

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, China and the New Great Game in Central Asia

Roy Anthony Rogers

Lecturer, Department of International and Strategic Studies,
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
University of Malaya.

Abstract

China's interest and influence in Central Asia has increased since the end of the Cold War. This has been made evident by an increase in energy deals, active participation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), bilateral ties and military exercises with the Central Asian republics. China is showing its intention of expanding its influence in Central Asia through the SCO. However, since the September 11 attacks, drastic changes have taken place in Central Asia. The US military presence in Central Asia poses a geo-political challenge to China.

Introduction

The objective of this paper is to analyse the security and politics of Central Asia after the disintegration of the Soviet Union (USSR). It also highlights the role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in promoting regional cooperation as well as the challenges it has encountered. The paper also deals with the impact of September 11 on the region, especially with regard to the SCO. The September 11 attacks caused changes in the politics, diplomacy and security of Central Asia. The paper also discusses the interests of China in Central Asia in the post-Cold War era, particularly after the September 11 attacks.

Central Asia is also known as Inner Asia or Middle Asia. The idea of Central Asia originated from the Russian concept of *Tsentral'naya Azia* or Central Asia which comprises of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.¹ It is a landlocked region – bordering Russia to the north and west; China to the east; Iran and Afghanistan to the south. The concept of *Tsentral'naya Azia* was used by the Russians to refer to the non-Slavic areas of Eurasian continent.

The idea of Central Asia as a distinct region in the world was first mentioned in the works of Alexander von Humboldt, a German geographer in 1843.² Central Asia occupies an area of over 1.5 million square miles. Almost 60 per cent of the area is covered by desert. Kazakhstan is the largest state in Central Asia with over a million square miles whereas Tajikistan is the smallest state with only 55, 000 square miles.³ Central Asia has a large amount of oil deposit estimated at 200 billion barrels of oil or 20 percent of the world's total oil deposit.⁴

The Turks were the early settlers of Central Asia. Hence the region is also known as Turkestan or 'land of the Turks'.⁵ Language and religion are the two factors that unify the peoples of Central Asia. Almost all the Turks in Central Asia speak the Turkic language. However, it is noteworthy to mention that apart from the Turkic language, other languages such Russian, Persian and Arabic are also spoken in the region.⁶ Islam is the dominant religion in Central Asia. It was first introduced to the region by Arab traders in the 7th century. However, it was not until the 14th century that Islam was adopted throughout the entire region.⁷ Most of the Muslims in Central Asia are Sunni Muslims. Nevertheless, there are small groups of Shia Muslims living in Tajikistan.

In the past, the Turks established their empires such as the Samanid, Ghaznavid and the Seljuks in the region. However, in the early 13th century, the region was invaded by the Mongols led by Genghis Khan. Ever since then, the region was under foreign occupation until the late 20th century. By the 18th century, during the decline of the Mongols, the Russians started to expand its territory into Central Asia. Peter the Great from Russia invaded Omsk (modern Kazakhstan) in 1716.⁸ By the end of the 19th century, the Russians were able to capture the entire region. After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Central Asia was incorporated into the Soviet Union. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the five Central Asia republics gained independence. It is noteworthy to mention that the present leaders of Central Asia were in fact, former officials of the communist party. Although they are Muslims, but administratively they practise secularism and have no intentions to establish an Islamic state.

China defines itself and its interest in Central Asia in terms of security and economy. China sees itself as a historically dominant power in Central Asia. Relations between China and Central Asia can be traced back to the Han Dynasty about 2000 years ago.⁹ The Chinese Emperor Han Wudi (141–87BC) expanded his empire into Central Asia. Zhang Qian, a Chinese explorer, was commissioned by the Emperor Han Wudi to make official visits to Central Asia and seek out tributaries from the Central Asian kingdoms.¹⁰ Although Zhang Qian took almost 13 years to complete his tour of duty, he was one of the first Chinese to travel across Central Asia. The route taken by Zhang Qian later came to be known as the 'Silk Road' which resulted in many historians regarding Zhang Qian as the 'Father of the Silk Road'.¹¹

The Silk Road was an ancient highway that connected China with the outside world and traders and merchants used the Silk Road to enter China.¹² China had been able to establish and maintain its influence in Central Asia until the rise of the Russian Czarist Empire in the nineteenth century. However, at that point in time, China was engaged in

a bitter struggle to control the region with powers such as Britain, Russia and the Turkish Ottoman Empire. This political struggle was also known as the 'great game'.¹³ During the Cold War, the Central Asian region was considered to be a potential threat to China due to the Sino-Soviet Union rivalry.

