

Good Neighbourhood and Cross-border Cooperation between China and Central Asian States

中国与中亚国家良好周边和跨径合作

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摘 要: 本文论述了中国与中亚的经济、政治和文化方面的合作情况与发展前景。

关键词: 合作, 中国, 中亚, 周边关系

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The world today is undergoing tremendous changes and adjustments. Peace and development remain the main themes of the present era, and pursuit of peace, development and cooperation has become an irresistible trend of the times. Global and regional cooperation is in full swing, and countries are increasingly interdependent. The president of China Hu Jintao said that for our neighboring countries, China will continue to follow the foreign policy of friendship and partnership, strengthen good-neighborly relations and practical cooperation with them, and energetically engage in regional cooperation in order to jointly create a peaceful, stable regional environment featuring equality, mutual trust and win-win cooperation.

The neighboring regions of Xinjiang and Central Asia, linked historically on the famous Silk Road. Since ancient times, Xinjiang has kept close economic and cultural exchanges along the Silk Road with neighboring countries. Xinjiang is home to a number of ethnic groups that share languages, religious beliefs, customs and consumption behavior with neighboring countries.

The Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region is centrally located in the Eurasian continent, on the northwest frontier of China, with 33 border counties and cities. It abuts on Kazakhstan, Russia, Mongolia, Kirgizstan and Tajikistan in the west, north and northeast; borders Pakistan, Afghanistan and India in the southwest; and is near to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The border extends about 5,600 km, of which 3,700 km are shared with three Central Asian countries.

Xinjiang now has 16 Class A ports, where foreign transport vehicles may deliver goods directly, and 11 Class B ports. The ports are all located within 200 to 500 km of large cities. The Alatau Pass is the western bridgehead of China. The Continental Bridge is China's gateway to the West, and provides a convenient passage for technological

cooperation and border trade between Xinjiang and Central Asian countries.

In April 1996 and April 1997, two agreements for security and disarmament along the borders—the “Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions” and the “Treaty on Reduction of Military Forces in Border Regions”—were signed by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. These two agreements marked the beginning of the Shanghai Five-SCO process and indicated the strengthening of security cooperation between China and her Central Asian neighbors. Under the framework of these two agreements, all of the disputes regarding the western section of the former Sino-Soviet border of more than 3,000 kilometers—a region that bred instability and conflict for centuries—were completely resolved within just six years.

At the same time, the Shanghai Five-SCO process has provided a solid structure for China and Central Asia to cooperate closely in combating the “three forces” of terrorism, extremism and separatism as well as various other cross-border criminal forces. China and Central Asia also support each other’s efforts to frustrate other conventional or non-conventional security threats and eliminate or resolve external disruptions to domestic stability and development.

Economic relations between China and Central Asian countries have also developed very rapidly. Overall levels of trade have grown from a meager US\$ 500 million in 1992 to \$ 8.5 billion in 2005, and to \$ 12 billion in 2006. Among the bilateral trade relations between China and the Central Asian countries, Sino-Kazakh trade is the largest, reaching \$6.8 billion in 2005. After several years of construction, the oil pipeline from Kazakhstan to China (Aterlao–Kenjiyaker–Atasu–Alataw) finally began to carry oil in late 2005. The handling capacity of the pipeline is 20 million tons per year, which will be a significant increase from the annual amount of 500,000 tons currently shipped via railways. Gas pipelines from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to China will also be constructed.

Islamic, Slavic, Confucian and Indian civilizations have converged in Central Asia for millennia. It is significant to note that against this background of history, cultural cooperation has been stepped up between China and the Central Asian countries. The focus of such cooperation is to highlight the spirit of the Silk Road by enhancing the mutual communication and understanding among the different civilizations and nations in the region, strengthening the emotional ties between Chinese and Central Asians and paving the way for comprehensive Sino-Central Asian cooperation.

President Hu Jintao remarked in SCO’s Astana Summit Meeting on July 5, 2005, “We shall, by effective measures, conduct and deepen our cooperation in culture, disaster relief, education, tourism, journalism, etc. Human resources capacity building should be another area of cooperation, and China will set aside a special fund to train 1,500 management and professional talents in different fields from other member states within three years”. One should note that this project, which is geared at training young professionals from Central Asia, has been progressing very well.

In looking into the future, it is necessary to highlight the fact that relations between China and Central Asia still face several major issues that deserve urgent attention.

First, a breakthrough in Sino-Central Asian economic cooperation is needed. In order

to realize this aim, participants should be pragmatic when articulating goals and implementing measures. Countries must also be willing to abide by market rules, such as creating a level playing field, ensuring mutual openings and using a combination of both bilateral and multilateral approaches. As quite a few cooperative programs are simply held up by the lack of funds, the fulfillment of China's promise of the \$900 million of buyer's credit certainly promoted economic cooperation between China and Central Asia.

