

COOPERATION BETWEEN CENTRAL ASIA AND CHINA: SILK ROAD STRATEGY

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation titled “COOPERATION BETWEEN CENTRAL ASIA AND CHINA: SILK ROAD STRATEGY” submitted by me in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Prof. Archana Upadhyay

(Chairperson, CRCAS)

Prof. Phool Badan

(Supervisor)

Dedicated to my late Ammy and Papa....

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgement	i
Abbreviations	ii – iii
Chapter: 1	
Introduction	1 – 27
Chapter: 2	
History of Silk Route	28 – 50
Chapter: 3	
Chinese Silk Road Strategies in Central Asia	51 – 70
Chapter: 4	
New Silk Road and its Impact on Central Asia	71 – 89
Chapter: 5	
Conclusion	90 – 97
Bibliography	98 – 110

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
BCM	Billion Cubic Meters
BRICS	Brazil Russia India China South Africa
CBTA	Cross Border Transport Agreement
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporations
CICA	Conference on Integration and Confidence Building Measure in Asia
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Products
ICB	International Competitive Bids
IGC	Inter Government Council
IEA	International Energy Agency
NDRC	National Development and Reforms Commission
NPC	National People's Congress
NDB	New Development Bank

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NSRI	New Silk Road Initiative
OBOR	One Belt One Road
PRC	Peoples Republic of China
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SREB	Silk Road Economic Belt
TAFA	Trade and Accession Facilitation for Organisation
USCENTCOM	United States Central Command
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Chapter-1

Introduction

The idea of New Silk Road launched by Chinese president Xi Jin Ping during his tour of the Central Asian republics in October 2013, will mainly take shape along railway lines connecting several cities in Western China to Europe via Central Asia, Iran, Turkey and Balkans, and the Caucasus across the 1100 km long Eurasian continent. Through the OBOR, Beijing could add an international policy pillar for the Go West drive, which was previously regarded as a domestic endeavour. In the early 1990s, the Chinese Government launched a Go West campaign aiming to address the development disparity between the coastal areas and the vast Western lands, including the provinces of Xinjiang, Ningxia and Qinghai. The wealthier provinces in the Eastern part of the country were required to aid the poorer ones in the West by providing financial support, co-developing large-scale business projects and transferring advanced human resources. For now, China is waking up to the huge potential of its ties with its neighbouring countries to the West. (Jafferlot, 2017)

A rapidly increasing number of Chinese corporations and sub-national governments are upbeat about the OBOR, keen on leveraging the golden opportunity it offers to enhance economic openness. “By solemnly declaring to the world never to seek hegemony, China tells its smaller Central Asian neighbors and the world at large that its rapid economic development and the strengthening of its military capability not only will not be a threat but also offer opportunities to its neighbors and partners in what could be described as a ‘win-win situation’” (Jintao, Continuing to promote the noble cause of peace and development of mankind, 2012).

China needs to be more attentive in monitoring the dynamics in Central, South and West Asia, and make “creative involvements” to help mitigate the tensions, resolve the hotspot issues, stabilise weak countries and respond to those countries’ “Look East” policy demands. Beijing believes that economic cooperation within the OBOR framework may help address the deep-rooted causes of instability and radicalization of poor countries that

have been on the periphery of the global economic system. In sum, the OBOR indicates a nuanced interplay of China's domestic and foreign policy

In March 2015, with China's State Council authorization, the white paper on the OBOR was issued by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Commerce. The paper outlines the vision of and future actions on the OBOR as well as cooperation priorities and mechanisms. To coordinate all related governmental agencies working on the OBOR, the central leading group was established in early 2015, presided over by first ranked Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli. Zhang also sits on the Politburo Standing Committee of the Communist Party of China, China's highest-ruling council. The Central Leading Group's office is affiliated with the NDRC.

Each of the New Silk Road initiatives has its own specific agenda, goals and priorities. But all of them contribute, much like the ancient Silk Road to a system of trade and cooperation that is reemerging in Central Asia. There are many indicators that the New Silk Road initiatives have every reason to thrive. One factor is the Central Asian diasporas living abroad who are ready to invest in their homeland markets once such an opportunity arises. Remittance that migrant workers send to the Central Asian countries is very significant. According to World Bank, for instance, Tajikistan has received \$3 billion of remittance in 2011(47 percent of its GDP) another champion of remittance inflow of is the Kyrgyz Republic receiving \$1.7 billion 2011 (29 percent of its GDP).

A considerable portion of this remittance is the money that is sent home by seasonal or temporary labour migrants to their families. Most of them do not have proper visa status work permits or immigration documents and are not eloquent in local languages to find a high paid job, so they have to work under difficult conditions and often receive minimum wage for their hard work (Peterson, 2013). If the new Silk Road initiatives create new jobs and provide opportunities to invest in small business, these hard working people of the Central Asian countries will return to their homeland countries.

The magnitude of their contributions to national economies in comparison to the current remittances will likely to be much higher. Another type of diasporas consists of well

educated and highly skilled expertise that had left their birthplace for their better economic opportunities. In their endeavour to start a new life, many of these workers received a high quality of education, provided him with various professional environments, learned new skills and languages and gained valuable expertise. If the new Silk Road initiatives produce one economic shift and create a better investment climate, the expertise that has significant experience, proper education, international connections and finances would surely be interested in investing their money and skills into their homeland. Various New Silk Road initiatives generally support and complement each other. For example, there has been active cooperation between Turkey and China over their respective visions of New Silk Road initiative. Historically the Silk Road was the most important route connecting the ottoman and Chinese empire. In an effort to revive the vitality of the ancient Silk Road trade scheme, in the last two decades, China has been actively cooperating with turkey in many areas. Growing volume of trade relationships between Turkey and China will certainly require the use of transportation routes, logistics, services and customer regulations that are likely to be provided by Central Asian states (Jintao, Creating a Harmonious Asia, 2006).

There are, of course, some challenges ahead for the New Silk Road initiatives. Reluctance by the authorities of the region to the change the status quo could be the main obstacle preventing their successful implementations. The practicality of some initiatives and projects are criticised because political leadership has not been overly enthusiastic in liberalising their trade, empowering their private sector or opening their economies (Sun, 2001). However staying aloof and failing to seize opportunities presented by such initiatives will eventually jeopardise the status quo. Since all the countries in Central Asia are landlocked, without regional cooperation it is extremely difficult to achieve rapid economic growth.

New Silk Road and Silk Route (Old)

The Silk Route was a series of routes, some on land and some by sea that linked china to Europe by Mediterranean region. It emerged gradually, so it is hard to date its origin precisely, but it was well established by the second century BC. Along it travelled not

only Chinese silk to Europe, together with many other goods, but also ideas such as Buddhism from India to China.

The New Silk Road is different from the historic trade routes in other fundamental ways. The routes served as connectors for trade and cultural exchanges and provided the means for military skill but they had little political significance. In contrast, the New Silk Road is an overt expression of China's power ambitions in the 21st century. General Qiao Liang said that his country's One Belt, One Road initiative is "a hedging strategy against the eastward move of the US" pivot to Asia. It is this continents-spanning massive Chinese initiative that distinguishes the New Silk Roads from the old. With Beijing's investment-led growth model reaching its limit, leaders are seeking new pastures to invest their capital and reserves and discover new markets and energy sources (Chanda, 2015).

The traditional geographic confines of historic trade routes are also being expanded. The New Silk Roads now touch Africa and Latin America. Chinese government maps now show the Kenyan capital of Nairobi as a stop on the New Silk Road – to be linked by a Chinese made \$3.8 billion railroad connecting Nairobi to the Indian Ocean port of Mombasa. While China wants to evoke the romanticism of the historic contacts; Beijing officials discourage reading too much history into the present incarnation. It is just as well. For while the historical Silk Road was marked by lucrative trade and uncharacteristic religious tolerance (the terminus of the Silk Roads, the ancient capital Xi'an, was a remarkably secular place where traders of many faiths lived in peace), it was also important for its significant military trade and the exercise of raw Chinese power.

The trade routes through the South China Sea and Indian Ocean that Beijing now calls the Maritime Silk Road also allowed China to demonstrate its naval prowess. In the early 15th century, a large armada commanded by the Ming Admiral Zheng He ruled the waves in the South China Sea, punishing rebels and pirates and bringing insubordinate Southeast Asian rulers back to China. China today boasts a growing blue-water navy armed with nuclear powered submarines and intercontinental ballistic missiles to protect the New Silk Road.

Central Asia

Central Asia is a region of Asia from the Caspian Sea West to Central China in the East, and from Southern Russia in the North to Northern India in the South. It is also sometimes known as Central Asia and is within the scope of the wider Eurasian continent. Various definitions of its exact composition exist and no one definition is universally accepted. Despite this uncertainty in defining borders, it does have some important overall characteristics. For one, Central Asia has historically been closely tied to its nomadic peoples and the Silk Road. As a result, it has acted as a crossroads for the movement of people, goods, and ideas between Europe, West Asia, South Asia, and East Asia.

In modern context, Central Asia consists of the five former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan on the north, Kyrgyzstan on the northeast, Tajikistan is situated to the southeast, Turkmenistan, which spreads from the Caspian Sea to the middle reaches of one of the largest Central Asian rivers, the Amu-Darya (the Vans in ancient times, Oxus in Greek, and Jehu in the Middle Ages); and Uzbekistan and, located in the lower region of the Amu-Darya River. Uzbekistan covers the lands between the two biggest Central Asian Rivers, the Syr-Darya and Amu-Darya. Other areas are often included such as Mongolia, Afghanistan, northern-Pakistan, north-eastern Iran, north-western India, and western parts of the People's Republic of China such as Xinjiang. South-western and middle China such as Tibet Autonomous Region, Qinghai, Gansu and Inner Mongolia, and southern parts of Siberia may also be included in Central Asia.

However, the term "Central Asia" used only in respect of the five countries: Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Other regions, which are geographically part of Central Asia, will be referred to as Central Asian part of this or that country. For example, we may be writing about a Central Asian part of China or Central Asian part of India and so on. During pre-Islamic and early Islamic times, Central Asia was a predominantly Iranian region that included sedentary Sogdians, Chorasmians and semi nomadic Scythians, Alans. The ancient sedentary population played an important role in the history of Central Asia. Tajiks, Pashtuns, Pamiris and other Iranian groups are still present in the region. After expansion by Turkic peoples, Central Asia

became also the homeland for many Turkic peoples, including the Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Uyghurs, and Central Asia is sometimes referred to as Turkestan.

China

Officially the Peoples Republic of China is a unitary sovereign state in East Asia. With a population of over 1.381 billion, it is the world's most populous country. China is a great power and a major regional power within Asia and has been characterised as a potential superpower. Covering approximately 9.6 million square kilometres (3.7 million square miles), China is the world's second largest state by land area, and either the third or fourth-largest by total area, depending on the method of measurement. China's landscape is vast and diverse, ranging from forest steppes and the Gobi and Taklimakan in the arid north to subtropical forests in the wetter South (Tucker, 2003). The Himalaya, Karakoram, Pamir and Tian Shan mountain ranges separate China from much of South and Central Asia.

The Yangtze and Yellow Rivers, the third and sixth longest river in the world, respectively, run from the Tibetan Plateau to the densely populated eastern seaboard. China's coastline along the Pacific Ocean is 14,500 kilometres (9000 miles) long and is bounded by the Bohai, Yellow, East China, and South China seas. As of 2016, it is the world's second largest economy by nominal GDP and largest by purchasing power parity (PPP). China is also the world's largest exporter and second-largest importer of goods. China is a recognised nuclear weapons state and has the world's largest standing army and the second largest defence budget. The PRC is a member of the United Nations, as it replaced the ROC as a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council in 1971. China is also a member of numerous formal and informal multilateral organisations, including the WTO, APEC, BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the BCIM and the G-20¹.

¹ The G 20 or group of twenty is an international forum for the governments and central bank governors from 20 major economies founded in 1999.

Relations between Central Asia and China

The present relationship between China and Central Asia is defined by geographic, political, economic and security factors. This is the basis behind the policy of China towards Central Asian countries. In terms of geography, China and Central Asia are neighbours. For the nations of Central Asia, China is an outlet to the sea, while the countries of Central Asia can help China establish inland communications to Europe and West Asia. In terms of politics, China and the nations of Central Asia have long standing ties. Now, China and Central Asia hold similar views on many national and international problems, and advantageous political relations have been formed among these nations. In terms of economics, China and the countries of Central Asia have complementary advantages that offer the possibility of extensive cooperation. For China, the energy resources, metals, leather goods and other commodities, as well as the raw materials and markets of Central Asia, are very important. At the same time, China's industrial, consumer and agricultural products and markets hold a strong attraction for the countries of Central Asia. In terms of security, China and the nations of Central Asia share common interests (Peterson, 2013). The actions of ethnic separatists, religious extremist and the threat of transnational crime, terrorism and regional conflict and mutual concerns. Maintaining the stability of Central Asia and the western border areas of China benefits everyone.

Although there have been cultural exchanges and trade between China and Central Asia for thousands of years, it was only after the recent independence of the Central Asian nations that an equal and mutually beneficial relationship was established among the countries. Over the past decade, sound foundations have been laid to form strategic cooperation in the twenty-first century between China and Central Asia. Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has created favourable conditions and new opportunities for developing China-Central Asian relations. Still, there are problems between China and the Central Asian countries. The main divergence in their views is over economic issues, such as bilateral trade and water utilisation. In addition, there are different opinions over some internal and external policies.

China and Central Asia in the New World Order

China and Central Asia are geographical neighbours. Central Asia offers China the prospect of a transportation corridor for overland communication between China and Europe, while China gives Central Asia safe, secure passage to the Pacific Ocean. Thousands of years ago, China and Central Asia enjoyed common prosperity through the Silk Road, but this relationship was completely severed. However, in the early 1990s, as the result of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, five new countries emerged in the central region of the Asian continent: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. With this development, a new historical period in the relationship between China and Central Asia began. The challenge brought by the new order to China is different from that of the Central Asian countries. As a powerful socialist country among developing countries, China plays an indispensable, ongoing role in the international arena. China has been pursuing independent, self-reliant domestic and foreign policies.

For some time, China faced rather severe international conditions, because of relationships between China and the two poles, the United States and the Soviet Union, was both tense. Generally speaking, the breakup of the old system of international relations has been advantageous to China. This change has greatly improved the international situation of China as well as relations between China and the Great Powers. The Central Asian countries tend to be economically less developed, not including Kazakhstan. They are also landlocked countries that have been separated from the outside world for a long time. With the abrupt change in the international situation, the nations of Central Asia suddenly declared their independence. However, it was not like a ripe melon that falls off its stem naturally (China's Central Asia Problem, 2013).

The prompt declarations of independence tangibly influenced the internal and foreign affairs of the Central Asian countries. These countries have had to take a protracted, torturous route to find a suitable place in the new international order. "Claims that China has hidden motives in Central Asia and is pursuing a grand geopolitical strategy aimed at ultimate control and dominance of the region is excessive and exaggerated. China has neither the capacity nor the intention to be Central Asia's hegemony. As it has been

argued, “there is no grand strategy for Central Asia on the part of Beijing. What there is, however, is a confluence of all the activities of these multifarious actors, which, regardless of what Beijing wants or doesn’t want, means that China is nonetheless the most consequential actor in the region”(Peterson, 2013).

The change of the world order also brought China and the five Central Asian countries numerous difficulties. Because they fall into the category of developing nations, they face many internal economic and social problems. Detrimental factors in their surroundings also often threaten the economic and political security of China and the Central Asian countries. Comparison of the International Strategies of China with the Central Asian Countries Position in the international order is determined by economic and political strength, geographical conditions and many other factors. Since launching its reforms and opening to the outside world, China, with its vast territory and large population, has achieved significant economic growth. In contrast, there are evident differences in the social and economic development of the five Central Asian countries. Each one of them has its own advantages, particularly in terms of natural resources.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are bigger and somewhat more flourishing countries, while the other three countries are relatively less developed nations, whose economies are restrained by their poorer natural conditions. These nations are greatly dependent on agriculture and animal husbandry. The national strength and geographical location of China are different from that of the five Central Asian countries. As a result, China and these five countries have worked out different foreign policies and international strategies. Firstly, they had distinct international orientations, and secondly, they did not follow each other in choosing cooperative partners. Cultural Characteristics The international strategies of China and the Central Asian republics have different foundations. China and Central Asia are both on the Asian continent and have traditionally been called Eastern countries. China is ancient state and has greatly contributed to the development of world civilisation.

Although Central Asia has a similar cultural tradition, it has been also influenced by Europe. While China does not have a strong religious tradition, Central Asia was part of the Islamic world. Over the past 5,000 years, China has been economically and culturally

independent and has played a key role in East Asia and Southeast Asia. China has always been an influential power in the region. In contrast, Central Asian countries have a history of failed attempts to obtain political independence, while having to withstand invasion from powerful neighbours. The Way of Development China has decided to construct “socialism with Chinese characteristics.”The Central Asian republics have followed the development formal model of the West, but they have persisted in the centralization of state power and their particular economic system. Geopolitical Relations China and Central Asia are neighbours with common economic and security interests. Each looks on the other as a “buffer” and trusts the other as a cooperative partner.

The geopolitical strategies of China and the Central Asian countries coincide to some degree. For example, they have the same orientation in terms of external relations and common views on many international problems. China and Central Asia are interdependent geographically. At present, China’s international strategy is focused on the East. It’s important economic partners and foreign trade is around the Pacific Ocean, where there are also matters of territorial sovereignty, such as the Taiwan problem. The international strategies of the Central Asian countries are different according to whether they are dealing with a near neighbour or a far neighbour. To offset the influence and control of Russia, the nations of Central Asia give priority to the West.

Although China and the Central Asian republics do not give each other top priority in terms of international strategy, neither side can over look the existence and actions of the other. China and Central Asia will, without a doubt, play important roles in international political and economic affairs. China has an active economy and adheres to the policy of reform and opening to the world. The opportunities provided by its large market have a strong appeal to every country. China can also firmly and unshakably represent the interests of the developing countries in international affairs. At the same time, the five countries that comprise Central Asia are the passageways for east-west and north-south overland communications. Furthermore, they have many strategic mineral resources. Because China and the five Central Asian countries occupy geographic positions that have very important strategic meaning, they can exert an immediate influence on the economic development, security and stability of the whole world.

China and the countries of Central Asia are newly emerging forces in multiple-dimensional, international political and economic relations. The powers that once belonged to the same bloc experience keen competition and more contradictions today. Therefore, China and the Central Asian countries can establish relations with all the Powers at the same time, without regard to ideology or geo politics. The trend of globalisation and the advancement of science and technology have been improving the circumstances of China and the Central Asian countries.

The Development of Cooperation between China and Central Asian Countries

Good political relations between China and the Central Asian countries have sound foundations. As early as the eleventh century BC, ancient residents of China and Central Asia began to trade. In the second century BC, China and Central Asia established diplomatic relations. The history of the Silk Road was a history of friendly exchange and mutual prosperity between China and the Central Asian countries. The Political Basis of Bilateral Cooperation Today, China and Central Asia are building a closer political relationship because they share a 3,300-kilometer common boundary as well as blood and cultural ties. China's fundamental policies toward Central Asia include:

1. Peaceful, good-neighborly relations;
2. Cooperation on the basis of mutual benefit and common prosperity;
3. Respecting the choices of the Central Asian people and not interference in the internal affairs of other nations; and
4. Respecting independent sovereignty as well as promoting regional stability.

On July 5, 1996, when China's President Jiang Zemin gave a speech at the Parliament of Kazakhstan, he promoted the relationships between China and the Central Asian countries to a strategic level appropriate for the 21st century. He said that because of China and the Central Asian (Cooperation between Central Asia and China, 2004) and common development with the Central Asian countries, being good neighbours, good

friends, and good partners forever. The leaders of the Central Asian countries generally approved this proposal (Cooperation between Central Asia and China, 2004).

In June 2004, chairman of the People's Republic of China Hu Jintao² visited Uzbekistan. Hu said in a speech at the Uzbek Parliament that China was delighted with the progress made by the Central Asian countries in economic development and hoped for everlasting stability and sustained development in the region. Along with the international community, China is willing to renew its efforts to preserve stability and promote development in Central Asia, said Hu. Meanwhile, Hu recalled that China and Central Asian nations fostered close ties through the "Silk Road" by learning from each other as early as the second century BC. China and the Central Asian countries have supported each other on issues related to sovereignty and territorial integrity and solved pending problems left by history, including delimitation of the borders, which laid the foundations for deeper mutual trust, he noted.