China has always considered Central Asia to be an important region for its security against foreign invaders such as the Mongols, Arabs and Russians. China is also concerned about the security and stability of Central Asia. The security and stability of Central Asia is challenged by the rise of Islamic militancy. The rise Islamic militancy in Central Asia was caused by the Soviet invasion into Afghanistan in 1979.¹⁴ In the 1980s, the Muslims from Central Asia were forced to join the Red Army. The objective was to fight against the Afghanistan resistance. The resistance group in Afghanistan consisted of the Mujahedeens who were also Muslims. As a result of this, many Muslims in Central Asian felt betrayed by the Soviet Union and subsequently protested as this would mean fighting against their fellow Muslims. Moreover, the Central Asian soldiers in Afghanistan were impressed and inspired by the Islamic dedication of the Mujahedeens. As a result, many Central Asian soldiers who were taken prisoners joined the Mujahadeen.¹⁵

Besides the Muslims from Central Asia, some Uighurs from Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), China, also participated in the Afghan War.¹⁶ They joined the Mujahedeens in their struggle against the Soviets. They were sent to Deobandi, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to study Islam in madrassahs (Muslim religious schools) and be trained as guerrilla fighters to fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan.¹⁷

However, they began to envision a fight beyond Afghanistan upon the withdrawal of Soviet Union in 1989. They were convinced that their new struggle was to overthrow the secular republics in Central Asia to establish Islamic republics. Similarly, the Uighurs eventually returned to Xinjiang with the aim of liberating Xinjiang from the Chinese rule and establishing an Islamic Uighurstan or East Turkestan.¹⁸ Such an idea was reinforced by Mullah Muhammad Omar of the Taliban in Afghanistan who was also trained in Deobandi, Pakistan.

It must be mentioned that leaders such as Juma Namangani of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Hasan Mahsum of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and Mullah Muhammad Omar are part of the Islamic militant network in Central Asia and Afghanistan sharing similar ideas and cooperate with each other to achieve their aims.¹⁹ Therefore, China has worked closely with the Central Asian republics in its fight against religious extremism and terrorism.

Apart from security reasons, China has economic interests in the region. Since early times, Central Asia has been very important for China's economy as it was part of the Silk Road connecting China with traders from the West such the Byzantium and Ottoman empires.²⁰ However, the Sino-Soviet rivalry contributed to a decline of interest from China and the relations between China and the Soviet Central Asian republics weakened. Nevertheless, since the disintegration of the USSR, China has

reasserted its interest in Central Asia as an important area for its economic development. Central Asia is rich in natural resources, such as petroleum which is a very important commodity for the Chinese economy.²¹

China aspires to reconstruct the ancient Silk Road in Central Asia by sponsoring the building of modern highways and railroads that will connect China with the Central Asian republics. Similarly, China has forged trade agreements with the Central Asian republics. For example, during the official visit by President Jiang Zemin of China to Kazakhstan in July 1996 a joint declaration was made to promote strategic partnership between the two countries.²² As a result in June 1997 the Chinese National Oil Company was able to acquire 60 percent of stock in Kazakhstan's Aktiubinsk Oil Company.²³ Caravans that travelled the ancient Silk Road have been replaced by pipelines on the modern Silk Road. China regards its security interests as advancing by its economic well-being.²⁴

Although the US participation in Central Asia is rather limited compared with China and Russia, since the end of the Cold War it has paid more attention to the region.²⁵ The US government has offered economic aid to the Central Asian republics in the hope of constructing a positive economic identity among the republics. For example in 1994 the Central Asian-American Enterprise Fund was established with the aim to develop small and medium sized business in Central Asia. The US government through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has contributed 150 million dollars to the fund.²⁶

