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THE ROLE OF CHINA IN THE RISE OF KYRGYZ NATIONALISM

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Introduction

The roots of nationalism are analyzed in various ways. Even though the most broadly accepted view is that nationalism should be understood within the context of modernism, the role of ethnicity cannot be ignored in the analysis of some societies. When these societies build their nations, they emphasize and utilize their ethnic origins. One of these societies is Kyrgyzstan. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, while Kyrgyzstan was establishing its national identity, it emphasized the ethnic values of Kyrgyzstan. Thus, unlike its Soviet past, it built its nation on Kyrgyz values. It may be said that ethnocentric nationalism is strongly felt due to these kinds of policies.

Furthermore, there are several projects in which Kyrgyzstan participated. These are increasing ethnic nationalism among the local population for distinct reasons. One of the projects that impacts the local society in Kyrgyzstan is the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB). This initiative, created by China and announced in 2013, spans many countries by land and sea. Among all the countries, Kyrgyzstan is one of the key territories in this situation. Owing to its proximity to China and its role as the gateway to the West, Kyrgyzstan is of great value to Chinese policies. This project, which also includes Kyrgyzstan, has various impacts on the Kyrgyz state and its society. Even if it has positive effects on Kyrgyzstan, the increasing presence of China in the country fuels nationalist sentiments among the indigenous population against the Chinese people. This article aims to explain how the SREB impacts the rise of ethnic nationalism in Kyrgyzstan.

1. Theoretical Framework: Nation, Nationalism

The concept of nationalism is analyzed in three groups. The first is primordialism, which explains that nationalism is an inherent and very ancient phenomenon. The second and the most widely accepted approach regarding nationalism is modernism which explains that nationalism emerged in the 18th century as a consequence of the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the American Revolution. However, the last group, known as ethno-symbolists, claims that although nationalism is a modern phenomenon, the ethnicity of society is essential for understanding it.

The terms of state and nation cannot be used interchangeably. While the concept of the state pertains to institutional operations, nations refer to a form of community. The state can be described as a collection of independent institutions separated from other

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organizations, possessing a legitimate monopoly of use of force and extraction in a specific territory. This distinguishes the state from the notion of a nation. Nation can be defined as a community who shares the same homeland and culture and the community who has experienced and live together [18, p. 12]. A nation does not just emerge at a particular time in history; instead, a social group evolves into a nation [8, p. 90]. Moreover, Stalin also described a nation as a historically created, stable group of individuals characterized by a shared language, territory and economic life. In addition to these components, a nation is a group of people who have a collective psychological framework based on a common culture. It should be said that the characteristics mentioned above cannot be taken separately to define a nation. Yet, it is said that the absence of one of these characteristics is enough to be no longer considered as a nation [20, p. 7]. Briefly, all components mentioned above are extremely vital to form a nation officially.

In addition to nation, nationalism is a political doctrine that claims cultural similarity is a fundamental social bond. The legitimacy of any authority that may be observed between individuals relies on the shared culture of the group's members (or in nationalist term, of a "nation") [10, p. 3-4]. Nationalism can be best defined as a particularly suitable form of political activity within the framework of the modern state and the contemporary state system [7, p. 1]. Gellner also supports the same idea that the root of nationalism is in modernity [10, p. 13]. The concept of nationalism is utilized to define political movements that obtain or exercise state power and justify their actions with nationalist rhetoric [7, p. 2].

In summary, while a nation mainly consists of people who share common values, nationalism is an ideology that motivates those people to be a nation. The concepts of nation and nationalism are essential to create and maintain a state. In addition to these, the requirements for being a nation-state are not limited to only national identity and the ideology of nationalism. The distinctions between "us" and "them" and the strong bonds among "us" are very crucial.

2. Nationalism in Kyrgyzstan

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan gained its independence, and it began to formulate its national identity. While the elites in Kyrgyzstan worked on it, they had to take into consideration the different ethnic groups in the country. Huskey noted that a new national identity had to be formed between the aspirations of some Kyrgyz for an ethnic nationalism and the wishes of ethnic minorities, many of whom were Russified Kyrgyz, to preserve civic nationalism [11, p. 114]. It may be said that although decision makers were aware of the situation regarding various ethnic groups, the policies which they implemented motivated Kyrgyz nationalism.

In Kyrgyzstan, politics is also characterized by a nationalistic attitude, as it seems Kyrgyz politicians, in general, believe that power should be exercised over "the people" who are ethnic Kyrgyz. However, there has been intense debate regarding what it means to truly be for 'the people.' This conflict defines the area where Kyrgyz political practice and debate take place [15]. The new nationalism is somewhat a critique of the Soviet past and partially a response to Russification. Thus, the efforts to establish laws that restore national culture and promote the use of Kyrgyz in the public sphere have been considered appropriate for the immediate post-independence period to address the historical imbalance [6, p. 392]. Moreover, ethnic values have been emphasized to formulate the national identity, and as Megoran noted that after independence, Manas has played a pivotal role in political and intellectual endeavors [15].

