum). (The Chinese emperor) did not reject my request and (they) sent the court painters of the Chinese emperor." But he also cares about the other pan of the scales and talks about the delegations which came from the other big states for the funeral (like Tibetans).

The geopolitical actor led by Bilge Kagan also tried to eliminate the sub-areas of sovereignty "at home" while it tried to strengthen itself against "outside powers". Most of the Kok Turk expeditions were launched in order to prevent the separate political projects of the relatives which had ties of identity with the subject. In the monuments, it is talked of the alliances of the elements, about whom Bilge Kagan said "... were my own people". With the triangle of big powers surrounding Central Asia against the Kok Turks. This shows that the common identity did not enforce the membership in the subject-space complex. In order to enforce participation, "they made the proud enemies bow and the powerful ones kneel." One of the reasons for clashing with such groups as Turgish, Nine Oguz, Kyrgyz and Basmil was the desire of preventing the disintegration of the subject from within and to get integrated with the pieces which it considered as part of the whole. For example, the rulers of Karluk ran away when they learned that an expedition was launched against them. The people who stayed behind praised Bilge Kagan by saying "our Kagan has arrived". The sentence "I took their realm" in the inscriptions, meaning that the military activity reached its aim after the enemy forces were scattered, must have been used for this reason.

Even these general lines belonging to one single historical conjuncture are sufficient to demonstrate the distortion of the general perspective which had dominated the general assessments of Western geopoliticians about the region from the end of the 19th century. Long centuries before the descriptions of the classical geopolitical theories based on the thinking of "Barbarian Central Asia", the region had been the cradle of the actors capable of creating geopolitical designs from their own perspectives. The way of comparing the heritage of thinking produced "from within" on the political meanings of geography with those reflected from the lenses of "outsider" Western geopolitics is given here: to produce studies which will transform the frameworks like ours into detailed pictures for each historical conjuncture and in a way to include all geopolitical actors which compete with each other.

In this way, it will be possible to follow the changes, transformations, disintegrations and renewals in the subject-space complex, which should be traced down firstly in Turkestan, and the syntheses produced by these processes. Many things from the spread of Islam in Central Asia to the new spaces adopted as homes by the convoy of immigrants advancing southward and eastward in the west of Caspian Sea are reflected in the mirror of the long

period which needs to be studied. This heritage which needs to be analyzed in more details and intimately has geopolitical functions bringing about practical results in foreign policy. For example, the thing which creates the thinking of Turkestan based on the understanding of brotherhood affecting Turkish foreign policy toward Central Asia is the fact that the perception of “collective I” has been maintained in spite of the diversification in the space and the transformations the subject went through in the historical process.⁸³

This thinking which perceives the region as an organic texture woven by culture and history is based on an intellectual projection which also renders the boundaries between the new states artificial in some ways. The common ties which make Central Asia, Turkestan shorten the physical distance with Anatolia and prevent the objectification of the region by the strategic vision shaping the direction of Turkish foreign policy by dealing with the region only according to the requirements of power equations.

In this understanding which appears in the Motherland / Fatherland dichotomy, the region stops being the area of foreign policy with which the subject established relationship on the instrumental level and transforms into a space which is seen among the elements of identity forming the subject. The practical result of this is that the region is considered as the main geopolitical axis of the Eurasian strategy independent of its political weight which stays weak in comparison with the big powers around it. The eye which looks at Asia focuses firstly on Turkestan and relations with big powers such as Russia and China are given meanings through the Fatherland though they are more powerful.

From the emergence of the discipline, Western geopoliticians had underlined, in a similar way, the connection between special relations and international politics. The assessments of the spread of the Western subject-space complex in the famous article of Mackinder, mentioned in the first chapter, are important for this reason.⁸⁴ However, similarities with the example of the vision of Turkestan end at one point. That point is the classic geo-

⁸³ This understanding is the thing which made Bilge Kagan say "... were my own people" to those societies which he accepted as the part of the same subject with himself because of the elements of common identity though they did not share the same space and area of sovereignty and even fought each other.

