

The Relationship between China and Central Asia

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Preface

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 neighbors. 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. The actions of ethnic separatists, religious extremists and the threat of transnational crime, terrorism and regional conflict are 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 favorable conditions and new opportunities for developing Sino-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 utilization. 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 geographically neighbors. 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 Effects of the New Order on China and Central Asia

The bipolar order ended too suddenly to allow for the formation of a new, mature and stable international situation. The end of the confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States did not mean that geopolitical and geoeconomic rifts disappeared. On the contrary, the relationships between countries and regions became more complicated. Because there are more international players, changes are now accelerating. For this reason, there will likely be some significant changes

during the period of the formation of the new world order. Countries or blocs of countries with great power may once again determine international relationships. For this reason, many strategic relations need to be regulated.

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 relationships between China and the two poles, i.e., the United States and the Soviet Union, were 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. 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.¹

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

¹ Kasymzhomart Tokaev, *Pod stiagom nezavisimosti: ocherki o vneshnei politike Kazakhstana* (Almaty: Bilim, 1997), 15–16.

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 is 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 an ancient state and has greatly contributed to the development of world civilization. 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 neighbors.

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 (although) they have persisted in the centralization of state power and their particular economic system.

Geopolitical Relations

China and Central Asia are neighbors 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. Its important economic partners and foreign trade are 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 neighbor" or a "far neighbor."² 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 overlook the existence and actions of the other.

The Roles That China and Central Asia Will Play in the International Relations of the Twenty First Century

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 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

² XUE Jundu and XING Guangcheng, eds., *Zhongguo yu ZhongYa* [China and Central Asia] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 1999), 145–146.

Powers at the same time, without regard to ideology or geopolitics.

The trend of globalization, and the advancement of science and technology, has been improving the circumstances of China and the Central Asian countries.

In the twenty-first century, China will look to play an important role in the following respects:

1. As a safeguard against hegemonism to ensure world peace;
2. As a resolute safeguard for the rights and interests of the Third World in international affairs;
3. As a positive force in the UN and other international organizations; and
4. As an accelerator of the development of the world's economy.

The roles that the Central Asian nations will play include:

1. As the focal point of Eurasia, it is indispensable for the development of the regional economy and overland communications;
2. As a counter balance to the Great Powers;
3. To play an important role in the establishment of a Eurasian security system; and
4. Central Asia can also play a role in environmental protection and surmounting ecological crises.³

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

³ SUN Zhuangzhi, *ZhongYa Xinggeju yu Diqiu Anquan* [Central Asia: The New Order and Regional Security] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2001), 64–66.

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 noninterference 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 twenty-first century. He said that because China and the Central Asian countries had common interests, China hoped to create a glorious future of friendly cooperation and common development with the Central Asian countries, being good neighbors, good friends, and good partners forever.⁴ The leaders of the Central Asian countries generally approved this proposal.

In June 2004, chairman of the People's Republic of China Hu Jintao 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. The traditional friendship opened a new chapter in the past decade when the

⁴ *Renmin Ribao*, July 6, 1996.

two sides further developed neighborly friendship, based on equality and mutual benefit, and expanded cooperation in various fields, said Hu.

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 neighborly and friendly relations with the Central Asian nations and ready to push the ties to a new high, Hu emphasized.⁵

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:

1. Deepening a friendly neighborhood 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.⁶

⁵ *Renmin Ribao*, June 17, 2004.

⁶ *Zhongguo Ribao*, June 16, 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 recognized 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 Karimov, 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 May 1992, the president of Kyrgyzstan and then in November 1992, the president of Turkmenistan, officially visited China. In March 1993, the leader of Tajikistan, and in October 1993, the president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev, 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 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 Jiabao, visited Kyrgyzstan in September 2004 and Tajikistan in September 2006.

In a 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 organizations.

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";
5. Providing modest economic aid to the Central Asian countries as an expression of friendship; and
6. Developing multilateral economic cooperation, promoting common prosperity.⁷

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 organized 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 favorable 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 totaled \$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

⁷ *Renmin Ribao*, April 27, 1994.

increased to over \$8.730 billion in 2005.⁸ 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 a certain 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 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.⁹ By the end of 1997, China had opened nine land ports for commercial use to Central Asia. In 1999,

⁸ *China’s Customs Statistics*, December 1997, December 2002, December 2005.

⁹ “Agreement on the Utilization of Lianyungang Port to Handle and Transship the Transit Freight of Kazakhstan,” *China and Kazakhstan*, <http://www.cctv.com/lm/1039/20/3.html>.

China built the Nanjiang (South Xinjiang) 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

1. 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.
2. 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;
3. Ultra-religious forces. Ultra-religious organizations have significant influence in some areas of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan; these organizations 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.
 4. 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 salinization.
 5. 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 cannot support the growing population. Besides, there are more than 100 ethnicities in Central Asia. Strong ethnic and tribal sentiments may be 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.

Progress of Security Relationships

China and the Central Asian countries are quite similar in their security strategies: practicing defensive policies; subordinating the enhancement of national defense 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.