In fact, since the 1990s, the US has shown great interest in the region and the US interest in the region has been mainly confined to economic and business cooperation. It is interested in the region's rich natural resources such as petroleum. For example in 1997 US oil companies have acquired 40 percent of stocks in the Azerbaijan International Oil Corporation (AIOC) which conducts exploration off the coast of the Caspian Sea and it produces 700,000 of barrels of oil per day.²⁷ Another example is American companies such as Exxon and Mobile who have expressed interest in investing in Uzbekistan.²⁸

Nevertheless, since the September 11 tragedy, US security interests in Central Asia have grown. The US has established strategic military bases in Central Asia. For example in 2002 the US has established a military base at Khanabad, Uzbekistan which capable of housing 1500 personnel. Similarly, the US has established a military base at Manas, near Bishkek the capital of Kyrgyzstan.²⁹ The base is capable of housing 3000 soldiers and it has an airfield to enable US warplanes and surveillance aircrafts to land. Besides that other airfields in Tajikistan have been used by the US forces.³⁰ Since early 2002 the US Special Forces have been training the Uzbek armed forces methods to counterinsurgency. In 2003 the US has also increased joint exercise with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan under the auspices of NATO's Partnership Peace Program.³¹ All these are part of the US strategy to fight against terrorism and Islamic militancy in Central Asia.

The US presence in Central Asia has created a dilemma for China and Russia. Although China welcomes the cooperation with the US to fight terrorism in Central Asia, especially the Uighur separatists groups such as the East Turkestan Movement, China and Russia are uneasy about the prolonged presence of the US in the region. In actual fact, China views the US as a challenge and a threat to its dominant status in the region. China fears that the US has already encircled China, with American troops already stationed in South Korea, Japan and Central Asia.³² China hopes to balance the US position in the region. Hence it has pursued stronger relations with Russia, to balance the US presence in Central Asia. Furthermore the two countries are struggling to counter Islamic militancy in Central Asia.³³

The Role of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Maintaining Regional Stability

In 1996, China initiated a regional grouping known as the Shanghai Five (SF). It consisted of China, Russia and three Central Asian States which were once part of the Soviet empire, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The group specifically focused on border demarcation, confidence-building measures (CBM) and resolving common problems such as terrorism and transnational crime.³⁴ As well as this it also focused on battling the terrorist threats emanating from Afghanistan by ensuring regional stability. In June 2001, Uzbekistan was invited to join and the group was officially named the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

As a regional organisation, the SCO is able to create a collective identity for its members. Although it is premature to evaluate the success of the SCO, it cannot be denied that their relations have definitely improved since its establishment in 1996. Five years later in 2001, the regional grouping was transformed into a regional organization. Member states will be able to share opportunities and deal with new challenges and threats more effectively.

The SCO has to date initiated several norms and rules of conduct to regulate state activities and construct a collective identity. Among these are³⁵:

- the Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions in 1996 in Shanghai;
- the Treaty on Reduction of Military Forces in Border Regions in 1997 in Moscow signed by the heads of states of Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan;
- the summary documents of the 1998 at Alma-ata Summit;
- the 1999 Bishkek Summit;
- and the 2000 Dushanbe Summit.

All the above-mentioned items have made significant contributions to regional and world peace, security and stability. They have greatly enriched modern diplomatic and regional cooperation practice, and exerted an extensive and positive influence in the international community.³⁶

Although the Shanghai grouping has only been established for about eight years, it has managed to bring states that were former enemies, such as Russia and China, to reconstruct their identities. It is also a way for the Central Asian republics as well as Russia and China to socialize with each other. It is hoped that through this socializing process, individual states can reconstruct their own identities. As a first move towards a collective identity, all the members of the SCO have agreed to abide by the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.³⁷

The issues of the security and stability of the region have pushed members towards a collective security identity. Member states work closely and cooperate with each another in implementing the Shanghai treaty on the crackdown on terrorism, separatism and extremism, including establishing the SCO anti-terrorism centre in Bishkek the capital of Kyrgyzstan.³⁸ In addition, the member states will develop corresponding documents of multinational cooperation in a bid to curb illegal arms smuggling, drug trafficking, illegal migration and other criminal activities. As China and Russia fear that the US has an imperialistic intention in the region, especially after the invasion of the US forces into Afghanistan and Iraq, they will need to interact with the US as a regional grouping rather than as individual states.