As for regional security, Hu said, China and the Central Asian countries have conducted bilateral and multilateral cooperation and made remarkable progress in the fight against the "three major threats" to regional security, namely terrorism, separatism and extremism. Recalling the past and looking forward to the future, China is fully confident of developing neighbourly and friendly relations with the Central Asian nations and ready to push the ties to a new high, Hu emphasised (Cooperation between Central Asia and China, 2004). China will work closely with all Central Asian nations to safeguard regional stability, as well as to expand economic and cultural exchanges, President Hu Jintao said. Moreover, China has cooperated closely with the nations through bilateral and multilateral channels to effectively fight against terrorism, separatism and extremism, which severely threaten the safety and security of the region. To push forward the development of the relationship between China and Central Asia, Hu put forward four suggestions:

²Hu Jintao is a Chinese politician who was the paramount leader of China from 2002 to 2012. He held the offices of General Secretary of the Communist Party from 2002 to 2012, President of the Republic's of China from 2003 to 2013.

1. Deepening a friendly neighbourhood atmosphere and increasing mutual political trust through intensifying high-level exchanges and perfecting regional cooperation mechanisms;
2. Enhancing security coordination and maintaining regional stability, and earnestly carrying out the convention of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and other bilateral agreements;
3. Adhering to the principle of mutual benefit and trust to accelerate pragmatic cooperation through the enlargement of investment; and
4. Scaling-up cultural exchanges and consolidating traditional friendships by encouraging contacts among cultural, media, academic, tourism and social groups (China and Central Asia, 2004).

Exchanging Visits of Leaders and Developing Political Relations China was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the five Central Asian republics. On December 27, 1991, the government of China recognised the independence of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In early January 1992, a Chinese delegation visited Central Asia and signed a communiqué establishing diplomatic relations with the governments of the five Central Asian republics. Since 1992, various government departments and groups from China and the Central Asian countries have exchanged consultation visits in order to develop cooperation.

In March 1992, the president of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov³, made an official visit to China. This was the first official visit to China of a leader from the ex-Soviet republics following their independence. In March 1993, the leader of Tajikistan, and in October 1993, the president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev⁴, also made their first state visits to China. After 1994, the leaders of the five Central Asian countries made third, fourth and even seventh visits to China. In early July of 1996, the then president of

³ Islam Abduganiyevich Karimov was the leader of and its predecessor state, the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, from 1999 until his death in 2016.

⁴Nursultan Abishulliy Nazarbayev is the president of Kazakhstan. He has been the country's leader since 1989, when he was named first secretary of the Communist Party of the Kazakh SSR, and was elected the nation's first president in December 1991.

China, Jiang Zemin, completed official visits to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. In June 2000, President Jiang visited the other two Central Asian countries, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. In 1998 and 1999, President Jiang completed a working visit to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In recent years, the Chinese leaders have made numerous trips to Central Asian countries.

In May 2003 and in July 2005, the new leader of China, Hu Jintao, visited Kazakhstan and he completed a state visit to Uzbekistan in June 2004. The premier of China, Wen Jiabao⁵, visited Kyrgyzstan in September 2004 and Tajikistan in September 2006. In senior visits between the leaders of China and the Central Asian countries, there was an exchange of views on significant international situations and problems of common interest. In addition, during these visits, both sides signed a series of important treaties, agreements and other cooperative documents. These meetings were very beneficial in promoting bilateral understanding and trust and thus laid the legal foundations for developing broad, ongoing bilateral relationships.

Other visits between China and the Central Asian countries have included parliamentary delegations, officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, other governmental departments, political parties, and groups and organisations. Economic Cooperation between China and the Central Asian Countries The leaders of China and the Central Asian countries take economic and trade cooperation seriously. In April 1994, China's premier Li Peng declared the following basic principles regarding economic cooperation between China and the Central Asian countries in Almaty Kazakhstan:

1. Equality and mutual benefits acting according to economic laws;
2. Diversifying the types of cooperation;
3. Proceeding from the actual situation and making full use of local resources;
4. Improving the conditions of communication and transportation, building a "New Silk Road";

⁵Wen Jiabao was the 6th premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, serving China's head of government for a decade between 2003 to 2013.

5. Providing modest economic aid to the Central Asian countries Asian expression of friendship; and

6. Developing multilateral economic cooperation, promoting common prosperity (Cooperation between Central Asia and China, 2004).

China and the five Central Asian countries have separately signed agreements on economic and trade cooperation, protecting investment, banking cooperation, traffic and other areas of cooperation. China and the Central Asian nations have also organised joint, bilateral committees for economic and trade and scientific and technical cooperation among governments. On several occasions, the government of China has also provided the Central Asian countries with loans on favourable terms as well as gratis economic assistance. In addition, there are also hundreds of joint ventures involving China in Central Asia. Trade between China and the Central Asian countries has been expanding by leaps and bounds. In 1992, import and export trade between China and the five Central Asian countries totalled \$459.35 million. It increased to \$872.41 million in 1997 and to over \$2.3 billion in 2002. The total volume of trade between China and the five Central Asian countries increased to over \$8.730 billion in 2005(China's Customs Statistics, 1997,2002,2005).

China is one of the principal trade partners of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Central Asia is rich in natural resources. The oil, natural gas and non-ferrous metals of Kazakhstan, the gold and uranium of Uzbekistan, and the oil and natural gas of Turkmenistan are the material foundations of their economic development. There are also quite rich gold and uranium deposits as well as abundant water power resources in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The strategic location of Central Asia is to ascertain extent determined by its rich natural resources and the fact that most of these resources can be exported to the world market. The five Central Asian states have worked out very ambitious plans to exploit and export these natural resources. China is a coastal country contiguous to Central Asia. It is possible that China will provide the nations of Central Asia with help because its economy is growing fast and it has a need for new sources of energy. China and the Central Asian States began energy cooperation some time ago.

In June and August 1997, the Chinese Oil and Natural Gas Company won International Competitive Bids (ICB) for the operation of the Aktyubinsk oilfield of Kazakhstan. In addition, China in September 2004 began the construction of a petroleum pipeline from the Western area of Kazakhstan to China, and this project was completed in December 2005. Therefore, the Central Asian states strongly desire to build a New Silk Road. The New Silk Road would extend from East China to Europe and include railways, highways, pipelines, airlines and energy cables, etc. The New Silk Road would be longer than the ancient Silk Route and have greater economic significance. Not only will this improve traffic conditions, but it will also help the Central Asian countries establish extensive economic and trade relations with other Eurasian countries.

The government of China and the governments of the five Central Asian countries have signed a series of agreements on international rail, highway and airline transportation. In September 1995, the governments of China and Kazakhstan signed an agreement on using China's Seaport at Lianyungang to transit Kazakhstan's goods (Agreement on the utilization of lianyungang port to handle and transship the transit freights of kazakhstan, 2014). By the end of 1997, China had opened nine land ports for commercial use to Central Asia. China built the Nanjing railway, which will connect with the railways of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

The revival of the New Silk Road has been often mentioned in the documents signed by the leaders of China and the Central Asian countries. Now, it has new significance and is becoming a symbol of friendly relationships. The leader of Kyrgyzstan even put forward a tentative idea of diplomacy of the Silk Road. The first step of China's great development of the Western area is to build gas pipelines and other transport installations. The New Silk Road has wonderful prospects. Security Cooperation between China and the Central Asian Countries China and Central Asia share a very long border. Thus, they have many common security interests. This means that they must improve security cooperation through bilateral or multilateral contacts and coordination to defend regional stability.

Regional Security: Some Threatening Factors

Lack of Unity

Historically speaking, Central Asia has experienced many periods of conflict and instability. After the independence of the five Central Asian countries, the problems left over by the “Cold War” and other contradictions between nations and religions brought with them very serious security problems. Besides, the newly independent republics lacked sufficient regional security. Afghanistan is a Central Asian country with many nationalities. Tajiks constitute 30 percent of the population and Uzbeks constitute 12 percent. The war in Afghanistan had lasted for over 20 years and put enormous pressure on the stability of this region. The relations between dissimilar areas in some Central Asian countries remain very complicated. For this reason to a certain degree, in Tajikistan civil war occurred in the beginning of 1990s and in Kyrgyzstan there was turmoil in the spring of 2005. Thus, the internal political situation of these countries makes it difficult for them to achieve stability.

International Crime

International criminal gangs take advantage of Central Asia to smuggle drugs and weapons. The smugglers even plant narcotics in Central Asia and sometimes stir up internal strife for the purposes of their smuggling activities;

Ultra-Religious Forces

Ultra-religious organisations have significant influence in some areas of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan; these organisations also maintain contact with some foreign political forces. In 1999 and 2000, Islamic extremists committed a series of acts of terrorism that destroyed regional stability.

Ecological Problems

The Aral Sea of Central Asia is in a serious ecological crisis. The sudden decrease in the water level of the Aral Sea has already affected the health of some 35 million people and

the regional economy. In addition, there are other ecological security problems caused by radioactive contamination, air pollution and land Stalinization.

Overpopulation and Ethnic Problems

The population of Central Asia is growing very quickly and is not evenly distributed. In many areas, the natural environment is so harsh that it can support the growing population. Besides, there are more than 100 ethnicities in Central Asia. Strong ethnic and tribal sentiments maybe a factor leading to instability. In addition, there are many other factors threatening regional security, such as the keen military competition of foreign countries in Central Asia and contradictions among the Central Asian states themselves.

The progress of Security Relationships China and the Central Asian countries are quite similar in their security strategies: practising defensive policies; subordinating the enhancement of national defence to economic development; defending world peace and opposing aggression and the arms race; supporting the peaceful settlement of disputes, arms control and disarmament. The leaders of China and the Central Asian states, in bilateral and multilateral meetings, have very vigorously displayed a conscientious attitude towards security cooperation and building trust. Upholding regional security and striking against religious extremism, international terrorism, national separatism and international crime are important topics for senior-level meetings between China and the Central Asian states. Efforts to uphold national and regional security by the Central Asian countries have enjoyed the support and help of China.

The government of China sent delegations to the meetings held in Almaty, and Tashkent, the Asian Conference on Coordination and Confidence proposed by Kazakhstan, the Forum on Central Asia's Security and Cooperation and the Conference on a Nuclear Free Zone in Central Asia proposed by Uzbekistan. "At the same time, through promoting economic development, China also aims to stabilise the Central Asian states, which are important for the security of the region, including the Chinese region of Xinjiang that borders former Soviet Central Asia. There is an intrinsic link connecting China's engagement in Central Asia to the Uyghur question (China's Central Asia Problem, 2013)."

In February 1995, the Chinese government issued an official statement, giving a security pledge to Kazakhstan. China promised not to use nuclear weapons against Kazakhstan.¹⁰The military-security cooperation between China and the Central Asian countries are continuously growing. National defence ministers of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have visited China, the chief of the General Staff of the armed forces of Kazakhstan. The national defence minister and the chief of the General Staff of China have also visited some Central Asian countries. In 1992, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan began negotiating on border disarmament. From 1992 to 1995, they held 22 rounds of negotiations. On April 26, 1996, the presidents of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan signed a confidence building agreement. The five nations pledged to take steps to increase trust along the border in areas controlled by their military forces. This agreement has promoted peace, stability and tranquillity along the borders shared by China and the other four countries. This agreement is a piece of pioneering work to strengthen regional security.

On April 24, 1997, the presidents of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan signed another agreement on reducing military forces along their common borders. This was the first document on border disarmament in the Asia-Pacific region and was of significant political and military importance. It was a good example of trust. In June 2002, Chinese President Jiang Zemin arrived in Almaty to attend the first summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA)⁶. When Jiang addressed the summit, he applauded the conference for having gradually developed into a unique and valuable forum for the deliberation of issues concerning Asian security and cooperation. Jiang noted that China, a conference member and a friendly neighbour of Kazakhstan, has been an active participant in the conference's activities. Commenting on the current security situation in Asia, Jiang said the continent still faces the arduous task of fighting terrorism, with some local conflicts intensifying and extremist forces acting unchecked. The facts have proven that China's foreign policy and diplomatic practices have contributed to Asian peace, stability and security, Jiang said(China and Central Asia, 2004).

⁶ Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia

At the second summit of the CICA, which was held in June 2006 in Almaty, President Hu Jintao called for the building of a harmonious Asia of enduring peace and common prosperity. He urged Asian countries to increase mutual trust and coordination to build a new type of security architecture. “We should respect every country’s right to safeguard national unity, pursue its development strategy and formulate domestic and foreign policies independently,” he said. He also stressed that the CICA Forum has become a platform where different civilisations carry out dialogues and different countries seek mutual understanding (Jintao, *Creating a Harmonious Asia*, 2006).

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and New Development of Relations between China and Central Asian Countries grew out of the “Shanghai Five,” which grew out of the strengthened border confidence and disarmament agreements among China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Each meeting and the documents of “the Shanghai Five” countries and “the Shanghai Cooperation Organization” were important for the regional security of Central Asia. Among them, there were four top-level meetings in Central Asia, which were especially significant to regional security.

On July 3, 1998, the presidents of China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and a special envoy of Russia’s president, attended a meeting held in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The leaders discussed promoting regional peace and stability and strengthening economic cooperation. After the meeting, a joint statement of the five countries was issued. Since then, the meetings of the five countries have changed from bilateral (with China on one side and Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan on the other) to multilateral meetings. On August 24, 1999, the presidents of the five countries held talks in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The joint statement issued after this meeting expressed the intention to strike firmly against activities disrupting regional stability.

In 2000, the meetings of the five countries were institutionalised. At the end of March, national defence ministers of the five countries met in Astana, Kazakhstan, and signed a joint communiqué. On April 21, 2000, the persons in charge of the security law enforcement agencies of the five countries, who had met in December 1999 and decided on the foundation of the “Bishkek Group,” held the second meeting in Moscow and signed two documents. On July 5, 2000, the presidents of the five countries held their

fifth meeting in Dushanbe and reached a common understanding to promote cooperation for the twenty-first century. The president of Uzbekistan attended this meeting as an observer and the president of China, Jiang Zemin, gave an important speech with the following points: Deepen security cooperation and support one another against threats to regional security. After the meeting, the leaders of the five countries signed the “Dushanbe statement (Cooperation between Central Asia and China, 2004).”

On the fifth anniversary of the Shanghai Five in June 2001, the heads of state of its members and the president of Uzbekistan met in Shanghai, the birthplace of the mechanism. First, they signed a joint declaration admitting Uzbekistan as a member of the Shanghai Five mechanism and then jointly issued the Declaration on the Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The document announced that for the purpose of upgrading the level of cooperation to more effectively seize opportunities and deal with new challenges and threats, the six states had decided to establish the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on the basis of the Shanghai Five mechanism.

In June 2002, the heads of SCO member states met in St. Petersburg and signed the SCO Charter, which clearly expounded the SCO’s purposes and principles, organisational structure, a form of operation, cooperation orientation and external relations, marking the actual establishment of this new organisation following the precepts of international law. According to the SCO Charter and the Declaration on the Establishment of the SCO, the main purposes of the SCO are:; strengthening mutual trust and good-neighborliness and friendship among member states; developing their effective cooperation in political affairs, the economy and trade, science and technology, culture, education, energy, transportation, environmental protection and other fields; working together to maintain regional peace, security and stability; and promoting the creation of a new international political and economic order featuring democracy, justice and rationality. The SCO stands for and acts on a new security concept anchored on mutual trust, disarmament and cooperative security, a new state-to-state relationship with partnership instead of alignment at its core, and a new model of regional cooperation featuring concerted efforts of countries of all sizes and mutually beneficial cooperation. In the course of

development, a Shanghai spirit gradually took shape, a spirit characterised by mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, cooperation, respect for diversified civilisations and common development (Jintao, Continuing to promote the noble cause of peace and development of mankind, 2012).

The SCO is an intergovernmental international organisation. Its member states cover an area of over 30 million square kilometres, or about three-fifths of Eurasia, with a population of 1.455 billion, about a quarter of the world's population. At present, SCO cooperation has covered wide-ranging areas such as security, the economy, transportation, culture, disaster relief and law enforcement, with security and economic cooperation being the priorities. Up to now, the SCO has already held six summits of leaders and five meetings of premiers.

Since 2004, it has accepted Mongolia, Iran, Pakistan and India as observers. Security Cooperation SCO security cooperation focuses on the fight against terrorism, separatism and extremism. The SCO was among the first international organisations to explicitly advocate the fight against these three evil forces. On June 15, 2001, the day on which the SCO was founded, the Shanghai Convention against Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism was signed, clearly defining terrorism, separatism and extremism for the first time in the international arena. It outlined specific directions, modalities and principles of the concerted fight against the three evil forces, thus helping to lay solid legal foundations for SCO security cooperation.

At the June 2002 St. Petersburg summit, the Agreement of the SCO Member States on Counter-terrorism Regional Structure was signed. China and Kyrgyzstan conducted a bilateral joint anti-terrorism military exercise within the SCO framework in October 2002, and the SCO member states held a successful multi-lateral joint anti-terrorism military manoeuvre in August 2003. The SCO has also decided to set up an anti-narcotic cooperative mechanism as soon as possible, and talks on relevant documents are actively under way. Of the 10 documents signed by the heads of state of the six SCO members on June 15, 2006, four are about security cooperation, including an anti-terrorism resolution for the 2007–2009, an agreement on joint anti-terrorism actions among member countries, and an agreement on cutting off the infiltration channels of terrorists,

separatists and extremists. The six SCO members also vowed to enhance international information security and eliminate possible dangers of using information and communication technologies for criminal or terrorist purposes a move indicating the SCO's security cooperation has gone far beyond regional disarmament and border issues to tackle conventional as well as unconventional threats and challenges facing the whole of humanity.

Economic Cooperation

Economic cooperation is a key area of cooperation for the SCO and serves as the material foundations and guarantee for the SCO's smooth development. Heads of government of the six member states held the first meeting in Almaty on September 14, 2001, to discuss regional economic cooperation and signed the Memorandum between the Governments of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on the Basic Objectives and Orientation of Regional Economic Cooperation and the Launching of a Process of Trade and Investment Facilitation. The year 2002 saw the establishment of mechanisms for economic and trade as well as successive transportation ministerial meetings as initial attempts to explore avenues of substantive cooperation in trade, investment, transportation, energy and other areas.

The SCO heads of government met in Beijing for a second time on September 23, 2003, and adopted a plan for multilateral economic and trade cooperation of the SCO member states, in which priority areas, main tasks and implementation mechanism of economic-trade cooperation among the six SCO member states were identified. This laid important foundations for economic cooperation among the six member states for a fairly long time to come. China and other SCO members are working on 127 joint projects covering the areas of trade, investment, customs, finance, taxation, transportation, energy, agriculture, technology, telecommunications, environment, health and education.

The SCO has also set up seven specialist panels to study and coordinate action in such fields as customs, transportation, energy and telecommunications. On the sidelines of the summit in 2006, some \$2 billion worth of business contracts and loan agreements were inked, with the deals involving a highway project connecting Tajikistan and Uzbekistan,

two high-voltage electricity lines in Tajikistan, a cement plant in Kyrgyzstan, and a hydropower station in Kazakhstan. The goal of the SCO in economic cooperation is to realise the free flow of goods, service, capital and technology by 2020 among its members (Jintao, Continuing to promote the noble cause of peace and development of mankind, 2012). The purposes, potential and smooth development of the SCO has attracted worldwide attention. An increasing number of countries and international organisations have proposed establishing contacts and cooperation with the SCO. The organisation follows a principle of openness and is ready to conduct dialogue, exchanges and cooperation in all forms with other nations and international organisations.

The SCO Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in November 2002 adopted the Interim Scheme of Relations between the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Other International Organisations and States, formally initiating SCO external relations. The scheme provides that other countries and international organisations may be invited to attend as guests to meetings of the SCO Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and diplomatic consultations, and the SCO, similarly, may send representatives to attend activities of other international organisations. To date, SCO representatives have attended several meetings such as the Special Session of the Counter-terrorism Committee of the UN Security Council in March 2003, the Meeting of the OSCE Partners for Cooperation in Vienna in April, the Fifth High-level Meeting between the United Nations and Regional Organizations in New York in July, and the OSCE Conference on Preventing and Combating Terrorism in Lisbon in September 2003 (Peterson, 2013).

