

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: China's Grand Strategy in Central Asia

Mara Gubaidullina, and Aigerim Yelibayeva

Abstract—The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is one of the successful outcomes of China's foreign policy since the end of the Cold war. The expansion of multilateral ties all over the world by dint of pursuing institutional strategies as SCO, identify China as a more constructive power. SCO became a new model of cooperation that was formed on remains of collapsed Soviet system, and predetermined China's geopolitical role in the region. As the fast developing effective regional mechanism, SCO today has more of external impact on the international system and forms a new type of interaction for promoting China's grand strategy of 'peaceful rise'.

Keywords—Central Asia, China's grand strategy, Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE analysis of China's foreign policy in Central Asia allows drawing a parallel in China's history of 70-80s. The period of Maoist political upheavals and controlled economy has changed with the revolutionary decisions undertaken by Den Xiaoping in 1978. The increased agricultural productivity, a huge expansion of small-scale industry and inflow of foreign direct investments made a contribution to increased efficiency of capital use, manufacturing and exports. It was the period when China made a breakthrough in its development, and took the first steps out of an inert and backward condition to prosperity.

According to Ashley J. Tellis, Deng Xiaoping intended to change China by modernizing four areas as agriculture, science, industry and military and declared as the principle objective of country's grand strategy for the accumulation of "comprehensive national power". It was the notion of developing national potential for modernization and high international status [1].

It was the period of efforts to recover the past greatness, the desire to restore previous eminence, and appear as a great power on the global stage. The increasing acquisition of resources over the three decades allowed the Chinese government to preserve high-level of internal order and security and prevent any political challenges to the governing regime. By strengthening the country's military capacity simultaneously, China protected the environment necessary for continued economic growth.

Mara S. Gubaidullina is Professor with the Department of International Relations, Al-Faraby Kazakh National University, Almaty 050000, Kazakhstan (mob. phone: +7-7772702936; e-mail: maragu@mail.ru).

Aigerim Y. Yelibayeva is with the Department of International Relations, Al-Faraby Kazakh National University, Almaty 050000, Kazakhstan (GSM: +7-7014904472; e-mail: aigerimy79@mail.ru).

Chinese political leaders followed Den Xiaoping's slogans of peace and development in China's foreign policy, according to which a great effort shall be put for the maintaining a good political relations with its neighbors with no compromise on in territorial and political claims. In spite of the competition among bureaucratic political elite, the development of China was accompanied by the liberalization of economy and desire to maintain an appropriate strategic environment for its best security. Though the reliance on military capacity was limited with the lessons learned from the ineffective Soviet over-militarized grand strategy, China still provokes increased regional and global anxieties on its intentions.

Today, China developed a grand strategy with its traditional emphasis on economic transition based on "permanently" peaceful intention [1, 35]. Zheng Bijan, originator of the "peaceful rise" term correlates the ascent of China as a great power with its peaceful strategy that will allow prospering in the era of tight economic interdependence.

In the late 1990s, China begun to look beyond the adjacent Asia-Pacific region, which was basically explained by the increased needs of its fast growing economy. National interests required new approaches to advancing China's aims and strategy. Beijing began to define the areas of its possible influence in the peripheries, so to ensure own vital interests and primacy.

A. China's Strategy of "Peaceful Rise"

The analysis of China's strategy of "peaceful rise" shows the various approaches to the explanation given by international scholars.

Barry Buzan makes the connection to the growing power with its own gains in material and status position [2, p.5]. Buzan highlights a two-way process in which the rising state accommodates the rules and structures of international society with the simultaneous adjustment of other powers to the changes in those rules and structures.

Li Junru in his speech SIIS Seminar, points out that China's peaceful development is necessary for the revitalization of the Chinese civilization that is joining the contemporary human civilization [3, p.1]. The revitalization of the civilization requires a harmonious socialist society with Chinese characteristics for the development of peaceful international surroundings and maintenance of its own development.

According to Yu Xintian, China's path for peaceful development serves as a guiding principle with regard to domestic politics and foreign strategy, and indicates the country's orientation with regard to the transformational

international system [4, p.1]. Shi Yinhong sees in a peaceful development an important asset to the grand strategy of China based on broad-sensed soft-power [5, p.20].

Yu Xintian gives the acknowledgement of deep-rooted value of harmony in Chinese culture. A number of Chinese leaders and philosophers put the idea of harmony as the core element of country's development and its foreign policy. The five principles of peaceful coexistence by Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping put forth the idea of common interests with the existing differences [4, p.7]. Based on 30 years of successful development after economic reforms, China declared the harmonious world as the main objective of its foreign policy.

In general, Chinese scholars consider the "peaceful rise" as the largest historical challenge that began with the national achievements and reforms in economic area. The growing shift from territorial and military security issues to economic soft power became an apparent tendency in primary issues of international relations. And China's experience of peaceful development constitutes as an important factor contributing to the harmonious world development, transforming China's reputation from bad and backward to the "peaceful". China's "new internationalism" based on multilateral cooperation, international organizations and international system led to the "internationalized" national interests [4, p.24]. And "peaceful rise" became the important feature of China's peaceful development. It required socialist modernization in the country to be linked to the economic globalization process [3].