Apart from security issues, the SCO is also concerned with economic interests. The SCO hopes to capitalize on the great potential and extensive opportunities in trade and economic cooperation among the member states, promote the further development of bilateral and multilateral cooperation between and among member states and the pluralism of cooperation. Within the framework of the SCO the process of negotiation in order to facilitate trade and investment issues will be carried out.

China's Interest in the SCO

China, as one of the founding members of the SCO, has hopes that the organization will enable it to pursue its interests in the region. It is noteworthy that the organization was, in fact, initiated by China in 1996 and at present the secretariat of the SCO is located in Beijing. Therefore it is not surprising that the SCO not only represents the interests of its members but is a part of the Chinese foreign policy strategy. China has asserted itself in the SCO and its interest in the SCO can be divided into three areas. They are security, a framework for socialization, as well as interaction and economic issues.

First, security is the most important reason that led China to initiate the SCO. China is concerned about the separatist movement in Xinjiang. Since the early 1990s Xinjiang has been experiencing ethnic unrest led by the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM).³⁹ The ETIM's objective is to liberate Xinjiang from Chinese rule through violence. A report was issued by China in January 1999 alleging the ETIM was responsible for the various terrorist attacks which caused the death of 162 persons in Xinjiang since the early 1990s.⁴⁰ In 2002 the US has also declared ETIM as a terrorist organization.⁴¹ China also fears the spill over of terrorism and extremism from Central Asia. Furthermore, China has to counter transnational criminal activities such as the narcotic trade in the Golden Crescent area in Central Asia and the smuggling of both weapons and human beings.⁴²

The SCO provides a tool for China to seek the cooperation of other Central Asian republics to combat terrorism, separatism, extremism and transnational crime. China is aware that it has limited military ability to ensure its security on its north-western frontier. Therefore it has sought regional cooperation in preventing extremist groups in Central Asia from supporting separatist groups in Xinjiang. Besides security reasons Xinjiang is also very important to the Chinese economy as it has been China's major oil and gas supply since the 1980s. In October 2007 PetroChina has discovered another major gas field in western Xinjiang known as Dabai III. It is estimated reserve of 130bil cubic metres which serve as an important supply source for the Chinese industry.⁴³ Hence, the SCO is extremely important for China to gain the cooperation and assurance of the Central Asian republics to ensure the stability in Xinjiang.

In June 2004 an anti-terrorist organization sponsored by the SCO was established in Tashkent the capital of Uzbekistan. The organization's objective is to coordinate and facilitate counter-terrorist activities organized by member states. Military exercises among member states have been conducted from time to time with the aim of combating terrorism. For example, in June 2003 the People's Liberation Army (PLA) participated in a joint military exercise organized by the SCO known as 'Cooperation 2003'.⁴⁴ Later that year, in August, China organized another counter-terrorism exercise in Xinjiang with the other members of the SCO. A year later in 2004, China conducted another counter-terrorist exercise, this time with Kyrgyzstan.⁴⁵

China and Russia held joint military exercises in the eastern Chinese province of Shandong in August 2005. In July 2007 members of SCO conducted another military exercise in the Urals, Russia. The military exercise was called 'Peace Mission 2007'. It was the largest military exercise ever organized by the SCO since its establishment in 2001 involving land and air forces as well as precision weapons. The former Russian Defence Minister, Sergei Ivanov, has expressed that the aim of the military exercise was to counter terrorism in Central Asia and not directed to any states.⁴⁶ Moreover he stressed that the SCO is not a military alliance such the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).⁴⁷

