



CULTURAL DIMENSION OF CHINA'S NEW SILK ROAD INITIATIVE

The most obvious incarnation of revitalization of China's efforts to strengthen its presence in Eurasia became the Chinese New Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the XXI century Marine Silk Road united into the so called One Belt, One Road Initiative, which has become one of the most iconic and innovative manifestations of modern trends of economic globalization and regionalization. The Silk Road Initiative suggested by China has become the final stage of the Deng Xiaoping's 'hide your strength and bide your time' strategy implementation.

The SREB concept was first introduced on September 7, 2013, during the President Xi Jinping's official visit to Kazakhstan. In his speech Xi Jinping emphasized the fact that the countries of the region are united by strong bilateral relations and shared history. Assuring the Central Asian countries that China would always respect the chosen development path of the other states, Xi Jinping also stated that Beijing had no claim to dominate in the region.

Speaking of the cultural dimension of China's New Silk Road Initiative it should be mentioned that it is based on the principle of interaction between the nations. According to the Fifth cooperation priority of the Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, strengthening the public diplomacy or people-to-people bond includes the following areas: education (10,000 scholarships per year); culture and art; tourism; health care; youth policy; science and technology; political parties and parliaments cooperation. Thus, China has proposed a geo-cultural strategy for Eurasia, which should provide realization of its economic goals and priorities.

Actually, the formulation of the geo-cultural framework of the New Silk Road Initiative (NSRI) is just as important for China as the implementation of its economic strategy. China's cultural vision of the NSRI is based on the assumption that mutual trust and better understanding of each other's art and culture will definitely enhance international cooperation and make it possible to overcome any deeply entrenched prejudices and suspicions raised from cultural differences. The Chinese experts stated that further efforts to build mutual trust and to make clear the difference between China's vision and those of

Russia and the U.S., stressing development and cooperation without deep economic integration are among the main goals of establishment of the Silk Road Economic Belt initiated by Beijing.

It is quite understandable that the need to overcome the long embedded divisions and prejudices regarding Chinese growing economic domination over the region, China's population growth rate and Beijing's geopolitical ambitions, some of which are justified while others are not, will be one of the main obstacles for the Silk Road Economic Belt implementation. Nowadays, the ancient Silk Road is being rebuilt in the form of a transcontinental network of bullet trains, oil and gas pipelines, highways, telecommunication lines and satellites, trade agreements and scientific cooperation. However, the SREB also needs a cultural dimension. The aforementioned barriers are mostly based on the sinophobia formed in many countries over the world, especially neighboring China, centuries ago. Therefore, Beijing's choice to use the concept of the revival of the Silk Road to destroy old and newly formed phobias and stereotypes towards China and people of the Chinese origin was not accidental. The Chinese authorities believe that the New Silk Road Initiative will be successfully implemented in the region due to historical analogies of mutual enrichment of cultures.

The cultural dimension of the NSRI played an important role in the creation of the positive perception of the Chinese project. One of the major outcomes of the Chinese strategy aimed at boosting cultural interaction within the framework of the SREB is the creation of a non-governmental Organization for Cultural Cooperation, "Eurasia – Silk Road". The agreement on launching of the Organization was reached during the Second Great Silk Road International Cultural Forum, which was held in Moscow on September 14-15, 2015 and organized by the Chinese Foundation of Culture and Arts of Nations, the China's Silk Road Fund, the Fund of Spiritual Development of people of Kazakhstan and the Intergovernmental Foundation for Humanitarian Cooperation for Commonwealth of Independent States. The main theme of the Forum was "Developing Partnership: Planning of Joint Projects for Cultural Cooperation". More than 300 eminent

scientists, artists, politicians, businessmen and media representatives from countries along the SREB and also representatives of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and UNESCO attended the meeting.

It also should be mentioned that according to the Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, China will focus on both holding years of culture, arts and film festivals, TV weeks and book fairs in each other's countries and cooperating on production and translation of high-quality films, radio and TV programs. It is obvious that tourism relations between countries along the SREB should also be enhanced. Beijing is planning to hold tourism promotion weeks and publicity months, to jointly create competitive international tourist routes and products with Silk Road features and to make it more convenient to apply for tourist visas in countries along the route of the New Silk Road Initiative. For instance, Kazakhstan and China have already initiated joint cultural projects such as an international expedition "Thousands li along the Silk Road", which was held in Almaty in 2014, and a walking friendship and cooperation caravan titled "China and Kazakhstan: Tea culture of the Great Silk Road", which arrived in Kazakhstan in 2015 which was directed from Xian to ancient trade routes and carried valuable Deyang treating tea Fuca grown in the Chinese Shaanxi province. Moreover, in order to integrate Chinese culture into the outside world by building the NSRI, China also launched press tour titled "A New Silk Road, A New Dream", which started in Xi'an, capital of China's western Shannxi province and the starting point of the ancient Silk Road, in June 2014.

Therefore, the Chinese large-scale New Silk Road Initiative is one of the most ambitious projects in the world. At the time when the initiative was firstly launched, it caused a great deal of concern and even mistrust in Eurasia. However, it took only two and a half years to develop rather strong support of the SREB initiative along the countries of the route. By implementing the NSRI China hopes to spread its cultural values, which could become a "modern fashion" in many countries along the road and in long-term perspective could even lead to the formation of the "Chinese Eurasia" or the "sinocentric world".

