

CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA: REGIME SECURITY
AS A DRIVER OF PEACEFUL TERRITORIAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION
AND INTERSTATE COOPERATION

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ABSTRACT

Despite historically bad relations between the PRC and the Soviet Union, China's policy towards the Central Asian republics has been especially friendly. Against realist expectations, the settlement of old territorial disputes was relatively quick and peaceful and China, moreover, dropped many of its original claims. Finally, the settlement of the disputes provided a basis for regional cooperation between the countries through the institutional framework of the SCO. Developing on already existing theories such as Omnibalancing and Fravel's work, this thesis argues that domestic politics were important in motivating Chinese behavior. Fear of instability in Xinjiang led Beijing to complement its policy in that region with those towards its bordering countries. This allowed the regime to balance internal threats—mainly motivated by the lack of legitimacy of the regime—by strengthening its relations with its western near abroad.

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INTRODUCTION

Much of the Western literature addressing Chinese foreign policy has done so from an America-centric perspective and has thus focused mainly on possible conflict in the East Pacific and rivalry with the US.¹ While China's western front has been far from quiet, most threats do not derive from states. The establishment of diplomatic ties between the PRC and the Central Asian republics in the early 1990s led to growing cooperation between the countries. Various issues, such as territorial disputes, that could have conceivably hindered the institution of friendly relations, were solved peacefully.

Research on Chinese involvement in Central Asia has increased over the years, but has remained informed by an overall traditional realist/neorealist perspective where Russia and China are seen as future rivals and China's policy in Central Asia is expected to turn expansionist.² The rationale behind this prediction is based on more than just a belief that alliances are generally volatile and short-lived; there are in fact many reasons to expect competition between Russia and China. As a rising power the PRC is expected to build a sphere of influence, or "living zone" in its near abroad. This would imply more aggressiveness towards

¹ Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005); Robert Kagan, *The return of history and the end of dreams*, (London: Atlantic Books, 2008); John Mearsheimer, *The tragedy of Great Power politics*, (New York: Norton, 2001).

² For example on Sino-Russian Relations, see: Bobo Lo, "The Long Sunset of Strategic Partnership: Russia's Evolving China Policy," *International Affairs* 80 (2004); "Ten things everyone should know about the Sino-Russian relationship," *Centre For European Reform Policy Brief* (2008). On China's role in regionalism in Central Asia: Roy Allison, "Regionalism, regional structures and security management in Central Asia," *International Affairs* 80, 3 (2004); Annette Bohr "Regionalism in Central Asia: new geopolitics, old regional order" *International Affairs* 80, 3 (2004). On China's expansionism in Central Asia: Stephen Blank, "China in Central Asia: the Hegemon in Waiting?" in *Eurasia in balance: the US and the regional power shift*, ed. Ariel Cohen (Burlington, VT : Ashgate, 2005); Niklas Swanstrom, "China and Central Asia: a new Great Game or traditional vassal relations?" *Journal of Contemporary China* 45 (2005): 572.

the Central Asian republics and possible conflict with Russia, which has long been the main power in the region. Thus, realist theories on hegemonic power fail to explain why China has been so compliant towards Russia and the Central Asian republics that lie within Moscow's sphere of influence and why it has resolved to enter into multilateral agreements, actually promoting the institution of international regimes with its western neighbors.

It is undoubtedly true that changes in the international structure influenced policy-makers in Beijing (the break-up of the Soviet Union was clearly a pre-requisite to establishing relations with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, for example). Moreover, a systemic balance of power/balance of threat analysis would seem to explain the Sino-Russian rapprochement and the harnessing of friendly relations with the Central Asian republics as a response to American power. Nonetheless the partnership is quite loose in nature, it is mainly oriented towards "defense" from mainly non-state actors, and finally it has not precluded occasional alliances between the countries involved and the US.³ This seems to prove that the approach is insufficient in explaining the extent and the nature of the evolving Chinese policy towards Central Asia.

This thesis is focused on understanding the processes through which foreign policy is affected by domestic politics, and how this can determine the emergence of cooperation between countries. After decades of stark antagonism, the Chinese leadership proved to be a supportive and engaging neighbor for the countries that emerged from the dissolving Soviet Union in 1992. Not only did Beijing agree to make territorial concessions in order to reach peaceful agreements with its Central Asian neighbors, but it strived to develop institutional ties with those countries, particularly through the SCO. While traditional realist theories would mainly explain this shift in

³ Robert H. Donaldson and John A. Donaldson, "The Arms Trade in Russian-Chinese Relations: Identity, Domestic Politics, and Geopolitical Positioning," *International Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (Dec., 2003): 717.

policy through an analysis of the international system of the kind described above, I argue that there is much to be explained by considering Chinese domestic politics.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My theoretical framework, which will be further discussed in the following chapter, builds on Taylor Fravel's work on Chinese foreign policy and territorial dispute resolutions, which in turn is generally based on theories of Omnibalancing (developed by Steven David). Omnibalancing expands the realist balance of power model by arguing that a regime will balance internal as well as external threats. This will be done by seeking alliances with foreign countries at the expense of factions within the state. This theoretical starting point has informed much of Fravel's research on Chinese territorial disputes. He noted that the PRC has historically been more prone to seek peaceful settlements for territorial dispute when it felt that there might be an internal threat. Thus, in the case of Central Asia, Beijing has pursued diplomacy with its neighbors (be it the Soviet Union or its successors) especially in those periods when there has been instability in the region.

I expand Fravel's work by considering Chinese behavior after the resolution of territorial disputes with the Central Asian republics and by looking more in detail at its domestic structures. These, in my view, explain why the CCP would view the Uyгур as a persistent threat and thus seek protracted cooperation with its neighbors. I argue that ethnic separatism and anti-government sentiments are easily rekindled just as civil conflicts are likely to explode again after peace settlements.⁴ In attempting to counter this, the government has sought to secure itself by

⁴ Steven David, "On Civil War," in *The American Interest* (March/April 2007): 25.

engaging in multilateral relations with both Russia and the Central Asian republics. This fits in with the general theory of Omnibalancing.⁵

The internal political dynamics of the PRC are analyzed by introducing some general theories of nationalism. These are important in understanding the difficulties encountered by the Chinese government in pursuing policies of assimilation and appeasement in Xinjiang. Ethno-national identity is important, because as Fravel himself points out, his theory does not apply to the regions of “Core China” where the population is Han Chinese. Here China has consistently preferred to allow conflicts to escalate rather than make concessions. While not overt, the argument of ethno-national unity is a driving force behind the claims on Taiwan. On the other hand this makes the case of Xinjiang particularly problematic since the bordering populations are closer to the Uyghurs culturally and ethnically than the Han Chinese.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

Foreign policy analysis will inform the general approach to the study. This is characterized by the attempt to explain foreign policy or foreign policy behavior through a theoretical analysis of decision makers who may act in singly or in group.⁶ The study of national bureaucracies, and the motivations and learning processes that influence decision-making are thus central to the research agenda.⁷ This thesis will look at the regime and the motivations behind its policy choices. I will not address the motivations and the role of individuals, interest

⁵ In this thesis I do not reject other possible motives behind Chinese involvement in Central Asia, such as energy security or even balancing behavior against the US. Yet, these are long-term goals that have not consistently, and sometimes urgently, informed Chinese policy in the region as I argue instead the “Uyghur problem” has.

⁶ Valerie M. Hudson, “The history and evolution of foreign policy analysis,” in *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, ed. Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield and Tim Dunne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12.

⁷ Jeffrey T. Checkel “Constructivism and foreign policy” in *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, ed. Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield and Tim Dunne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 74.

groups or even the CCP itself, although I recognize their importance. Developments and reforms within the Chinese Communist Party (particularly since the early 1990s) make it so that individual leaders are not as crucial as they were previously (as was obvious during Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping's lifetimes).⁸

It is particularly important to define the level of analysis in any research because it defines the object of the hypotheses, which in turn can affect their validity.⁹ In my case it is particularly important because I focus on realism's tenet that the state should be the only unit of analysis in International Relations. Here I propose to consider exclusively how the regime's interests influence decision making. It is clear that while the interests of the regime become identical with those of the state, it is not the case that the interests of the state become the primary motivation behind the regime's actions (as realists would have it). Thus, the unit of analysis in my research will be the regime itself rather than the state as in traditional realist research agendas.

Broadly speaking I look at how foreign policy—the dependent variable—is affected by domestic political and social factors. In the specific, the thesis considers how internal turmoil and the regime's fear of the latter affects the state's choices in matters of international politics. In this sense one could argue that the thesis will be characterized by a “second image” approach. Yet, rather than address the effect that the structure of the Chinese state has on its foreign policy I aim to consider the motives of the regime. Thus, the internal organization of the PRC will only matter

⁸ Evan S. Medeiros and Taylor M. Fravel, “China's New Diplomacy,” *Foreign Affairs* 82 no. 6, (Nov/Dec2003): 22-35. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=11107749&site=ehost-live> ; Robert H. Donaldson and John A. Donaldson, “The Arms Trade in Russian-Chinese Relations: Identity, Domestic Politics, and Geopolitical Positioning,” *International Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (Dec., 2003): 710.

⁹ Janet Buttolph Johnson and H. T. Reynolds with Jason Mycoff, *Political Science Research Methods* (Washington DC: CQ Press 2001), 53.

insofar as it defines how changes in society and domestic politics affect the regime and its expectations.¹⁰ Moreover, while not expressly addressed, it is implied that a “second image reversed” effect is also present.¹¹ Separatism and ethnic tension inside China are likely to increase if the neighboring countries were to experience significant instability. On the other hand, economic growth, strong state structures and stability in its near abroad may have a positive influence within the PRC’s borders. This is not only important in and of itself, but also because it affects the leadership’s choices in matters of foreign policy-making.