Chinese history witnessed the rapid progress done by the society in a short time [6], and today the awareness of being able to build up a powerful nation and revitalize its civilization became more apparent.

The idea of harmonious world and "peaceful rise" is the necessary requirement of China's grand strategy that shall rely on the resources and power that shall effectively deal with social contradictions. Since the shortage of resources, ecological and economic problems may delay China's development in the future; Beijing elaborated the Five-year plan program, which called to accelerate country's progress.

Despite of the skepticism among western scholars, Beijing is actively positioning itself as a harmonious society interested in harmony with others.

Barry Buzan underlines that China has been successful in its empowerment only after the collapse of Soviet Union that eased its security and allowed to use the period of relative stable world economy for the development of export-led policy. The future prognosis is rather skeptical, since the future period of China's "peaceful rise" may not be easy. He believes that for the creation of necessary conditions for its grand strategy, China should rely on international society [2, p.7].

Avery Goldstein, in his analysis of grand strategy concept, gives a broad understanding that it is not a label for a description of state's foreign policies. It refers to the logic that is called to inform and link foreign policies and help to serve the nation's interests [7, p. 19]. It can provide a rough guide to assess the particular initiatives: military, economic or of

diplomatic nature. According to this logic, China's grand strategy became apparent in the mid-1990s, only after Chinese leaders modified their approach in changes that were necessary after the collapse of the Cold War international order.

China's nuclear capability in the early 1980s, provided with sufficiently frightening deterrent. After the period of Cold War, China faced no direct military challenges, they were of indirect nature. Beijing needed a new strategy containing its long-term goals for protecting its core national interests. The post-Cold War period was characterized by the US primacy in economy and supremacy in military. China's foreign policy having failed to cope with these challenges, in 1996 it has adjusted a new grand strategy. The new grand strategy contained three main approaches based on the point that the polarity of the international system though changed, it has not changed the ordering principle. They were security dilemma for dealing with the US primacy in an anarchic international system; self-help for cultivation of commitments from other states and organization, and at last the geopolitical choice in the foreign strategy.

Historically, there were different grand strategies with its own specific period and policy: hegemony, balancing, bandwagoning, isolation. The current transitional strategy of "peaceful rise" is a next step for the China's rise as a great power. As A. Goldstein notes it is not clear what course will China follow in the case of its successful realization [7, p.39].

B. Shanghai Cooperation Organization and "New Regionalism" in Central Asia

The beginning of 1970s started with the China's integration intentions on the regional level. With the grown understanding of its place, China became willing to be engaged in multilateral politics and diplomacy, especially in the structures, where China's primacy has been recognized. There was a shift in China's behavior; Beijing made an effort to become a responsible and constructive partner-state so to stimulate good neighborly relations.

The cooperation between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan resulted in the creation of a new kind of multilateral instrument "Shanghai Five" that later, in 2001 was transformed into Shanghai Cooperation organization (SCO). SCO as the result of the successful Beijing's foreign policy agenda became a political forum for the discussion of regional security issues.

China's leadership and its appreciation of the benefits of the multilateral cooperation resulted in financial support of SCO member-states and active participation in bilateral projects. In its turn, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization gave China an access to Central Asian vast energy resources and promises for Islamic separatism in the country's western provinces.

According to Michael Clarke, China by taking an active steps in 1997, has established geopolitically vassal relations with other member-states. Clarke characterizes the current China's foreign policy in Central Asia as "new regionalism" – new security concept for promoting China's "peaceful rise"

[8, p.118]. China has shaped SCO in a unique fashion bearing the imprint of China's foreign policy thinking since the early 1990s.

There are several imperatives of China's foreign policy. From one side, China is more concerned with own sovereignty issues and control over the Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region, from the other side China is actively promoting the economic development.

The collapse of Soviet Russia and the creation of new states have reduced Moscow's influence and opened new gates to China's active engagement in the region. The broadening of Chinese involvement in military, economic, cultural and political matters, demonstrate the seriousness of efforts taken by China. The necessity in hydrocarbon resources for the rapidly growing economy required a new style of interaction. Russia and China in the face of SCO received a new platform for the discussion and sharing interests. It is useless to ignore the Russian potential, and at the same time to fear the Chinese rise. There is a huge dependency of China's influence on the power and policies of Russia [9, p. 9]. And peculiar to China's foreign policy that it is in search of the regions where less obstacles arise for the expansion of China's influence.

SCO is an effective tool in China's foreign policy basket that forms a new type of interaction and level of political dependency. It is the politics of continuing convergence of interests that may bring to common values. Today, SCO is considered as a new pole out of a pole of the US that is effective and unique in its nature.

China's new regionalism seeks to protect the regional status and promote the economic and social development. It presents a complex of tasks for achieving a "peaceful rise" to great power.

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