Apart from countering terrorism the SCO is also important for China to assist in providing border security. China has a total of 7,300km of common border with the members of the SCO.⁴⁸ Again, China needs the cooperation of Russia and its Central Asian neighbours to ensure border stability. Thus far the organization has initiated several agreements that are crucial for China's border security. Among them are the Treaty of Confidence Building in the Military Field in the Border Areas in 1996 and Agreement of Mutual Reduction of Armed Forces in Border Areas in 1997.⁴⁹

The SCO also provides a framework for China to interact and socialize with Russia and the Central Asian republics. The SCO is crucial for these countries as they were once enemies because of the 1969 Sino-Soviet border conflict. The conflict was due to the dispute between China and the Soviet Union over the control of the Ussuri River in Manchuria which separates the two countries.⁵⁰ Therefore, the organization is part of the strategy to overcome suspicion between China, Russia and the former Soviet Central Asian republics. China hopes that through the SCO it can socialize better with

its Central Asian neighbours and thus create a framework for broad and long-term cooperation in security, economy, politics and culture.

The SCO also provides an opportunity for China to further its economic interests in Central Asia. It is believed that Central Asia has the third largest energy reserves in the world. Meanwhile, China with a booming economy and experiencing rapid industrialization along its eastern coast requires more energy than ever. China has been reliant on imported oil, with 70 million tons being imported in 2004.⁵¹ It is estimated that by 2010 China will require 150 to 200 million tons of oil annually.⁵² Being a member of the SCO China hopes to engage oil-producing members such as Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in energy deals and joint exploration. This may pave the way for China to construct an East Asian oil and natural gas transportation network to link the oil-producing countries in Central Asia with the major industrial cities of China as well as countries like Japan and South Korea.

Apart from the investment in energy where China aspires to gain more concessions through its participation in the SCO, China also has investments in trade in Central Asia. For example China has diversified its economic activities in Central Asia such as investing into real estate, aircraft leasing and large establishing department stores.⁵³ Therefore, the SCO is an important instrument for China to utilize in socializing with the Central Asian republics. China hopes to construct a positive and benign identity which represents a successful economic transition from socialism to open market economy for the Central Asian republics to emulate. In fact, in 1993, countries such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan expressed their interest in the 'Chinese model' to help conduct their plans for economic development.⁵⁴ This is because China enjoys rapid economic growth despite retaining an authoritarian political structure. The leaders of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and China have already conducted talks regarding trade opportunities and investments. President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan has expressed his desire for stronger economic ties with China.⁵⁵ These efforts are further enhanced through the countries' cooperation in the SCO.

According to the *Xinhua* news agency, since the disintegration of the Soviet Union trade between China and the Central Asian republics has increased. For example, from 1992 onwards 50 per cent of Kazakhstan's imports of consumer goods were from China.⁵⁶ In April 1993, China established 150 small joint ventures in Kazakhstan. China is also involved in building roads and highways linking Urumqi the provincial capital of Xinjiang with the major cities in Central Asia.⁵⁷ For instance, in 1992 the train service linking Urumqi and Almaty, Kazakhstan was resumed.⁵⁸ Flights between the major Chinese cities and the capital cities of Central Asia were initiated. China intends to re-establish the 'Silk Road'; however, the ancient caravan routes will be replaced by modern highways and pipelines linking Central Asia with China. Moreover, the trading commodity is no longer silk but oil and gas. In 2003 and 2004 China was able to secure energy deals with Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan.

New Challenges to the SCO since September 11

Prior to the September 11 tragedy, the US influence and interest in Central Asia was confined to oil and gas exploration. Russia, being a former administrator of the region,

was actively involved in the politics and security of the area. Most of the Central Asian republics wanted to retain close relations with Russia and hoped to receive foreign aid from Moscow, whereas China's influence in the region was mainly through trade and commercial activities.