The hypothesized independent variable will be regime security, while instability in western China due to ethnic and economic issues is the intervening variable.¹² My main hypothesis is that in China higher ethnic tension and economic underdevelopment undermine the legitimacy of the regime. The lack of legitimacy in turn threatens the security of the regime and provides a strong incentive to collaborate with foreign countries that can contribute to fighting those threats. The other hypothesis—which would support realist theories—is that if realist assumptions are correct and internal politics do not significantly influence international relations,

¹⁰ In his seminal work *Man, State, and War* Kenneth Waltz argued that in understanding war and cooperation—the main objective of research in International Relations—there are three different levels of analysis. These are human nature, the organization of the state and the international system and were termed by him as first, second and third image. Waltz contended that while first and second image analysis may contribute to isolating immediate causes of war or cooperation between states, only the third image—the international system—accounted for the “permissive cause.” In other words, the structure of the international system is a prerequisite for conflict and cooperation to occur. Nonetheless an analysis of the first and second image might provide circumstantial and proximate explanations. Waltz’ discussion regarding different levels of analysis will be discussed more in depth in the theoretical section of this thesis. See: Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the state, and war: a theoretical analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

¹¹ Peter Gourevitch in his article “The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics” *International Organization*, 32 No. 4 (Autumn, 1978): 881-912 famously discussed the importance of analyzing international structures in order to understand change in domestic politics. He defined this process as second image reversed in response to Waltz’ original definition of second image analysis in explaining international relations through structures of domestic politics.

¹² For a specific definition of variables see Janet Buttolph Johnson and H. T. Reynolds with Jason Mycoff, *Political Science Research Methods* (Washington DC: CQ Press 2001), 39.

the PRC would have a more aggressive and less cooperative approach to Central Asia. This would be because China would be interested in expanding its influence and power into the region and make territorial gains to the expense of countries that are relatively inferior militarily and economically. In particular, it would be unlikely in a realist model to expect China to make concessions with regard to territorial disputes.

The other hypothesis which might validate realist theories is one that sees China's cooperative behavior in Central Asia as a response to US power. The balance of power and balance of threat theories would seem to explain the PRC's behavior. Yet, if this were to be the principal aim behind the institution of friendly relations with Central Asia and Russia (although Russia is of course a more complicated matter that will not be dealt with extensively in this thesis), then Chinese agreements with these countries would be mainly aimed at countering American presence in the region. As will be seen in the third chapter, most of the agreements actually aim at countering non-state threats and pre-date any serious US involvement in the region.

In order to operationalize these variables, I will take into consideration a variety of factors. As an indicator of instability and the regime's level of legitimacy in Xinjiang I will look at the incidence of violent acts linked to separatism and ethnic tension. Yet, the more important variable is the government's perception of the threat due to these phenomena rather than their incidence. To measure this I will measure the state's response—under the form of militarization, expansion of the police force, the number of arrests and official campaigns and crackdowns. Thus, my hypothesis is that ethnic tensions in Xinjiang and the perceived threat of terrorism and separatism pushed the PRC to normalize its relations with the former Soviet Union states in the 1990s. Moreover, those concerns pushed the Chinese leadership to pursue regional cooperation

and develop institutional frameworks that would improve both economic and political collaboration with Russia and the Central Asian republics.

The other indicator that needs to be operationalized in order to test the second hypothesis is aggressiveness. I will take lack of compliance with international agreements, a low likelihood of making concessions in disputes and the use or threat of force in relations with foreign states as signs of aggressiveness. This implies that a less aggressive state is more likely to make concessions, to comply with international norms and to prefer diplomatic means to military ones in international relations. This last preference is likely to lead to proneness towards institutional frameworks and multilateralism. Aggressiveness should be understood as a scale rather than a fixed quality, which means that no state will adopt purely non-aggressive behaviors or vice-versa. Yet, on the whole, an aggressive regime would be unlikely to cooperate with its neighbors and especially to develop institutions to further regional collaboration and development. This is because, as mentioned before, within a realist framework cooperation only takes place when balancing against a threat posed by a third country. Chinese behavior could thus be seen as a balancing act against US involvement in the region. To test whether this is the case I will look at whether cooperation emerged so as to counter American presence in the region or other fields.

CASE STUDY RESEARCH

As pointed out by Stephen Van Evera case studies are particularly effective in understanding how dependent and independent variables are connected. Case studies are also valuable because they can test unique predictions, which in turn is the mark of a strong test.¹³ On the other hand the main problem that can arise when using case studies is that the samples may

¹³ Stephen Van Evera, *Methods for Students of Political Research* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1997) 54.

be unrepresentative, are not randomly picked and—most importantly—do not yield conclusions which can be then generalized.¹⁴ This may be a problem in my study because I will only look at a limited sample of similar cases. Thus, my theoretical framework will have relatively low-range explanatory power (Chinese foreign policy towards Central Asia). Having only a single case study implies that generalization will be particularly difficult. As such, I will aim at refining and developing already existing approaches rather than developing my own. The latter would require an extension of the study to include more cases.

Given the disadvantages linked to case study analysis which I have just addressed, other methods of theory testing in social sciences are worth considering. While experimental analysis is quite difficult to conduct in the field of IR, observational analysis is not limited to case studies and encompasses also large-n analysis.¹⁵ This is often considered a more scientific approach since it has the advantage of being more random and specific variables may be accounted for through partial correlation.¹⁶ Yet, given the limited scope of the research there would probably not be enough quantitative data to process and it would probably fail to provide a satisfying explanation of how the variables are related. As mentioned before case studies are more appropriate in this sort of situation.

OBSERVATIONS

The case study which will be discussed in the third chapter was mainly chosen because it was relatively representative of Chinese policy in the region and was a fundamental moment in the development of friendly relations between the countries. Another fundamental reason was

¹⁴ Ibid. 53.

¹⁵ Ibid. 50.

¹⁶ Ibid. 51.

that it reflects an instance where realist theory should apply but does not seem to offer a good explanation on its own. On the one hand, territorial disputes are issues that lie at the very heart of national security. Because of this one would expect realism to be applicable and to provide relatively clear, and testable, predictions (thus making for a strong test).¹⁷ In the case in question, realism would seem to predict that the PRC would act aggressively to defend its national interest. Thus, that China has been relatively un-aggressive in the resolution of these problems seems to be troubling. The territorial disputes were solved without the deployment of military force and within multilateral settings that actually paved the way to the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the most illustrious regional organization in Central Asia.

METHODS

The case study will be analyzed through process tracing.¹⁸ The latter is applicable even to a single one case study, and has often been used to compare different theoretical approaches. The method itself consists in logically tracing, step-by-step, the causal link between the hypothesized cause and consequence.¹⁹ In this way I predict what the expected outcome would be according to realist theory and my own framework and compare them. This will then be tested in the empirical section of the paper, and be accordingly evaluated. This implies that the thesis will be structured in a predominantly deductive way. Of course this assumes as always the difficulties that lie in distinguishing induction and deduction in research design.²⁰ The data itself, which will

¹⁷ Ibid. 54.

¹⁸ Stephen Van Evera, *Methods for Students of Political Research* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1997) 58; Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory development in Social Sciences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).

¹⁹ Bob Hancké, *Intelligent Research Design: A guide for beginning researchers in the social sciences* (Forthcoming, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 60.

²⁰ Ibid. 100.

be discussed in the third chapter, will be retrieved mainly through primary sources, mainly Chinese newspapers in English language, and secondary sources such as scholarly work.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter is meant to provide the theoretical backbone of the thesis. The empirical research considered in the third chapter is to be evaluated through the theories that will be here presented. In what follows I will review both traditional approaches to the study of IR, as well as more specific models, such as Omnibalancing, applied to the case of China and Central Asia. The former set of theories are mainly composed of various strands of realism and liberalism. The former is particularly important since realist and neorealist scholars have influenced the field significantly. The main focus will be on Kenneth Waltz and Robert Gilpin's theories. I also consider "offensive" realism, as presented by Mearsheimer. As will be seen, all of the theories developed by these authors seem to predict a competition and conflict between China and Russia (which would clearly play out in Central Asia), and more aggressive China in Central Asia. To its credit, realism does seem to provide an explanation for the emergence of cooperation between these countries based on systemic analysis and balance of threat. Yet, these explanations remain simplistic and incomplete because it ignores the internal constraints and motives of states and regimes (in our case the PRC and the CCP) that are so important to endow the theory with predictive and in-depth explanatory power.

After having considered realism, which—as mentioned—informs much of the debate, the chapter will briefly consider Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye's theory of complex interdependence. This was developed to expand realism, and might provide somewhat of an alternative particularly as it considers economic issues and internal politics more closely.

Nonetheless, I will conclude that this model too is only partially able to explain state behavior in this context. In particular, economic issues seem insufficient to justify Beijing's policies and domestic security. Furthermore regime security which is largely determined by internal state mechanisms seems to play an important role, which is only partially accounted for in the theory. As a consequence, I propose an interpretation of Chinese foreign policy based on Omnibalancing, regime security and Taylor Fravel's work, which in turn can be better explained by analyzing the political role of national identity in China with the help of theories of nationalism.

REALISM AND NEOREALISM

This thesis mainly challenges the realist assumption regarding the unity of states as actors whose political choices are determined by the structure of the international system. Realism, in its various forms has shaped the field of international relations so much that its base assumptions are often taken for granted. The framework was developed in opposition to the idealist and liberalist views that dominated Anglo-American academia up to then. Realists such as Hans Morgenthau argued that "the moving force" of the world "is the aspiration of sovereign nations for power," as opposed to ideas and norms.²¹ Edward Carr similarly rejected the notion that ethical norms, international organizations and ideas might influence international relations.²² Thus the assumption, later further developed by the neorealists, of states as sole and stable actors in international politics first emerged.

²¹ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Knopf, 1964), 53.

²² Edward Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (London: Macmillan, 1946), 64.

This thesis does not propose that the nature itself of the political system in a state (for example a democracy vs. autocracy) has an impact on its willingness to cooperate with foreign countries, as proposed by some within the liberal tradition.²³ Rather, the nature of a regime is argued to impact a state's foreign policy depending on the security of the former's position. As a consequence, the study of a country's internal politics is necessary to understand those threats and the shifts in a government's expectations, which in turn affect the choices made by the leadership in matters of foreign policy.

As mentioned, while the original "unity of the state" assumption was initially made to reject some of the idealist positions, it was also maintained and developed in the realist framework for methodological reasons. As pointed out by Richard Ashley, many neorealist authors recognize the importance of domestic politics in international relations. It is a "metaphysical commitment," a methodological expedient that requires such an assumption to be made.²⁴ Unfortunately by abstracting from the characteristics of the unit level of analysis (such as the internal structure of the state) one may overlook the fundamental differences that exist between strong and weak states. By overlooking the importance of regimes as actors within the system and considering only the structure of the system, one fails to see how sometimes the interests of the former do not coincide with those of the state itself.

Waltz' lengthy discussion of methodology and theory-building in the *Theory of International Politics* largely focuses on defending the assumption that self-interested states are the only actors in international politics. He contends that a theory should be assessed according

²³ For an example of this approach in the case of China, see: Rober Kagan, *The return of history and the end of dreams*, (London: Atlantic Books, 2008).

