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Central Asian Perceptions of China



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Guest Editors

Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse
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Dear Readers,

To shed new light on China-Central Asia relations and to avoid the well-trodden paths of studies on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the energy issue, we have chosen to cast a more in-depth look at the impact of China on Central Asian societies. This issue of *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* is therefore situated at the cross-roads of studies on international relations and of sociological approaches to the “transition” of the former Soviet space. China’s rise to power in the Central Asian space constitutes a driving force of social change. Cultural apprehensions, although difficult to measure, are a key area of international relations: the functioning and evolution of the world system are shaped by local representations of it. In this domain, Central Asian societies no doubt move more quickly than could be shown by any analysis of their political regimes, which are characterized by stagnation. Despite the fact they only have a narrow space in which to move, Central Asian societies are participants in the international game and therefore ought to be considered as political actors in their own right, not as mere objects of international competition between the great powers.

With the exception of our own article, the texts herein have a twofold interest and ought to be grasped on two levels: first of all, they are the work of Central Asian specialists who are either part of the world of expertise or that of academia, and who we have expressly asked to examine the question of the perception of China in Central Asia. They do this, however, without getting weighed down in the areas of Sino-Central Asian diplomatic relations or of the geopolitical weight of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, subjects that have already been thoroughly researched elsewhere. Two of them, Ablat Khodzhaev (Uzbekistan) and Konstantin Syroezhkin (Kazakhstan), are renowned Sinologists: the first embodies the famous tradition of 1970s-1980s Soviet Sinology, the second of contemporary post-Soviet Sinology. The other three authors, Saodat Olimova, Sadykzhan Ibraimov and Amantur Zhaparov, are well-known specialists in the analysis of their respective societies (Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan), and here offer their views of the “Chinese question” and of its sudden arrival on the Central Asian scene.¹

¹ These five articles were commissioned by Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse as part of the project “Coping with the Russo-Chinese Competition in Central Asia: Local Perspectives and Strategies”, funded by the Smith Richardson Foundation.

Their articles can both be read as analyses performed by first-rate scholars, but also as an indirect contribution to ongoing debates regarding China in their respective countries. The reader will indeed quickly understand that Beijing leaves no one indifferent in Central Asia and that it elicits—depending to the political orientations and convictions of each author—contrasting viewpoints, extending from anxiety to serenity. Both phenomena can sometimes even co-exist in the same author. In accordance with whether interest is taken in economic, socio-cultural or demographic questions, China gives rise to a multiplicity of perceptions. In the balancing game that Central Asia is maintaining between Russia, China and the West, the discreet call that some authors make to Central Asian unity must be heard. Numerous local intellectual and political figures, often of western sensibility, regret that the Central Asian states were unable to come together to form a regional union at the beginning of the 1990s and view China's rise to power as one of the results of that historic failure. The reader will also be struck by just how much China's presence in Central Asia raises questions of a more general nature linked to globalization. In this landlocked region, which has often lived in isolation, the discovery of globalizing mechanisms, whether positive (commercial flows, birth of merchant diaspora) or negative (factory closures, relocation, labor market competition), today largely pass through China.

To ascertain a precise picture of Central Asian reactions vis-à-vis China involves overcoming several challenges related to the authoritarian character of these regimes. First, the limited nature of political life in Central Asia makes it difficult to identify opposition milieus expressing opinions that diverge from those espoused by the ruling authorities. No political dissension is permitted in either Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan, while in Tajikistan it is reserved for the Party of Islamic Rebirth, which has no real formed opinion on foreign policy. A similar thing is happening in Kazakhstan, where the opposition also concentrates more on questions of domestic political and social affairs than on those concerning international relations. In addition, the only state in which the so-called opposition has succeeded in attaining power, namely Kyrgyzstan, shows that changes in political personnel have no effect on foreign policy choices, so limited is the room for maneuver in such countries. This is why we have chosen not to heed the opinions on China expressed by the political opposition, since they are extremely limited and probably quite irrelevant for the analysis of China's impact on Central Asian societies. Despite that limitation, divergences of opinion and of assessment are numerous, and this issue brings them to light.

