

From Cultural Diversity to Cultural Affinity: Turkey As A Mediator Between East and West*

Ali Merthan DÜNDAR*

Abstract: "One Belt and One Road" project, currently being implemented by China, is of great interest to Turkey. Although Turkey is not directly included in the project, if the project succeeds the resulting change in the international balance of trade would certainly affect Turkey. The project, which can also be called a 21st century reimagining of the original Silk Road, will not only make China's products and natural resources more readily available for global trade but will have the same effect on Turkestan states (Central Asian states) like from this point on, Turkey will continue its role as both a cultural and geographical bridge between Europe and Asia. In this study, the benefits and risks of the "One Belt and One Road" project will not be discussed. The focal point of this study will be on the cultural and historical bond between Anatolian Turks and Turkestan Turks and from this basis, the cooperation opportunities between China, Turkestan and Turkey. This is a precursor to a more comprehensive study.

Key words: One Belt One Road, Turkestan, Turkish-Chinese Relations.

Kültürel Farklılıktan Kültürel Yakınlığa: Batı ve Doğu Arasında Bir Aracı Olarak Türkiye

Öz: Çin'in hayata geçirmeye çalıştığı "Bir Yol Bir Kuşak" projesi, Türkiye'yi de yakından ilgilendirmektedir. Türkiye dahil olsa da olmasa da bu projenin gerçekleşmesi durumunda küresel ticarete dengelerin değişeceği ortadadır. Eski İpek Yolu'nun 21. yüzyıl uygulaması olarak da adlandırabileceğimiz bu proje Çin'in olduğu kadar Türkistan'daki (Orta Asya) Türk Devletlerinin doğal zenginliklerinin ve mamullerinin de dünyaya pazarlanmasına olanak verecektir. Bu noktada Türkiye, sadece coğrafi olarak değil kültürel

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* Prof. Dr., Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih- Coğrafya Fakültesi Japon Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı Öğretim Üyesi, merthandundar@gmail.com, Gönderim Tarihi: 12.12.2018, Kabul Tarihi: 20.12.2018

olarak da Türk Devletleri ile Avrupa arasında bir köprü olmaya devam edecektir. Bu çalışmada, "Bir Yol Bir Kuşak" projesinin olası faydaları ya da zararlarına değinilmeyecek olup Anadolu Türkleri ile Türkistan Türkleri arasındaki tarih ve kültür ortaklığının altı çizilerek Çin, Türkiye ve Türkistan'daki Türk Devletlerinin iş birliği imkanları hakkındaki görüşler aktarılacaktır. Daha kapsamlı bir çalışmanın habercisi olarak kaleme alınmıştır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Bir Yol Bir Kuşak, Türkistan, Türk-Çin İlişkileri.

Introduction

It looks that the story of the grand grand fathers of the modern Turks began at Central Siberia Plateau and continued towards Europe among thousands of years. As we can see at the history of the many other nations all around the world, many Turk tribes moved different parts of Asia while some of them stayed where they were living. One of the first stop; Altay Mountains and Mongolian Plateau were the regions where the population of the nomadic Turks increase. After establishing states like Turk Qaganate or Turk Empire at today's Mongolia, we see that Turk tribes continue to spread west. Therefore, the journey ended up at Vienna in the 16th century.

If we think for a moment about the route of this journey we can see that, this route passes from the centers of civilizations oases that effected the civilization of the world and history. Beginning from East to west we can simply count nine regions or countries at once: China, Central Asia, India, Iran, Middle East, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Anatolia (including, Hittites, Frigs, Assyrians, etc. and Roman Empire - Byzantine Empire) and Greece. If we consider these lands with their influence areas, we can understand that we are talking about simply the world. Because, these lands are also the places where monotheistic religions were born. Judaism, Christianity and Islam with their all sects were born here. Hinduism, Buddhism, Lamaism, Confucianism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism etc., as well.

Living or ruling those lands in different periods and durations added valuable richness to today's Turkish culture. Yes, but how? Turks embraced to Judaism, Christianity, Islam and other

polytheistic religions too. I think this feature makes Turks different from many other nations. While ruling or being ruled, Turks lived together with variety of cultures in different geographies. Even though they live in small populations you can still find Turkic speaking Jews like Crimean Karaites and Krymchaks in Crimea, Poland and Lithuania, Christians like Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox's in Turkey and Gagauzes in Ukraine and Moldova, Buddhists like Yellow Yugurs (*Yugu Zu* 裕固族) in China. Besides, many Turkic speaking population has been believing in all sects of Islam in different lands. Even though, a multinational and multi cultural governance system existed in Turkish territories for hundreds of years, it has weakened its affects since 19th century. However, the reminiscences of this method is still seen on today's governances. It could also be seen in the collective memories of the Anatolian Turks.

China: The oldest neighbor of Turks

The early information about Turks were written in Chinese records like; Weishu 魏書, Beishi 北史, Zhoushu 周書, Suishu 隋書, Xin Tangshu 新唐書, etc. This is not very surprising because China is the oldest neighbor for Turk states and Chinese people are the oldest neighbors of the Turks. Because of living close there has been some linguistic and cultural affinity between Turks and Chinese. Some samples are; Nazar boncuğu - Evel eye, Chinaware - Çini ceramics, "çi" suffix, Cinese drawings - kara kalem, mantı and mantou etc.

Moreover Uyghur, Kazak, Kirgiz, Tatar, Salar, Ozbek and Yugur ethnic minorities of China are the most important ties between Turks of Anatolia and China. At the same time these minorities could be consider as a bridge between China and Turkic Central Asia states like, Kazakistan, Kirgisistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan.