Written by Azhar Serikkaliyeva,
Eurasian Research Institute, Kazakhstan

Politics, Foreign Affairs and Security

- During his official visit to Erevan, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Sergey Lavrov, and the President of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan, discussed a wide range of bilateral, regional and international issues. Special attention was given to the peace settlement in Nagorno-Karabakh in the wake of a recent surge of tensions in the zone of conflict.
- During the bilateral meeting in New York, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan, Sirodjidin Aslov, and his Belarusian counterpart, Vladimir Makei, agreed that Tajikistan and Belarus would jointly develop cooperation with third countries. The parties also stressed the importance of open and engaged cooperation among all states against international terrorism.
- During the meeting of the Council of National Coordinators of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member-states in Beijing, the participants exchanged views on the draft agenda, the outcome documents of the upcoming meetings of the Council of the Heads of the SCO member-states, the Council of Foreign Ministers, the meetings of Culture Ministers, the meetings of the Board of the Business Council, the Council of Interbank Association, planned to be held in Tashkent in June 2016.
- During the meeting of the NATO – Russia Council at Ambassadorial level held in Brussels, the sides discussed the crisis in and around Ukraine and the need to fully implement the Minsk Agreements and the situation in Afghanistan.
- The Russian Security Council announced that Russia and the United States have agreed to step up information security cooperation. This agreement was one of the results of a high-level meeting on international information security held in Geneva. The two sides agreed to intensify the bilateral cooperation to counter threats in the field of information and communication technologies.

Economy, Finance and Energy

- The First Deputy Minister of Energy of Russia, Kirill Molodtsov, reported that Russia had exported 6.8 million tons of crude oil to China in the first quarter of 2016. In 2015, Russian

crude oil exports to China surged by 17.5% to 26.7 million tons.

- About 10.6 billion cubic meters of natural gas was supplied via 1,830 kilometers long Central Asia – China gas pipeline, which starts in the Turkmen – Uzbek border city of Gedaim, runs through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and crosses the Chinese – Kazakh border in Khorgos, in January-March 2016 that is by 33% more than in the same period of 2015.
- According to the Ministry of Oil and Gas of Turkmenistan, almost 450,000 tons of liquefied natural gas (LNG) will be produced in the country in 2016. Major part of this volume, namely, 340,000 tons, is to be produced at the Turkmenbashi complex of oil refineries.
- The Chairman of the Skyland Petroleum, David Robson, announced the company's plans to acquire partial stakes in several large oil and gas fields in East Siberia in Russia. After completing the investment, oil and gas will be transported to Chinese regions, such as Heilongjiang, Liaoning, Beijing and Shanghai, through the Eastern Siberia – Pacific Ocean oil pipeline and the Power of Siberia gas pipeline.
- According to the National Holding Company of Uzbekistan, Uzbekneftegaz, the Russian oil company LUKOIL started the construction of the Kandym Gas Processing Complex, a key production facility in the development of the Kandym group of gas condensate fields located in the Bukhara Province in the south-west of Uzbekistan. The first phase of the plant construction project scheduled for completion in December 2018 envisages construction of a gas processing plant of Kandym group of fields with an annual production capacity of 7,819 billion cubic meters of marketable gas, 134,360 tons of gas condensate and 212,900 tons of elemental sulfur.
- According to the Minister of Communications and Information Technology of Iran, Mahmoud Vaezi, Azerbaijan agreed to open a \$500 million credit line to finance the Rasht – Astara railway project, a section of the Qazvin – Rasht – Astara railway, which is currently under construction. A total cost of the construction is estimated at \$0.9-\$1 billion.
- The First Deputy CEO for Operations Management of Rosatom, Alexander Lokshin, announced the company's plans to increase its foreign contracts portfolio in 2016 by \$20 billion to nearly \$130 billion.
- According to the Head of the Foreign Ministry Headquarters to Monitor Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action of Iran, Abbas Araqchi, Tehran signed a deal with an American company to export its excess heavy water supplies in the amount of 32 tons to the U.S.
- The electricity consumption in Kazakhstan has dropped to the minimum level over the last five years due to the negative dynamics in the industrial production, which accounts for over 67% of the energy consumption. The electricity consumption in Kazakhstan has decreased by 2.2% in the first three months of 2016 as compared to the same period of 2015 and stood at 24.4 billion kilowatt hours.
- According to the Minister of Information and Communications Technology of Iran, Mahmoud Vaezi, trade turnover between Iran and Azerbaijan increased by 53% in January-March 2016.
- In the framework of a meeting of the working group on Russian – Armenian interregional cooperation under the Intergovernmental Economic Cooperation Commission, the Deputy Minister of Economic Development of Russia, Alexander Tsybul'sky, reported that Russia's trade with Armenia was \$1.3 billion in 2015 and currently is demonstrating a decrease by 11.6% in nominal terms while growing by almost 2% in real terms.

Society and Culture

- A total of 175 countries have signed the Paris Climate Agreement at the United Nations in New York, four months after the agreement on keeping the average temperature below 2 degrees Celsius over the preindustrial era by 2100 was adopted in Paris. The Paris Agreement will come into force as soon as 55 countries responsible for 55% of the world's greenhouse gases have ratified the accord.
- The Ministry of Emergency Situations of Azerbaijan, the State Maritime Administration and the Caspian Shipping Company JSC jointly stated that fire on the Russian PALFLOT 2 tanker in the Caspian Sea has been extinguished.

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