⁸⁴ Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot...", pp. 422-423. Historian Koenigsberger summarizes the idea of "Europe" spreading from the single subject-space complex to various geographical places as follows: "European history began in the fifth century with the collapse of the western half of the Roman Empire under the attacks of the 'barbarian' Germanic tribes. In the succeeding one thousand six hundred years the fragments left by this catastrophic event expanded into a new cultural entity which covered the whole European continent, established itself in the American and Australian continents and, in one form or another, came to dominate the rest of the world... In the course of the twentieth century, however, the centre of gravity of European global power has shifted outwards, from the centre of the European continent and its old imperial monarchies, Spain, France, Great Britain and Germany to greater Russia (the USSR) and to North America (the USA)." H.G. Koenigsberger, **Medieval Europe 400-1500**, Longman, New York 1989, pp. 1,4.

politics' effort of feeding the feeling of being partner of the Western subject through the common threat it concretized in the heartland.

This viewpoint which has been dealt with previously has rather deep roots in the European intellectual tradition. For example, when we listen to Gibbon, the famous historian who wrote in the 18th century, we realize that Mackinder used a world projection which was highly common in the cultural environment where he was brought up: "If a savage conqueror should issue from the deserts of Tartary, he must repeatedly vanquish the robust peasants of Russia, the numerous armies of Germany, the gallant nobles of France, and the intrepid freemen of Britain; who, perhaps, might confederate for their common defence. Should the victorious Barbarians carry slavery and desolation as far as the Atlantic Ocean, ten thousand vessels would transport beyond their pursuit the remains of civilized society; and Europe would revive and flourish in the American world, which is already filled with her colonies and institutions."⁸⁵

Although Gibbon lived in the Europe of the age of nation-state, he expected the Western states to act as if they were the soldiers of the same army in encountering the assault of the heartland which he symbolized with the deserts of Tartary. It is not important whether it was France or Britain which stood to the assault in this struggle which melted all differences in the joint subject. This highly familiar language which transforms civilization into a conflict by placing the "civilized" against the "barbarians" has reached our age with its refined versions. One of the examples carrying ideological parameters belonging to the past full of conflicts to the future is that the new geopolitical equation in Asia is considered in the light of "great game"⁸⁶. This analogy has little analytical value beyond producing the dualist pattern in the form of the barbarian that has the control of the heartland and the Western power spreading civilization by fighting against it.

Although it is possible to accept the Russian Federation and the Tsarist Russia, the United States and the Great British Empire as the extension of the same subject-space complexes, the continuity will help us to understand only one part of the geopolitical equation belonging to the existent conjuncture. The expression "the new world game" implies that history appears with similar garment in the conjunction where the past and the present intersect. It also degrades the changes in both actors and the system, which shape the basis and limits of the competition, to the details which can be ignored.

⁸⁵ Edward Gibbon, **Roma İmparatorluğu'nun Gerileyiş ve Çöküş Tarihi**, Vol. III., Translated by Asım Baltacıgil, BFS Yayınları, İstanbul 1988, p. 399.

⁸⁶ It is possible that the desire to understand it through the heritage of the competition between the Tsarist Russia and the British Empire has the role from the early 1990s in the increasing number of the studies which analyze the "Great Game" in the 19th century. As examples of that literature see Edward Ingram, **Britain's Persian Connection, 1798-1828: Prelude to the Great Game in Asia**, Clarendon Press, Oxford and New York 1992; Peter Hopkirk, **The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia**, Kodansha International, USA 1994; Sir Martin Ewans (ed.), **The Great Game: Britain and Russia in Central Asia**, Routledge, USA and Canada 2003; Karl Ernest Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, **Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia**, Basic Books, 2006.

The insistence on its widespread use in spite of its disadvantages mentioned above points to the existence of the circles who find a confrontation between friendly and hostile powers desirable. Some developments such as the Russian-Georgian war in 2008, which have not been clarified yet, remind us that we should not miss the connections between terminological choices and certain geopolitical projections regarding the future. This vision of future, which advises looking at the future decades by placing the possibility of repetition of history on the centre of producing strategy, also contains the assumption that Turkestan is doomed to live the fate predetermined by others. We certainly need a historical basis to look at the future. Therefore, we should turn our face to the conjunctures prior to “the passive phase”, which will enable us to focus on the possibility of the emergence of Central Asia as a geopolitical actor which has achieved the subject-space integration.⁸⁷

When we embark on a journey on the time arrow without turning our back to realities, we do not see any conjuncture resembling the picture created by the transition to the “New Era”. The parallelisms which we can discover have meaning only in the context of the simplifying logic of geopolitics. If we remember our above framework belonging to the 7th and 8th centuries by reserving our criticisms, we can make the following abstraction by keeping the contexts of events and facts outside. The equation facing Central Asia both in the age of Kok Turks and in the present age is composed of two pieces related to internal and external dynamics separately.