²⁴ Richard K. Ashley, 'The Poverty of Neorealism,' *Neorealism and Its Critics*, Robert O. Keohane ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 270.

to its predictive and explanatory power as well as its elegance. This is to be achieved by adopting a systemic approach and thus abstracting from the unit level of analysis, in our case, states.²⁵ This allows for a distinction between those variables that are at the unit-level and those that are at the system-level.²⁶ The structure is characterized by the relationship of the units as determined by their distribution in the system, not by their specificities, which are derived from the characteristics of the units themselves. Finally this leads Waltz to argue that domestic and international politics should be analyzed separately much as firms and markets are in economics.²⁷ Although he recognizes the risk of oversimplification, this is supposedly made up for by gains in elegance and applicability.

There has been much debate regarding the trade-off incurred by adopting an elegant and simple theory. For example, domestic politics and their effect may be overlooked because assumed to be *a priori* only capable of explaining immediate causal relationships, as argued by Waltz in his discussion of second image analysis.²⁸ There are many criticisms to the realist approach. The neoliberal camp, which will be addressed later in this chapter, for example, points at the importance of intergovernmental and international ties. Others, such as Steven David, argue that internal threats may determine a state's behavior in international politics.²⁹ This last argument is particularly interesting when related to Robert Gilpin's argument for maintaining the state as the base unit of analysis of the international system.

²⁵ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 69.

²⁶ Ibid. 79.

²⁷ Ibid. 89.

²⁸ Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the state, and war: a theoretical analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

²⁹ For an introduction to David's work on omnibalancing see: Steven R. David "Explaining Third World Alignment" *World Politics*, 43:2 (Jan., 1991): 233-254.

Gilpin's argument is less epistemological than Waltz' as he contends that survival in the international system becomes the top priority in any state because it is a precondition to its very existence.³⁰ While efficiency in the internal organization of a state is important, that is so because it advances the state's position on the international arena. Economic wealth is similarly an instrument in obtaining power abroad rather than an internal stabilizer. States are defined as being self-interested actors separate from societies that are mainly concerned with competing with other states.

What Gilpin's analysis seems to overlook is that often states face (or perceive) threats to their existence from within their very borders. If this were to be the case then international and national politics would cease to be two strictly separate realms of study, as already foreseen by Gourevitch in his discussion of the second image reversed.³¹ In fact, literature on this subject has focused particularly on non-western states, where internal instability is particularly threatening to both the state and the (often autocratic) regime. This argument is applicable to the case of China as well, and will be addressed more in detail later in the chapter.

Cooperation between two states whose hierarchy is not clearly defined is unlikely to take place within this model. In Gilpin's words "a weakening of the hierarchy of prestige and increased ambiguity in interpreting it are frequently the prelude to eras of conflict and struggle."³² Thus, one should expect more instability at a time when hegemony over the system has not been established or when it could be challenged. This is particularly likely given that in

³⁰ Ibid. 55.

³¹ Peter Gourevitch, "The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics," *International Organization* 32, No. 4 (Autumn, 1978): 881-912.

³² Ibid. 31.

the framework the three main objectives of the state are territorial expansion, increasing influence over other states and control over the world economy. None of these aims seem to fit in a ‘positive sum’ framework, that is to say, they all preclude inter-state competition. Countries either accept the status quo, thus submitting to foreign power in one way or another, or reject it, thereby embracing instability and promoting change. Hegemonic war is essentially motivated by the need and desire to determine the hierarchy of prestige in the system.³³ This fits in with general principles of realism regarding alliance formation and cooperation.

In the context of Gilpin’s model Russia could be categorized as the current—and declining—hegemonic power. The economic and demographic contraction experienced during the 1990s undoubtedly contributed to a declining “economic capacity to support the status quo.”³⁴ The economic recovery of the first decade of the 21st century was mostly fueled by high commodity prices on the world market and was in many ways problematic and not sufficient to enable a return to unchallenged hegemony. China, on the other hand, has been growing steadily from an economic point of view since the 1970s. This led the country to launch new strategies in foreign policy during the 1990s. Not only did the People’s Republic undertake reforms in the military sector, but it also renewed its interest and ties with its western neighbors.

“Territorial, political, and economic expansion” writes Gilpin, will be carried out when “the marginal costs of further change are equal to or greater than the marginal benefits.”³⁵ Finally, and very importantly, he makes the claim that once such a condition is reached, the costs of maintaining the status quo will increase more quickly than the actual capacity to keep it so.

³³ Ibid. 32.

³⁴ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 11.

³⁵ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 10.

From this perspective it would follow that if China were to expect the benefits from expansion to make up for the costs it would pursue a policy aimed at undermining Russian power and promoting change in the system. Gilpin's model also addresses the role of economic growth and its potentially destabilizing role. When a state encounters diminishing returns it will tend to counter it by use of force if necessary. What this means is that a given state will have an incentive to increase its fixed factors in production once it cannot have any more increases, for example land as opposed to labor.

Gilpin's position is more or less in accordance with Waltz'; states will tend towards a "balance of power" status, which is relatively stable. The balance of power model predicts that states will join alliances to counter the threat posed by a third country. Generally those countries that have less power will unite against one that has more. Yet, bandwagoning, where states choose to enter alliances with the stronger power is also a possible outcome. Steven Walt further developed the model by contending that states' decision to balance or bandwagon is based not so much on the structural distribution of power, but rather on the level of threat posed by other countries. This is determined by geographical proximity, offensive capabilities and perceived intentions. Thus the perception of a threat, rather than its actual existence, motivates other states' reactions.³⁶ This more sophisticated approach to the balance of power theory is generally referred to as "balance of threat."

Balance of power/Balance of threat theory has two important implications for the thesis. Given their geographical vicinity and offensive capabilities Russia and China could well consider each other a threat. Moreover any of the Central Asian republics could consider either

³⁶ Stephen Walt, *The Origin of Alliances* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press 1987), 5.

of their large neighbors as a danger to their sovereignty. Thus one could expect either bandwagoning and balancing behavior at a regional level. This might imply that China might seek to balance Russian power in the region by allying with the Central Asian republics. This, as we will see, is not a very credible scenario given that Russia's influence in Central Asia remains quite strong. Moreover Russia has often acted as a third party in agreements between the Central Asian republics and China and is itself a member of organizations such as the SCO that are instrumental to facilitating the PRC's presence in the region.

The other, more credible, implication of the balance of power theory is that China's actions are motivated by the perceived threat posed by US power. According to this view the Chinese leadership would seek to find allies to balance American power. If this were the specific aim behind Sino-Central Asian cooperation though, it would be reflected by the nature of the agreements, which would be aimed at countering US presence and intervention in the region. As the third chapter will show, this does not seem to be the prime objective of the alliances.

In opposition to Glipin and Waltz' view, Mearsheimer argues that the structure of the system will unavoidably lead to aggressive behavior and conflictual relations between countries.³⁷ His thesis regarding the inherent instability of the system argues that states tend to choose between "balancing" and "buck-passing."³⁸ The latter indicates support for balancing alliances without any active participation. In Mearsheimer's view this is every state's preferred line of action because it is the least costly with the highest expected gains.

³⁷ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton & Company 2001), 22.

³⁸ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton & Company 2001), 140.

According to Mearsheimer then, multipolar systems are argued to be the least stable. This is because the final goal of states, security, is equated with hegemony over the system.³⁹ While alliances do exist, the problem of relative gains and the fear of being cheated make the transaction costs rather high. As a consequence, there will be little cooperation between states in the system, even less so than in Walt's and Gilpin's view. No country will be satisfied until it has reached hegemony, which is different from Gilpin's proposition that expansion will stop once the marginal costs equal the marginal benefits of the campaign.

In the context of this thesis, Mearsheimer's model implies (and clearly states) that China would be likely to adopt an aggressive policy aimed at creating a "sphere-of-influence" around its borders to achieve state security. In fact, according to Mearsheimer the achievement of regional hegemony—the first step towards global hegemony—is the first aim of every state. This is important in our case because it would seem to predict possible rivalry between China and Russia for hegemony in the region.⁴⁰

Another aim of states in Mearsheimer's view is the overall maximization of wealth; this contributes to the development of "latent power." The latter is achieved by gaining military advantage, which in turn is determined by the possession of a strong land power and superior nuclear capability.⁴¹ On the whole then, regional (and eventually global) hegemony is to be achieved through economic growth and the improvement of military capabilities of the state. The ways in which countries achieve the above-mentioned goals are through War; Blackmail; "Bait

³⁹ Ibid. 21.

⁴⁰ Authors such as Lo and Swannstrom have predicted such scenarios, see: Bobo Lo, "The Long Sunset of Strategic Partnership: Russia's Evolving China Policy," *International Affairs* 80 (2004); Niklas Swannstrom, "China and Central Asia: a new Great Game or traditional vassal relations?" *Journal of Contemporary China* 45 (2005).

⁴¹ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton & Company 2001), 141-147.

and Bleed” and “Bloodletting” tactics.⁴² These aim at impoverishing the opposing country and destroying its power either by directly engaging in military confrontation or by supporting other countries to do so. The model should apply to Sino-Central Asian relations, and we should thus expect a behavioral pattern that follows those tactics.

Because structural factors within the international system are the main determinant of state actions, internal factors are relatively unimportant. This, as mentioned before, is in line with the general realist theory. What I argue is that while this view does not explicitly ignore the idea that foreign policy may be influenced by concerns for regime stability, it fails to address how this takes place. By not considering the internal mechanisms of a state it becomes very difficult to analyze its foreign policy and its motivations. Yet, Mearsheimer argues that the internal organization of a state (in his example a autocratic China, as opposed to a democratic one) does not affect its external policy. In this sense he remains well anchored in the realist paradigm exemplified by Waltz and his argument regarding the need to separate different levels of analysis. In Gilpin’s view internal politics are somewhat more important, but only insofar as they enhance the efficiency of a given state and thus its economic and military power. Thus states’ motives remain primarily determined by outside factors and the everlasting hunger for power.