The preamble of the Kyrgyz Republic's constitution, adopted on May 5, 1993, starts by emphasizing the significance of "providing for the national renaissance of the Kyrgyz." The second and lesser significant position states that safeguarding and promoting the interests of individuals of all nationalities who constitute the people of Kyrgyzstan along

with the Kyrgyz [19, p. 147].

Briefly, as can be seen, ethnic nationalism is felt very strongly in the country, and at the same time it is supported by elites and seen in the constitution of Kyrgyzstan.

3. The Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB)

The Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), also known as the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative, was declared by Chinese President Xi Jinping at Nazarbayev University in September 2013. This project, which links Asia to Africa and Europe, is expected to enhance economic integration and cooperation among countries. The aim of the massive infrastructure project is to connect multiple continents through both land and maritime routes.

The Communist Party of China (CPC) included the initiative in its Charter in 2017 and reiterated its importance in 2022 during its 20th Party Congress [21]. OBOR consists of a land-based "Silk Road Economic Belt" and a maritime "Maritime Silk Road." The "Belt" represents an infrastructure network that includes transportation, energy, communication projects extending from Xi'an in China through Central Asia to Moscow, Rotterdam, and Venice. The "Road" serves as its maritime counterpart, comprising a network of proposed ports and coastal infrastructure stretching from South and Southeast Asia to East Africa and the northern Mediterranean Sea [13]. This project will utilize not only road transportation but also sea transportation, and furthermore, it will stimulate the development of various projects in many areas.

Additionally, the main aims of this project were described as "policy coordination, connectivity of facilities, seamless trade, financial integration, and people-to-people connections" [17, p. 3]. Throughout the years, OBOR has encompassed a variety of investments, ranging from physical development to financial investment projects, including the construction of railways and the establishment of satellite networks. SREB is one of the largest infrastructure projects undertaken by a single nation [9].

OBOR differs from China's previous international economic collaborations by emphasizing participation in complex networks, enhancing connectivity, and optimizing relationships with key players. The main components of the OBOR consist of five key elements. First, enhancing the coordination of the development strategies. Second, the establishment of an infrastructure network. Third, boosting investments and trade collaboration. Fourth, improving the level of financial integration. Fifth and last, promoting people-to-people ties. [16, p. 5]. Thanks to this initiative, connections between nations will be strengthened, trade barriers will be eliminated, and trade volume will increase for participating countries. Moreover, the construction of pipelines, railways, roadways, and other infrastructure to develop a transportation system will also enhance the infrastructure of these nations. According to Omonkulov, such institutions as SREB, which deal primarily with problems of infrastructure of member countries, are well suited to cope with these infrastructural issues in these countries [4, p. 50]. Pop mentioned that the measures to be undertaken will improve economic stability in a variety of ways. The key benefits will encompass coordinated investment opportunities between countries, enhanced financial structures, trade expansion, and reduced financial risk through collaborative institutions [17, p. 3]. Most of the countries which are to take part in the project are developing nations. With the help of these kinds of infrastructural investments, these countries will manage to be on the same level as more developed countries to some extent.

4. SREB and Central Asia

There are a variety of reasons, such as geographic, political, economic, and security factors, that shape the relationship between China and Central Asia. The rich natural resources of Central Asia have also been of major significance to China. These are the reasons

why this country is interested in Central Asia. The countries in this region are crucial for China. Due to its proximity to these countries, China could be affected by any instability that occurs in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, or Tajikistan.

The five Central Asian nations have developed intricate plans for the export of their natural resources. Consequently, they are enthusiastic about building a "New Silk Road." This will also allow the Central Asian republics to develop extensive trade and economic relations with several other Eurasian countries [23, p. 51]. The Central Asian countries, particularly Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, were among the earliest participants in the SREB from 2013 to 2015. At present, China possesses distinct economic, political, and security-related interests in Central Asia that shape its diplomatic strategy. However, Xi Jinping seeks to promote Chinese influence over the region due to Central Asia's symbolic significance. For OBOR to truly become the "New Silk Road," Xi Jinping must integrate Central Asia into the project. Central Asia is like a door that opens to continental Europe. This implies that the land routes of the OBOR (the North Belt and the Central Belt) must pass through Central Asia to reach Europe without interruption [14].

OBOR consists of six main land routes and the Maritime Silk Road [2]. Two of these routes pass through Central Asian territories. Aytekin mentioned that the first route that links China to Europe is referred to as the "New Eurasian Land Bridge". It starts in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region located in northwestern China and constructs a railway transport network that goes above the Caspian Sea, through Kazakhstan, western Russia before reaching Eastern Europe and Germany. The second route is built on a different axis and is called the "China-Central Asia-West Asia Corridor" (CCAWAC). Starting in Xi'an, northern China, the route goes over the Xinjiang region, then cuts across Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, connecting to the Caspian Sea. From the Caspian Sea, it moves through the Caucasus and over Türkiye and continues into the territories of the Balkans and Central Europe [2].