The summit on June 15, 2006, in Shanghai reviewed the developments of the organisation since it was established five years ago, analysed international and regional situations, and studied the organisation's future development and outline cooperation plans. "Although there are big differences among the SCO member states in ideology, culture and level of economic development, the reason that the SCO has made such rapid progress and outstanding achievements lie in our insistence on the Shanghai Spirit," China's president Hu said.

The Chinese government has played its due role in establishing and developing the SCO by working closely with member states to boost mutual trust and trade cooperation, Hu

Jintao said. "China will make joint efforts with the other countries to lift bilateral relations to a new height and promote the SCO to make new progress." He also noted that China has basically placed \$900 million worth of loans for other members of the SCO. The loans were made in the form of preferential buyers' credit for SCO member states who buy Chinese exports (Mohan, 2017). Top legislators of the six member states of the SCO met on May 30, 2006, for the first time in Moscow. In his speech at the meeting, Wu Bangguo, chairman of the Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress (NPC), hailed the achievements of the group since its founding and made a three-point proposal aimed at improving cooperation among the parliaments of the SCO member states.

First, he said, the parliaments should cooperate to ensure the ratification of agreements at an early date and supervise their implementation to provide legal guarantees for exchanges and cooperation within the regional bloc. Secondly, Wu said, the bloc's parliaments should promote cooperation on issues of common concern, such as regional security and economic cooperation. Thirdly, Wu said, the parliaments should diversify their cooperation in a flexible manner (China's top Law Maker Calls for Closer SCO Parliamentary Cooperation, 2006). The legislators pledged greater parliamentary efforts to provide legal guarantees for cooperation in the organisation, to boost exchanges of legislative experience and information, and to ratify relevant agreements.

From the political and security policies of China toward Central Asia arise new contents along with the development of bilateral relationships and a positive change in the international situation. For the last ten years or more, China has made concerted efforts with Central Asian countries to bring their relations to a new high. After entering the new century, China has been reiterating to the leaders the importance of the Central Asian countries shaping a new type of cooperative relationship from a strategic-level aspect in meetings. In June and December of 2002, China signed with Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan respectively the Friendship Treaty of Good Neighbourly Relations. The treaties settled the desire of China and the countries and peoples of Central Asia to sincerely renew and develop their century's old friendship in the form of law that became the guiding

principles behind the development of friendly Sino-Kyrgyzstan and China-Kazakhstan relations in the new century.

China and Central Asian countries consider terrorism, separatism and extremism as severe threats to global security and stability, and will expand bilateral and multilateral cooperation to campaign against these threats. The two sides will, within the bilateral agreed framework, continue to effectively strike against terrorism in all forms and terrorist groups and terrorists recognised by the United Nations, including the East Turkistan force that poses a direct threat to regional security and stability. In terms of politics, Chinese leaders brought forward a policy of keeping good-neighboring relations, maintaining safe bordering relations and bringing prosperity to neighbours(Sun, 2001). This policy was to further develop a strategically bilateral relationship in a long term and friendly way by signing a series of important legal papers; to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries of Central Asia; to enhance mutual understanding and to propel extensive cooperation through regular meetings and friendly contacts in different levels and fields; to support Central Asian countries in choosing the roads suitable for their own conditions in development; and to deal with international and regional affairs through mutual support.

In terms of security, China would like to see Central Asia keeping there on stable, which is thought to be in accordance with China's strategic interests. Economic factors will continue to be more important in Chinese policy towards Central Asian countries. Four of the six members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization are Central Asian countries, and this will have a very great bearing on how cooperation will be organised(Jafferlot, 2017). China will work closely with all Central Asian nations to safeguard regional stability as well as to expand economic and cultural exchanges. Ongoing cooperation between China and the Central Asian countries within the framework of the SCO can help serve regional economic integration and can help solve common security and development problems.

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Chapter-2

History of Silk Route

The ancient Silk Route linked China in the East with Europe in the West, crossing through the heart of the Asian landmass. Its interlocking paths covered a distance of over 8000 kilometres. Many different people lived along the Silk Route. These included not only the Chinese and the Europeans but the many peoples of Central Asia and West Asia: Huns, Mongols, Iranians, Arabs and Turks to name but a few. During the 1600 years of its existence, the Silk Route acted as a channel of communication between these diverse cultures.

“There is snow both in winter and summer, winds, rain, drifting sand and gravel stones. The road is difficult and broken, with steep crags and precipices in the way. The mountainside is simply a stone wall standing up 10,000 feet (3000 meters) on going forward, there is no sure foothold.” (Fahian) This passage is taken from the writings of the 5th Century Chinese pilgrim, Fahian⁷. Fahian describes some of the terrifying conditions he met as he travelled along stretches of the Silk Route on his pilgrimage to India from China.

But why did this extraordinary route come about? The simplest answer is to trade; the buying and selling of goods. Since earliest times, people have traded goods with their neighbours. Certain prized goods were passed on from one tribe to the next, causing distinct trading routes to emerge. Gradually, these routes joined together to extend over huge distances. Each separate tribe or community was like a link in a chain and the trade brought wealth and prestige to each link. It was around the start of the first century before the Common Era (100 BC) that the many different links in a long trading chain came together to form what we now call the Silk Route.

For the first time, European gold could buy the luxuries of China, including the silk that gives the route its name. But it was a difficult exchange: as Fahian describes, the route

⁷Fahian, was a Chinese Buddhist monk who travelled by foot from China to India, as well as Silk Route, visiting many sacred Buddhist sites in what are now Xinjiang, Pakistan, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka between 399-412 to acquire Buddhist text.

crossed some dangerous terrain and the traders also faced the possibility of attack from marauding tribesmen and bandits. The Silk Route was safest and most successful when its paths were protected by powerful empires. Thus the history of these empires, their rise and fall, directly affected the fortunes of the Silk Route, from its early origins until its final decline around 1500 BC, when the sea routes took over as the main trade links between East and West.

In its turn, the Silk Route had a deep effect on history. Before its coming, the Chinese and the Europeans had no idea of each other's existence. Along the Silk Route not only goods travelled but knowledge of different lands and people, of their cultures and beliefs also. It is this knowledge that has been the Silk Route's greatest influence on history and its most lasting legacy for us today (Foltz, 1999).

There is an endless popular fascination with the “Silk Roads,” the historic routes of economic and cultural exchange across Eurasia. The phrase in our own time has been used as a metaphor for Central Asian oil pipelines, and it is common advertising copy for the romantic exoticism of expensive adventure travel. Most today would agree that Richthofen's⁸ original concept was too limited in that he was concerned first of all about the movement of silk overland from East to West between the “great civilisations” of Han China and Rome. The history of the Silk Road is a narrative about movement, resettlement, and interactions across ill-defined borders but not necessarily over long distances.

Great Silk Route: Formation and Development

The Western end of the Silk Route appears to have developed earlier than the Eastern end. The Persian Empire controlled a large swathe of the West Asia, extending as far as the Indian kingdoms to the east. Trade between the different parts of the empire was already starting to influence the cultures of these regions when Alexander the Great conquered this area as far as Ferghana on the border of the modern day Xinjiang region of China. Here, in 329 BC, he founded the city of Alexandria. For the next three

⁸Richthofen was a German traveler, geographer and scientist .He is noted for coining the term Silk Road or Silk Route

centuries, the Greeks remained in central Asia, always expanding eastward. In fact, the Greek historian Strabo, writing in the 1st century BC or stated that 'they extended their empire even as far as the Seres (China). Some historians think that Euthydemus (230-200 BC) of Bactria, which had been Persia's eastern most provinces, may have led expeditions as far as Kashgar in Chinese Turkestan, resulting in the first official contacts between China and the West.

The process of the Silk Road formation towards the West started with a marital alliance. A princess of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E. - CE 220) sent to marry the Shanyu⁹ who tended their animals in the area of modern Mongolia and Southern Siberia. This group, which needed trade with China, became increasingly bellicose when denied such commerce. The ecological crisis also could have prompted them to raid Chinese settlements to obtain the goods they required. The Han, economically self-sufficient, tried to limit commercial and diplomatic relations with these peoples, whom they perceived as barbarians. Yet awareness of the threat posed by the Hsiung-nu cavalry and armies compelled the Chinese dynasty to seek peace. One of their tactics was marital alliances, and thus the dispatch of the Princess.

Despite the marital alliances, the Han Hsiung nu remained fraught with conflict and Chinese denied badly needed a trade to the pastoral nomads. Simultaneously, economic difficulties, on occasion, compelled the Hsiung-nu to raid Chinese border settlements. Deciding to seek assistance against its bellicose neighbours, around 139 B.C.E. the Han Emperor of China, Wuti sent Chang Chien to Central Asia to forge such an alliance (Foltz, 1999).

Chang travelled through the oases and towns that would eventually constitute the Silk Roads and reached Central Asia but was rebuffed in his efforts to secure allies. Chang mission was failed but learned quite a bit from his travels in which he spent around thirteen years. During this time he was captured and imprisoned by the Hsiung-nu. Chang escaped from the prison and was imprisoned by them again on his way but finally, he managed to return and offer his report to the Emperor. A historian has suggested that

9. Ruler of a pastoral nomadic people known in the Chinese sources as the Hsiungnu, the predecessors to the Huns.

Chang's mission was less an official embassy than “an intelligence mission staffed with expendable personnel” (Laslo, 1997).

Chang suggested to Wuti tempting opportunities for trade with the Western land. Within a few years, Chinese merchants were regularly braving the difficult journey West through the Gansu corridor, around the Taklimakan desert, and into Central Asia. Trade seems to have thrived in next years. Wuti was particularly keen on obtaining horses from Taiyuan, probably the Ferghana Valley, which Chang had visited. The Chinese referred to these mounts as “heavenly horses” (Foltz, 1999).

The people of Taiyuan were reluctant for these horses, however, in 104 BCE, the Han Emperor sent his general Li Kuangli as the head of a large army with instructions to acquire these horses by force. Supply was not sufficient so much army starved on the route. But Wuti reinforced massively and finally succeeded in gaining the inhabitants of Taiyuan to capitulate. Chinese managed to bring home only thirty heavenly horses, but the trade route had been definitively opened and its eastern part put under the control of Han Empire (Welford, 1993).

Silk Route under the Han Empire (206BC- 200AD)

The development of Central Asian trade routes caused some problems for Han rulers in China. Bandits took advantage of the terrain to plunder trade caravans along the Gansu Corridor. As a result, trade began to suffer great losses at the expense of merchants at either end of the route. Han rulers answered this threat by constructing forts and defensive walls along part of the route. These sections were later combined to form the 'Great Wall' which still stands today as a testament to human achievement. It became apparent to later Han rulers that in order to control the route, especially the Taklimakan region, a permanent local government was established.

Once a local government in the Taklimakan region was secure, the growth of settlement along the routes really began to take off. Under the protection of the Han Empire, the settlements were able to reap the benefits of secure and reliable trade. They also absorbed a lot of the local culture and the cultures that passed through the route.

During the Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), many settlements were set up along the Silk Route, mostly in oasis areas. The settlers profited from the passing trade and also absorbed much of the local culture as well as the alien cultures they encountered through commerce. Local people undoubtedly acted as guides for the caravans over the most dangerous sections of the route. The Han Empire set up the local government at Wutei, not far from Kuqa on the Northern border of the Taklimakan, in order to protect the states in this area, which numbered about 50 at that time. At the same time, the city of Gaochang was constructed in the Turfan basin.

Many settlements were set up along the way, mostly in the oasis areas, and profited from the passing trade. They also absorbed a lot of the local culture and the cultures that passed them by along the route. In 115 BC, Wudi sent the first Chinese embassy to Anxi (Persia), to the court of the Parthian King Mithridates (Tucker, 2003). Its aims were commercial and the Parthian sovereign having responded courteously. By the historians, this mission started the trade relations between China and Persia and the latter purchasing of Chinese silk. A few years later the Parthians were able to dazzle the Romans with their banners of embroidered silk which imparted from China.

In 42 B.C., Han armies conducted campaigns across the Pamirs, West Sogdiana and Ferghana in Central Asia, opening up the Silk Road even further (Tucker, 2003). During the 42 BC campaign, they laid siege to a walled settlement in Sogdiana, probably by the Talas River, this event described in the history of Han Empire. The defenders were Xiongnu but the settlement was protected by wooden railings, a structure favoured by the Romans which were unknown in the East till this event. The sinologist Homer Dubs explained that Xiongnu defenders were assisted by Roman soldiers and captives taken at the Battle of Carriage and sent East as slaves. The Chinese were victorious and captured 145 of the Roman soldiers, these captives taken back to China as this was the first contact of China with the Romans (Tucker, 2003).

The progress of commerce with the West was started mutually by the arrival of some foreigners at Xian and this was also the cause of foreign influence on the art. As China expanded its borders into Central Asia merchants and envoys started to arrive in China to swear allegiance to the Han court and to bring exotic goods as tribute. Chinese merchants

joined many of the expeditions towards West and developed a process of trade and cultural interchange. The Han dynasty acquired technical innovations from neighbouring countries through the Silk Road. These innovations were critical in the development of Chinese civilisation and absorbed via early trade and military contacts on the Silk Road. These innovations were harnesses, saddles and stirrups (from the Steppe nomads), construction methods for bridges and mountain roads, knowledge of medicinal plants and poisons and the cultivation of cotton and seafaring from India (Garnet, 1982).

Merchants frequently pretence emissaries to the Han court in order to ensure a favourable reception for their goods. During the reign of Chengdu (33-7 BC) all the delegations that had come to pay tribute to the Han all belong from merchants group of various places. From 73 AD onwards General Ban Chao (31-103AD) of Han emperor began the process of restoring Han rule in Central Asia. The various states of the Tarim Basin had submitted to Han rule till 91 AD. This happened through a process achieved by Ban Chao at minimal expense and using of local troops. This enabled China to reoccupy its control of the Silk Road. Within same period he appointed “Protector General of the Western Region” (Tucker, 2003) and led an expedition across Central Asia as far as the Caspian Sea. Ban Chao dispatched an emissary called Gan Xing to Da Qin (Rome) in 97 AD. Gan Xing was deterred from continuing his journey and he preserved the lucrative role of the Parthians as middlemen in the Silk trade between China and Rome.

The Romans refer repeatedly to China as the “land of Seers”, (Tucker, 2003) a country where silk was produced by combing it from trees, and the Chinese believed that the Romans were physically similar to the Chinese and they called the country 'Great Qin' after China. The first century A.D. of Han rule was a period of growing trade between China and the West. Hou Han Shou (the Han historian) mentioned that the peasant colonies were founded in the fertile lands, inns and posts for changing horses were established along the main routes, messengers and couriers travelled in every season of the year and the merchant strangers knocked daily on our gates.

Trade and commerce of Han dynasty with its neighbours influenced the art. Predominating ideas from Steppe art, such as confronting animals or openwork narratives and landscapes are to be found on Chinese bronze belt plaques and harness fittings. These

were absorbed via their trade with the Xiongnu. A silver box and a jade ruyi (drinking horn) found in it reflect contacts with Western and Central Asia. When the region was absorbed into the Chinese empire in 111 BC, the new Han rulers of the South introduced Chinese culture and craftsmanship but indigenous styles were not entirely displaced.

A lot of examples of Han dynasty art reveal contacts with the influences from the Southeast Asia and Central Asia. The necked Cherub appears on a liquor plate unearthed at the tomb of General Zhu Ran (249 AD) in Ma'anshan, Anhui province. This plate dates to the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 AD). This motif occurs many times in Roman mosaic and on silver vessels and this is a fact that it has travelled so far with unchanged form. Such motifs reached China through the intermediary of nomadic art.

Silk Route during the Tang Dynasty (618 AD- 207 AD)

The height of the importance of the Silk Road was during the Tang dynasty, with relative internal stability in China after the division of the earlier dynasties since the Han. The individual states have mostly been assimilated and the threats from marauding peoples were rather less. In the seventh century, the Chinese traveller Xuan Zhiang crossed the region on his way to obtain Buddhist scriptures from India. He followed the northern branch of the Silk Road around the Taklimakan on his outward journey, and he returned to the Tang capital at Xian via the Southern route. He is still seen by the Chinese as an important influence in the development of Buddhism in China and his travels were dramatised by the popular classic "Tales of a journey to the West" (Marilyn, 2003). When the Silk Road was first established, silk was not the chief commodity. Han dynasty made very little profit from it until the Romans were fanatic about silk that the large profits came in. The Romans love silk so much that they even exchanged silk for its weight in gold. During the Tang dynasty, thirty percent of the trade on the Silk Road was comprised of silk.

The civilisation and art of the Silk Road achieved its climax during the Tang Dynasty. Xian, as the starting point of the route, as well as the capital of the dynasty developed into one of the largest and most cosmopolitan cities of the time. By 742 AD, the population had reached about two million and the city itself covered almost the same area

as present day Xian, considerably more than within the present walls of the city (Wild, 2013). The 754 AD census showed that five thousand foreigners lived in the Xian, Turks, Iranians, Indians and others from along the Road, as well a Japanese, Koreans and Malays from the east. In these foreigners, many were missionaries, merchants and pilgrims but every other occupation was also represented. Rare plants, medicines, spices and other goods from the west were to be found in the markets of the city. It is quite clear, however, despite the exotic imports, that the Chinese regarded all foreigners as barbarians; the gifts provided for the Emperors by foreign rulers were simply considered as tribute from vessel states (Wild, 2013).

Tang Emperors of China welcomed foreigners and foreign trade. A Persian merchant and a Central Asian dancer represented the travellers of this time. The Persian merchant, a Muslim can be used to indicate the spread of such religions as Islam, Zoroastrianism and Nestorians throughout Asia along the Silk Road (Morris, 1999). Account based on the travels of such traders yield descriptions of the lively markets in the Central Asian towns and in the great Chinese capital of Xian, of the products exchanged, and of the condition of commerce.

The Central Asian dancer, who can be visualised through the Tang tri-colored ceramic figurines of foreign entertainers (examples of which may be found in almost any museum with a significant collection of Chinese art), to reveal cultural diffusion in the case of music and dance and to show activities of the court. The Nestorians, persecuted by the Council of Ephesus in 432 A.D. fled eastward to Central Asia and from there to Xian via the Silk Road where their first Church was established in 638 A.D. during the Tang Dynasty. Nestorian books have been found in ancient oases like Turfan and Dun Huang (Shafi, 1988).

The advent of Islam in Western China via the Silk Road makes a fascinating study. According to Tang Dynasty records two embassies, one from Yezdgerd, the grandson of Khosro and the other from the Roman Empire came to the court of Tai Tsung, the second Tang Emperor (627-650 A.D.) in 638 and 643 respectively and both reported their defeat by the Arabs. Yazdegerd, the last of Sassanian kings of Iran had sought refuge with the Turkish tribes of Ferghana and had also sought friendship with Emperor Tai Tsung. The

Chinese were at the height of their power and had frontiers with the Persian Empire (Shafi, 1988). In 650 A.D., Tai Tsung died and his son Emperor Kao Tsung received an appeal for help from Firuz, the son of Yazdegerd. Kao Tsung sent an emissary to Caliph Osman to plead for Firuz and the Caliph in return sent one of his generals to Xian in 651 A.D. and thus the first Muslim Embassy was established in Western China (Shafi, 1988).

Contacts with China and the states of the Korean peninsula gained greater intensity at the beginning of the sixth century when Japan experienced a wave of immigration. The Japanese sent students, officials and Buddhist monks to China for training. The Japanese, Yellow and Eastern Seas became a continuation of the Great Silk Road. From the sixth century on, Japan's path to the West began in Osaka the sea route to Japan. The two largest collections of silk fabrics in the world brought to Japan from China in the Tang epoch testified the importance of the Silk Road in Japanese Civilization. These are found in the monastery of Horyuji and in the imperial treasure-trove of Shosian (City of Nara) (Shafi, 1988).

The art and civilisation of the Silk Route, in common with that of the rest of China, achieved its greatest glory during the Tang Dynasty which is generally regarded as China's 'Golden Age'. At the same time, with the spreading of various religions in the world range, more and more missionaries reached to the east in succession by this road. With the Silk Road acting as an information superhighway, the exchange of ideas grew to a larger scale than ever before. And as a result, the Tang dynasty, fortunately, experienced the best flourishing period of the Silk Road. During the long period of peace and stability which characterise this era, prosperity reigned throughout the empire. Its capital Chang-an, the 'Rome of Asia' and point of departure for travellers using the Silk Road, was one of the most splendid and cosmopolitan city on the earth.