In the empirical chapter of this thesis I will prove that China’s policy towards Central Asia is not fully explained by any of the models presented up to now. I will now proceed to consider other theories that may offer insight regarding China’s foreign policy. Given how liberalism has shaped the discourse in the field of international relations it is important to address it here. Realism rejects the view that democratic states are less likely to go to war or that

⁴² Ibid. 147-154.

economic interdependence lowers the likelihood of war significantly. This is the real aim of reducing the study of foreign policy to the analysis of the structure of international politics. Since no country in the region under scrutiny is a democracy, taking into consideration the democratic peace theory would be somewhat redundant. Yet, given the importance of China as a trading partner in the region, it seems logical to consider theories on interdependency.⁴³

LIBERALISM

An essentially cyclical vision of history where power struggles are eternal and not affected by changes in technology, political structures or ideas is among the main tenets of realism. Liberalism instead tends to argue that changes in the economy, in domestic politics (mainly under the form of democratization) and international regimes have led to a change in the relationship between powers. The actions of international actors are no longer determined solely by their position in the system and the distribution of capabilities. Depending on the specific theory, the internal structure of the state, the presence of international regimes, ideology and economic interests have changed the role and the motives of states.

As mentioned before, complex interdependence, as theorized by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, addresses the change in economic transactions between countries and how they affect state actions. They argue that economic interdependence may raise (or lower) the cost of waging war.⁴⁴ Traditional security, characterized by military preponderance, is assumed to be the main concern of states in the realist conception. According to Keohane and Nye this is not always the case when complex interdependence is in place; then economic and environmental

⁴³ There are also theories on dictatorial peace. These would be more relevant to the study but will not be considered because it would require a discussion of the foreign and domestic policies of the Central Asian republics as well, which due to space constraints is not possible.

⁴⁴ Robert Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (New York: Longman, 2001), 7.

security concerns may also pose severe threats on the existence and viability of states. As a consequence military power should not be considered as superior to all other spheres, especially not to the economic one.⁴⁵ The interconnectedness of military and economic security implies that domestic politics have much more of an impact, and are in fact much more closely linked to international politics than realists would have it.

An important variation on the realist theme in the interdependence model is that societies are linked by multiple channels. These may be interstate, transgovernmental and transnational. While the first is the relationship traditionally studied by realists, the second emerges when states are not assumed to act as coherent units and the third when we do not assume states to be the only actors.⁴⁶ The question of transgovernmental relations is the most relevant to this thesis. I argue in fact that the interests of the government as an institution as opposed to the state itself play a significant role in explaining the relations between China and its Western neighbors.

Finally the theory concludes that military force is not as fundamental when complex interdependence prevails. One of the main assumptions of the theory is that the nature and volume of trade between states changes the cost function of entering a conflict. This means that if one state is highly dependent on another for a given resource it is more vulnerable to and thus more influenced by its supplying state. In fact, Keohane and Nye go as far as to argue that “military force is not used by governments toward other governments within the region, or on the issues, when complex interdependence prevails.”⁴⁷ This is not the case for China and Central Asia. Military security does remain a priority, although the referent object of security may have

⁴⁵ Ibid. 10.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 21.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 22.

changed. Moreover, economic integration is not so widespread in the region. While the PRC's dependence on energy imports from Central Asia will increase in the near future as of now they are not highly significant. China still relies heavily on domestically extracted coal and the 10% of its imported oil is mainly of Middle Eastern and African origin.⁴⁸

The authors stress that complex interdependence is not meant to supplant realism as a whole. Rather it aims to provide a more encompassing theory that solves some of the oversimplifications present in realism. In this sense, there is a recognition that various theoretical approaches combined explain change in the international setting better than any single model. This will inform the approach of this thesis as well, since it proposes a multi-causal explanation which does not reject realism altogether.

The reason why I discuss complex interdependence is because the aggressiveness envisaged by realism is not wholly consistent with China's behavior in the region, at least in the areas here taken into consideration. Moreover, economic issues have risen in importance as both exports from China and imports (mainly natural resources) from Central Asian republics have increased. Nonetheless, while I agree with the importance of intergovernmental ties and in understanding issue hierarchy differently, I argue that the volume of trade is not sufficient in explaining the cooperative behavior between the Central Asian republics, China and Russia since the 1990s.

DOMESTIC POLITICS, REGIME SECURITY AND OMNIBALANCING

Complex interdependence's recognition that foreign and domestic politics cannot be analyzed separately is one of its most important theoretical contributions, at least in the context

⁴⁸ David H. Shinn, 'Africa, China, the United States, and Oil,' *Africa Policy Forum, Center for Strategic & International Studies* <http://forums.csis.org/africa/?p=34>.

of this thesis. This is because domestic politics play a fundamental role in explaining Chinese foreign policy towards Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and even Uzbekistan. As I will explain further in the following chapter, China's concern for *internal* stability leads it to pursue policies that promote stability in its western near abroad. The theoretical problem lies in how to address the relationship between domestic politics and international relations. In what follows I will propose a framework that expands the basic realist model to include both constructivist elements (regarding national identity) and looks at how those affect internal legitimacy and may threaten the regime enough to push it to Omnibalance.

Robert Putnam's two-level game, which could under some aspects be useful here, is problematic insofar as we are considering non-democratic countries.⁴⁹ In the original model bargaining parties at the international level are bound in their choices by the win-set that is determined by the constituencies at the national level. The model assumes that there is a public or an institution of sorts at the national level that can influence choices made at the international level. This does occur to some extent in China insofar as the regime relies heavily on economic achievements and nationalist discourses to legitimize itself. Since the 1990s there has been a surge in demonstrations that responded to events in foreign policy.⁵⁰ Some internal critics of the regime have often argued that it has not been acting aggressively enough, failing to uphold national honor.⁵¹ Nonetheless, public opinion was not directly involved in shaping China's

⁴⁹ Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two Level Games," *International Organization* 43: 3 (1988): 427-60.

⁵⁰ Since 1999 there has been popular outrage at the US, Japan and more recently France.

⁵¹ The series of "China can say no" books which were first published in the mid-90s are usually seen as the most prominent form of this. For more on the subject see: John Wong and Zheng Yongnian, "Nationalism and Its Dilemmas: Chinese Responses to Embassy Bombings" in *Reform, Legitimacy and Dilemmas: China's Politics and Society*, ed. Wang Gungwu and Zheng Yongnian (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2000); Suisheng Zhao, *A*

policy towards Russia and Central Asia. While the ethnically Turkic populations that lives in China's western region (mainly Uyghurs and Kazakhs), Xinjiang might have had both cultural and economic interests in reviving relations with the newly established Central Asian republics in the 1990s, it is unlikely that they would have had much of a say on the issue. High-level policy makers in China are predominantly of Han ethnicity. This has an impact on the internal legitimacy of the regime and thus on the stability of the state and these issues in turn influence the government's choices in matters of foreign policy.

OMNIBALANCING AND REGIME SECURITY

I propose to take general theories regarding regime security, Steven David's work on "omnibalancing" and Taylor Fravel's application of the latter in the case of Chinese foreign policy. David argues against the excessive focus on wars between Great Powers which informs much of the realist literature. He points instead at the growing number of civil conflicts, especially in developing countries. Here he argues that the scenario portrayed by the traditional balance of power model is inaccurate. Instead, states often seek support abroad to counter internal threats (which as mentioned are actually more common than external ones).⁵² Internal threats are often oriented to the regime as opposed to the state itself. This of course is particularly applicable to the case of weak states where the government is relatively illegitimate (which can be for a variety of reasons).

The security of the regime becomes a particularly important determinant in international relations when the state is relatively weak. The government is less likely to have the capabilities to respond to the danger. Moreover domestic threats, such as civil conflict, ethnic violence,

Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004).

⁵² Steven R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment" *World Politics*, 43:2 (Jan., 1991): 235.

poverty, social breakdown, political instability and crime, have come to represent a much more tangible and frequent problem for weak states.⁵³ In the case of China, as explained in the section on nationalism, the government holds a certain degree of legitimacy in the regions that are more ethnically homogenous, but much less so in regions such as Xinjiang. Thus, while the state may be deemed as relatively strong in “Core China” it is less so in peripheral areas, particularly those where separatist movements have a strong hold. In the case of Xinjiang, strategic alliances with states such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and even Uzbekistan are instrumental. Not only could these countries provide a launching pad for “terrorist” attacks on China, but loose border controls foster the growth of transnational organized crime and other activities that can undermine the central authority. This explains Beijing’s desire to openly pursue a policy of regional stabilization. This is to be achieved by strengthening the countries economically and by improving their policing capabilities. Chinese pressure on Kazakhstan to suppress Uyghur advocacy groups in the country and the organization of joint training activities within the framework of the SCO can be seen as examples of this kind of policy. The emergence of regional structures that promote regime security and patrimonialism in Central Asia has been documented by various scholars.⁵⁴

Taylor Fravel argues that by looking at the historical record of the PRC, one finds that the Chinese leadership has been willing to cooperate on border disputes in times when it faced ethnic

⁵³ Richard Jackson, ‘Regime Security’ in *Contemporary security studies*, ed. Alan Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 147.

⁵⁴ Annette Bohr “Regionalism in Central Asia: new geopolitics, old regional order” *International Affairs* 80, 3 (2004); Kathleen Collins “Economic and Security Regionalism among Patrimonial Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of Central Asia” *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61 no. 2 (2009): 249-281.

unrest on its borders.⁵⁵ This is also the case for the agreements with the Central Asian republics (as well as with the Soviet Union). Thus, in his view, unrest in Xinjiang during the 1980s and 1990s pushed China to seek a quick and peaceful solution to territorial disputes, so as to secure its borders and its neighbors' support. I take this argument further by arguing that due to how the regime maintains its legitimacy in the country, ethno-separatism and overall instability in Xinjiang continues to be perceived as a threat in Beijing. Thus, the border agreements—which may have been the reaction to specific threats—became the starting point for a more encompassing partnership aimed at securing the regimes (a category which the above mentioned SCO fits into). Thus, protracted cooperation is the response to protracted balancing behavior towards an internal threat. In this sense one can see how external relations with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and to some extent Russia complemented domestic policies toward Xinjiang. This will be further developed in the following chapter.

Fravel argues that the PRC's policies with regard to territorial disputes in areas where the Han are not the majority (as opposed to the cases of Taiwan and Hong Kong, for example) are well explained by building on the omnibalancing model.⁵⁶ Given that the regime relies so much on nationalism (which is presented as civic, but is in many ways ethnically based) for legitimacy it feels undermined in areas that are ethnically diverse. This is particularly the case in those regions that are relatively homogenous but where the Han are not the majority (such as Tibet and Xinjiang). Given the role played by nationalism in Chinese domestic politics (and thus

⁵⁵ Taylor Fravel, "Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: Explaining China's Compromises in Territorial Disputes," *International Security* 30, No. 2 (Fall 2005): 50-52; "Power Shifts and Escalation: Explaining China's Use of Force in Territorial Disputes," *International Security* 32, no. 3 (Winter 2007/08): 44-83.