These pieces are in mutual and intensive interaction with each other. A multi-polar world order exists in the part of equation related to external dynamics. The roads of the rising states with similar power meet in Turkestan. An atmosphere of competition which frequently results in conflicts dominates the relations between these powers. They establish coalitions with each other or with the Central Asian peoples against the common enemy. However, the alliances as well as enmities change quickly.

On the other part of the equation exists a Central Asia which is separated into the sub-areas of sovereignty as a result of disintegration. The peoples living in Turkestan make alliances with the outside powers in order to be successful in the struggle for power they conduct against each other. An internal conflict invites foreign intervention while a war outside the region is transferred easily to inside. The region is behind its big neighbors demographically and economically. The weakness created by this shortage is intended to be compensated by superior military organization. Maintaining the balance of power outside and achieving integration at home are strategic goals. If we look at the Orkhon Inscriptions, it is seen that solving this hard equation became possible at least at a certain period.

Central Asia of the coming century, coincides with that framework in some points. This geographical region takes its place among the fields of competition in which new and

⁸⁷ Adshead categorizes the Turkestan history into two as the active phase until 1700 and as the passive phase from 1700 up to now, in which Central Asia became the periphery of the world. Adshead, **Central Asia in....** One of the developments which made the 1700s as special is that Russia and China embarked on direct trade with each other by sidelining Central Asia. Frank, **ReOrient, Global Economy....**, p. 121.

old powers face each other in the new world order gaining multi-polarity. The fragmentation in the region continues to exist together with the bunch of risks and problems which it has created. These two issues constitute the basic internal and external parameters of the geopolitical equation which might determine the face of Turkestan in the future.

Conclusion: Can Central Asia be Saved form its Geopolitical Importance?

In many books and articles written without any effort of empathizing with the region even at the lowest level, Central Asia serves only as decoration at the background of analyses. In these studies, modern and more refined versions of the classical orientalist approach degrading the non-Western world to the places where people incapable of determining their fates and exhibiting passive and irrational attitudes are produced.

For example, the revival of the "Great Game" metaphor with the adjective "new" invites the strategic patterns which emerged in the highly othering climate of the Victorian age and which were adorned with cultural images from the corridors of the ancient times to today's world. The updates of these patterns which consider the region as a place inhabited by uncivilized people and as playgrounds and hunting areas where great powers compete with each other create an atmosphere of language affecting everybody thinking on the future of Central Asia. This atmosphere sows in minds the visions of future parallel to the dark periods of the past specified by the chain of imperial actions in various forms. The expression of "geopolitical importance" used like compliment points, in fact, to a similar passivity.

Attributing importance to geographical places is a privilege belonging to the major actors of world politics who are engaged in competition. For example, the geopolitical importance of the United States or Russia in the Cold War period is not mentioned in any study. In fact, geopolitical importance is gained with positions such as remoteness/proximity to these major actors or the areas of interests concerning them closely. We should not confuse this reality with "advantages" which are constituted by special geographic forms such as crossing points, straits etc.

The major actors of the world system might have geographical advantages, but another power's attributing importance to these advantages is out of question. These advantages transform into "importance" which will be made the basis of bargaining by the major powers only when they are accumulated at the hands of the countries which do not have capacity to set its own play. Therefore, whether a region will be the central subject of global power relations or a secondary object on which strategy is produced is determined by the relationship between that region and the distributors of geopolitical importance.

So, if a basic strategic goal is to be determined for the future of Central Asia or any other once marginalized geography, this should be to save the region from its geopolitical importance. To achieve this, a vision which can combine cultural studies with geopolitics from within will be needed.

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