Briefly, Central Asia serves as a bridge for China to the rest of the world. The project's success could be impacted if Central Asia is excluded from the project. China's network with the rest of the world depends, in part, on the network it establishes with Central Asia. Therefore, both Central Asian nations require these investments for their own development, and China needs cooperation with this region to implement its project.

5. SREB Project for Kyrgyzstan

The relations between Kyrgyzstan and China started in 1992, following Kyrgyzstan's independence. The geographical proximity between the two countries and China's role as a key economic partner for Kyrgyzstan imply the importance of their relationship.

At the beginning of its independence, Kyrgyzstan's relationship with China initially focused on resolving border issues. As a participant of the Belt and Road Initiative from the year 2013, Kyrgyzstan has signed multiple loan and grant agreements with China [3, p. 144]. Although Kyrgyzstan is a member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), it has embraced Beijing's OBOR Initiative because the project will assist in maintaining its economic growth and finance the necessary infrastructure investments in different sectors [4, p. 71]. Under the OBOR initiative, China is providing significant loans to the region. In this regard, one of the most important results of the OBOR project for Kyrgyz is railways.

China is keen on establishing a railway link with Uzbekistan via Kyrgyzstan. The goal of this connection is to transport Chinese products to local markets, and it is also planned to bring some raw materials into China. In different versions of the project, the route links China through Kyrgyzstan not only to Uzbekistan but also to Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey and finally to the European railway system [12, p. 33].

There are some drawbacks to the project. The China-Kyrgyzstan railway is concerning

because it will increase China's influence in the country and Kyrgyzstan's dependence on China. Additionally, only a small portion of the goods transported via this railway will belong to Kyrgyzstan. In other words, the most salient feature of the project is that it will increase China's dominance and mainly benefit China. It is highly likely that one side's economic dominance will result in political control over the other [1, p. 326].

While the increasing population of Chinese people in the region is already a problem, the arriving Chinese population to the region due to the new investment such as OBOR, is alarming the indigenous population in Kyrgyzstan. Erarslan mentioned that one of the main issues that has emerged from the inflow of Chinese investors into the region is the relationship between Chinese migrant workers and the local population [3, p. 136]. The expert noted that anti-Chinese sentiments have been increasing in Kyrgyzstan. Between 2019 and 2020, Kyrgyzstan experienced a series of protests targeting Chinese investments in the country [22]. For that reason, the anti-Chinese protests in the country occur within a wider context of increasing sinophobic sentiments in the region in recent years [5].

In conclusion, even though SREB is a vital project for Central Asia, the local community is becoming concerned about the growing Chinese influence in the region. This increases fears that Kyrgyzstan may be exploited by China. Instead of creating job opportunities for the local people, the project is strengthening China's regional influence. This leads to exacerbating nationalist sentiments among the indigenous people.

Conclusion

Kyrgyzstan is one of the countries that started the nation-building process following the fall of the Soviet Union. Kyrgyzstan was officially formulated by Soviet Russia, and when it became independent, it still carried on the legacy of the Soviet Union. Yet, to be an independent state on the international stage, it had to build its nation-state on unique values that belong to Kyrgyzstan. At the beginning of the process, the elites tried to fuel civic nationalism and initiated policies that encompassed all nations living in the country. However, after some time, it became clear that the ethnic components came to light more prominently than the civic elements.

China, which is one of the essential trade partners and neighbors of Kyrgyzstan, is strengthening its presence in the country through its various investments. Particularly, thanks to the OBOR project, China is becoming a very essential power in the region. The fragile economies of Kyrgyzstan are not sufficient to establish the infrastructural developments required by the OBOR project. For that reason, China's presence and economic power are very important for Kyrgyzstan. Due to that reason, the increasing presence of China irritates the local population and causes different disturbances. It may be said that OBOR is contributing to the increase of ethnic nationalism in Kyrgyzstan, where it is already felt strongly.