⁵⁶ Taylor Fravel, "Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: Explaining China's Compromises in Territorial Disputes," *International Security* 30, No. 2 (Fall 2005): 50-52.

indirectly—within my model—in international relations) it is worth reviewing some general theories on the subject.⁵⁷

NATIONALISM AND LEGITIMACY

The PRC is relatively stable due to the presence of a relatively strong regime and state, yet because it is not legitimized through democratic means its input legitimacy—as in most autocracies—tends to be relatively weak.⁵⁸ Sustained economic growth and the expectation of rising living standards contributes to providing significant output legitimacy to the CCP, while nationalism is important in providing both input and output legitimation.

Both the economy and nationalism can be somewhat controlled through government policies but the balance remains somewhat precarious. Scholars debate widely over the nature and origin of nationalism; purely instrumentalist approaches will be here rejected.⁵⁹ I argue that identity can only be shaped by government intervention when there are pre-existing conditions

⁵⁷ There is a growing corpus of literature on the influence of national identity in international relations, mostly from a constructivist perspective. My work distinguishes itself from that approach since it does not consider the direct effects of nationalism on foreign policy, but rather its importance in legitimizing the regime. Thus identity shapes international relations only indirectly since lack of legitimacy, as I argue, is one of the main drivers of China's foreign policy in Central Asia.

⁵⁸ Or rather the ability of the regime to strengthen its position since the 1980s. For more on the legitimacy base of the CCP and its evolution since the 1980s see: Suisheng Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004); David Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation*, (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008).

⁵⁹ For an overview of different schools of thought on nationalism, see Anthony D. Smith, "Theories of Nationalism: Alternative Models of Nation Formation," in *Asian Nationalism*, ed. Michael Leifer (London: Routledge, 2000). somewhat Primitivist view on Chinese nationalism see Michael Yahuda, "The changing faces of Chinese nationalism: the dimensions of statehood," in *Asian Nationalism*, ed. Michael Leifer (London: Routledge, 2000); For instrumentalist theory of nationalism, see: Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); Tom Nairn, 'The Modern Janus,' *New Left Review* 1/94, 1975. For critiques of purely instrumentalist accounts of nationalism and its relation to economic growth, see: Leah Greenfeld, *The Spirit of Capitalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); . Crane, 'Economic Nationalism: Bringing the Nation Back In,' *Millenium* 27 (2001); Andreas Pickel, 'Explaining, and explaining with, economic nationalism,' *Nations and Nationalism* 9 (2003).

for this to happen and possibly provide a basis for economic growth and political stability. Nationalism has been a very important component in explaining China's extraordinary economic growth and the regime's legitimacy. It also explains the polarization of national movements over the past two decades. These have rejected Beijing's attempts to assimilate them into the wider economic and cultural structure of the country. Although regions such as Tibet and Xinjiang have experienced high rates of economic growth, this does not seem to have prevented resentment from developing against the ethnic majority, the Han, who are generally more politically as well as economically empowered.⁶⁰

While nationalism in China has always been constructed "top-down," it has never been under any institution's control. This has been the case since the revolutionary elites of the 1890s first began to use a nationalistic discourse, and is still so now. The government has understood this and has been successful in shaping nationalism so that it would legitimize its rule, largely by linking it to the economic performance of the state and the nation (which are constructed as being the same). This is important in understanding how economic nationalism legitimizes the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in wealthier regions that are mainly inhabited by ethnically Han and the latter's approach towards ethnically diverse regions such as Xinjiang and Tibet where there are strong separatist movements. Nationalism in China is neither definable as strictly ethnic or civic, but rather encompasses both. While it behooves the government to promote a patriotic, civic, sort of nationalism, the differences between ethnicities (which due to the strong

⁶⁰ The Economist, "Plateau bargaining" Mar 11th 2009, http://www.economist.com/world/asia/displaystory.cfm?story_id=13269905; Rémi Castets, "The Uyghurs in Xinjiang – The Malaise Grows," *China perspectives* 49 (2003)
URL : <http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/document648.html>. (Accessed 30 mars 2009); James Millward *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 304-305.

claims to independence one might define as nations) emerging in the Western regions undermine Beijing's legitimacy.

Government strategies to promote civic national identity (*ai guo*, love the country as opposed to *ai minzu*, love the 'nation' intended as an ethnic community) along with economic development have been criticized for aiming at assimilating diverse ethnicities within the dominant Han group. Because the Han are seen as the more modern, and thus successful group within the country, these policies are often perceived as necessary to promote progress and development.⁶¹ Thus, unlike in other areas, nationalism seems to actually undermine the regime and economic growth is not acting enough as a stabilizing force. As a consequence the legitimacy of the government itself comes under threat in Xinjiang.

LIMITS TO OMNIBALANCING

There are limits of course to the use of this theory, as any other. In the specific case of China it should be remembered that while the regime is far from absolutely secure and legitimate, it is far more so than in other countries. Another particularly important issue is that it is quite difficult to separate those drivers of foreign policy that are generated within the domestic arena and those that are responses to the international system. For example, energy politics certainly play a role in China's interest in securing friendly relations with Kazakhstan; the question is whether these concerns outweigh those for Xinjiang's stability. In my view, one can easily argue that these are under many aspects not distinguishable. Energy security is fundamental to ensuring a growing economy, which in turn is extremely important to

⁶¹ Solomon M. Karmel, "Ethnic Nationalism in China," in *Asian Nationalism*, ed. Michael Leifer (London: Routledge, 2000), 50.

legitimizing the government throughout the country.⁶² At the same time, securing Xinjiang is a very important move in economic terms, since it would be the passageway to Central Asian (and possibly Middle Eastern) gas and oil.

Fravel's work is also weak under some aspects. He dismisses balance of power theory, yet it seems unlikely that the Chinese leadership would have no wider strategy. It is generally recognized that the PRC began to engage more openly in multilateral organizations during the mid-nineties. This was in part a response to US power as well to the newly acquired consciousness of not being self-sufficient as far as its energy needs were concerned.⁶³ Thus, it is difficult to argue that Omnibalancing alone is a sufficient explanation for Beijing's foreign policy. As a consequence, this thesis will not reject the view that PRC may have adopted a general balancing strategy towards the US. Yet, it is mainly through Omnibalancing that one can explain Beijing's foreign policy in Central Asia.

⁶² Steven David, "On Civil War," in *The American Interest* (March/April 2007): 31.

⁶³ Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005).

CHAPTER 3: CASE STUDIES

The following chapter will address the empirical research in relation to the theoretical approaches previously discussed. First, I consider what realism would have led us to expect or offers as a possible explanation. This leads to the formulation of general hunches and testable hypotheses which I will then measure up to the empirical evidence. This mainly consists of facts and figures that describe those processes which determined the evolution of peaceful cooperation between the PRC and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. These will be traced step-by-step in order to determine the logical sequence of events. What I aim to prove is that realist balance of threat/balance of power theory only provides a partial explanation of why China embraced institutionalized cooperation and multilateralism in Central Asia. Instead, I argue that by studying the internal politics of the PRC it emerges that foreign policy in Central Asia was also part of a wider strategy aimed at stabilizing Xinjiang.

REALIST PREDICTIONS

Realism would not be one of the main theoretical frameworks of international relations if it were not so broad and encompassing. As I attempted to explain in the previous chapter, different scholars within realism offer different sorts of analyses. For example, in a balance of power/balance of threat model—such as that proposed by Waltz and Walt (and in his own was Mearsheimer)—a given country is expected to react to a perceived threat on the part of another state by balancing it. On the other hand, Gilpin's hegemonic power model predicts that countries

are often prone to conflict when their relationship is unclear and their relative position is changing.

As any theory will recognize, in dealing with contested territories, a state may pursue an “escalation” policy which uses threat or force; a “delay” policy that seeks to maintain the status quo; or a “cooperation” strategy that seeks appeasement by either dropping claims altogether or ceding land in the dispute.⁶⁴ Given the PRC’s superior power in the 1990s, a realist framework would exclude the latter policy-choice. To a realist it would not have been surprising to see the PRC use its muscle to obtain significant concessions from Kazakhstan, as well as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (which were certainly not more powerful than Kazakhstan).⁶⁵

REALISM TO THE TEST: TERRITORIAL DISPUTES WITH KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN AND TAJIKISTAN

A good example of the relationship between a rising and declining power is that of China and Kazakhstan. While as part of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan enjoyed relative power superiority compared to China, this changes after it gained independence. Moreover, Russia’s declining economy and military capability made it so that its authority and power quickly began to wane in those regions traditionally within its sphere of influence. Given its size, its wealth in resources, its relative military power and the relative length of the shared border—over 1700 km, Kazakhstan is the most important among China’s western neighbors.⁶⁶ Yet, its military power is

⁶⁴ Taylor Fravel, “Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: Explaining China’s Compromises in Territorial Disputes,” *International Security* 30, No. 2 (Fall 2005): 252.

⁶⁵ For a discussion on the failure of realism in the context of China’s territorial disputes, see Albert B. Wolf and Taylor Fravel, “Correspondence: Structural Sources of China’s Territorial Compromises” *International Security* 31, No. 2 (Fall 2006): 199–205.

⁶⁶ This obviously ignores Russia, whose importance is a given. Nonetheless, since the western border between Russia and China is only 45 Km, it is relatively less significant. Guangcheng Xing, “China’s foreign policy toward

significantly inferior to that of the PRC. The latter's possession of nuclear weapons is a prime example of its relative military superiority. In fact, in 1992, soon after its independence, Kazakhstan agreed to comply with the Start-I treaty and it thus committed itself to the removal of nuclear weapons from its territory.⁶⁷ In 1995, the year when the last nuclear weapon was disposed of, China offered a security guarantee to Kazakhstan. Beijing promised it would offer support in case of military aggression. If the situation was such that Kazakhstan was willing to seek Chinese protection, then it should follow that the PRC was in a position of power at the time. Nonetheless, when we look at how the relationship between the two countries evolved and at how the territorial disputes were settled, realism does not seem to provide a convincing explanation.