Second, there is an obvious need for the expansion of security cooperation between all countries. A joint advantage of China-Central Asia cooperation in the near future will still be in the security area. The SCO Regional Anti-terrorism Structure should be quickly consolidated to work more efficiently. The proposed Central Asian Nuclear-Free Zone (CANFZ) program should also be furthered so that the region avoids a nuclear arms race and any proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Additional campaigns should be launched to crack down on drug-trafficking, arms-smuggling, illegal immigration and other cross-border crimes.

Third, cultural cooperation should continue to be encouraged. The existing bilateral cultural cooperation should be expanded into multilateral cultural cooperation, which calls for organizational coordination, financial support and professional programming. In the near future, cooperation will specifically unfold on these fronts: exchanging mutual visits by cultural, artistic and sports groups, hosting joint art festivals and exhibitions, dispatching and accepting more exchange students, promoting visits by high-level experts and scholars, providing professional training in various fields, increasing cultural exchanges among the youth and facilitating culture-oriented tourism along the Silk Road.

Regional cooperation must be steadily institutionalized and be guaranteed by relevant international or regional laws and regulations. At the same time, the discrepancy in rules and regulations between the domestic and regional agreements should be sorted out in a careful manner. Moreover, regional security cooperation must be based on "comprehensive security" with the handling of conventional security threats combined closely with the handling of non-conventional threats. Finally, the maintenance of regional security and stability is a precondition and a guarantee to the facilitation of regional economic and cultural cooperation. Economic and cultural cooperation can in turn constitute a solid basis for political and security cooperation throughout the region.

Central Asia is a near neighbor of China, its security and stability was very important for the stability of West China, its prosperity and development was beneficial to the development of West China. China's substantial standpoint to situation of Central Asia was very clear. As PRC president, Hu Jintao expressed in the speech of Astana summit of SCO in 2005: "The people of Central Asia have their own right to choose their developmental pattern in accordance with their fundamental realities of country independently. They have wise and capability to deal with affairs of their own country and Central Asia area." China wished "various bilateral and multilateral cooperation and development in Central Asia area in order to meet challenges jointly, advance the development of this region, uphold regional harmony and realize the co-prosperity." Therefore, China wished that Central Asia could keep stability of political situation, China wouldn't interfere in political choice of the peoples of Central Asia, but China didn't wish other foreign power to involve into Central Asia politics, purposely produce "Revolution"

and arouse political unrest in Central Asia. China paid close attention to the possible extension of various extremists in Central Asia too, because it would certainly exercise influence to stability and security of border regions in China, especially the Xinjiang region. China wished Central Asia region to act as cooperative partner in politics, economy, security and so on, keep peace and stability of Central Asia hand in hand, advance the development and prosperity of Central Asia and western China.

To my mind, the parties and states concerned could promote multilateral security cooperation in Central Asia at three levels in the future:

The first was cooperation among Central Asian States. At present, there still existed many traditional issues such as territorial dispute, resource allocation, ethical and religious contradictions. This level of cooperation rested on these Central Asian States to relieve and resolve the ethical and religious contradictions and territorial disputes concerned the security of this area by means of bilateral or multilateral cooperation among themselves.

The second was cooperation among the regional relevant countries. Because the development standard of Central Asian States was still very low and the national power was finite, so it was difficult for themselves to solve the problems, and needed the effective cooperation to the extent of the region. Nowadays there already existed an effective framework of cooperation, such as Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) and SCO. At the beginning, SCO effectively solved the military trust and border security between Central Asia, Russia and China. Now SCO had an active campaign of economic cooperation besides the security cooperation, because it was one of essential guarantees to solve the question of security of Central Asia by means of promoting further development and prosperity.

The third was the multilateral cooperation in the world scope. The region of Central Asia lies on the center of Eurasia Continent and links with East Asia, South Asia and Middle East. Such a complicated geopolitical situation doomed that the security of Central Asia interrelated with both the regional countries and the world. The security cooperation on the international level was indispensable to the peace and stability of Central Asia. At the same time, USA, Europe, NATO, OSCE, UN and other relevant international organizations paid close attention to security of Central Asia had common interests at least on keeping stability of Central Asia. They could cooperate by various means such as structural exchange, official conference and security forum, information exchanges of fighting against terrorism, preventing drugs trafficking and even the corresponding combined blow. As to the future security of Central Asia, this kind of cooperation was both necessary and possible.

Yesterday's Silk Road became today's oil and gas road, tomorrow it will develop as a win-win cooperation road between Central Asia and China.

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Abstract: This paper discusses the situation and development prospect of economic political and cultural cooperation between China and Central Asian States.

Key words: cooperation, China, Central Asia, good neighbourhood.

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