Kushans and the Silk Route

Under the rule of the Kushans, north-west India and adjoining regions participated both in seagoing trade and in commerce along the Silk Route to China. The period of the 1st century A.D. introduced a new era in the Indian history when Kushans, belonging to the Yuchi tribe of China, migrated into India from Central Asia. The Yuchi appear to have

begun their migration in about 165 B.C. and arrived in Bactria in about 140 B.C.; thus migrating over a distance of more than 4,000 km within a single generation. They extended their rule across Bactria and the Kabul region and during the first century A.D. into the Gandhara Kingdom with Punjab. Much of this was accomplished during the reign of Kujula-Kadphises (30- 80 A.D) thereby ending Parthian rule in the area. Kushanas conquered large parts of Central Asia. Kushan kings issued coins that initiated the style of the Scythians and Parthians who preceded them. Fascinatingly, some of these coins include depictions of the Roman Emperor, Augustus, with modifications made to the design for them.

In second century A.D. the Kushan King Kanishka I ruled an empire that extended from the Gangetic Plain of northern India to Sogdiana. He administered from two capitals: Purushapura (now Peshawar) near the Khyber Pass and Mathura in northern India. Under Kanishka's rule, at the height of the dynasty, Kushan controlled a large territory ranging from the Aral Sea through areas that include present-day Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan into northern India as far east as Benares and as far south as Sanchi. Kanishka was the greatest of all the Kushan rulers. His rule brought prosperity and security and led to an increase in trade throughout the region. Bactria was the original nucleus and centre of the Kushan Kingdom.

The Great Silk Route, the first transcontinental trade and diplomatic road in the history of mankind were laid across the lands of the Kushans and the Parthians from China to the Mediterranean Roman Empire. The principal trade route from India passed through Taxila, through the Khyber Pass to Bamiyan and across the Hindu Kush to Balkh. From Balkh, the highway led East along the Wakhan corridor and through the Pamirs to China or North to Termez and onward to Central Asia. Bamiyan was the approximate halfway point of an arduous journey across the country. At the Eastern end of this part of the Silk Road is the Khyber Pass, rising through the foci of the Sulamanfromits starting point, about 16 km west of Peshawar. The 45 km long pass has provided access to India since the beginning of recorded history (Tucker, 2003).

It was in the empire of the great Kushan King Kanishka that the agents of Maes Titian were set out from the Stone Tower for the eastern deserts and the land of the Seres. Their way

that they took the way of the oases of the Tarim, and this was under the hands of Kushanas. The east part of this great Route was under the China. It was undoubtedly the ascendancy of these two powers over the many small states in their area enabled the caravans of this period to go about their business in peace and with a reasonable degree of security. There were garrisons everywhere. It was a highly favourable period for trade. Three Western oases fell within the sphere of influence of the Indo Scythian Kingdom of the Kushans (Liu X. , 2010).

History records that Kushans and Chinese had one serious disagreement: a rejected proposal of marriage. In A.D. 90 the king of Kushans sent an ambassador to the court of China to ask on behalf of his sovereign for the hand in marriage of a Chinese princess. This ambassador was stopped by the commander of the Western Territories, who had no intention of allowing the visitors to carry out such an audacious project. The Chinese could sell their silk either to the Persians or the Kushans; and the offer of marriage may well have been made in the hope of securing the monopoly of silk purchase and resale, which would have been a serious blow for the Persians. By refusing the Kushans offer, China expressed her wish for an alliance with Persia. After all, Persia won in this struggle and got this profitable alliance with Chinese.

The Gandhara region at the core of the Kushan Empire was home to a multiethnic society tolerant of religious differences. Desirable for its strategic location, with direct access to the overland silk routes and links to the ports on the Arabian Sea, Gandhara had suffered many conquests and had been ruled by the Mauryans, Alexander the Great (327-26, 325-24 B.C.), his Indo-Greek successors (third-second centuries B.C.), and a combination of Scythians and Parthians (second -first centuries B.C.). The melding of peoples produced an eclectic culture, vividly expressed in the visual arts produced during the Kushan period. The Kushan King sent an embassy to Rome because China and Persia were made their trade agreement.

The kingdom of Kushans was hoping to form an association with Rome, due to the differences between China and Kushans. Therefore Rome and Kushans came on a common platform and engaged in direct trade. It was in the Kushans period that the peoples of the East began to appreciate as never before the benefits of cultural relations

and contacts, and so they proceeded to evolve common cultural values and build up a community of culture for everyone inhabiting the great empire. A most important feature of these cultural and economic contacts which made through the Great Silk Route was that in the process of cooperation each culture retained its local tradition, original character and national identity.

Trade along the Silk Route

The Silk Route did not exist for the sole purpose of trading silk. Although silk was most remarkable for Westerners, it was only one of many items that were traded throughout the history of the Silk Road. Gold, precious metals, ivory, precious stones, and glass went towards China, while furs, ceramics, gun, powder, jade, bronze objects, lacquer, and iron went West. All of these items went overland by way of the caravan which consisted of anywhere to 100 to 1000 camels. Such caravans were extremely valuable and vulnerable to bandits; as such, they needed escorts and a secure place to camp each night.

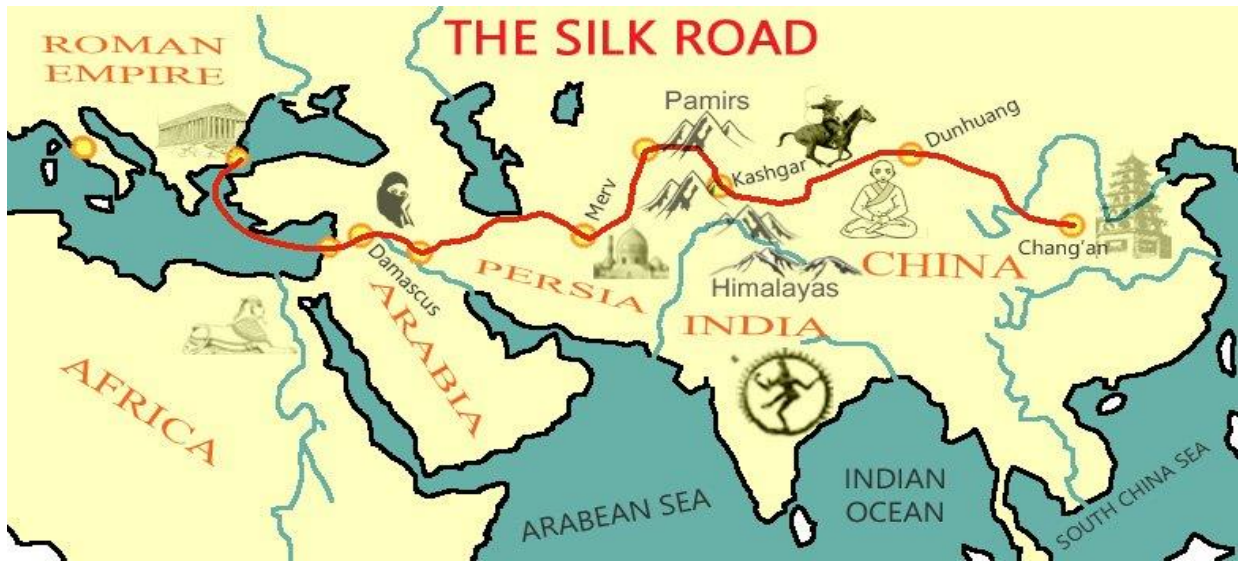
To the countries of the West, China was synonymous with Silk hence the name Seres. However, the process of producing this precious commodity was kept a well-guarded secret. It was known only to the master weavers at centres like Hangchow in East Central China (Liu X. , 2010). There are many stories as to how a Han princess, married to a prince of Khotan, smuggled silk worm eggs in her elaborate wedding head-dress and thus made Khotan a centre for Silk weaving which famous for its Atlas (Shafi, 1988).

Earlier the Parthians had come to know of silk and when the material found its way to Rome it became the rage of the time not only with the ladies who found it soft and enticing but also with men who loved to wear silk togas. The fashion caught on to the extent that it adversely affected the Roman economy so much so that in early time. However, apart from silk, China also exported ivory and precious stones, textiles and furs, ceramics and lacquer, cinnamon bark and a variety of spices. These goods were bartered or sold in the various oases on the way, in Central Asian cities like Samarkand and Bukhara, in Parthian and then in the Mediterranean lands. Goods were eventually shipped to Rome and Alexandria.

The Parthian, Kushans as well as the Central Asian traders played the role of middlemen and reaped profits on the two-way traffic. The returning caravans brought mainly gold from Greek and Roman Empires, jewels and pearls from India, horse and rubies from Badakhshan. According to the Historical annals of China, a caravan moved out of China every lunar month. Each camel carried about 140 kilogrammes of weight and walked 30 kilometres per day. Pack-animals were changed at regular staging posts along the 9000 miles long route but many of these perished each year either in the deserts or on the high passes en-route.

There were many instances of mass migration of entire communities along the route. The migration of Yuezhi, founders of the Kushan Empire is famous. The origin of Roma is uncertain but there are linguistic similarities between the Romani language and some dialects of India. It appears that Roma originated in North Western India and departed from their home land in about the 9th century.

Among the most exciting archaeological discoveries of the 20th century were the frozen tombs of the nomadic pastoralists who occupied the Altai mountain region around Pazyryk in southern Siberia in the middle of the 1st millennium BCE. These horsemen have been identified with the Scythians who dominated the steppes from Eastern Europe to Mongolia. The Pazyryk tombs clearly document connections with China: the deceased was buried with Chinese silk and bronze mirrors. The graves contain felts and woven wool textiles, but curiously little evidence that would point to local textile production. The earliest known pile carpet, found in a Pazyryk tomb, has Achaemenid (ancient Persian) motifs; the dyes and technology of dyeing wool fabrics seem to be of Middle Eastern origin. Other aspects of the burial goods suggest a connection with a yet somewhat vague northeast Asian cultural complex, extending along the forest-steppe boundaries all the way to Manchuria and North Korea.



Source:<http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2017/05/05/520631/China-may-invest-500bn-in-BeltRoad-initiative>

Discoveries from 1st Millennium BCE sites in Xinjiang reinforce the evidence about active long distance contacts well before Chinese political power extended that far west. While it is difficult to locate the Pazyryk pastoralists within any larger policy that might have controlled the center of Eurasia, the Xiongnu, the Huns, who emerged around the beginning of the 2nd century BCE, established what most consider to be the first of the great Inner Asian empires and in the process stimulated what, in the conventional telling, was the beginnings of the Silk Roads. Evidence about the Xiongnu supports a growing consensus that Inner Asian peoples formerly thought of as purely nomadic in fact were mixed societies, incorporating sedentary elements such as permanent settlement sites and agriculture into their way of life. Related to this fact was a substantial and regular interaction along the permeable boundaries between the northern steppe world and agricultural China. Substantial quantities of Chinese goods now made their way into Inner Asia and beyond to the Mediterranean world.

This flow of goods included tribute the Han Dynasty paid to the nomad rulers, and trade, in return for which the Chinese received horses and camels. Chinese missions to the “Western Regions” also resulted in the opening of direct trade with Central Asia and parts of the Middle East, although we have no evidence that Han merchants ever reached

the Mediterranean or that Roman merchants reached China. The cities of the Parthian Empire, which controlled routes leading to the Mediterranean, and the emergence of prosperous caravan emporia such as Palmyra in the eastern Syrian Desert attest to the importance of interconnected overland and maritime trade, whose products included not only silk but also spices, iron, olive oil, and much more.

The Han Dynasty expanded Chinese dominion for the first time well into Central Asia, in the process extending the Great Wall and establishing the garrisons to man it. While one result of this was a shift in the balance of power between the Xiongnu and the Chinese in favour of the latter, Xiongnu tombs of the late 1st century BCE through the 1st century CE in north-central Mongolia contain abundant Chinese lacquer ware, lacquered Chinese chariots, high-quality bronze mirrors, and stunning silk brocades. There is a good reason to assume that much of the silk passing through Xiongnu hands was traded farther to the west. Although Richthofen felt that the Silk Road trade ceased to be important with the decline of the Han Dynasty in the 2nd century CE, there is ample evidence of very important interactions across Eurasia in the subsequent period when both in China and the West the great sedentary empires fragmented (Liu M. , 1982).

Silk Route as the Roof of the World

The eastern starting point of the Silk Route was Changan (modern day Xian), the ancient capital of the Chinese Empire. From here the traders and their caravans of camels set out west along the Gansu Corridor, a strip of fertile land which stretched over 800 kilometres to Dunhuang. This city was at the western end of the Great Wall of China, which the Chinese had built to protect themselves from the war-like tribes to the north. For the ancient Chinese, Dunhuang was considered the edge of the civilised world.

The next stage of the Silk Road crossed one of the most inhospitable stretches of terrain on the surface of the globe: the Tarim Basin. This vast natural basin today forms part of the north-eastern Chinese province known as Xinjiang. It is over 1500 kilometres long and 750 kilometres wide and is surrounded on three sides by mountain ranges rising to over 6000 meters. Its eastern end opens into the Gobi Desert. In the midst of the Tarim Basin lies the Taklimakan, a desert of high, shifting sand dunes that over the centuries

have buried entire cities. Mongolian, Turkic, Iranian and Chinese people inhabit this desolate region. They live in small, isolated cities on the edge of the Taklimakan at the foot of the surrounding mountains. The patches of fertile ground around these cities are watered by the spring torrents from the melting glaciers of the peaks beyond (Tucker, 2003).

Travellers on the Silk Road could choose to skirt North or South around the Taklimakan Desert, covering the long hazardous journey in a series of stages from oasis to oasis. This part of the journey was very hard. Temperatures could range from -20°C to over 40°C and swirling sandstorms were a constant hazard. From the southern path, it was possible to cross over the Karakoram Mountains into India, but the main north and south trails met up again at Kashgar, which marked the halfway point of the Silk Route. Still a thriving community today, this city lies at the foot of the Pamir Mountains. These have peaks which rise to over 7500 meters. Their height and central position on the globe have led them to be called 'The Roof of the World'. The Silk Route caravans now had to cross one of the high passes over the Pamir to continue their journey to the West. Here the trail often consisted of little more than narrow rock ledges, 4500 meters up along the sides of sheer cliffs. The caravanners, with their precious cargoes of silk, were forced to battle their way through snowstorms and faced the danger of avalanches and falling rocks often with only the thought of the vast profit at the end of their journey to keep them going.

Route to Europe

After crossing the snowy passes of the Pamir Mountains, the trails of the Silk Route descended through a series of narrow valleys to the plains of Western Turkestan. Today this area lies in northern Afghanistan and in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, south of the Aral Sea. Here the Silk Route passed into a pleasant land of green fields, gardens and orchards watered by two great rivers: the Oxus (now known as the Amu Darya) and the Syr Darya. The Silk Route continued to follow several trails at this point.

Many of the caravans would trade in goods from India and so continued down the southern trail to Bactra (later called Balkh). For centuries the Indian Great Road, the trading route up from the Punjab plain, ended here. This meeting of two great trading

routes made Bactra into an important trading centre. In its bazaars and markets, goods from as far afield as China, Malaysia, the Middle East and Europe were exchanged. For a time, the trade enabled Bactra to become one of the world's great cities, an equal of Rome, Baghdad and Chang'an. But as the sea routes to India gained in importance, so overland trade dwindled and with it the wealth that made Bactra great.

The main northern trail of the Silk Route passed through Samarkand (now in Uzbekistan, part of the former Soviet Union), and then continued up onto the Iranian plateau to Rayy (which is just outside modern day Tehran, the capital of Iran). From here the Silk Route divided again. One route turned north to Trebizond on the Black Sea; the other descended into the fertile land of Mesopotamia, watered by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. During the centuries the Silk Route passed through this region, many great empires rose and fell: amongst these were the Parthian and Sasanian empires of Iran and the Muslim caliphates. Each of these empires came to rely on the wealth created by the Silk Route trade (Shafi, 1988). After Mesopotamia the Silk Route continued north-west, skirting the Syrian Desert, before splitting once more into several trails. Some routes headed north across Anatolia (in modern Turkey) to Constantinople (now Istanbul), from 330 BC the capital of the eastern Roman Empire. Other trails fanned out to ports such as Tyre and Antioch, on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. In these ports, silk and other valuable oriental merchandise were sold for gold and transported by ship to Rome, or, in later times, to whatever great European cities had wealth to squander on the luxuries of the East.

Silk Route and Religion

During the 2nd century CE, Buddhism began to spread vigorously into Central Asia and China with the active support of local rulers. The earliest clearly documented Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures date from this period, although the process of expanding the Buddhist canon in China and adapting it to Chinese religious traditions extended over subsequent centuries. Understandably, many of the key figures in the transmission of the faith were those from Central Asia who commanded a range of linguistic skills acquired in the multiethnic oasis towns such as Kucha. Buddhism also made its way east via the coastal routes (Liu M. , 1982). By the time of the Northern Wei Dynasty in the 5th and early 6th centuries, there were major Buddhist cave temple sites in

the Chinese north and extending across to the fringes of the Central Asian deserts. Perhaps the best known and best preserved of these is the Mogao Caves at the commercial and garrison town of Dunhuang, where there is a continuous record of Buddhist art from the early 5th century down to the time of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty in the 14th century.

One of the most famous travellers on the Silk Roads was the Chinese monk Xuanzang, whose route to the sources of Buddhist wisdom in India took him along the northern fringes of the Tarim Basin, through the mountains, and then south through today's Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. When he returned to China after some 15 years, stopping at Dunhuang along the way, he brought back a trove of scriptures and important images. Many of the sites that we connect with this spread of Buddhism are also those where there is evidence of the Sogdians: Iranian speakers who were the first great merchant Diaspora of the Silk Roads. From their homeland in Samarkand and the Zerafshan River Valley (today's Uzbekistan and Tajikistan), the Sogdians¹⁰ extended their reach west to the Black Sea, south through the mountains of Kashmir, and to the ports of South East Asia (Liu M. , 1982).

Early 4th-century Sogdian letters, found just west of Dunhuang, document a Sogdian network extending from Samarkand through Dunhuang, and along the Gansu Corridor into central China. Sogdians entered Chinese service and adopted some aspects of Chinese culture while retaining, it seems their indigenous religious traditions (a form of Zoroastrianism). Their importance went well beyond commerce, as they served not only the Chinese but also some of the newly emerging regimes from the northern steppes, the Turks and the Uyghurs. The Turks for a time extended their control across much of Inner Asia and were influential in promoting trade into Eastern Europe and the Byzantine Empire. The Uyghurs received huge quantities of Chinese silk in exchange for horses.

Sogdians played a role in the transmission of Manichaeism another of the major Middle Eastern religions to the Uyghurs in the 8th century, by which time both Islam and Eastern Christianity had also made their way to China. With the final conquest of the Sogdian

¹⁰Sogdia or Sogdians was an ancient Iranian civilization that at different times included territory located in present day Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

homeland by Arab armies in the early 8th century, Sogdian influence declined (Schafer, 1963). By the time of the Tang Dynasty (618–906), which managed once again to extend Chinese control into Central Asia, the foreign culture was all the rage among the Chinese elite: everything from makeup and hair styles to dance and music. Even women played polo, a game imported from Persia.

Impact of the Arabs and the Mongols

By the second half of the 8th century with the consolidation of Arab control in Central Asia and the establishment of the Abbassid Caliphate, with its capital at Baghdad, western Asia entered a new period of prosperity. Many threads made up the complex fabric of what we tend to designate simply as “Islamic civilisation.” Earlier Persian traditions continued, and the expertise of Eastern Christians contributed to the emergence of Baghdad as a major intellectual centre. Even though Chinese silk continued to be imported, centres of silk production were established in Central Asia and northern Iran. Considerable evidence has been found regarding the importation of Chinese ceramics into the Persian Gulf in the 8th through the 10th century (Shafi, 1988). The importance of maritime trade for the transmission of Chinese goods would continue to grow as Muslim merchants established themselves in the ports of South-East China. The Chinese connection had a substantial impact on artistic production in the Middle East, where ceramicists devised new techniques in order to imitate Chinese wares. Conversely, the transmission of blue and white pottery decoration moved from the Middle East to China (Tucker, 2003).