The main bone of contention between the Soviet Union (subsequently Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) and China was the 1864 Chuguchak (or Tarbagatai) Protocol that settled the western border between the Qing and the Russian Empires. This was drawn along the Chinese permanent outposts, which Beijing claimed were actually located well within the Chinese territory.⁶⁸ Given China's institutional and military weakness during the

Kazakhstan," in *Thinking strategically: the major powers, Kazakhstan, and the central Asian nexus*, ed. Robert Legvold (Cambridge : American Academy of Arts and Sciences : MIT Press, 2003), 118.

⁶⁷ Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms <http://www.state.gov/www/global/arms/starthtm/start/start1.html> ; "Protocol to the Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms" <http://www.fas.org/nuke/control/start1/text/lisbon.htm#lisbonPROTOCOL> .

⁶⁸ Claes Levinsson, and Ingvar Svanberg, "Kazakhstan-China Border Trade Thrives After Demarcation Treaty," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst* (02/16/2000), <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/367>; Jin Noda, "The Kazakhs in the Muslim Rebellions of 1864-65" *Central Asian Studies Review* 5, no.1 (Winter 2006): 29.

century or so that followed, it is unsurprising that it was unable to contest the treaty and that specific claims were only made in the 1960s, after ties with the Soviet Union deteriorated.⁶⁹

Territorial disputes with the USSR also included the northern border in Russia's Far East, although almost two-thirds of the contested territories—that is 910,000 km²—were located in Central Asia; talks in 1964 addressed both issues.⁷⁰ Chinese leaders insisted on not pursuing separate resolutions for the western and eastern border disputes until 1989. After the failure of the talks the border itself was rapidly militarized; Central Asia remained by and large sealed off from China until the 1990s.⁷¹ Because foreign relations were exclusively carried out through Moscow, the republics had little interactions with their neighbors until independence, in 1992.⁷²

When the political characteristics of the PRC's western border changed in 1992 Beijing had already begun settling some of its disputes with Moscow. In 1989 the PRC agreed to hold talks regarding the eastern and western borders with the Soviet Union separately. This allowed the two parties to reach an agreement on the eastern border (whereby China obtained about 52% of the contested territory) in 1991.⁷³ Yet, this meant that in 1992 the border with the republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan still remained to be defined.

⁶⁹ Claes Levinsson, and Ingvar Svanberg, "Kazakhstan-China Border Trade Thrives After Demarcation Treaty," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst* (02/16/2000), <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/367>.

⁷⁰ Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse, *China as a Neighbor: Central Asian Perspectives and Strategies* (Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program, 2009), 24.

⁷¹ Taylor Fravel, "Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: Explaining China's Compromises in Territorial Disputes," *International Security* 30, No. 2 (Fall 2005): 74.

⁷² Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse, *China as a Neighbor: Central Asian Perspectives and Strategies* (Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program, 2009), 24.

⁷³ Taylor Fravel, "Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: Explaining China's Compromises in Territorial Disputes," *International Security* 30, No. 2 (Fall 2005):76.

After signing a Joint Statement on the Foundation of the Friendly Relations and agreeing to cooperation over civil and business travel as well as cultural exchanges in 1993, Kazakhstan and China came to an agreement over the border issue in 1994.⁷⁴ A supplementary agreement was then signed in 1998 marking the resolution of the remaining disputes, this was sanctioned by the joint communiqué of 1999.⁷⁵ The PRC agreed on receiving about 22% of the territory it had originally claimed, thus softening significantly its original position.⁷⁶

Resolutions with Dushanbe and Bishkek followed a similar pattern to those with Kazakhstan. With Kyrgyzstan, agreements were reached in 1996 and hailed as a model of border dispute settlement by Askar Akaev.⁷⁷ The settlement was finalized in 1999; similarly to the Kazakh agreement, here too China made concessions, agreeing to hold only 32% of the disputed territory.⁷⁸ The agreements with Tajikistan were more complex, but similarly led to a finalized agreement in 2002 where China dropped most of its—substantial—claims.⁷⁹

As mentioned before, a different realist approach to the issue would be the application of the balance of threat model. In this scenario cooperation would be explained as the result of

⁷⁴ Xinhua, “Brief Introduction to Relations between China and Kazakhstan,” *Xinhuanet* May 21st 2003 http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2003-05/21/content_879991.htm

⁷⁵ Ibid.; Huasheng Zhao, ‘Central Asia in China's Diplomacy,’ in *Central Asia: Views from Washington, Moscow, and Beijing* by Rumer, Eugene; Dmitri Trenin and Huasheng Zhao (Armonk, New York M.E. Sharpe, 2007): 179.

⁷⁶ Taylor Fravel, “Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: Explaining China’s Compromises in Territorial Disputes,” *International Security* 30, No. 2 (Fall 2005): 79.

⁷⁷ Guangcheng Xing, “China’s foreign policy toward Kazakhstan,” in *Thinking strategically: the major powers, Kazakhstan, and the central Asian nexus*, ed. Robert Legvold (Cambridge : American Academy of Arts and Sciences : MIT Press, 2003), 118.

⁷⁸ Taylor Fravel, “Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: Explaining China’s Compromises in Territorial Disputes,” *International Security* 30, No. 2 (Fall 2005): 79.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

China's attempts to balance US hegemony by forming alliances with its neighboring countries. This would imply that cooperation between the PRC and the Central Asian republics would primarily focus on opposing the US and would be strongly affected by American involvement in the region. This rationale is often applied to the Sino-Russian *rapprochement* as well.⁸⁰

Given that Washington only really emerged as an actor in Central Asia after September 11th 2001, it is unlikely that the PRC would have much of an incentive to pursue immediate and particular collaboration before then. Moreover, there is little indication that the PRC truly saw Russia as a valuable ally against the US during the 1990s.⁸¹ Most importantly, cooperation mainly emerged place in fields that benefitted national security from internal non-traditional threats. In fact, the rhetoric of the SCO (which was established on June 15th 2001) somewhat echoed that of the Bush administration's with regard to anti-terrorism and benefitted from the latter's "War on Terror." Finally, Chinese involvement in the region has remained constant while US presence peaked and waned. Yet, no party within the SCO has been prevented from occasionally rubbing shoulders with Washington, indicating that the organization has not actively sought to counter the American presence in the region.⁸² In this sense it appears as though Beijing's foreign policy was not predominantly determined by international factors. The analysis below will further investigate these hypotheses.

LIBERALISM

⁸⁰ Bobo Lo, "The Long Sunset of Strategic Partnership: Russia's Evolving China Policy," *International Affairs* 80 (2004); Robert Kagan, *The return of history and the end of dreams*, (London: Atlantic Books, 2008).

⁸¹ Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 137.

⁸² Robert H. Donaldson and John A. Donaldson, "The Arms Trade in Russian-Chinese Relations: Identity, Domestic Politics, and Geopolitical Positioning," *International Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (Dec., 2003): 717.

Given the number of trade agreements and loans aimed at developing Central Asia, a neoliberal perspective might foresee cooperation in view of perceived future gains. While trade in energy and raw materials has indeed increased and shaped China's policy towards Central Asia in the past few years, it was not of particular concern in the 1990s.⁸³ It is true that since then Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and—to a lesser extent—Tajikistan, have been increasingly relying on Chinese trade. Yet, even nowadays Central Asia as a whole only represents 1% of China's foreign trade.⁸⁴ For all the talk of re-establishing the Silk Road routes, the relative underdevelopment of Western China would make it unlikely for Chinese leaders to expect significant gains from trade with Central Asia.⁸⁵ Thus, this evidence calls for a rejection of complex interdependence as a theoretical explanation. Instead, it is by looking at internal politics in one of the PRC's most problematic border regions that other drivers for cooperation abroad emerge.

OMNIBALANCING AND DOMESTIC POLITICS

There are multiple reasons why Xinjiang is such a thorny issue in Beijing and why the government's response has been increasingly strong over the years. As is publicly recognized in the Chinese discourse, the stabilization of Xinjiang is essential to the security of China's borders

⁸³ Huasheng Zhao, 'Central Asia in China's Diplomacy,' in *Central Asia: Views from Washington, Moscow, and Beijing* by Rumer, Eugene; Dmitri Trenin and Huasheng Zhao (Armonk, New York M.E. Sharpe, 2007).

⁸⁴ Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse, *China as a Neighbor: Central Asian Perspectives and Strategies* (Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program, 2009): 40.

⁸⁵ The "develop the West" strategy was only launched in the late 1990s, making it unlikely that Beijing even expected Xinjiang to develop significantly before then. Moreover, as will be explained later, ethnic tensions and violence also were an open wound.

from both traditional and non-traditional threats.⁸⁶ Moreover, as the 2008 White Paper on China's defense clearly states, "damages caused by non-traditional security threats like terrorism, natural disasters, economic insecurity, and information insecurity" are expected to rise.⁸⁷ Finally, Xinjiang is also important because of China's increasing energy needs. Not only are oil and gas extracted in the region itself, they are also transported through pipelines from Central Asia.⁸⁸ As a consequence, the security of China's west is of high strategic importance.

Because Xinjiang plays such an important role in the CCP's national security and development strategies, it is particularly problematic that the government's legitimacy is not well-established in the region. As explained in the theoretical chapter, since the 1990s the regime's legitimacy has increasingly relied on a mix of nationalism and economic growth. Beijing's instrumentalist approach to Chinese "civic nationalism" has aimed to promote patriotism throughout the country. In Xinjiang these policies have sometimes taken the form of anti-separatist propaganda and cultural assimilation minority groups within the dominant "Han" group.⁸⁹ Uyghur identity itself has in many ways developed as a response to the policies of the central Chinese government.⁹⁰ As a consequence, despite the government's efforts to shape

⁸⁶ Xinhua 'Senior Party official: Xinjiang's stability has national strategic value' *People's Daily Online* January 28, 2008 <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90785/6345925.htm> .

⁸⁷ China's National Defense in 2008 (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2009): 6. http://www.china.org.cn/government/central_government/2009-01/20/content_17155577.htm .

⁸⁸ Xinhua 'Xinjiang leads China in oil, gas production for 1st time in 2007' *People's Daily Online* January 4th 2008 <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90778/90857/90860/6332611.htm> .

⁸⁹ For example by banning books on Uyghur history and targeting schoolchildren with nationalist discourses; see Michael Dillon 'Uyghur Language and Culture under Threat in Xinjiang' *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst* (08/14/2002) <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/127> .

⁹⁰ Justin Rudelson and William Jankowiak 'Acculturation and Resistance: Xinjiang identities in Flux,' in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* ed. Frederick Starr (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 315.

nationalism to its benefit (as in much of the “core China”) ethnic nationalism continues to play an important role along its western border (both in Xinjiang and Tibet).