The September 11 tragedy had a tremendous impact on the politics and security of Central Asia, with two major changes taking place since then. First, is the increased US presence in Central Asia. The US has improved its relations with the Central Asian republics and increased its military presence and economic investment in the region. US forces have been stationed in Afghanistan since 2002 and there are now US military bases in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, which will enable the US to deploy its armed forces at anytime.⁵⁹

Most of the Central Asian republics such as Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have started to look to the US for assistance including in economic and military areas. Hence the US presence has undermined Russian influence in Central Asia. It has expanded from energy to military and political areas. It also poses a challenge to China's aspirations in the region.

Furthermore, the US is the only superpower among the actors in the new 'great game' that has the military as well as economic capabilities to maintain a large number of foreign forces in the region and offer economic and technical assistance to the Central Asian republics. Central Asia has important strategic interest for the US especially in its efforts against international terrorism. The US will not withdraw from the region, and therefore the SCO has to accept the fact that the US is there to stay in Central Asia for the long term.

Another major occurrence in Central Asia after the September 11 tragedy was the collapse of the Taliban rule in Afghanistan. Again, prior to September 11, Taliban rule was a threat to the Central Asian republics, due to an allegation that the Taliban in Afghanistan was supporting Islamic militant groups such as the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (HT), Islam Lashkarlary and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), in their attempt to overthrow the secular Central Asian republics and establish Islamic republics.⁶⁰ The support given by the Taliban included military aid and providing protection to terrorist groups and also moral and doctrinal training for the extremist groups.

As a result the members of the SCO branded Afghanistan under the Taliban rule as a major threat to the region. The SCO considered the Taliban to be the main sponsor of extremism, terrorism and separatism in Central Asia and therefore it put in place mechanisms to prevent their widespread influence. As well as terrorism and extremism the Taliban rule has been accused of indulging in organized crime, such as the narcotic trade and smuggling, and was also considered the source of organized criminal activities in the region.

The political and security situation in Central Asia after September 11 changed with the overthrow of the Taliban regime by US forces. As a result one of the major threats to the security of region was eliminated and the security situation in the region

improved. This has motivated the Central Asian republics to reconsider their security strategies.

The drastic changes that have taken place in Central Asia pose a serious question about the relevance of the SCO. One of the main objectives of the SCO is to provide mechanisms to counter terrorism, separatism and extremism and so the collapse of the Taliban as well as the presence of US forces in the region may make it seem that the SCO is irrelevant. Nevertheless, during the SCO St Petersburg Summit in June 2002 as well as the Moscow Summit in May 2003, member states have re-emphasized the need for a regional organization to encourage cooperation in the areas of politics, security and economy according to their own design.⁶¹

However, it is worth mentioning that despite the overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan the region is not free from the problems of terrorism, separatism and extremism. According to Pauline Jones Luong from Yale University, although the Taliban regime has been eliminated by the US military operation extremism is still on the increase in Central Asia, especially in Uzbekistan.⁶² Therefore the region is far from being terrorism free. Furthermore, the objectives of the SCO are not confined to countering terrorism alone.

Economic cooperation is one of the objectives of the SCO although it is in the initial stages. Central Asia is rich with natural resources such as oil and gas. It has great potential to be developed into one of the major oil-producing regions, apart from the Middle East. China and Russia have already shown great interest in investment in energy, transportation, communication and trade in the region. Economic cooperation among the members of the SCO is gradually increasing and requires long-term planning. Therefore, the SCO as a regional organization has an important role in facilitating communications among the business communities of the region. It is unreasonable to assume that the SCO has lost its relevance due to the changes that have happened since the September 11 tragedy. Besides economic cooperation the SCO also functions as a regional forum for the Central Asian republics to resolve other political and security issues as well as terrorism, separatism and extremism. The SCO has an important role to play in resolving border security issues such as smuggling and environmental security.

The SCO may occupy a role acting as a balance to the US presence in the region. This does not mean that it is anti-US military alliance. The US and the SCO should never view each other as antagonists but rather constructive partners. The SCO-US relations should be based on a productive relationship, engaging and cooperating on issues such as counter-terrorism, separatism and extremism. At the same time, the SCO should be a forum where its members can voice their disagreement on issues related to US policies in Central Asia. Therefore the constructive partnership should be the basis for the SCO-US relations.