The apogee of these developments came substantially later in the period of the Mongol Empire when in the 13th and 14th centuries much of Eurasia came under the control of the most successful of all the Inner Asian dynasties whose homeland was in the steppes of Mongolia. Under the Mongols, we can document for the first time the travel of Europeans all the way across Asia, the most famous examples being the Franciscan monks John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck in the first half of the 13th century, and Marco Polo a few decades later. Genoese merchant families took up residence in Chinese port cities, and for a good many decades there was an active Roman Catholic missionary church in China.

The reign of Kublai Khan in China and the establishment of the Mongol Ilkhanid regime in Iran in the second half of the 13th century was a period of particularly extensive exchange of artisans and various kinds of technical specialists. While their long-term impact may have been limited, the exchanges included the transmission of medical and astronomical knowledge. There is much here to temper the view that the impact of the Mongol conquests was primarily a destructive one (Garnet, 1982).

Despite the rapid collapse of the Mongol Empire in the 14th century, under their Ming Dynasty successors in China and the Timurids in the Middle East, active commercial and artistic exchange between East and West continued into the 16th century. Timuri Samarkand and Herat were centres of craft production and the caravan trade. The early Ming sponsored the sending of huge fleets through the Indian Ocean, which must have flooded the markets in the West with Chinese goods, among them the increasingly popular celadon (pale green) and blue-and-white porcelain. The centres of Chinese ceramic production clearly began to adapt to the tastes of foreign markets, whether in Southeast Asia or the Middle East.

The legacy of this can be seen in the ceramics produced in northern Iran, which decorated palaces and shrines, and in the later collections of imported porcelain assembled by the Ottoman and Safavid rulers in the 16th and 17th centuries. Persian painting, which reached its apogee in the 15th and 16th centuries, was substantially influenced by Chinese models. Conventional histories of the Silk Roads stop with the European Age of Discovery and the opening of maritime routes to the East in the late 15th century. Of course, there had already long been extensive maritime trade between the Middle East, South Asia, Southwest Asia, and East Asia. Undoubtedly the relative value of overland and sea trade now changed, as did the identity of those who controlled commerce (Schafer, 1963).

Yet, despite growing political disorders disrupting the overland routes, many of them continued to flourish down through the 17th century. New trading Diasporas emerged, with Indian and Armenian merchants now playing important roles. Trade in traditional products such as horses and spices continued, as did the transmission of substantial amounts of silver to pay for the Eastern goods. Among the Chinese goods now much in

demand was tea, whose export to the Inner Asian pastoralists had grown substantially during the period of the Yuan and early Ming dynasties. Trade along the Silk Roads continued, even if transformed in importance, into the 20th century.

Re-Discovery of the Silk Road

An important chapter in the history of the Silk Roads is the story of their rediscovery in modern times. Over the centuries, many of the historic cities along the Inner Asian routes declined and disappeared as a result of climate change (where water supplies dried up) or changes in the political map. Only episodically did the ancient sites attract the attention of local rulers; at best, amoral tradition preserved legends which bore little relationship to the earlier history of the ruins. In Europe, it was travel accounts such as that of Marco Polo which helped to alert early explorers of Central Asia to the possibility of unearthing traces of Silk Road civilisations now buried beneath the desert sands. The foundation for modern Silk Road studies was laid between the late 1880s and the eve of 1st World War. Somewhat by accident, the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin discovered several of the ruined towns along the southern Silk Road, including Dandan Uiliq, north of Khotan, and Loulan, near the dried up bed of Lake Lop Nur.

The term ‘Silk Roads’ refers to a vast network of land and maritime trade and communication routes connecting the Far East, Central Asia, the Indian sub-continent, Iranian and Anatolian plateaus, the Caucasus, the Arabian peninsula and the Mediterranean region and Europe. The incessant movement of peoples and goods along these routes resulted in an unprecedented transmission and exchange of knowledge, ideas, beliefs, customs and traditions over three millennia. These peaceful exchanges between East and West, which have profoundly shaped and enriched the cultures along the Silk Roads, hold many valuable lessons for contemporary societies about the potential of intercultural dialogue.

There was no one Silk Route, but many routes, roads, and paths that headed in an east-west direction. Some routes were well developed and relatively free from bandits, while others were less protected and had fewer oasis towns which offered protection from the bandits. One route along the southern edge of the Taklimakan was quite risky, but it took

Jesse time to cross. Kashgar (Kashi) being the meeting point of the various roads of the Silk Route, became one of the most important trade centres of Central Asia. The main route was, the "Oasis Route" which was the most popular not only because of its historical significance in terms of East-West trade and cultural exchange, but also because it attracted people mainly because this route evolved through consistent human efforts, with countless people traveling along this route over thousands of years (Day, 1950).

The terminals of the Oasis Route were Changan (Xian) in the East and Rome in the West, and later on Luoyang in the East and Byzantium (Constantinople) in the West? The route crossed many hazardous regions such as the Taklimakan desert, the Tien Shan and Kunlun Shan, the Pamirs, the Karakum and Kyzylkum deserts, and the Hindu Kush. The Taklimakan dessert was called by the local people as the "Land of Death", or "the Land of Irrevocable Death" (Laslo, 1997). At the foot of steep mountains, there were oases of various sizes with streams and springs. Cities were constructed in the oases and protected by gates and walls, and these cities were surrounded by green trees, farmlands and orchards, with ponds possessing water and flower beds. Many travellers from various lands gathered in the oases to form markets and open air trading markets where they traded goods which they had brought from their respective localities. People of these oasis cities formed a caravan and got engaged in the intermediate activities of the East-West trade. Well, there were many peaceful exchanges along the Silk Road, but wars and conflicts were equally part of the long saga.

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Chapter- 3

Chinese Silk Road Strategies in Central Asia

To comprehend China's engagement in Central Asia it is important to first analyse the main principles that underpin its foreign policy. Chinese foreign policy is still informed, at least in the official discourse, by the 1954 Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence: respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. Chinese officials emphasise that foreign policy questions in Central Asia, as well as in other regions around the world, derive from the Five Principles. They portray China as a developing country which is not part of any power bloc such as that around the United States, and which through the Five Principles pursues the road of peaceful development. Emphasis is placed on China never seeking hegemony or wanting to impose its will on other countries. By solemnly declaring to the world never to seek hegemony, China tells its smaller Central Asian neighbors and the world at large that its rapid economic development and the strengthening of its military capability not only will not be a threat but also offer opportunities to its neighbors and partners in what could be described as a 'win-win situation'.

China's Foreign Policy

The Chinese policy discourse often stresses the distinctiveness of China's approach as a responsible great power that respects other countries' sovereignty, in contrast to what is perceived as Western powers' efforts to interfere with other countries' social systems, development paths, and internal and external policies. China's alternative world model emphasises instead multi polarity and equal treatment of all countries "no matter they are big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor"(Jintao, 2012). Each national government alone, acting on the basis of its own national conditions, have the right and ability to properly handle matters related to domestic, political, economic, or social affairs, including internal conflict. Such a view on the conduct of international relations is clearly informed by China's own history and its sensitivity on issues such as Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang. China's position on most disputes around the world is that they should be

solved by mutual understanding, sincere dialogue, and peaceful negotiation, and it opposes interference from the outside.

This has been China's view and approach to resolving its border issues with Central Asian countries, as well as on major international crises and hotspot regions, including the war between Iran and Iraq, the struggle between Israel and the Arabs, the rivalry between North and South Korea, the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, and the most recent upheavals in the Middle East, including the current Syrian conflict. Therefore the core idea behind the Five Principles as interpreted by China today is sovereignty that one state has no right to interfere in the internal affairs of another state. However, as one Chinese scholar put it, "principles must be understood in the context of reality"(Wang, 2010).The reality is that the balance of protecting China's interests overseas while maintaining a steadfast commitment to the principles of state sovereignty and noninterference will become ever more precarious.

As Chinese officials and scholars are becoming more aware of the tensions between the principle of non-interference and China's responsibilities as a global power and have started to realize that attempts to separate politics and business do not generally succeed(I.Taylor, 2009), China has become more flexible in its interpretation of non-interference and has been willing to take a more active diplomatic role in the resolution of conflicts, for example the role that it has played in Sudan and South Sudan over the past two years. When voting at the UN on sanctions or interventions aimed at resolving or dealing with major international crises, instead of using its veto power, China often abstains because as a permanent Security Council member China's negative vote would constitute a veto, angering countries who favour intervention. By not voting or casting an abstention, China has allowed several interventions to go ahead without reversing its commitment to non-intervention (Nathan).

While security and development are the main issues confronting Central Asia, it is interesting to see how security and development are interpreted by China. On the one hand, in order to develop properly a country needs a peaceful and stable internal and external environment because nothing could be achieved without a peaceful and stable environment. On the other hand, security is often seen through the prism of development:

underdevelopment generates insecurity and instability and is a root cause of conflict, or in other words, investing in development offers the best guarantee for promoting security.

The security-development nexus was initially based on China's national experience and later translated into foreign policy, in particular through the promulgation by former President Hu of the harmonious society concept where development and security are closely linked. The implications and conclusions to be drawn for dealing with political and ethnic tensions in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, or indeed other conflicts across the broader Central Asia Region are quite clear: economic development has the power to attenuate, or even eliminate, political and ethnic tensions.

Previous analyses have already warned against the assumption of a unitary, "monolithic Chinese dragon"(D.Large, 2008), producing a single and neatly-bound Chinese position on all matters related to foreign policy. Instead, the formulation and implementation of China's foreign policy stance involves multiple institutions, factions, and ideologies (Jacobsen, 2010). This also applies to relations with Central Asia where a range of key actors are involved in the formation and implementation of Beijing's relations with the five countries of the region. The State Council has overall responsibility for China's Central Asia policy. The International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Politburo's Leading Group of Foreign Affairs are also crucial in policy formation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has official responsibility for the implementation of China's diplomatic relations with Central Asian republics.

However, the Ministry of Commerce appears to have more influence as it manages economic relations and development assistance. The National Energy Administration that operates under the National Development and Reform Commission plays a key role in matters related to the top-priority area of energy cooperation. It takes the lead in, among others, launching international energy cooperation, participating in the formulation of policies related to energy resources, finance, taxation, and environmental protection, and making recommendations on energy price adjustments. The Ministry of Finance, the state owned China Development Bank, the China Export-Import Bank, and the China Investment Corporation also play important roles in the economic relationship. The People's Liberation Army and the Department of Public Security also play crucial roles

in counterterrorism cooperation, especially within the framework of SCO. State owned enterprises also have influence in the process of policy creation, formalisation, and implementation. Among the most prominent in Central Asia are the state-owned energy corporations: Sinopec, the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), and the China National Offshore Oil Company. Although operating within the policy framework set out by the Chinese party-state, such companies, with their huge business portfolios and their own domestic and international interests which do not necessarily coincide with those of the party state can be powerful policy shapers.

China's Main Interests in Central Asia

Despite its deepened engagement in the region over the past decade, China's interest in Central Asia has to be put into perspective. Central Asia does not lie at the forefront of China's main international, economic, and security concerns. Traditionally, and even more so in recent years, China's assertive proclamations and actions have focused on more fundamental zones of interests, in particular, the relationship with the United States, Sino-Japanese relations, cross-strait relations with Taiwan, tensions in the Korean peninsula, and relations with India.

China has hidden motives in Central Asia and is pursuing a grand geopolitical strategy aimed at ultimate control and dominance of the region is excessive and exaggerated. China has neither the capacity nor the intention to be Central Asia's hegemony. As it has been argued, "there is no grand strategy for Central Asia on the part of Beijing... What there is, however, is a confluence of all the activities of these multifarious actors, which, regardless of what Beijing wants or doesn't want, means that China is nonetheless the most consequential actor in the region"(Peterson, 2013). Others have argued that China's strategy towards Central Asia "may be a reflection of China's larger strategy toward the external world, which involves a lot of natural resources coming in a lot of trade going out (Peterson, 2013)".

However, the lack of a grand design does not mean that Chinese foreign policy in Central Asia is not realistic or strategic or that it lacks any geopolitical connotation. There is a range of pragmatic issues and interests involved in China-Central Asia relations. Scholars

and analysts studying China's engagement in Central Asia do not always concur on what is the main driver, in particular, whether economic issues, especially natural resource extraction, or internal security issues, that is, the Xinjiang question, are the main priority. What is clear is that both sets of interests have a direct relationship to China's domestic issues and that they are interconnected. After three decades of very high growth rates, urbanisation, and a breathtaking social transformation – and with only one per cent of the world's oil reserves for the second largest consumption China needs to secure sustainable energy supply sources from elsewhere. Countries in Central Asia, especially those with large hydrocarbon reserves and mineral deposits, have become for China premier investment destinations, given their geographic proximity and the opportunity they also offer to secure continental energy supplies, thus reducing Beijing's dependence on maritime routes.

However, China-Central Asia policy transcends a mere quest for resources. As stated in the 2011 White Paper on China's Peaceful Development, the "central goal of China's diplomacy is to create a peaceful and stable international environment for its development"(Nathan). At the same time, through promoting economic development, China also aims to stabilise the Central Asian states, which are important for the security of the region, including the Chinese region of Xinjiang that borders former Soviet Central Asia. There is an intrinsic link connecting China's engagement in Central Asia to the Uyghur question (Laurelle, 2013). China wants the region to develop and stabilise as underdevelopment, instability, and possible conflict may spill over and undermine its efforts to develop, 'pacify', and more strongly bind Xinjiang to the rest of China. It also wants its Central Asian neighbours, which have the largest Uyghur populations of any countries except for China, to take a more active part in the fight against Uyghur separatism (Doyon, 2011).

Unrest in Kyrgyzstan, that shares a 1,000-km border with China, and in the Fergana valley, that spreads across Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, runs the risk of disrupting trade, energy supplies, and, ultimately, to threaten its own internal stability, especially in Xinjiang. This was clearly demonstrated by the 2010 riots in Kyrgyzstan

between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, which “directly affected Xinxiang’s exports there, as well as to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan” (China's Central Asia Problem, 2009).

State Policy and Rhetoric

Chinese and Central Asia leaders visit each other very frequently both bilaterally and on multilateral occasions, signing agreements and exchanging opinions on bilateral relations and regional issues of common concern. Declarations and policy statements issued in the course of such visits often feature good neighbourly friendship, mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, and the pursuit of common development goals as the basic principles for cooperation. Topics related to common development, economic, and trade cooperation often take precedence in the policy statements by Chinese leaders who have emphasised common development as the fundamental purpose of good neighbourly relations (Makhmudov, 2016).

In a speech at the Supreme Assembly of Uzbekistan in 2011, Wu Bangguo, former Chairman of the Standing Committee of China’s National People’s Congress, announced China would continue this pattern of good-neighborly friendship and common development” as a means “to write a new chapter of peace, cooperation and harmony. In September 2012, former Premier Ben Jia Bao declared the Eurasian continent to be one of the most promising regions in the world in terms of consumption and investment calling on further opening markets to each other, as well as advancing “cooperation in cross-border infrastructure to accelerate the connectivity process and deepening culture and people-to-people exchanges.

In a joint written interview by the media of SCO member states published in June 2012, former President Hu emphasised that “Through the signing of the Program of Multilateral Trade and Economic Cooperation, member states have gained significant progress in the cooperation projects of transportation, energy and communications”(Jintao, 2012). He praised the new SCO concept of development which consists in adapting to the general trend of economic globalisation, taking into account the features of regional economic development, achieving “mutual benefit through complementing each other with advantages of member states based on their own strategic planning”(Jintao, 2012).

During visits to Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan in July 2013, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stressed Beijing's support of development in Central Asia, its "endorsement of measures taken by them to maintain stability" and its "aim of injecting a new vitality into the region". He also stated that the leaders of the three countries consider China "a trustworthy friend and partner", and "highly value Beijing's huge influence in regional and international affairs as a responsible world power". These visits served as preparation for a state visit of Chinese President Xi Jin Ping to Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan in September 2013. A typical feature in Chinese official statements is that China does not seek political concessions in return for its financial support. Unlike other major financial and economic actors that often place conditions on loans and other financial instruments, Chinese financial assistance is provided without any "additional conditions" and "on the basis of equal partnership (China Pledge Support for Kyrgystan Infrastructure Projects, 2013)."

Enhancing political trust to safeguard regional peace and stability also features prominently in official statements by Chinese leaders. At the SCO summit held in Beijing in June 2012, the Chinese Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cheng Guoping, stated that "the peace and stability of Central Asia relate to the core interests of China, as well as the members of the SCO. Our determination to maintain the peace and stability of Central Asia is steadfast. We will absolutely not allow the unrest that happened in West Asia and North Africa to happen in Central Asia. At the regional level, Chinese policy statements lavish compliments on what is often described as the remarkable achievements and immense prospects of the SCO, which paved the way for people in the region to overcome Cold War legacy and conduct friendly cooperation, and played an important role in maintaining regional peace and stability.

In a joint interview by media of the SCO Member States, Hu Jintao also pointed out the contribution made by SCO in accelerating the peaceful reconstruction of Afghanistan and becoming an indispensable force to deal with the security issue in the region. In the interview, he also set out China's new security concept in Central Asia, focusing on comprehensive security, common security and cooperative security and enhancing capability against real threats and risks. He added: "We will stick to the principle that

regional affairs should be decided by countries in the region, keep a close watch on the impact of turmoil outside the region and play a bigger role in the peaceful reconstruction process in Afghanistan. We will target the core issues and key factors of regional security, establish a more comprehensive security cooperation system and enhance the capacity and efficiency of preventing and addressing risks. We will reinforce communication, coordination and collaboration on major international and regional issues and maintain the common security and development interests of member states”(Jintao, 2012).

Significant Interventions and Engagement

The economic importance of China's role impact in Central Asia is apparent in each of the five Central Asian republics for whom China has become a major, if not the leading, economic partner through natural resource extraction projects, investments in infrastructure, and low-interest loans. Over ten per cent of China's oil and gas imports now come from Central Asia. The speed at which trade relations have deepened is staggering. This has brought many benefits to Central Asian countries: their foreign currency reserves have increased; governments' finances have become more secure, and there has been a rise in investment and development.

The bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and China have assumed an important strategic role with expanding commercial and strategic cooperation between the two countries, which was formalised through the establishment of an all-round strategic partnership in June 2011. An Intergovernmental Cooperation Commission was created in May 2004. China has sought to obtain a leading role in cultivating and developing energy industries in Kazakhstan, harnessing Kazakhstan's oil, natural gas, minerals, including uranium, and other major energy resources. The Atyrau Alashankou pipeline that was developed by the CNPC and the Kazakh Company Kaz Munai Gaz¹¹ is an important source of oil for the Dushanzi refinery in Xinjiang, the largest foreign purchase ever by a Chinese company, in 2005(Zsztowt, 2012).

¹¹Kaz Munai Gas is the state owned oil and gas company of Kazakhstan. It was founded in 2002 by merging Kazakh Oil and Oil and Gas Corporation.

In Turkmenistan, its second-biggest trade partner in the region with rich deposits of natural gas, China has intensified its engagement, especially over the past decade. An agreement on Expansion of Natural Gas Supply was signed in November 2011. It was preceded by the signing on 29 August 2008 of an agreement establishing an Intergovernmental Cooperation Committee with four sub-commissions on economy and trade, energy, humanities, and security. This resulted in the construction of a 1,830 km gas pipeline, which was completed in December 2009, starting in Turkmenistan's eastern fields and crossing Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan before connecting to the Chinese grid. By end of February 2013, a total 46 Billion Cubic Meters (BCM) of natural gas had been transported by the Central Asia-China pipeline with a total value of \$15.72bn. During President Xi's state visit to Turkmenistan in September 2013, bilateral relations between China and Turkmenistan were lifted to a strategic partnership level. The two sides agreed to further expand the gas pipeline in order to boost annual gas exports to China to 65 BCM per year by 2016(Makhmudov, 2016).

In Kyrgyzstan, strategically located at the intersection of geopolitical interests in Central Asia and a crucial port of entry for oil from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, Chinese companies are developing infrastructure, including important road networks and power lines. A major railway connection linking China with Kyrgyzstan's southern provinces and Uzbekistan is also under discussion. In July 2013, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was reported as saying that China would continue to provide Kyrgyzstan with all kinds of support for Kyrgyz infrastructure projects (China Pledge Support for Kyrgystan Infrastructure Projects, 2013). In September 2013, China–Kyrgyzstan relations were upgraded to a strategic partnership level. In the last two decades, trade with China has grown enormously and China has become Kyrgyzstan's second-largest trade partner, behind Russia. In the words of a former Kyrgyz cabinet minister, every small business in Kyrgyzstan is reliant on trade with China. Particularly important is the re-export of Chinese consumer goods to neighbouring Uzbekistan and to Kazakhstan and Russia.