About half of Xinjiang’s population is Turkic-speaking and Muslim; of this the majority is represented by the 9 million Uyghur and 1 million Kazakhs that have traditionally inhabited the area.⁹¹ The Uyghur used to represent the absolute majority of the inhabitants in Xinjiang, but the percentage of ethnic Han in the population has grown from 6.7% in 1949 to about 40% at the end of the 1990s.⁹² The influx of migrants from the east (attracted by jobs in the oil sector, the cotton industry, trading opportunities with Central Asia, and overall incentives developed by Beijing) has contributed to tensing relations between ethnic groups. Various studies demonstrate that average incomes in Xinjiang districts mainly inhabited by Turkic-speaking peoples are significantly lower than those in areas populated by the ethnic Han.⁹³

While economic disparities are certainly one of the main grievances of anti-Beijing movements in Tibet and Xinjiang, ethnic assimilation is also resisted. Economic growth has thus not been able to solve the existing problems, and has actually worsened them under some aspects.⁹⁴ Thus mutually supporting economic expectations and national identity which are so important in legitimizing the government in other regions of China will be much more difficult to achieve in the Western regions of the country. The economic underdevelopment of Xinjiang

⁹¹ James Millward, “Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment,” Policy Studies No. 6 (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center Washington, 2004): vii.

⁹² Rémi Castets, “The Uyghurs in Xinjiang – The Malaise Grows,” *China perspectives* 49 (2003)
URL : <http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/document648.html>. (Accessed 30 mars 2009).

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Rémi Castets, “The Uyghurs in Xinjiang – The Malaise Grows,” *China perspectives* 49 (2003)
URL : <http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/document648.html>.

and Tibet, along with the rejection of a civic nationalism constructed around Han ethnic dominance undermine the regime in these areas.

Finally, instability in Xinjiang is dangerous for the regime because it could jeopardize the flow of oil and gas from Central Asia (and maybe someday the Middle East) which is expected to represent a more significant portion of China's energy imports in the future. A cut-off in energy supplies could undermine the economic growth of the country as a whole. This would be especially dangerous for the regime because rising living standards provide much of its legitimacy in most of the country.

Three specific moments marked the surge in anti-government violence during the 1990s; in 1990 there were demonstrations in Talip and what was labeled by the government as “an armed rebellion” in Baren county; between 1992 and 1993 bombs were placed in public places in some of the major cities of Xinjiang; between 1995 and 1996 there was a surge in protests, bombings and assassinations.⁹⁵ There has been some debate on whether the violence in 1996 was partly motivated by the launch of the “strike hard” campaign, aimed at repressing separatism and crime. It is likely that the extraordinary number of arrests carried out in that period—which according to PRC sources was somewhere between 1700 and several thousand—was rather due to the success of the crackdown rather than a sign of particularly high levels of anti-government activities.⁹⁶

The bloody incident in Yining/Gulja of 1997, where popular unrest was brutally repressed, is likely directly linked to the growing government involvement in the region and anti-

⁹⁵ James Millward, “Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment,” Policy Studies No. 6 (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center Washington, 2004): viii ; James Millward *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007): 322-329.

⁹⁶ James Millward, “Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment,” Policy Studies No. 6 (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center Washington, 2004): 16.

separatist policies that targeted Uyghurs. Nonetheless, since the late 1990s, there seems to be evidence that organized anti-government activities have diminished. This was probably due to the success of the combined tactic of repression and economic development pursued by Beijing.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, given the size of the government's response to the "separatist threat" throughout the years, which has included significant policing actions, an espousal of the American "War on Terror" and regional cooperation with neighboring countries, it would seem that the CCP continues to view Uyghur separatism as a problem.⁹⁸ An example that proves the government's continued—and increased—concern is that since 2001 military presence in the region has increased.⁹⁹

Military presence in Xinjiang as a whole only became significant in the 1980s when the government began to express its will to establish control in the area.¹⁰⁰ Increased scrutiny of Chinese politics, strong government reaction and the linking of the "East Turkestan Islamic Movement" (ETIM) movement to the "War on Terrorism" has led to the perception that Uyghur separatism and violence have been increasing consistently since the 1990s.¹⁰¹ This is most likely due to the fact that before the late 1980s the central government's interest in the region was only

⁹⁷ Ibid. ; The explosion of bombs in Kunming and Shanghai the country and an attack on a police station in 2008 may have marked the resurgence of violent separatism. Yet, it might have proved to be short-lived and mainly due to the "Olympic-hype" as well as lowered military presence due to widespread unrest in neighboring Tibet.

⁹⁸ For an example of Chinese newspaper coverage of crime and terrorism and the government's responses in Xinjiang see: Xinhua "Golden Crescent" drug spell plagues China's northwest' *People's Daily Online* September 02, 2007 <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/6252919.html>; Nan Zhang 'Xinjiang plays key anti-terrorism role' *chinadaily.com.cn* July 09, 2007, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-07/09/content_5422224.htm ; Xinhua 'Xinjiang armed police elevated to greater role in fighting terror' November 11th 2008 http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-11/28/content_10426812.htm.

⁹⁹ Niklas Swanstrom, "China and Central Asia: a new Great Game or traditional vassal relations?" *Journal of Contemporary China* 45 (2005) 572.

¹⁰⁰ James Millward *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 297.

¹⁰¹ Niklas Swanstrom, "China and Central Asia: a new Great Game or traditional vassal relations?" *Journal of Contemporary China* 45 (2005): 573.

limited (except when the situation escalated drastically as happened during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution).¹⁰² In the 1990s, as the party re-established its legitimacy throughout the country through a mix of nationalism and economic growth, it planned to strengthen its position in a similar way in turbulent Tibet and Xinjiang. Moreover, changing geostrategic conditions made it so that Xinjiang became increasingly important to Beijing.

Uprisings in the region (which are both the cause and the response to the Party's policies), government-led repression and development campaigns are all chronologically and causally linked. The latter two phenomena point at a two-pronged strategy in Beijing, where economic growth and political stability are seen as mutually constitutive and are pursued at the same time. By adding a foreign dimension to the CCP's approach to the "Xinjiang problem," one can see how this fits into an Omnibalancing model and confirms—and develops—Fravel's model.

One can thus trace the relationship between domestic and foreign policies. As noted before, 1992 was the year that marked the beginning of the first major development campaign in Xinjiang as well as the beginning of diplomatic relations with Kazakhstan and the other Central Asian republics. 1996 marked both the beginning of the "Strike Hard" campaign and the establishment of the Shanghai Five group, which was further institutionalized in 1997—the same year of a particularly bloody repression. This was followed by the dispute settlement treaties in 1999. The following year saw renewed efforts to develop Xinjiang economically—through the "Great Development of the West" campaign, which included the investment of over 900 billion

¹⁰² James Millward, "Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment," Policy Studies No. 6 (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center Washington, 2004): viii; Taylor Fravel, "Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: Explaining China's Compromises in Territorial Disputes," *International Security* 30, No. 2 (Fall 2005): 70.

yuan.¹⁰³ The convergence of these internal and external policies is exemplified by the establishment of the SCO in 2001.

Thus, we can see how the dependent variable in the study (Chinese foreign policy in Central Asia) was affected by variations in the independent variable (regime security). The regime felt less secure as its stakes in the region increased and its legitimacy remained in question. This will be further discussed by looking at how the regime's perception of a protracted threat in the region influenced the creation of regional institutions such as the SCO.

THE SCO AND BALANCING AGAINST INTERNAL AND TRANSNATIONAL THREATS

According to Zhao border security was the prime motive behind China's diplomacy in Central Asia up until 1997 and then began to lose importance as anti-terrorism and energy procurement took its place.¹⁰⁴ It is true that cooperation over the settlement of disputes became the platform for the development of the SCO, which has been mainly aimed at fighting transnational crime, terrorism and separatism. It is similarly true that since China became a net importer of oil in the mid-nineties energy security has become an ever important issue. Yet, it is hard not to see these issues as intrinsically linked. Direct military aggression on the part of bordering countries may have stopped to be perceived as a major threat in Beijing, but this has not meant that the border areas are now seen as relatively unproblematic.

In fact, since the 1990s—when the borders were opened—the movement of goods and people between China and Central Asia increased significantly.¹⁰⁵ While this has had a positive

¹⁰³ James Millward *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 297.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Claes Levinsson and Ingvar Svanberg, "Kazakhstan-China Border Trade Thrives After Demarcation Treaty," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst* (02/16/2000) <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/367>.

effect on the economies of the countries involved, it has also meant that drug and arms trafficking, as well as trans-national crime organizations as a whole have also received a huge boost. Moreover, as explained in the previous chapter, weak states (and weak regimes) can represent a tangible threat to neighboring countries because of spill-over effects.¹⁰⁶ Thus, a weak regime in Central Asia could potentially lead to high levels of instability in that country, this could provoke a refugee crisis, the spread of ethnic or sectarian violence and offer a base for transnational crime. The danger posed by such a scenario—which Tajikistan partly experienced during its bloody civil war—taking place in Central Asia was quickly recognized as one of the main threats to national security by Chinese leaders.¹⁰⁷ Trans-nationally organized crime is not only a threat in of itself to the state, it also provides a way to finance anti-governmental activities. Moreover, the spread of radical Islam, which appealing throughout Central Asia, was another perceived threat that Beijing was particularly wary of. There are some clues that the party felt increasingly threatened by Islamic extremism and Uyghur nationalism in the mid-nineties; according to Millward the Standing Committee of the CCP Politburo released a secret directive (CCP Central Committee Document 7) in 1996 where it made explicit the need to counter illegal religious activities and foreign infiltration in Xinjiang.¹⁰⁸ The same year the “strike hard” campaign was first launched and led to widespread repression.

In 1996, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan’s leaders signed the Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions, which aimed at demilitarizing borders

¹⁰⁶ Richard Jackson ‘Regime Security’ in *Contemporary security studies*, ed. Alan Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 150.

¹⁰⁷ Marc Lanteigne, “In Medias Res: The Development of the Shanghai Co-operation Organization as a Security Community,” *Pacific Affairs* 79, No. 4 (2006-2007): 607.