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 Central Asia has needed a regional organization to facilitate communication, exchange ideas and encourage cooperation among member states in order to advance integration and to meet regional demands. The SCO have fulfilled this role. It has been transformed from a regional

dialogue mechanism into a regional organization within five years. It is undeniable that the SCO is one of the fastest growing regional organizations in the world. Thus far, members have benefited from the political, security and economic cooperation of the SCO and therefore they should continue their support for the SCO and ensure it fulfils its objectives.

Conclusion

Since ancient times, the welfare of Central Asia, in terms of its economy and security has dominated the attention of China for many reasons. Firstly, the economic development of Central Asia through the trading activities in the Silk Road region benefits China. Secondly, the stability and security in Central Asia will ensure the safety of China as this prevents any foreign invaders such the Turks, Mongols and the Russians at its borders.⁶³

China has developed a superior identity due to the socialization process that it has had with Central Asia in the past. As a result, China aspires to be a dominant power in Central Asia in the post-Cold War era, especially as its former rival, Russia, has not been certain of its identity in the region. China strives to construct its own image and identities through the SCO.

China has encountered three major challenges in its quest to function as a regional hegemonic power. The first challenge is facing the threat posed by religious extremists, who threaten China's economic and security interests. The second is the presence of American forces in Central Asia which challenges China's ambitions in the region. The third challenge is the rise of other regional powers such as Pakistan, India, Iran and Turkey which threaten China's position in the region. At the same time, Russian's bid to strengthen its position in Central Asia cannot be ignored by China. There is a possibility that Russia will re-establish its former hegemonic position in the region. All these challenges leave China with no alternative than to strengthen its position in the SCO in order to achieve its interest and maintain its dominance in Central Asia.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Asia See also A .H. Dani and V.M. Masson (eds.), *UNESCO History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, Paris: UNESCO, 1992.

² Ibid.

³ Martin McCauley, *Afghanistan and Central Asia*, London: Longman, 2002, p. 22.

⁴ Manabu Shimizu (ed.), *The Caspian Basin Oil and its Impact on Eurasian Power Games*, Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies, IPE Spot Survey, June 1998, p. 1. See also Martin McCauley, *Afghanistan and Central Asia*, p. 128-129.

⁵ Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, New York: Penguin Books, 2003, p. 19.

⁶ Muhammad Anwar Khan, "People of Central Asia," *Central Asia Journal of Area Study Centre*, No. 48, Summer 2001, p. 2.

⁷ Martin McCauley, *Afghanistan and Central Asia*, p. 23.

⁸ Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, p. 20.

⁹ Morris Rossabi, *China and Inner Asia*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1975, p. 19.

¹⁰ Oliver Wild, 'The Silk Road' <http://www.ess.uci.edu/~oliver/silk.html>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Oliver Wild, 'The Silk Road' <http://www.ess.uci.edu/~oliver/silk.html>

¹³ Please refer to Peter Hopkrik, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.

¹⁴ Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, p. 42-44.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Michael Dillon, *Xinjiang-China's Muslim Far Northwest*, London: Rutledge Curzon, 2004, p. 95.

¹⁷ Mariam Abou Zahab and Olivier Roy, *Islamist Networks The Afghan-Pakistan Connection*, London: Hurst and Company, 2002, p. 22.

¹⁸ Michael Dillon, *Xinjiang-China's Muslim Far Northwest*, p. 95.

¹⁹ Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, p. 42-44. See also Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda Global Network of Terror*, New Delhi: Lotus Collection Roli Books, 2002, p. 168-173.

²⁰ Morris Rossabi, *China and Inner Asia*, p. 11.

²¹ Zhao Huasheng, "New Situation in Central Asia and Shanghai Cooperation Organization," *China and Asia's Security*, China in the Globalized World Series, Vol. 1, Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2005, p. 22.