China's Role and Interest in Central Asia

In Uzbekistan, China has made important investments in the strategic sectors of energy, transport, and telecommunications and has become the second-biggest trading partner

and its biggest investor. A Memorandum of Understanding on the Expansion of Trade and Investment and Financial Cooperation was signed on 16 June 2004, while an agreement on establishing an Intergovernmental Cooperation Commission was signed in October 2011. Bilateral trade volume reached \$2.87bn in 2012, growing almost 50 times since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1992. In the same year, China had 35 direct investment projects in Uzbekistan with a total investment of nearly \$4b. According to the data of State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 347 companies with Chinese investors, including 57 with 100 per cent Chinese capital, operate in Uzbekistan. In 2012, Uzbekistan's first deputy prime minister confirmed that Chinese banks had supplied more than \$5bn in favourable loans for industrial projects. Former Chinese President Hu and Uzbek President Islam Karimov signed a joint announcement to establish a strategic partnership on 6 June 2012. During President Xi's state visit in September 2013, the two sides agreed to further strengthen their cooperation in the energy sector by ensuring long-term, safe and stable operation of the China-Uzbekistan gas pipeline, promoting joint exploration and development of oil, gas, and natural uranium, and tapping the cooperation potential in renewable energies agreements to implement projects worth a total of \$15bn were reportedly signed (Nathan).

In Tajikistan, the poorest of the five Central Asian countries, but strategically important given the long border with the Xinjiang region, China has developed roads, for example, the Dushanbe-Chanak highway, power lines, and hydropower plants. China is also a vital source of credit. In 2004, Tajikistan received from China over \$600m of a \$900m development loans package that had been offered to SCO member states. In June 2012, it was announced that ten new deals signed by the Tajik president in Beijing "would bring Tajikistan about USD 1bn in new Chinese investment, loans and aid (Tajikistan Secures New Chinese Loans and Investment, 2012)".

As a sign of the growing importance that China attaches to its relations with Tajikistan, on 20 May 2013, President Xi and Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon signed a joint announcement to establish a strategic partnership aimed at boosting bilateral cooperation between the two countries (news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-05-20/c-13239574.html). There is a long list of security threats in Central Asia, from domestic

grievances undermining stability to regional ethnic tensions and negative spillover effects from Afghanistan. Currently, the biggest long-term security concern is related to the planned withdrawal in 2014 of NATO troops from Afghanistan. The key question for China is whether the region will become more unstable after NATO's withdrawal. The specific concern in this regard is whether separatist organisations operating in Xinjiang may find a sanctuary, as well as financial, technical, and training support in post-2014 Afghanistan, as well as in Pakistan. The prospect of an increase in Islamic insurgencies in the region, possibly coupled with terrorist activities within China's borders, is a very daunting prospect for Chinese leaders.

New Silk Road and Engagement with USA and Afghanistan

In 2011, the United States announced its own New Silk Road Initiative (NSRI) that aimed to connect Central Asia to India and Pakistan via Afghanistan. The ultimate goal was to support the integration of Afghanistan into the broader region and to provide a boost to the Afghan economy. The NSRI shares a focus on energy and transportation infrastructure with China's New Silk Road Economic Belt. Almost from the start, this initiative was received with significant scepticism in both China and the broader region. Chinese experts routinely dismiss the project as an attempt to maintain America's influence in the region as the U.S. draws down forces in Afghanistan. At the same time, Beijing questions whether Washington is willing to commit the political and economic capital required to support a major effort (Wang, 2010). It is also in the U.S. interest to engage China in its planning around the NSRI. China has laid out plans for significant investment in Central Asia. As the U.S. has voiced concerns about entrenching corruption, bad governance, and weakened environmental standards, it must ensure open lines of communication with Beijing to discourage policies that undermine standards. The U.S. has encouraged China's growing role in Afghanistan, and cooperation there between both countries has been one of the highlights of their bilateral relationship in recent years. It is of mutual benefit to connecting Afghanistan to Beijing's broader regional efforts.

One of the most advanced U.S.-supported NSRI initiatives is the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project, or CASA-1000, a \$1.2 billion electricity transmission grid that will allow Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to sell hydropower to

Afghanistan and Pakistan. This project presents a potentially interesting area for U.S. engagement with China. The World Bank and the Islamic Development Bank are leading the project, with significant funding from USAID. An Inter-Government Council (IGC) is coordinating planning with representatives from the four participating countries. After years of political wrangling, in April 2015, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan signed general and power purchase agreements at an IGC meeting in Istanbul.

The agreement outlines plans for a transmission line that would originate in Kyrgyzstan, run through Tajikistan and Afghanistan, and terminate in Pakistan. The line would be capable of transmitting 1,000 MW to Pakistan and 300 MW to Afghanistan. If fully implemented, the project would contribute to addressing Pakistan's persistent energy shortages, providing power during the summer months when Pakistan's power demand surges. Afghanistan is expected to receive roughly \$45 million per year in transit revenues. The project is currently scheduled to be completed in 2018(D.Large, 2008).

CASA-1000 potentially complements China's own plans to invest significantly in Pakistan's electrical infrastructure. China has already made initial inquiries into playing a role in the development of CASA-1000. In 2011, China participated in the Intergovernmental Council meeting in Bishkek on the project. Additionally, the State Grid Corporation of China, China's largest state-owned electric utility company, expressed early interest in participation and sent a representative to the 2013 Bidders Conference in Almaty. If CASA-1000 continues to advance, the U.S. State Department will be understandably eager to tout the initiative, which is currently the highest profile NSRI project in progress. The multilateral nature of the project and the World Bank's leading role may make China more amenable to collaboration. The President of the World Bank has voiced his enthusiasm for cooperation with the AIIB, a fact that was specialised by China's state media. Chinese experts, however, believe the episode illustrates Washington's reflexive opposition to expanding China's role in multilateral institutions (Jacobsen, 2010).

While there is certainly a degree of schadenfreude in Beijing over the U.S. being rebuffed by allies who did join the new bank, there is also a desire to see the U.S. engage with the AIIB. Pursuing opportunities for the AIIB and World Bank to co-finance projects would be in the interest of both governments. While the NSRI's capital-intensive infrastructure projects may get more attention, the initiative is at least as focused on addressing regulatory and technical challenges facing the region (Jacobsen, 2010). There is also the potential for U.S. China engagement over railway development in Afghanistan. The development of transportation infrastructure plays a central role in both the Chinese and U.S. Silk Road visions, with the two countries viewing rail development as key to accomplishing mineral extraction in Afghanistan. In 2011, Afghanistan's first new train line since the 1920s, a 75 km route from Mazar-e-Sharif to Hairatan on the border with Uzbekistan, was completed. This project was funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and operated by Uzbekistan's railway authority. Since that time, the U.S. has worked with the Government of Afghanistan to develop and train the country's railroad authority under the Ministry of Public Works. The World Bank, ADB, and United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) have released a series of feasibility studies on a number of proposed rail lines within Afghanistan and connecting Afghanistan to its neighbours (Tajikistan Secures New Chinese Loans and Investment, 2012). There is also the potential for U.S. China engagement over railway development in Afghanistan. The development of transportation infrastructure plays a central role in both the Chinese and U.S. Silk Road visions, with the two countries viewing rail development as key to accomplishing mineral extraction in Afghanistan. In 2011, Afghanistan's first new train line since the 1920s, a 75 km route from Mazar-e-Sharif to Hairatan on the border with Uzbekistan, was completed. This project was funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and operated by Uzbekistan's railway authority. Since that time, the U.S. has worked with the Government of Afghanistan to develop and train the country's railroad authority under the Ministry of Public Works. The World Bank, ADB, and United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) have released a series of feasibility studies on a number of proposed rail lines within Afghanistan and connecting Afghanistan to its neighbours (Tajikistan Secures New Chinese Loans and Investment, 2012).

In December 2014, China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Iran, and Afghanistan signed an agreement to develop a railway connecting Kashgar in China's Xinjiang Province to Herat, from where it will connect to Iran. The route will traverse six Afghan provinces: Kunduz, Balkh, Jawzjan, Faryab, Badghis, and Herat. This project, largely financed by the Export-Import Bank of China and the ADB, follows on a feasibility study by an Iranian consulting company.

While aspects of the proposed line remain unclear, it appears to resemble the northern route discussed in a series of U.S. - supported reports, including one produced by a USCENTCOM planning team made up of experts from the U.S. government, academia, and the U.S. rail industry. The World Bank also funded a feasibility study of similar routes in 2012. The World Bank Report found a line between Kunduz and the Iranian border to be the most promising option under consideration, saying it had the potential to "foster economic development along (Afghanistan's) Northern border. The U.S. government and its allies have put years of research into the opportunities, challenges, and potential pitfalls of rail development in Afghanistan, and it is an issue where both the U.S. and China stand to benefit from cooperation and information exchange (China, Kirgizstan Hold Joint Anti- Terror Exercise, 2013).

The Obama administration has repeatedly highlighted the positive role it sees China playing in Afghanistan and the region. In a March 2015 address at the Brookings Institute, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Tony Blinken said that the Administration does not see China's involvement in Central Asia in zero-sum terms and that it viewed China's infrastructure investments as complementary to those of the U.S. Blinken added that the U.S. sees an important role for China in supporting the transition in Afghanistan and advancing its own integration into the broader Asia region. China remains understandably sceptical of the seriousness of U.S. investments, but Afghanistan remains an area where both countries stand to advance their common interests.

Security

The situation in Kyrgyzstan and hope to seen early restoration of order and stability in the country and relevant issues can be settled through the legal means. More immediate

threats deriving from domestic grievances, pervasive corruption, transnational crime, socioeconomic problems, coupled with rising nationalism, suspicion, and antipathy among the general public of China's role in the national economies, also make China's investments vulnerable. One of the problems for Chinese engagement in Central Asia is that despite efforts to develop 'people to people relations' China's engagement is predominantly the purview of official state to- state relations, meaning that the official discourse inevitably focuses on issues related to national, rather than human, security. Without channels through which to engage Chinese policy makers, alternative voices, especially from civil society, often go unheard. In the extreme, it could lead to support on the part of China that essentially only secures regime stability. Without any effective form of dialogue to connect with host communities and operating in environments often characterized by rising nationalism, ingrained suspicions about Chinese expansionism and few tangible grassroots benefits, Chinese investments run the risk of having a political, but not social, license to operate, thus "becoming targets for local residents voicing a variety of complaints"(Makhmudov, 2016).

Despite its massive economic footprint and its security concerns, China's direct engagement in the region's security problems has been limited, deferring for now to Russia on Central Asian security and military issues and showing no immediate interest in increasing its role outside a multilateral framework. China has stated its determination not to deploy its military in Central Asia, regardless of the threat to Chinese citizens or investment. What type of event would foreseeable trigger a rethink of such policy and raise the possibility for China to deploy its military in the region? Certainly, this did not happen during the 2010 unrest in Kyrgyzstan, which nevertheless appeared to be of great concern to China, during the so-called 2005 'Tulip Revolution'. But one may wonder whether a direct threat to a flagship energy project in the region may be such an event. The SCO is the only intergovernmental body addressing security issues that involve China. It helps China strengthen its political ties with Central Asian states and stabilise the neighbourhood of Xinjiang and to establish a collective discourse on the common non-traditional security threats they face, including terrorism, transnational crime, and natural disasters.

At the first SCO summit in 2001, SCO member states signed the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism, which identifies the fight against the “three evil forces” as the major task of the organisation. Since then, SCO member states have signed various security cooperation documents, such as the SCO Convention against Terrorism, the Anti-drugs Cooperation Agreement, and the Agreement on Joint Fight against Crimes. The security portfolio of the organisation has gradually expanded in broader areas including strategic security, defence, law enforcement, information security, and the fight against transnational organised crime.

The SCO has two permanent agencies: the Secretariat located in Beijing and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure headquartered in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. China’s military cooperation with other SCO countries focuses mainly on bilateral and multilateral counter-terrorism exercises, which are conducted on a regular basis (D.Large, 2008). The first took place in 2002 with Kyrgyzstan and was followed by more than 20 bilateral and multilateral exercises with other SCO members. For example, in the autumn of 2010, a joint anti-terror exercise involving 1,000 Chinese army and air force officers and soldiers took place at the Matybulak base, near Gvardeisky in Kazakhstan, as part of the SCO’s ‘Peace Mission 2010’. More recently, on 11 August 2013, China and Kyrgyzstan held a joint anti-terror drill, under the auspices of the SCO. The exercises took place along the border between the two countries. Around 460 armed police from both countries took part, practising new weapons and man oeuvres. The drill aimed to improve both countries’ abilities to cooperate in their response to terrorist threats.

Officially, China seems content with what SCO has agreed and its future prospects. A more attentive analysis, however, reveals that Chinese leaders are also aware of the fact that the multilateral security dimension within the SCO remains underdeveloped. This has, in part at least, been recognized by some top Chinese officials who, for example, have pointed out that SCO needs to put in place a full-fledged system for security cooperation and coordinate and formulate common positions on major international political, security, economic and financial issues, and become more capable and efficient in preventing and managing crises. Other Chinese leaders have pointed out the importance of strengthening security cooperation by enhancing the SCO’s capacity of

resisting real threats, in particular the three forces that are getting active again”, as well as drug trafficking and transnational organized crime at a time when “the security situation in the region is more complex as regional and international hotspot issues keep emerging.”

On a more practical level, there have been recommendations from the Chinese side to “establish a more comprehensive security cooperation system, actively implement the Shanghai convention on fighting against the ‘three forces’, earnestly implement the bilateral security cooperation agreements, deepen security dialogue and consultation and information exchange, continue to hold regular joint anti-terrorism exercises, enhance security cooperation on large events, strive to increase the organizational capacity for action and rapid response capability, fiercely combat the ‘three forces’ and effectively curb drug trafficking, arms smuggling and other transnational organized crimes to ensure lasting peace and stability in the region”(Xi Proposes a New Silk Road with Central Asia, 2013).

At the 2012 annual SCO summit held in Beijing, a rule was adopted providing for a collective response to events “threatening the peace, stability and security of a member state of the SCO or the entire region.” Theoretically, such a rule gives SCO member states the right to intervene politically and diplomatically, although not militarily, in each other’s internal affairs in the event of an outbreak of internal conflict. It was a not insignificant development whose practical impact, however, remains to be seen. Western analysts and commentators have been much less upbeat, if not utterly pessimistic, about the achievements and future prospects of the SCO. They have pointed out that there is a significant gap between the organisation’s declaratory statements and the cooperative actions that need to be put in place to implement them. In particular, SCO has failed to coordinate joint activities against drug trafficking, or to become a forum to discuss water disputes. It has never managed to react to large-scale crises in any one of its member states. Its silence during the Kyrgyz unrest of 2010 “underscored the institutional weaknesses that limit its effectiveness as a security body” (China's Central Asia Problem, 2009).

It is difficult to predict how the SCO will evolve, given Russia's integration projects with the Central Asian republics. It appears unlikely that SCO, beyond declaratory statements, will become anytime soon an active international alliance, able to carry out its own security interventions. Its future prospects hinge mainly on Sino-Russian relations in the region. While in the last two decades China and Russia have made great strides in energy, investment, high technology, and military technology cooperation, and share similar security concerns, and both wish to cooperate to counter US influence in the region, the reality is that Russia also has a clear geopolitical objective of reasserting control over Central Asia, especially through plans for the Eurasian Union, which, in the long term at least, will run contrary to a deepening of the SCO and will hardly fit with China's expanding economic, political, and diplomatic presence.

Although Russia is a founding member of the SCO, it also uses another organisation in the region, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to further its political, security, and military objectives. It remains unclear what practical cooperative engagement the two organisations will be able to pursue in the future. Any muscular military intervention in Central Asia even attempts to have a military footprint through setting up military bases, such as those that Russia and the US have, would run contrary to China's principle of non-interference and has been categorically rejected by China. However, as its economic engagement in the region deepens, and given the challenges posed by an insecure and unstable environment, it is hard to see how China will be able to protect its interest without a more proactive engagement in the stability and security of the region.

Driven by economic interests, China's substantial engagement with Central Asia has triggered what has been dubbed 'The New Great Game' in a region where the influence and interests of Russia, Europe, and the US often collide. As China's economic engagement in Central Asia continues to expand, its relative influence in the region with respect to Russia and Western countries has grown alongside it. There is no doubt that China's economic dynamism and expansion has the potential to be a 'win-win' arrangement that benefits China, as well as Central Asian states for which increasing Chinese trade and investments are a catalyst for growth. Through its diplomatic relations

and growing economic engagement, China does have an impact on the internal affairs of Central Asia (Jacobsen, 2010). But China's involvement and influence on security issues have been very modest compared to its wider economic engagements, mainly revolving around the SCO, China's main multilateral tool in the region, which has proved unable to act in times of crisis such as the 2010 ethnic conflict in Kyrgyzstan.

Although there is a concern shared by many in China that a worsening security situation in the region resulting, for example, in mass emigration, Islamic fundamentalism, drug trafficking and internal and regional conflicts, would endanger economic and trade cooperation and ultimately threaten China's own internal stability, China has shown no willingness to intervene or mediate in major crises, while the effectiveness of the SCO, very ambitious on paper, is limited by rivalry between China and Russia.

Russia and China have different strategies, different interests, and different priorities in Central Asia that times appear irreconcilable with China's emerging role. While cooperation between them in energy, investment, high technology, and military equipment has significantly increased over the past two decades, given Russia's strategic rapprochement to Central Asia it is too early to say whether the phenomenon of collaboration/competition between Russia and China will lead to reaching an agreement on jointly controlling the region, or whether the region will serve as a field of confrontation between them. As Chinese and Western experts have pointed out, China is not in a "position to outflank Russia and become the leader in the region in the medium term"(Doyon, 2011).

What is certain, however, is that with more dependence on Central Asian energy supplies, it will become increasingly important for China to maintain influence in the region and to protect its interests, especially energy supplies and billions of dollars of investments. Although China cannot solve alone any future crises arising in Central Asia, in order to protect its own interests and in line with the slow evolution of the principles of sovereignty and non-interference, it will inevitably have to become more involved in Central Asia's peace and security and move beyond crisis reaction to a more proactive strategy for peace, security, and stability in the region.

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Chapter- 4

New Silk Road and its Impact on Central Asia

Exemplifying the old Chinese proverb “A near neighbour is better than a distant cousin,” official Beijing is switching its main foreign policy focus from great power relations to neighbourhood diplomacy. The Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road initiatives demonstrate the willingness of the Chinese leadership to advance its vision of regional integration, which will have significant ramifications for the Chinese neighbours in general and Central Asia in particular.

Beijing has long been using the Silk Road discourse in the context of Central Asia. Yet, only recently this discourse emerged as an official Chinese policy. President of China Xi Jin Ping presented the Chinese vision of Silk Road Economic Belt in Kazakhstan in 2013. The seriousness of Beijing’s intentions to promote its economic programmed in Central Asia has been underpinned by a series of visits by Xi Jin Ping to each Central Asian state, where Xi Jin Ping restated his commitment to invest \$40 billion in the region’s infrastructure. The recent unveiling of China-backed \$50 billion Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank further confirmed the determination of China to expand its influence in Asia (Sheppard, 2016).

Nonetheless, even prior to these developments, economic engagement of China in Central Asia over the past years has been nothing but impressive. China emerged as the major economic player in Central Asia. If in the early 2000s the International Monetary Fund estimated the Chinese-Central Asian trade to hit \$1billion bar, these numbers reached nearly \$50 billion last year. During the period of the financial crisis, China surpassed Russia as the region’s leading trading partner. For instance, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) is nowadays one of the largest contributors to the budget of Turkmenistan. In fact, in addition to breaking Gazprom’s gas monopoly across the region, CNPC is currently well situated to act as a mediator in Central Asia. The China-Central Asia pipeline consists of three separate enterprises with 50% ownership between China and Kazakhstan, China and Uzbekistan and China and Turkmenistan. Moreover, China is continuing to invest significantly in transport and energy infrastructure in

Central Asia such as Atyrau, Alashankou Crude Oil Pipeline and Turkmenistan-China Gas Pipeline (Tsereteli, 2014).