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Xülasə

Burcu Temür

Çinin Qırğız milliyyətçiliyinin artmasındakı rolu

Elm adamları arasında milliyyətçiliyin ümumiyyətlə qəbul edilmiş vahid bir tərifi yoxdur. Ümumiyyətlə, milliyyətçilik üç kateqoriyada dəyərləndirilə bilər. Bunlardan birincisi primordializmdir. Bu baxışa görə,

milliyyətçilik təbii bir hadisədir və qədim dövrlərdən bəri mövcuddur. Ən geniş yayılmış yanaşma, milliyyətçiliyin 18-ci əsrdə modernləşmə ilə ortaya çıxdığı görüşüdür. Bunlara əlavə olaraq, üçüncü yanaşma etno-simbolik yanaşmadır ki, bu yanaşma milliyyətçiliyin müasir bir anlayış olduğunu, lakin etnik bağların nəzərə alınmamasının mümkün olmadığını irəli sürür. Baxmayaraq ki, milliyyətçilik müasir bir anlayışdır, bəzi ölkələri təhlil edərkən etnik bağlar əhəmiyyətli rol oynayır. Bu ölkələrdən biri Qırğızıstandır. Qırğızıstan 1991-ci ildə müstəqilliyini qazandıqdan sonra, digər postsovet ölkələri kimi, ulus quruculuğu prosesinə başlamışdır. Bu prosesdə vətəndaş milliyyətçiliyinin önəmi vurğulansa da, etnik dəyərlər daha mühüm rol oynadığı aşkardır. Məsələn, Manas Dastanı, Qırğız millətini qurarkən elitələr tərəfindən bir vasitə kimi istifadə edilmişdir. Beləliklə, zamanla ölkədə etnik milliyyətçiliyin artdığı müşahidə edilmişdir.

Qırğızıstan beynəlxalq platformada bəzi layihələrin iştirakçısıdır. Bunlardan biri, 21-ci əsrin ən önəmli layihələrindən biri olan "Bir Kəmə, Bir Yol" təşəbbüsüdür. Çin tərəfindən 2013-cü ildə elan olunan layihə, yalnız Qırğızıstan üçün deyil, təşəbbüsə daxil olan onlarla ölkə üçün də olduqca vacibdir. Bu layihə sayəsində, Qırğızıstan kimi həssas iqtisadiyyata sahib ölkələrə əhəmiyyətli investisiya yatırılacaqdır. Bu, ölkənin inkişafına yalnız iqtisadi sahədə deyil, həmçinin müxtəlif digər sahələrdə də töhfə verəcəkdir. Lakin yerli əhali arasında Çin ilə artan asılılıq və layihə çərçivəsində Qırğızıstanda Çinli işçilərin olması kimi amillər səbəbindən narahatlıqlar yaranır. Çinin artan təsiri ilə bağlı narahatlıq, Qırğızıstanda Çin əleyhinə milliyyətçi hisslərin artmasına səbəb olmuşdur. Bu məqalə, İpək Yolu İqtisadi Kəmərinin Qırğızıstan üçün əhəmiyyətini vurğulayır və bunun Qırğızıstandakı yerli əhali arasında milliyyətçiliyi alovlandırması barədə gəlinən nəticələrə yer verir.

Açar sözlər: *millət, milliyyətçilik, Qırğızıstan, SREB, Çin*

Резюме

Burcu Temür

Роль Китая в развитии Кыргызского национализма

Среди академиков нет универсально принятого определения национализма. В целом, национализм оценивается в трех категориях. Первое из них это примордиализм. Согласно этому взгляду, национализм это естественное явление, которое существует с древних времен. Наиболее распространенный подход это мнение, что национализм возник в XVIII веке с началом модернизации. Кроме того, третьим подходом является этно-символический подход, который утверждает, что национализм это современное понятие, но этнические связи нельзя игнорировать. Хотя национализм является современным понятием, этнические связи играют значительную роль при анализе некоторых стран. Одной из этих стран является Кыргызстан. После того как Кыргызстан получил независимость в 1991 году, как и другие постсоветские страны, он начал процесс строительства нации. Хотя в этом процессе подчеркивалась важность гражданского национализма, этнические ценности играли более значительную роль. Например, эпос Манас был использован элитами как инструмент при строительстве кыргызской нации. Таким образом, со временем в стране наблюдается рост этнического национализма.

Кыргызстан участвует в нескольких проектах на международной платформе. Один из них это Инициатива "Пояс и путь", которая является одним из самых важных проектов XXI века. Проект, объявленный Китаем в 2013 году, имеет важное значение не только для Кыргызстана, но и для десятков стран, участвующих в инициативе. Благодаря этому проекту, такие страны с уязвимыми экономиками, как Кыргызстан, получают значительные инвестиции. Он будет способствовать развитию страны не только в экономической сфере, но и в различных других областях. Однако среди местного населения возникают опасения из-за таких факторов, как растущая зависимость от Китая и присутствие китайских рабочих в Кыргызстане для реализации проекта. Опасения по поводу растущего влияния Китая привели к увеличению националистических настроений против Китая в Кыргызстане. Эта статья подчеркивает важность Экономического пояса Шелкового пути для Кыргызстана и приходит к выводу, что он вызвал рост националистических настроений среди местного населения Кыргызстана.

Ключевые слова: *Нация, Национализм, Киргизия, ЭПШП, Китай*

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