¹⁰⁸ James Millward, “Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment,” *Policy Studies* No. 6 (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center Washington, 2004): 16.

and was followed by the 1997 Mutual Reduction of Military Forces in the Border Areas Treaty.¹⁰⁹ These treaties were the basis of the so-called Shanghai Four group, which then evolved in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001. The latter was mainly presented as a platform for cooperation against the “three evils” of “terrorism, extremism and separatism.”¹¹⁰

The importance of the SCO has been the object of some debate among scholars. While some argue that it may provide the basis for a more durable alliance and possibly even the formation of a security community, others argue that alliances in the region are structurally fragile and there is little political commitment to international organizations. Thus—in this latter view—the SCO mainly serves as a vehicle for the pursuit of the larger powers’ (Russia and China) goals.¹¹¹ An important view, represented by Annette Bohr is that the SCO’s main success lies in enabling cooperation aimed at ensuring regime security. In theoretical terms this would make the organization an expression of the inter-state alliance against domestic and trans-national threats. In other words, the institution would be aimed at promoting cooperation between regimes rather than the states per se. Given the relative weakness of some of the

¹⁰⁹ Huasheng Zhao, ‘Central Asia in China's Diplomacy,’ in *Central Asia: Views from Washington, Moscow, and Beijing* by Rumer, Eugene; Dmitri Trenin and Huasheng Zhao (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 140.

¹¹⁰ Xinhua ‘SCO Cooperation to Combat “Three Evil Forces”’ [www.China.org.cn](http://www.china.org.cn/english/2006/Sep/181910.htm) September 22, 2006 <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2006/Sep/181910.htm> .

¹¹¹ For a positive assessment of the SCO’s potential in achieving regional integration see: Marc Lanteigne “China’s Energy Security and Eurasian Diplomacy: The Case of Turkmenistan,” *POLITICS* 27, no.3 (2007); “*In Medias Res*: The Development of the Shanghai Co-operation Organization as a Security Community” *Pacific Affairs* 79, No. 4(2006-2007). Among scholars that are more skeptical on the possibility of regional cooperation see Roy Allison, “Regionalism, regional structures and security management in Central Asia,” *International Affairs* 80, 3 (2004); Annette Bohr “Regionalism in Central Asia: new geopolitics, old regional order” *International Affairs* 80, 3 (2004); For a realist approach to the Sino-Russian rapprochement and the future of the relationship see Bobo Lo, “The Long Sunset of Strategic Partnership: Russia’s Evolving China Policy,” *International Affairs* 80 (2004); “Ten things everyone should know about the Sino-Russian relationship,” Centre For European Reform Policy Brief (2008).

governments of the Central Asian republics and the power to undermine their legitimacy held by non-state actors such as religious groups, this is significant.

In the context of this thesis the SCO is an important phenomenon since it is an indicator of non-aggressive, but rather collaborative, behavior between countries. It also indicates a commitment to protracted partnership. Moreover, if looked at from a closer perspective, one can argue that it is an example of institutionalized Omnibalancing behavior. To assess the SCO and its goals and aims one can look at its founding charter. What emerges from the analysis is a hierarchy of goals. “Goodneighborliness” and stability emerge as fundamental aims, while “terrorism, separatism and extremism” as well as “illicit narcotics and arms trafficking and other types of criminal activity of a transnational character” appear as major threats to be countered through cooperation.¹¹² The organization has also been the institutional basis for the establishment of the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) in 2004; this is meant to facilitate coordination of anti-terrorism information sharing and collection. Finally the SCO has been successful in organizing joint military exercises which are supposedly specifically targeted at preparing against non-traditional security threats.¹¹³

What the discussion the organization stands to show is how its role has mainly been shaped by the regimes’ need to secure their position against internal (although organized transnationally within the region) threats. This is in line with Kathleen Collins’ argument regarding the link between the spread of security regionalism in Central Asia and patrimonialism.¹¹⁴ The

¹¹² “Charter of the Shanghai Co-operation Organization,” *Shanghai Co-operation Organization*, 7 June 2002 http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-06/12/content_614628.htm.

¹¹³ Marc Lanteigne, “In Medias Res: The Development of the Shanghai Co-operation Organization as a Security Community,” *Pacific Affairs* 79, No. 4 (2006-2007):

¹¹⁴ Kathleen Collins “Economic and Security Regionalism among Patrimonial Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of Central Asia” *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61 no. 2 (2009): 249-281.

elites, mainly focused on gaining wealth and securing their position have focused on regional cooperation mainly for security purposes rather than economic ones that would require liberalization and increased transparency. If the SCO were not an instrument at the service of the regimes, it would not have goals and programs that reflect the policies of the domestic governments. In particular, we would not see continuity between the PRC's policies in Xinjiang and the SCO in the Central Asian region as a whole.

That the SCO has largely been sponsored by China provides further clues as to the CCP's strategy. Not only is it a useful instrument in securing stability and cooperation in fighting domestic threats, it also provides a basis for engaging with Russia and for stabilizing the region as a whole. As mentioned before, Xinjiang would likely be destabilized if the regime in one of the Central Asian republics were to weaken significantly. Beijing's strategy has been to promote development in the region and integrate its neighbors' economy with its own. In this way it improves its standing and importance in the region while enhancing and strengthening the individual states and particularly their regimes.

In conclusion, Beijing's evolving strategy towards Central Asia has been consistently motivated by its interest in strengthening its position in Xinjiang. Interest in the latter may have been increased by the escalating importance of Central Asia in US foreign policy and world affairs in general, as would be argued by realists. Yet, policies towards Xinjiang and the Central Asian republics (starting with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and later Uzbekistan and more recently there have been attempts to engage Turkmenistan) have been mutually reinforcing and have been mainly motivated by concerns regarding regime security and internal stability.

CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to present a different approach from the traditional realist one to understanding instances of cooperation between states. While not rejecting the overall validity of balance of power theory, I argued that a state may have more than one motivation and that domestic politics may play a significant role, possibly at times more important, in international politics. While this is not a new view, I contributed to already existing literature by looking specifically at the case of China and developing Fravel's work on that country's behavior in matters of territorial disputes. In particular, I showed that there is continuity between Beijing's policy toward Xinjiang and towards Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. By analyzing the situation in Xinjiang during the 1990s and the internal legitimacy structure of the regime, I found that the domestic threats posed by ethno-separatism that Fravel had pointed to cannot be rooted out and require protracted engagement.

That there has been continuous fear of instability in Xinjiang is proved by a growing military presence in the region, strong political and cultural repression as well as development programs and ethnic assimilation policies. This points at a two-pronged domestic policy aimed at promoting ethnic harmony through economic development and enabling growth by ensuring stability.¹¹⁵ The policy had implications on foreign policy as well, since it pushed China to pursue cross-border cooperation beyond the settlement of the territorial disputes *per se*. By

¹¹⁵ James Millward *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 304.

promoting the institution of the SCO and by offering renewed and continuous support for the regimes of the Central Asian republics, the PRC has aimed at limiting the negative effects of having weak neighbors and has sought to find allies in fighting anti-governmental forces.

As argued in the third chapter, the regime has perceived instability in Xinjiang as a threat to its security. This is also because elements such as national identity, which are essential to the legitimation of the regime elsewhere in the country, are either missing in the region or have actually been constructed in opposition to the government. Since the 1990s Beijing's policy has been shaped so as to develop Xinjiang economically while cracking down on any expression of political dissent. Given the ethnic and cultural kinship and geographical vicinity that ties Xinjiang to the rest of Central Asia, any policy aimed at the region had to take into consideration cross-border relations as well. China had either the option of isolating its westernmost state (as was by and large done during the Soviet era) or engaging with its neighbors in securing its sovereignty.

The main realist assumption challenged in the thesis was that a state's foreign policy is mostly determined by the international structure rather than internal constraints. Foreign policy analysis—the approach adopted in this thesis—necessarily recognizes the importance of national bureaucracies and the link between domestic interests and international politics. Yet, within a realist framework the internal organization of the state is largely assumed to be irrelevant in international relations, aside from explaining proximate causes.

I recognize that an analysis of the international political structure is essential to understanding any country's foreign policy (including China's). It is likely that China's rapprochement with Russia is influenced by concerns regarding US power. Similarly, Beijing's

policy toward Central Asia was probably informed by a general strategy towards international relations overall. Finally, the international race to securing energy supplies obviously shapes much of the PRC's interest in Central Asia. Yet, I contend that any explanation that does not account for the internal structure of China will read incomplete. In particular, understanding the source of legitimation of the regime (and thus its security dilemma when this is lacking) is essential to understanding its actions. Moreover, it is important to recognize that the socio-political structure of Xinjiang is so linked to the rest of Central Asia that any policy aimed at the region will be unavoidably have external ramifications as well.

Falsification, or at least allowing for it, is essential to any theory. In this case, one could posit that policy toward Xinjiang is not a major driver of Chinese foreign policy in Central Asia. If this were the case, agreements with the Central Asian republics should not reflect policies carried out by the Chinese government in Xinjiang. On the other hand, the most likely realist explanation for the Chinese cooperative behavior would be the PRC's interest in balancing US power. As a consequence one should expect that military and political cooperation between the Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and China (let alone Russia) would be aimed at countering a powerful state actor. As explained in the third chapter this is not so. Much of the military cooperation has been aimed at countering insurgencies. Even more obvious is that political collaboration between the states is founded on securing the regimes' power, mainly by repressing political dissent. This indicates that there is continuity between domestic policies (which combine repression and economic incentives) towards Xinjiang and foreign policy in Central Asia (which aims at securing military cooperation in fighting "extremism, terrorism and separatism" and strengthening the position of the foreign regimes through military and economic support).

As mentioned in the introduction the thesis does not aim to develop an original theory, but rather develop already existing approaches. As explained, Omnibalancing offers a general framework and Fravel's work a more specific application to the case of China. While Fravel's work looks at territorial dispute resolutions in general, I consider a specific case—that of Central Asia. This allows me to consider more in detail the specific threat perceived by the regime—Xinjiang separatism—in relation to the international agreements it pursued. Moreover, I looked at specific mechanisms of the PRC's domestic politics, and the role of nationalism in the regime's legitimation. This, allowed me to evaluate more in detail the reasons why Beijing would see Xinjiang ethnic tensions as problematic.¹¹⁶ Thus, while recognizing all the limitations of presenting a single case study, I argue that my approach has added to the existing literature by tracing more in depth the link between the internal structure of the PRC and its foreign policy.

¹¹⁶ As explained the empirical section the government was able to renew support—its legitimacy—by leveraging nationalism and the middle class' growing living standards during the 1990s. These policies were not particularly successful in those areas that were neither benefitting particularly from economic growth and did not feel a nationalist tie to Beijing, such as Xinjiang and Tibet particularly.

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