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.¹⁰

The military-security cooperation between China and the Central Asian countries is continuously growing. National defense ministers of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have visited China, as has the chief of the General Staff of the armed forces of Kazakhstan. The national defense 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 tranquility 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). 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

¹⁰ *Renmin Ribao*, February 9, 1995.

and a friendly neighbor 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.¹¹

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. Hu also stressed that the CICA Forum has become a platform where different civilizations carry out dialogues and different countries seek mutual understanding.¹²

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and New Development of Relations between China and Central Asian Countries

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization 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

¹¹ *Zhongguo Ribao*, June 5, 2002.

¹² "President Hu: Creating a Harmonious Asia," *Xinhua News Agency*, June 19, 2006, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2006-06/19/content_4713773.htm.

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 institutionalized. At the end of March, national defense 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 a 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.¹³ After the meeting, the leaders of the five countries signed the “Dushanbe statement.”

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, organizational structure, form of operation, cooperation orientation and external relations, marking the actual

¹³ *Renmin Ribao*, July 6, 2000.

establishment of this new organization 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 abides by the following basic principles: adherence to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations; respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, mutual non-use and non-threat of use of force; equality among all member states; settlement of all questions through consultation; non-alignment and non-orientation against another country or organization; opening to the outside world and willingness to carry out all forms of dialogues, exchanges and cooperation with other countries and relevant international or regional organizations.

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 characterized by mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, cooperation, respect for diversified civilizations and common development.¹⁴

The SCO is an intergovernmental international organization. Its member states cover an area of over 30 million square kilometers, 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

¹⁴ <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/topics/sco/t57970.htm>.

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 organizations 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 multilateral joint anti-terrorism military maneuver 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.¹⁵

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 period, 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.¹⁶

¹⁵ SUN Zhuangzhi, *ZhongYa Anquan yu Afuhan Wenti* [The Central Asian Security and Issue of Afghanistan] (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 2003), 278, 291–292.

¹⁶ “SCO Outlines New Norm of Int’l Relations,” Official website of SCO Summit, http://english.scosummit2006.org/en_spzq/2006-06/16/content_815.htm.

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 realize the free flow of goods, service, capital and technology by 2020 among its members.¹⁷

The purposes, potential and smooth development of the SCO have attracted worldwide attention. An increasing number of countries and international organizations have proposed establishing contacts and

¹⁷ "What Drives SCO Forward?" Official Website of SCO Summit, http://english.scosummit2006.org/en_spzq/2006-06/16/content_814.htm.

cooperation with the SCO. The organization follows a principle of openness and is ready to conduct dialogue, exchanges and cooperation in all forms with other nations and international organizations.

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 Organizations and States, formally initiating SCO external relations. The scheme provides that other countries and international organizations 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 organizations. 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 Combatting Terrorism in Lisbon in September 2003.¹⁸

The summit on June 15, 2006, in Shanghai reviewed the developments of the organization since it was established five years ago, analyzed international and regional situations, and studied the organization'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 lies 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, he 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," said Hu. He also noted that China has basically put in place \$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.¹⁹

¹⁸ <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/topics/sco/t57970.htm>.

¹⁹ "Hu Anticipates Successful SCO Summit," China.com, May 31, 2006, http://english.china.com/zh_cn/news/china/11020307/20060531/13363399.html.

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.²⁰ The legislators pledged greater parliamentary efforts to provide legal guarantees for cooperation in the organization, to boost exchanges of legislative experience and information, and to ratify relevant agreements.

Conclusion

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-neighborly Relations. The treaties settled the desire of China and the countries and peoples of Central Asia to sincerely renew and develop their centuries-old friendship in the form of law that became the guiding principles behind the development of friendly Sino-Kyrgyzstan and Sino-Kazakhstan relations in the new century. Statistics show that the trading turnover between China and Central Asian

²⁰ "China's Top Lawmaker Calls for Closer SCO Parliamentary Co-op," *Xinhua News Agency*, May 30, 2006, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2006-05/30/content_4621896.htm.

countries was more than \$8.7 billion in 2005, which was 18 times higher than the 1992 figure. At the same time, China's investment in the region has exceeded \$7 billion.

The security policy of China toward Central Asia is based on respect for the independence of those countries. The Chinese side reiterated its adherence to its non-first-use policy to never strike nor threaten to use its nuclear weapons arsenal on Central Asian countries. 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 recognized by the United Nations, including the "East Turkistan" force that poses a direct threat to regional security and stability.²¹

In terms of politics, Chinese leaders brought forward a policy of "keeping good-neighborly relations, maintaining safe-bordering relations and bringing prosperity to neighbors." This policy was to further develop a strategically bilateral relationship in a longterm 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 the region stable, which is thought to be in accordance with China's strategic interests. China has pledged to bring security to the Central Asian countries; to ensure peace in the bordering regions; to strengthen cooperation in the field of military security and to strike against the "Three Forces," which include Uyghur separatists in coalition with Central Asian countries, to provide assistance to these countries; to uphold Central Asia to be a non-nuclear region and drug-free region; and to begin cooperation on multilateral levels after enhancing bilateral cooperation between China and Central Asian countries.

The Central Asian countries have thought highly of the active and

²¹ *Renmin Ribao*, May 18, 2004.

realistic foreign policy that China holds in the region. In the future, China will go on attaching importance to relationships with Central Asian countries as usual. Some of the areas that have remained problematic for the two sides will hopefully be resolved or improved upon. 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 organized. 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.