Furthermore, apart from being a key trading partner, China became de facto the region's largest lender and source of development finance. Since independence, Kyrgyzstan received nearly 1.8 billion USD from China in the form of loans and grants, which stands for more than half of Kyrgyzstan's external debt. The government-sponsored Export-Import Bank of China remains Tajikistan's largest single creditor holding nearly 40 percent of Tajikistan's external debt. In a similar vein, during the financial crisis, China provided two loans to Turkmenistan for energy projects not only to secure its own gas deliveries but also to prevent the Turkmenistan leadership from borrowing money from international financial institutions.

In light of these developments, the Silk Road Economic Belt appears to be a logical step for Beijing to implement. Poor infrastructure remains one of the greatest obstacles to the trade growth in Central Asia. Accordingly, Central Asian states are willing to accept Chinese investments into their Soviet type infrastructure. Substantial investments in energy and transport infrastructure by China, Russia and other international partners have already significantly improved the logistics performance index of all five Central Asian states according to the World Bank (Sheppard, 2016).

Nevertheless, notwithstanding economic incentives, the general perception of the Central Asian leadership towards China remains more of a caution and a fear. China's economic goal in Central Asia is often regarded in the Central Asian public and political discourses as a gradual long-term attempt of Beijing to subdue Central Asia economically and then absorb the region into the Chinese empire. These fears are bolstered by the nescience and incomprehension of the Chinese foreign policy goals by the Central Asian ruling elites along with the historical legacy of confrontation between China and Central Asian nomadic tribes. In fact, sin phobia may emerge as one of the greatest obstacles for the Beijing led regional integration. For instance, the land deals between China and Kyrgyzstan, China and Kazakhstan and China and Tajikistan sparked a public outcry in Central Asia and were used by the local opposition leaders to rally against the ruling authorities.

Although Beijing's longer-term goals are linked to the development and stabilisation of restive Xinjiang region, Central Asian elites perceive the Beijing led regional architecture as one more tool of China to assert its regional hegemony. In fact, those views prevail in neighbouring Russia as well. The new role of Beijing as the main economic and development player in Central Asia is being unrecognised in public discourses due to the sensitivity of Moscow to such processes. The Kremlin always reacted sensitively to any developments in the region related to the engagement of other players and thus resisted the Chinese efforts to evolve the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in a more economic and development direction. This phenomenon explains why the SCO with its potential is still regarded as a discussion forum with the budget of \$4 million (Daniyar, 2015).

Yet, it is evident that Beijing wants Central Asian states to synchronise their individual economic development goals with the larger Silk Road vision since economic ties between China and Central Asian states are stronger than political discourses prevailing in the region. However, the ruling regimes in Central Asia tend to prioritise their own security and shape foreign policies of their countries in accordance to their perceptions and home-generated threats. As a result, even as the Central Asian elites may demonstrate a commitment to regional integration initiatives, in reality, they are still unwilling to be dependent upon any new "big brother."

China's Assertive Foreign Policy towards Central Asia

In Central Asia, Beijing knows that it is engaging rapidly ageing heads of state ruling societies that might be prone to instability in the short-to-medium term. China surpassed Russia in 2009 to become the single greatest source of investment in the region, and its political influence has grown in parallel. Central Asia continues to face high levels of corruption and capital flight, and there are real concerns over whether the region has the capacity to absorb the proposed levels of investment. Moody's found, however, that "while China will increase its exposure to unrated or sub-investment-grade emerging markets, this risk appears manageable given China's large external buffers," a view shared by many Chinese academics (Daniyar, 2015). In some ways, China has positioned itself intentionally or otherwise to play a mediating role in Central Asia through the

structuring of some of its economic investments. One example is the China-Central Asia pipeline, which is structured as a series of 50/50 joint ownership ventures between the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and the state-owned gas companies of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. China's stake may place Beijing at the centre of disputes that arise within the network (Wilson, 2016).

Chinese policy circles believe that while cooperation with Russia has historically been quite difficult, Moscow is currently too dependent on China to object to Beijing's economic initiatives in Central Asia. In the context of EU sanctions and Russia's declining access to international capital markets, Russia has increasingly looked to China to bolster its economy. Last year's \$400 billion deal, under which Russian natural gas conglomerate Gazprom will provide CNPC with 30 years of natural gas, further cemented that tie. While China's economic clout in the region has continued to grow, Beijing has made a point of emphasising that its initiative will not be in competition with Russia's Eurasian Economic Union. The open question has been the degree to which Russia will ultimately push back against China's efforts to play a larger role in what Moscow has long considered its backyard (Wilson, 2016).

By and large, Russia has been publically welcoming of the initiative and has called for "cooperation in the China-EEU format." Recent announcements regarding plans to integrate the Silk Road Economic Belt with the EEU and apparent support for the SCO playing a greater role in coordinating economic development in Central Asia indicate that Russia sees the benefit of China's investments in the region. At the same time, Russia has made it clear that it expects to have a role in discussions with Central Asian states, which would stand in contrast to Beijing's historical preference for bilateral engagement. Russia has also taken steps to increase its political influence and ensure its central role in regional security through organisations like the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). While Russia appears to view Chinese economic investments in Central Asia as beneficial, Moscow will almost certainly be watching carefully for political realignment.

New Silk Road's Impact on Central Asia

Prior to the dissolution of the USSR, the vast majority of economic flows involving that country were among its constituent republics. This was particularly true for Central Asia, whose economic ties were overwhelming with the Russian Republic. After independence, the five states of post-Soviet Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) tried to compensate for the rupture of basic economic relations by diversifying their economic partners. However, trade flows toward the south (Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan) remain minimal, and those to the West (Turkey) and South-West (Iran) are modest. They lag far behind Russia, which has continued its political and economic dominance in the region, but also and above all, behind trade with China, whose role has become very significant.

The redirection of economic flows has raised several political issues for the states of post-Soviet Central Asia as they increase Russia's and China's influence over the entire region, with significant variations depending on countries. The importance of trade with China raises questions about the political and economic autonomy of states such as Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. For example, what would happen to Turkmenistan's economy if Beijing decided to suspend its imports from the country for political reasons, as China is Turkmenistan's main export client? (Sheppard, 2016)

Then there are the economic issues since Russia and China's overwhelming commercial domination continues to hinder any prospects for the large-scale development of commercial relations with Turkey and Iran. Lower priced Chinese products quickly came to supplant many of the goods produced in other states. This commercial reality reduces the prospects for developing trade relations with the South; with India and Pakistan via Afghanistan. Lastly, there are the geopolitical issues, which confine Central Asia within Russia's sphere of influence, making the states further dependent on their Chinese neighbour and removing them even more from Western influence.

New Silk Road and United State's Policy

In this context, the United States has decided to address these concerns through a new project called the New Silk Road Initiative. It seeks to promote:-

1. greater regional connectivity through improved trade and transit routes by improving the “hardware” of reliable roads, railways, bridges, and border-crossing facilities;
2. the development of regional energy markets by supporting the Central Asia-South Asia regional electricity grid (CASA-1000¹²), energy transmission lines, hydropower plants, and reforms in Afghanistan;
3. strengthened customs and border operations harmonising national customs systems, bringing states into multilateral trade institutions, and getting neighbours to work together to break down institutional and bureaucratic barriers to trade; and,
4. deeper people-to-people and business relationships by supporting training programs for students in business, and organising meetings, and conferences to help these countries' businessmen reach trade agreements (Cooley, 2012).

The initiative aims to further economic development and bolster peace and stability in a volatile region. It seeks the growth and diversification of economic flows between Central Asia and South Asia since this is crucial to any improvement in the balance of political forces in the region. For Washington, the New Silk Road Initiative is part of a two-part logic: to develop Afghanistan's economy through the improvement of infrastructure, integrating “the country further into the region by resuming traditional trading routes and reconstructing significant infrastructure links broken by decades of conflict” and by extension, to develop regional commerce and therefore the economies of neighboring countries, those of Central Asia on the one hand, and of Pakistan and India on the other.

¹²Central Asia South Asia Power Project commonly known as the CASA-1000 is a \$1.16 billion project currently under construction that will allow for the export of surplus hydroelectricity from Tajikistan and Kirgizstan to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

However, as Alexander Cooley explains, the initiative “‘geopolitics’ what should be a standard trade policy. The policy is designed to deliberately exclude Russia, Iran, and China.” With time, these projects are supposed to create intercontinental corridors and provide landlocked states with access to sea ports. In this regard, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton explained, “Let’s work together to create a new Silk Road an international web and network of economic and transit connections. That means building more rail lines, highways, energy infrastructure.” Researchers have remained content to relay this discourse, in particular, S. Frederick Starr who, under the auspices of the Central Asia and Caucasus Institute, authored several documents and gave interviews asserting the pertinence of the New Silk Road Initiative.

One of the most promising ways forward for the US and NATO in Afghanistan is to focus on removing the impediments to continental transport and trade across Afghanistan’s territory. Absent is the overall prioritization, coordination, and risk management that will enable Afghanistan to emerge as a natural hub and transit point for roads, railroads, pipelines, and electric lines. The US and its coalition partners can provide these missing ingredients.

Trade and Communication

Regional trade dominated by Russia and China Trade route projects in Central Asia must take into account a context in which Russia and China largely dominate trade flows. This raises the question of the West’s capacity to redirect trade flows and how much interest the states of the region have in cooperating with the West to do so. Moreover, it is rather unlikely that Russia and China will abandon certain economic prerogatives in which they have invested, both politically and economically, for more than 10 years.

Today, economic connections rank as one of the most important drivers of Russian influence in Central Asia. Moscow regained an important, although no longer monopolistic, economic position in Central Asia at the beginning of the 2000s. Russian Central Asian trade tripled between 2003 and 2007, rising from US\$7 billion to \$21 billion. In 2014, trade flows stood at almost US\$22 billion, positioning Russia as the region’s third largest trading partner behind China and the European Union. Despite the

predominance of energy, Russia's trade with Central Asia involves other important sectors of cooperation; uranium, electricity, construction, telecommunications, transport and railways, banks, the military-industrial complex, and certain agribusiness sectors. Russia remains a dominant economic actor in mineral resources, which are important for the heavy industry sector and in infrastructure the old Soviet specialisations, but is a relatively limited and uncompetitive actor in terms of small and mid-size companies and new technologies (Daniyar, 2015).

Since 2010, the Russia-Belarus-Kazakhstan Customs Union has enabled Russia to develop trade with its two partners and maintain common strategies in terms of trade with non-member states. The three member states removed their customs borders in July 2011, created a common market of 170 million people in January 2012 and renamed it the Eurasian Economic Union in January 2015. The political message of regional integration is clear: the Kremlin is openly mulling the idea of creating a few joint, supranational mechanisms in specific areas, mainly the economic and financial domains, and potentially the strategic sector that would guarantee an integrative dynamic between Russia and some of its Community of the Independent States closest strategic and economic neighbors; Kazakhstan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and possibly Tajikistan.

A second consideration is that every program to develop trade routes necessitates an assessment of the role and growing influence of Beijing in local economies and regional trade. In the first half of the 2000s, China moved forcefully to establish itself in the Central Asian market, mainly in hydrocarbons, extractive industries, infrastructure, and communications. Between 2002 and 2003, trade between Central Asia and China increased about 300 percent, from about US\$1 billion per year to more than US\$3 billion. An increase of 150 percent followed between 2004 and 2006, with trade reaching Eurasian Geography and Economics Downloaded by more than US\$10 billion according to Central Asian figures, or US\$13 billion, according to Chinese figures. In 2008, before the global economic downturn, trade between China and Central Asia exceeded US\$25 billion (European Commission Statistics 2009). Since then, China has clearly gained the upper hand, with US\$45 billion for Beijing compared to about US\$30 billion for Moscow in 2014. In a few years, China has succeeded in improving its reputation with soft-power

diplomacy and drastically changed the economic and strategic status quo in Central Asia. China positions itself as the second most influential external actor in the region behind Russia but surpasses Moscow in economic terms (Wilson, 2016).

Chinese influence profoundly changed the region's economy. As in the other parts of the world where Beijing is establishing itself, its strategy pursues many objectives, which the Chinese authorities see as intrinsically related. First, China consolidates its geopolitical influence in Central Asia by creating economically based good neighbourly relations that work to defuse potential tensions. Secondly, it contributes to regional development in order to avoid political and social destabilisation, which could have domestic consequences in its Xinjiang region and slow down Chinese economic growth. Relations between Central Asia and China have indeed been concerned with managing the difficult Uyghur question.

In 1991, the sudden appearance on the international stage of five new states reinforced Chinese concerns about the claims of Uyghurs, who appear much like the “sixth people of Central Asia,” still waiting for independence. Lastly, the Central Asian states provide new markets for Chinese products; markets that could open up to the whole of Russia, Iran, and Turkey. For landlocked Central Asia, the Chinese economic engine brings with it the prospect of new trans-Eurasian corridors and is thus seen as a unique historical opportunity. These elements are part of the Chinese New Silk Road Economic Belt; an attempt to create a vast loop on three continents that Chinese leader Xi Jin Ping unveiled in September 2013. It includes countries situated on the original Silk Roads through Central Asia, West Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. It calls for the integration of the region into a cohesive economic area through building infrastructure and increasing trade (Sheppard, 2016).

The Central Asian states and China have every interest in developing their mutual relations, as their economies are more complementary than in direct competition with one another. China has the capacity to export consumer products to Central Asia at low prices, which suits the low purchasing power of the local populations, whereas Russian, Turkish, and Iranian (not to mention Western) products remain too expensive. China is also able to provide technological goods to the middle and upper classes, whose

consumption patterns are constantly rising, in particular in Kazakhstan. Between 80 and 90 percent of Chinese exports to Central Asia consist of mainly finished goods such as consumer products, machinery, processed foodstuffs, textiles, shoes, electronic goods, pharmaceutical products, and automobile parts. On the other side, about three-quarters of Central Asian exports to China consist of raw materials, crude oil, natural gas, and ferrous and nonferrous metals. Faced with the overwhelming economic domination of Russia and China in the region, the two partners that were meant to take on a major role in terms of political and economic influence, namely Turkey and Iran, were largely eclipsed.

Economic Engagement and Impact of New Silk Road

Driven by economic interest, especially the pursuit of resource security and the desire to preserve stability and security in its Xinjiang region, China's substantial engagement with Central Asia has triggered what has been dubbed 'The New Great Game' in a region where the influence and interests of Russia, Europe, and the US often collide. As China's economic engagement in Central Asia continues to expand, its relative influence in the region with respect to Russia and Western countries has grown alongside it. There is no doubt that China's economic dynamism and expansion has the potential to be a 'win-win' arrangement that benefits China, as well as Central Asian states for which increasing Chinese trade and investments are a catalyst for growth.

Through its diplomatic relations and growing economic engagement, China does have an impact on the internal affairs of Central Asia. But China's involvement and influence on security issues have been very modest compared to its wider economic engagements, mainly revolving around the SCO, China's main multilateral tool in the region, which has proved unable to act in times of crisis such as the 2010 ethnic conflict in Kyrgyzstan. Although there is a concern shared by many in China that a worsening security situation in the region resulting, for example, in mass emigration, Islamic fundamentalism, drug trafficking and internal and regional conflicts, would endanger economic and trade cooperation and ultimately threaten China's own internal stability, China has shown no willingness to intervene or mediate in major crises, while the effectiveness of the SCO,

very ambitious on paper, is limited by rivalry between China and Russia(China's Foreign Policy could Reshape a Good Part of the World Economy, 2016).

Russia and China have different strategies, different interests, and different priorities in Central Asia at that times appear irreconcilable with China's emerging role. While cooperation between them in energy, investment, high technology, and military equipment has significantly increased over the past two decades, given Russia's strategic rapprochement to Central Asia it is too early to say whether the phenomenon of collaboration/competition between Russia and China will lead to reaching an agreement on jointly controlling the region, or whether the region will serve as a field of confrontation between them. As Chinese and Western experts have pointed out, China is not in a position to outflank Russia and become the leader in the region in the medium term. What is certain, however, is that with more dependence on Central Asian energy supplies, it will become increasingly important for China to maintain influence in the region and to protect its interests, especially energy supplies and billions of dollars of investments.

Although China cannot solve alone any future crises arising in Central Asia, in order to protect its own interests and in line with the slow evolution of the principles of sovereignty and non-interference, it will inevitably have to become more involved in Central Asia's peace and security and move beyond crisis reaction to a more proactive strategy for peace, security, and stability in the region.

Central Asia as Centrepiece of New Silk Road

Central Asia occupies the centrepiece of China's Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) initiative. Yet, reviving the Silk Road in Central Asia will not be easy and the geopolitical challenges will be the biggest hurdle to building the SREB in the region. The idea of Central Asia as a regional grouping in political and security terms is almost non-existent and Central Asian countries remain widely divided with serious internal conflicts caused by an unresolved boundary, water and energy disputes, regional rivalry, deep mistrust and differences in political, diplomatic and security policies. Also, there is an ongoing big power game in Central Asia.

In recent years, while better trade and investment ties with all five Central Asian countries boosted China's economic influence in Central Asia, China is still far from being a dominant force in Central Asian affairs because of the influence of Russia and, to a lesser extent, the United States. In the near to medium term, China still cannot compete with Russia which had a significant head start in the region. Regarding reactions towards China's SREB, Central Asian countries seem to have mixed feelings. On the one hand, they generally welcome more Chinese investment while on the other, some express anxiety and concerns with China's rapid expansion in the region. This is partly attributed to lack of a clear time table and detailed roadmap for constructing SREB and partly due to the complicated political and social dynamics in Central Asia. Thus, the success of the SREB will have to start with a better understanding of the political and economic dynamics in Central Asia (Geethanjali Natraj, 2016).

The SREB (Silk Road Economic Belt) potentially involves over 40 Asian and European countries with the centrepiece of the Belt occupied by Central Asia. As the former hub of the ancient Silk Road, Central Asia will once again play a major role in the success of constructing the SREB. While the SREB is essentially about enhancing economic cooperation and building closer and deeper economic ties between China and countries in Central Asia, reviving the Silk Road in Central Asia will not be easy and the geopolitical challenges will be the biggest hurdle to building the SREB in the region. As China is making all-around efforts to push forward its SREB initiatives, a better understanding of the complex relations among Central Asian countries, as well as big power politics in the region, will be critical to the future success of the SREB.

China's New Silk Road and its Challenges

If implemented as planned, China's Silk Road initiatives have the potential to alleviate a number of the most pressing challenges facing Beijing. Most frequently discussed is the need to find new markets to absorb the products of China's excess industrial capacity and to improve access to energy supplies as domestic demand continues to grow. Beijing remains concerned that economic indicators in China's interior and western provinces have persistently lagged behind those of China's more affluent eastern coastal cities. China has made significant investments as part of its "Go West" strategy, and in recent

years many of the targeted provinces have seen significant GDP growth. Still, they have yet to catch up with the national average. Beijing also hopes that greater economic integration with its neighbours will encourage the use of the Renminbi in global trade (Zhiping, 2014).

Beijing sees accelerated development as the most promising cure for the persistent instability in Xinjiang Province, where it voices concerns about growing threats from terrorism, extremism, and separatism. By establishing the province as a gateway to a “Eurasian Land Bridge” through Central Asia to Europe, China hopes to alleviate one of the greatest threats to its internal security. The March 2015 blueprint for OBOR states that China intends to “make good use of Xinjiang’s geographical advantages” and “make it a key transportation, trade, logistics, culture, science, and education centre (Lain, 2014).”

While China has gone to great lengths to frame its initiatives in cooperative non-exclusionary terms and to emphasise its openness to a wide range of stakeholders, it also clearly intends to further establish itself as a central actor in regional affairs. Both initiatives are discussed within China’s policy circles as an effort to counterbalance the U.S. “pivot to Asia” and American attempts to “dominate” the region. (China views the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union or EEU as far less of a threat.) Chinese government officials and scholars publically contrast their plans with the post World War -II American Marshall Plan, claiming that OBOR lacks the latter’s hegemonic characteristics. Beijing characterises its initiatives as an effort to encourage integration and economic growth in Eurasia, rather than an attempt to expand its own political influence in the region.

Chinese policy makers describe OBOR as a mechanism to promote peace and stability in the region by strengthening China’s bilateral relations with its neighbours and developing international organisations that are not dominated by Western powers. This pattern should extend to security issues according to some Chinese scholars who, echoing President Xi, have called for security problems in Asia to be solved by Asians themselves. While Beijing stresses that the Silk Road framework will be built on an “inclusive and balanced regional economic cooperation architecture that benefits all”, it is

part of a broader push to ensure that China has a say that is commensurate with the size of its economy and military in setting the strategic and economic agenda of the region (Deepak, 2013).