During the last ten years Turkish-Chinese economic and cultural relations gained speed. There exist 14 sister cities¹ between two countries. Turkey receives 1.965 students² from China and 1.000 companies³ with 10.000⁴ Chinese passport holders work in Turkey. On the other hand there are many Turkish students in China and Turkish companies in China.

About prosperity and tranquility of China the words which Turkish Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu said is suggestive: “We take China’s security as our security,” “We absolutely will not allow in Turkey any activities targeting or opposing China. Additionally, we will take measures to eliminate any media reports targeting China.”⁵

Turkey and Central Asian Countries

In his article Fidan mentions that: A common historical heritage between Turkey and Central Asia is a great motive for building good relations. Common history, language, religion, tradition and lifestyle have engendered potential areas for facilitating bilateral and multilateral relations. On the other hand, common problems have created crucial motivation for regional integrative schemes. Among these common problems are consolidating the institutions of democracy and rule of law, human rights, minority rights and free market economy. Besides disadvantages, the rich natural resources of the regions constitute importance for integrating into the world energy markets with a potential for rapid economic development in the region.⁶

¹ MA Lirong, Sino-Turkish Cultural Ties under the Framework of Silk Road Strategy <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/19370679.2014.12023242> Erişim: 10.11.2018

² <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yerel-haberler/istanbul/merkez/ipek-yolu-projesi-turkiyede-cinli-ogrenci-sayi-40977317> Erişim: 10.11.2018

³ <https://www.ahaber.com.tr/ekonomi/2018/06/29/turkiyedeki-cinli-sirket-sayisi-1000i-buldu>. Erişim: 12.11.2018

⁴ <https://www.turkinfo.nl/haber/turkiyede-yasayan-yabanci-sayisi-650-bin-kisiyigecegi/13956/> Erişim: 10.11.2018

⁵ <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/08/03/turkey-china-security/> Erişim: 10.11.2018

⁶ Hakan Fidan (2010), *Turkish foreign policy towards Central Asia*, Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies, 12:1, 109-121,

At the web site of the Foreign Service of the Republic of Turkey, Turkish - Central Asian relations summarized as follows:

"Central Asia is a strategically important region for ensuring the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic region. Its energy resources are vital for global energy security and it is a major hub for gas and oil pipelines as well as trade corridors.

In their 25 years of independence, the Central Asian Republics have made substantial progress in many areas, particularly in solidifying their sovereignty, institutionalizing their state-building structures and elevating their level of integration with the world.

Turkey is the first country to have recognized the independence of the Central Asian countries in 1991. Common historical, linguistic and cultural ties, Turkey has sought to increase engagement with Central Asia on a broad range of issues. In this respect, the High Level Strategic Cooperation Council mechanisms that Turkey has established with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and the Cooperation Council with Tajikistan provide a useful basis to further our relations.

Turkey's economic relations with the Central Asian Republics have developed rapidly, and significant progress has been achieved in the fields of trade, transportation and communications. The Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) was established in order to provide technical assistance to these countries and has been operating successfully in close cooperation with the local authorities in the region.

Turkey's trade volume with the countries of the region was about 7 billion USD by the year 2016 and the total investments of Turkish companies in the region exceeded 13 billion USD as of December 2017. The total value of projects realized by Turkish contracting companies in the region has reached a level of around 86 billion USD. Nearly 4 thousand Turkish companies have been operating on the ground.

Relations have also developed in the areas of culture and education. The International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY) was established in 1993 for the purpose of protecting the Turkic culture, art,

language and historical heritage; introducing these values to the world and transferring them to the younger generations.

Turkey pioneered the process of "The Summits of Turkic Speaking Countries' Heads of States", held since 1992 in order to increase solidarity between the Turkic Speaking Countries and to create new cooperation opportunities among them. This process has acquired an institutional structure through the Nakhichevan Treaty regarding the Establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (Turkic Council) signed on 3 October 2009. The Secretariat of the Council was established in Istanbul. Turkic Council continues its activities in every field and every level with close cooperation of member countries".⁷

Thomas Wheeler notice that some scholars mentioned that the Turkish Government's current policy towards Central Asia contains five central components:

- "1. Developing bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the fields of energy, economy, commerce, culture, society, politics, etc.*
- 2. Assisting them to find a peaceful solution to the frozen regional conflicts.*
- 3. Serving as an energy terminal.*
- 4. Providing assistance to the regional states in their nation- and state-building processes.*
- 5. Helping them develop and maintain close relations with the other countries." ⁸*

Conclusion

1. Turkey has a historical and cultural ties with China and Central Asia, Balkans and Europe.
2. Not only geographical but also cultural aspect, Turkey is a bridge between East and West.
3. More than 4 million Turkish citizens live in Europe and they have strong economic ties and trade network with European

⁷ http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-relations-with-central-asian-republics.en.mfa Erişim: 10.11.2018

⁸ <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/172943/turkeys-role-and-interests-in-central-asia.pdf> Erişim: 10.11.2018

countries and companies. This network can be integrated with the China and Central Asia.

4. There is not any panturkist threat from Turkey towards China and Central Asia. Attempting to establish cultural or economic collaborations between Turkey and cognates living in Central Asia or China should not be thought as a panturkist action.
5. Uyghurs of China should be considered as a bridge between Central Asia, China and Turkey. Over 400,000 Uyghurs live in Turkey⁹ so their prosperity and weal have a natural effect on the multilateral relations.
6. Turkey suffers from extremism, radicalism and separatist terrorism so could be a good partner for war on terrorism.
7. In the first quarter of 20th century with the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk Turkey broke her economic and political chains and gained undeniable position in her region. In current century Turkey became one of the biggest economies in the world. With her experiences Turkey could be a mediator between East and West on economic, politic, cultural and military aspects

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