²² Konstantin Syroezhkin, 'Central Asia Between the Gravitational Poles of Russia and China', Boris Rumer (ed.) *Central Asia A Gathering Storm*, M.E Sharpe: New York, 2002, p. 182.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Sean L Yom, 'The Future of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation' <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~asiactr/haq/200204/0204a003.htm>

²⁵ Konstantin Syroezhkin, 'Central Asia Between the Gravitational Poles of Russia and China', p. 170.

²⁶ Boris Rumer, "The Search for Stability in Central Asia," Boris Rumer (ed.), *Central Asia A Gathering Storm*, M.E Sharpe: New York, 2002, p. 57. See also *New York Times*, 4 September 2001.

²⁷ Manabu Shimizu (ed.), *The Caspian Basin Oil and its Impact on Eurasian Power Games*, p.1. See also "The US in Central Asia," *Central Asia Journal*, No. 52, Summer 2003, p. 231-232.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Gregory M. Gleason, "Central Asia: State Building in the Face of Insurgent Islam," Ashley J. Tellis and Michael Wills, *Strategic Asia 2004-05 Confronting Terrorism in the Pursuit of Power*, Seattle: The National Bureau of Asia Research, 2004, p. 206-207. See also "The US in Central Asia," *Central Asia Journal*, No. 52, Summer 2003, p. 231-232.

³⁰ Martin McCauley, *Afghanistan and Central Asia*, p. 153.

³¹ Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, p. 192.

³² Ibid.

³³ Sherman W. Garnett, *Limited Partnership Russia-China Relations In A Changing Asia*, Washington: Russian and Eurasian Program Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1998, p. 38.

³⁴ 'Shanghai Cooperation Organisation' http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-06/08/content_337605.htm

³⁵ http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-06/08/content_337605.htm

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ 'Shanghai Cooperation Organisation' [www.vic-info.org/International Organisations/IO-SCO.htm](http://www.vic-info.org/International%20Organisations/IO-SCO.htm)

³⁸ 'Shanghai Cooperation Organisation' [www.vic-info.org/International Organisations/IO-SCO.htm](http://www.vic-info.org/International%20Organisations/IO-SCO.htm)

³⁹ J. Richard Walsh, "China and the New Geopolitics of Central Asia," *Asia Survey*, Vol. 32, No. 3, March 1993, p. 274.

⁴⁰ John Hill, "China joins US War on Terror," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, October 2002, p. 56.

⁴¹ Dru Gladney, *Dislocating China*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004, p. 239.

⁴² Kenneth Weisbrode, *Central Eurasia: Prize or Quicksand?* Adelphi Paper 338, London: Oxford University Press, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2001, p. 54. See also Alan Dupont, *Drug, Transnational Crime and Security in East Asia*, Working Paper No. 328, Canberra: Strategic & Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, December 1998,

⁴³ *The Star*, 12 October 2007.

⁴⁴ Zhao Huasheng, "Security Building in Central Asia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,"

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/china_peace2007_page.html

⁴⁷ http://english.people.com.cn/200604/26/eng20060426_261341.html

⁴⁸ Zhao Huasheng, "Security Building in Central Asia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no2_ses/4-2_Zao.pdf

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sino-Soviet_border_conflict

⁵¹ Zhao Huasheng, "Security Building in Central Asia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no2_ses/4-2_Zao.pdf

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ J. Richard Walsh, "China and the New Geopolitics of Central Asia," p. 280.

⁵⁴ Ross H. Munro, "Central Asia and China," Michael Mandelbaum, *Central Asia and the World*, New York: Council on foreign Relations Press, 1994, p. 231.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 230.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Martin McCauley, *Afghanistan and Central Asia*, p.153.

⁶⁰ Anthony Hyman, "Russia, Central Asia and Taliban," William Maley (ed.), *Fundamentalism Reborn?*, London: Hurst & Company, 2001, p. 105-107.

⁶¹ 'Shanghai Cooperation Organisation' [www.vic-info.org/International Organisations/IO-SCO.htm](http://www.vic-info.org/International%20Organisations/IO-SCO.htm)

⁶² Luong and Weinthal, 'New Friends, New Fears in Central Asia', *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2002, p. 64.

⁶³ Morris Rossabi, *China and Inner Asia*, p. 10.