China's New Silk Road Fund and Central Asia

China's planned \$40 billion Silk Road Fund, officially established in December 2014, is viewed as the primary bilateral investment vehicle for projects under OBOR. At least \$16 billion will be dedicated to funding projects in Central Asia. The fund was initially capitalised with \$10 billion in contributions from China's foreign exchange reserves, the China Investment Corporation, the Export-Import Bank of China, and the China Development Bank. Chinese experts have said that this fund will more closely resemble a private equity fund than a sovereign wealth fund, comparing it to the World Bank's International Finance Corporation. The fund is to be profit-driven with a focus on delivering "reasonable mid- and long-term investment returns." In mid-April, The People's Bank of China announced the first investment from this fund would be \$1.65 billion for the construction of a hydroelectric dam across the Jhelum River in northern Pakistan.

Beijing intends the recently established Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to act as another important financing instrument for OBOR projects. The AIIB will have a \$100 billion capital base and be a multilateral institution with up to 57 countries registered as "Founding Members" (50 countries signed the Articles of Agreement, the other seven had not yet obtained approval from their legislatures) (Munza, 2016). China has proposed the AIIB as a way to bring additional resources to close the widely recognized infrastructure investment gap in Asia (projected to be as large as \$8 trillion¹⁸), but it is also widely viewed as a response to stalled efforts to give developing states a greater say in the management of Breton Woods Institutions.

While China announced it would not have formal veto power, Beijing will hold an approximately 30 percent stake in the AIIB, and the articles of the agreement require that 75 percent support is required to take decisions on major operational and financial policies. The AIIB also has a clear regional emphasis, requiring regional members to hold

a minimum 75 percent stake in the bank. Regional Governors will elect nine out of 12 members of the Board of Directors.

The under-representation of developing states in Breton Woods's institutions that spurred the creation of the AIIB also contributed to the announcement of the New Development Bank (NDB) at a BRICS summit in July 2014. The NDB incorporates \$50 billion in initial capital (with each country initially contributing an equal share) with the goal of expanding to \$100 billion. The Bank was officially launched in July 2015 with the goal of selecting possible projects for study by the end of the year. It has also been reported that the NDB's first investment will be issued in Chinese renminbi. Beijing clearly views the NDB as an important financing mechanism for Silk Road-related projects. However, Chinese academics highlight the bank's broader mandate to finance sustainable development in states facing financial hardship and the fact that NDB will be led by five equal partners as reasons China will have greater difficulty guiding its investments toward OBOR infrastructure projects (Sheppard, 2016).

Finally, China has pushed for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to establish a financial institution that would provide an additional funding stream for OBOR projects. Russia has historically been concerned over the potential of an SCO development bank increasing China's leverage in Central Asia, but this dynamic appears to be shifting. In March 2015, SCO General Secretary Dmitry Mezentsev said that the organisation would "combine its development strategies" with China's Silk Road strategy and that all members would be invited to participate in the initiative. Four months later, President Xi and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed to take steps to integrate the Silk Road Economic Belt with the EEU, using the SCO as a coordinating platform. Beijing appears to view the SCO as a primary mechanism to rally regional support for its initiatives as the organisation increasingly looks to play a greater role in global affairs. Chinese policy experts have described plans for the SCO to play a driving role in OBOR. The SCO granted Afghanistan observer status in the SCO in 2012 and, in July 2015, voted to grant full membership to India and Pakistan.

Silk Road Fund and Central Asian Projects

To finance projects under the framework of the “One Belt, One Road” initiative, China introduced two key financial instruments the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the USD 40 billion Silk Road Fund. As far as funding projects in Central Asia are concerned, Silk Road Fund would be the better financial instrument for two major reasons. First, although Russia, which had tried to distance itself from the AIIB, eventually submitted its application after the AIIB gained huge momentum with major European powers, it still has considerable doubts and concerns towards it. Russia is wary that the AIIB interferes in Central Asian affairs where historically the main mediator and financial donor was Russia. For instance, Russia is concerned that the AIIB could shadow its common currency vision in Central Asia. In March 2015, Russian President Vladimir Putin said the EEU should adopt a single currency.

However, for China, one of the major objectives of creating the AIIB is to promote RMB¹³ internationalisation and given China’s economic power and global reach, any common currency along the SREB will very likely be the RMB. Therefore, Russia, now as a founding member of the AIIB, might not fully support China’s plan to finance projects in Central Asia, though it will be highly interested to utilise the AIIB to fund infrastructure projects in Siberia and the Far East. Second, while many European countries’ joining provided more legitimacy and influence to the AIIB, it also means that China will not be able to dominate the leading decisions and there will be high and stringent criteria to not only include economic viability but also social, environmental and human rights impacts, issues for project selection and restrictions on lending. Yet, given that most Central Asian countries have unstable regimes, corrupt political system, weak governance and poor human rights record, it will be difficult for them to borrow from the AIIB to finance their infrastructure projects (China's Central Asia Problem, 2009).

Central Asia occupies the centrepiece of China’s Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) initiative, one of the pillars of China’s international strategy under the new leadership. As

¹³RMB (renminbi) is the official currency of the china. The Yuan is the basic unit of the renminbi, but it also use to refer to the Chinese currency especially in international arena.

Chinese policy makers and scholars debate and draft the detailed road markets and sort out priority projects to build the SREB, it becomes critical to understand the internal and external geopolitical factors which determine the regional development trajectory. Despite previous attempts from both Central Asian countries and external powers to support regional integration, the idea of Central Asia as a regional grouping in political and security terms is almost non-existent. Central Asian countries remain widely divided with serious internal conflicts caused by an unresolved boundary, water and energy disputes, regional rivalry, deep mistrust and differences in political, diplomatic and security policies. Furthermore, Central Asia remains highly vulnerable to both external and internal shocks.

External factors such as growing Islamic extremism in the Middle East and the NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan pose severe security challenges to Central Asia. Internal factors such as leadership transition in both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, in addition to struggling economic development, undermine regional stability. Furthermore, there is an ongoing big power game in Central Asia. In recent years, while better trade and investment ties with all five Central Asian countries boosted China's economic influence in Central Asia, China is far from being a dominant force in Central Asian affairs because of the influence of Russia and, to a lesser extent, the United States. In the near to medium term, China still cannot compete with Russia which had a significant head start in the region. In addition, as Alexander Cooley states, great power games are played according to local rules set by Central Asian leaders who employ the balance of power strategy. In this great power game between China, Russia and the United States in Central Asia, the local leaders, who have been able to manipulate and lay off the economic and security interests of great powers to strengthen the sovereignty of their states, are important actors in their own right (Cooley, 2012).

While energy cooperation will certainly be the focus of China's SREB plan, agricultural ties between China and Central Asian countries should be a priority too. Unlike energy investment which largely benefits the Central Asian elites, agricultural cooperation has the potential of bringing wider economic benefits to ordinary people. Given the food insecurity in Central Asian states such as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, closer China Central

Asian agricultural ties via intra-regional trade, Chinese financial investment, agricultural and technology will ensure regional food supply and enhance regional stability. In addition, agricultural modernization will help keep regional water conflicts under control. Agriculture accounts for over 70 percent of the fresh water usage in Central Asia, yet 50-80 percent of water used for agricultural irrigation is wasted due to faulty irrigation systems. China has the resources, given that its Xinjiang province is known for its advanced water-saving irrigation system, to modernise regional water infrastructure and to promote agricultural trade to address regional spatial water scarcity (D.Large, 2008).

Given the unfavourable conditions of deep regional divide, weak mutual trust, different political and security policy preferences, it seems that a multilateral approach to building the SREB will not work. Therefore, instead of focusing on grand-scale projects involving many countries, China should adopt a bilateral approach by engaging in economic, social, cultural and even political and security cooperation with individual Central Asian countries. In this way policies can be customised for individual countries, taking into account country specific interests and other limitations.

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Chapter -5

Conclusion

China's connection to Central Asia can be traced back from the period of Second century B.C when the Han Dynasty's (206 B.C.-220A.D.) great Emperor, Hanwu, conquered the Hsiung-nu tribes living in the region. Subsequently, the Silk Road was built to connect Ancient China to the Roman Empire through the newly claimed lands conquered by Hanwu to further extend his empire and his powers. Silk Road importance has changed throughout the history-sometimes it has risen, and sometimes it has fallen. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the decline of its influence in the region, both China and Central Asia tried hard to normalise its relations with each other under the principle of mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Central Asia offered a number of strategically important opportunities for China. *First*, it shares a roughly 3000-kilometer border with the region. Unsurprisingly, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Central Asian countries possess great political, economic, and cultural connections, as can be seen, most clearly in the Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region. *Second*, with rapid economic development, China's energy demands are rising and Central Asian resources will play a large role in the PRC's energy strategy. *Third*, Central Asia's geographic position is very important; it is an axis that links the North-Eastern, Western, and Southern regions of Asia, including China and Russia, and it serves as an increasingly important trade route to Europe. *Fourth*, it is a strategic buffer zone for China, as great powers wax and wane in influence along its periphery.

China's interests in Central Asia were based on a variety of factors including border security, terrorism, economics, energy, and geopolitics. With the ascension of President Xi Jin Ping to the office, China has promoted a more assertive foreign policy, devising a New Silk Road Strategy that will enhance China's relationship with the countries of the region. On the one hand, the People's Republic of China (PRC) emphasised economic relations over security issues in this new approach. On the other hand, while bilateral and multilateral diplomacy is necessary in order to meet the aims of the New Silk Road Strategy, great power competition is the most important influence on whether this will be

successful. The New Silk Road Strategy provides an opportunity for China and Central Asia to cooperate in the region and reconsider their relationship within the context of their individual interests and strategy across the continent.

The present study is largely centred on the following two hypotheses:

- . The economic and energy linkages of Central Asia with China are a core aspect of the Chinese Silk Road strategy.
- . Strategic relations between Central Asia and China helped China to reduce US interference/presence in the region.

Central Asia has rich mineral resources that China needs to support its economic development. The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that the Caspian region (including Azerbaijan) contains 3.5 percent of the world's proven oil reserves while remaining recoverable reserves are closer to 5 percent. The bulk of these reserves is in Kazakhstan, with smaller volumes in Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. The region's share of global proven natural gas reserves is around 7 percent, concentrated in Turkmenistan. In 2001, China put forward a new energy strategy for the twenty-first century, in which it sought to diversify energy imports as it became a net energy-importing country. China's main source of energy is coal; roughly 20 percent of its energy supply comes from oil. Between 1997-2007, China's booming demand for oil accounted for approximately one-third of world oil consumption, ranking behind only the U.S. Quite concerning for policymakers, China acquires more than half of its oil imports from the Persian Gulf. Not only is China sensitive to the conflicts in the region, but it also remains concerned over the insecure method of transport of oil to the Mainland. 85 percent of crude imports to China arrive by tanker, navigating risky sea lanes.

China is driven, mostly, by domestic concerns, or international influences that mobilise it into action. China has no intention to participate actively in international affairs. As David Shambaugh (2013) has noted, its reflex is too shy away from challenges when international crises erupt. For example, China took a passive approach to Central Asia in the immediate post-Cold War period, staying on the sidelines of the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union for influence in the region. Today, China's intentions

in Central Asia are tied to specific concerns that connect to broader, national interests: border security, terrorism, energy tied to economic issues, and geopolitics. And, as much of the PRC's domestic strategy is designed to promote economic development, it desires a stable relationship with the region to ensure political stability to meet those ends.

Energy and economics are among the most important interests in the region for China, although they did not drive many of China's actions in Central Asia during the 1990s. The annual trade volume between China and the five Central Asian countries was less than one billion U.S. dollars during this period, as Central Asian countries remained wary of opening their markets to cheap Chinese goods. More recently, the West Development Strategy in China has incentivized Western provinces of the PRC to cooperate and collaborate with partners in Central Asia. In addition, Central Asia has become a transportation hub linking China with Western Asia and Europe. Finally, China wants to build a regional economic framework in Central Asia that will allow it to enhance its economic development and political influence in the region. Since 2009, China's economic influence, measured in trade volume, in Central Asia has surpassed even that of Russia. China is the biggest trading partner of four of the region's five countries (except Uzbekistan). In short, China's growing presence in the region clearly comes at Russia's expense. Though Russia still controls the majority of Central Asia's energy exports, its economic clout in the region is slipping.

Over the last twenty years, China and the Central Asian countries have forged a strong relationship as strategic partners and the trade volume between both sides has increased sharply since their independence from the former Soviet Union. China and the Central Asian countries have worked jointly to attack terrorism and sustain border security in Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Yet, China desires greater political and economic influence in the region (Sun and Wu, 2015). Politically, the instability of the regimes of the Central Asian countries limits their ability to cooperate with the PRC. Regional integration has been blocked by different interests and disputes over border and water resource amongst the Central Asian countries. China has tried its best to improve the level of regional integration in the SCO but has been detected by Russia.

Economically, the trade volume between China and Central Asian countries has developed rapidly, totalling 50 billion dollars. This figure is over one hundred times greater than it was twenty years ago. However, the proportion of trade between China and Central Asia is not high. Once obstacles to trade are eliminated, there is the potential for considerable growth. It is important for China to increase its trade volume with Central Asia in order to help ameliorate the economic difficulties that the PRC is currently facing. At the same time, cooperation between China and Central Asia is not as high a priority for government officials as is supporting China's relationship with the Middle East, a reflection of China's continued reliance on Middle Eastern oil to bolster its economy.

Also, China's slowing economy now faces a number of challenges. The global economic crisis and domestic social problems have made the current export- and FDI-driven economic models less effective. As a result, China seeks to explore new export markets or revitalise existing ones while, at the same time, narrowing the gaps in development between the well-developed coastal areas and the less developed inland parts of the country. The New Silk Road Strategy can create an inland route to the markets of Europe to foster economic growth, as well as strengthen China's energy security. This strategy consists of five points: (i) strengthen policy communication, which may help facilitate joint economic cooperation. (ii) strengthen road connections, with the idea to establish a great transport corridor from the Pacific Ocean to the Baltic Sea, and from Central Asia to the Indian Ocean, gradually building a mark of transport connections across all of Asia. (iii) strengthen trade, with a focus on eliminating barriers and investment expenses. (iv) strengthen monetary cooperation, with special attention to currency settlements that could decrease transaction costs and lessen financial risk while increasing economic competitiveness. (v) strengthen people-to-people relations.

The New Silk Road Strategy reflects China's thinking about its role as rising power on the international stage. It has taken a more assertive posture so that it can influence the international order. As Michael Swaine observes in his book *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy* (2000) "In defining Chinese assertiveness, Western observers emphasize a newly forceful, 'triumphalism,' or brash tone in foreign policy pronouncements; the

promulgation of (or threat to implement) more aggressive or confrontational policies in specific areas; or some combination of the two.” This argument is echoed by Thomas J. Christensen in chapter eight of his book, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power* (2015). These authors do not see China’s more active, assertive foreign policy as a means to defend its core interests, given its limited capabilities, and a reflection of its continued adherence to the goals of peace and development. Within China, the New Silk Road Strategy follows in the peaceful foreign policy tradition. First, the concept of morality and interests indicates that justice is very important to China’s foreign policy and that economic cooperation, economic interests, and morality should complement one another. Second, China’s foreign policy toward neighbouring countries will continue to be characterised by good will and friendly relations, treating these countries honestly, and supporting the concepts of mutual assistance and development.

The New Silk Road Strategy will embody President Xi’s new thinking about international relations, emphasising a win-win strategy. The New Silk Road Strategy represents two aspects of economics in China’s foreign policy: the growth of foreign trade and international finance to serve its economic aims and the development of economic means to meet its diplomatic objectives in order to improve its international status. One can see its growing economic influence in the region through a number of developments. China has helped develop the Sino-Kazakh Oil Pipeline and Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline. It is now the second largest trading partner for Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, respectively; a free trade zone across the region would be a logical next step. Chinese companies have contracted to help build infrastructures in the region, such as highways, telecommunications networks, and electricity grids. In addition, China provided a 10-billion dollar infrastructure loan for Central Asia through the SCO. Finally, China has signed a currency agreement on trade with Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Despite these benefits, the Central Asian countries have indicated their wariness of China’s rise and the threat this could pose to their security and economic independence. To ameliorate these concerns, China should pursue a multilateral strategy in the region. This would produce two positive outcomes. *First*, the developing economic belt across

the region is reliant upon transport trunk and hubs for goods to move across borders. Greater regional cooperation would eliminate trade barriers and allow for coordination across legal systems that would generate stronger market-based relations. *Second*, multilateralism can reduce other countries' worries about the PRC's intentions and foster the success of the New Silk Road.

Silk Road Strategy is motivated by both political and economic concerns. For example, the Obama administration has claimed that its pivot to Asia was not designed to balance the growing influence of the PRC. Many Chinese scholars, however, regard it as an indicator of a switch in U.S. strategy from a liberal approach to a more realist view of the world and the belief in the inevitability of conflict during a power transition. In order to deal with this pivot Asia, China has to adapt its foreign policy approach and the New Silk Road is one example of this.

China, Russia and the U.S. each hold a number of interests in Central Asia that can lead them to cooperation and conflict and often at the same time. Of these three countries, Russia has the most influence in the region. China maintains economic connections but possesses little political impact (Nichol 2014). U.S. influence has waned after 9/11 and the subsequent colour revolutions and will decrease further as the country withdraws its military forces from Afghanistan. Central Asia consists of a binary system in which politics and security rely on Russia's capacities, while its economy is driven by China's actions. The U.S. may try to compete with Russia for influence in the region; former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton put forward efforts to connect Central Asia to South Asia in a similar approach to China's New Silk Road Strategy. However, this influence was undermined by lack of funding. Russia and China continue to cooperate to address the threats posed by the American-influenced colour revolutions to stability in Central Asia. Fortunately, China and the U.S. have common interests in the region. Chinese commerce minister Hucheng Gao claims that China and America will find their interests converging as China implements its "One Belt and One Road" strategy. And, many scholars a lack of competing interests between the two countries.

Thus, great power competition can influence China's New Silk Road strategy in two ways. First, cooperation between China and Russia has its limits, which will hinder

China's political and security influence in Central Asia. Simply put, Russia continues to regard Central Asia as its sphere of influence. Though China and Russia have built the Strategic and Cooperative Partnership, Russia does not want China to gain influence in Central Asia. And, China's efforts at regional integration cannot bypass Russia; Russia is a member of the SCO and the organisation operates on norms of consensus and unanimity. Indeed, Russia remains sceptical of the SCO as a potential instrument for China's economic expansion into the Region. Second, China and the U.S. do not possess competing interests in Central Asia, particularly since China's New Silk Road Strategy is inclusive and open in approach.

In fact, cooperation between China and the U.S. will support China's New Silk Road Strategy. Of course, China is wary of U.S. influence in Central Asia, particularly as it threatens the border security of China and regime stability in the Central Asian countries. Most scholars think China and Russia will cooperate to push the U.S. out of the Central Asia. However, China's New Silk Road Strategy requires U.S. cooperation in order to counter Russian dominance in the region. So long as China can use its economic influence to produce stability while allowing the U.S. to conduct its war against terrorism per its interests, there should be little conflict in their strategic objectives.

China's New Silk Road Strategy has little impact on U.S. interests in Central Asia. On the contrary, China and U.S. interests complement one another, and the New Silk Road Strategy provides an intriguing opportunity for both countries to enhance their relationship across Asia. If China and the U.S. can work together in Central Asia, they can build strategic trust in their bilateral relationship and will make cooperation in other parts of East Asia and South Asia, notably more likely. It behoves both countries to take the steps necessary to build a cooperative relationship in the region.

So, in the end, from we can state that both of the hypotheses holds *true* as both the economic and energy linkages of Central Asia with China are a core aspect of the Chinese Silk Road strategy and strategic relations between Central Asia and China helped China to reduce US interference/presence in the region.

The New Silk Road Strategy is a function of the political and economic interests of a rising China. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, China's interests in Central Asia have evolved quite rapidly. The New Silk Road Strategy is China's effort to emphasise economic cooperation and energy agreements in its relations with the region in order to fulfil its domestic political and strategic aims. China's more assertive foreign policy should not be construed, however, as a deviation from its traditional approach of respect for sovereignty, equality, and the status quo. China will use multilateral diplomacy to alleviate the concerns of the Central Asian countries as it expands its relations with them. This approach will face challenges, as noted above, and the long-term success of the New Silk Road Strategy is far from certain.

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