Contrary to widespread opinion, the ostensible Sinophilia of Central Asian states ought to be qualified. The reason that the heads of state and their Foreign Affairs Ministers make so much publicity about their friendly relations with Beijing is precisely because they do not view their troublesome neighbor as simply a power *like the others*. Central Asia cannot afford to endorse policies that are contrary to Chinese interests. While the official declarations have been unanimous about the need to maintain friendly relations with Beijing, experts present more variegated viewpoints and their understanding of the situation is far more critical than that of their political leaders. Almost all of them are concerned by the silence with which the authorities shroud the partnership with Beijing and denounce the high level of domestic corruption. More, they vigorously decry the authorities' incapacity to make decisions for the future of the nation and are concerned about the atmosphere of suspicion—generated precisely through the dearth of information—that surrounds the topic of China in public opinion. They maintain that if this issue does not receive adequate expression, it will only contribute to increasing social tensions.

The rather underdeveloped nature of the survey institutes in Central Asia means that it would be pointless to wait for detailed works to appear on public opinion in Central Asia of the sort that are to be found in Russia and the Ukraine. In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, a certain amount of sociological examination of public opinion takes place, but is still rather limited; in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, it is almost impossible to conduct. Moreover, for the most part, local sociological centers tend to specialize on domestic questions. This is mostly because of the considerable presence of NGOs and western foundations, which tends to favor research on social issues over those on foreign policy. Some centers deal with international topics on occasion, mostly when conducting studies on how public opinion perceives their respective country's geopolitical situation. Through this angle, Beijing's rise to power in the region is starting to appear in their vision, especially since Central Asian societies are increasingly affected by various socio-economic phenomena linked to China (import of Chinese products into bazaars, road-building to open up isolated regions, migration flows, etc). In addition, then, to the already lengthy studies on Russia's and the West's activities in the region, these sociological centers are also going to become distinctly interested in the "Chinese question". However, despite the fact that the information is good quality, it remains limited in quantity. As we will see here, the authors have made the best use of the little data that exists on this question and have often themselves selected first-hand information that they have gathered directly on the field.

In the space of a decade, China has become a key, even if indirect, object of debates in Central Asia—to the extent that they can be openly expressed. In the framework of the “Chinese question”, local public opinion has found a way to formulate its legitimate anxieties over the threats to national territorial integrity that emerged shortly after independence, and to articulate its desire for self-determination without undue external pressure, especially in relation to issues such as cross-border rivers. Moreover, public opinion, albeit discretely, has also evoked its opposition to the selling of its national underground resources, which it suspects the elites have done at bargain basement prices in order to promote their own personal interests. The China question provides a way to express social anxieties related to the market economy, such as the development of the labor market, the deterioration of working conditions, and to discuss the difficulties faced by the classes of small entrepreneurs who made their fortunes in very unregulated commercial sectors. Their fears of possibly massive migratory flows from China are also part of the broader context: immigration is a new phenomenon in Central Asian societies, which, lacking an understanding of its underlying economic mechanisms, generally find it brutally confronting. At any rate, China’s rise to power has acted as a catalyst, exposing the dysfunctional aspects of the Central Asian economies, and compounding the anxieties and phobias connected to the last two decades of major social transformations.

The Chinese question also brings the diversity of Central Asia spectacularly to light: each of the five states in fact has its own specific “Chinese question”, none of which can be systematically generalized. The reader will remark several schemas by which it is possible to differentiate between the differing relations of Central Asian states to China. On the first schema, the three border countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) can be separated from the two non-border countries (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan). While the former have all established inter-state relations with China, as well as significant private enterprise trade flows, and are experiencing migration flows, the latter have limited their economic relations with Beijing to official agreements between large companies. They have had practically no private trade exchanges, nor any seesawing cross-border migratory flows of Chinese, Uzbek or Turkmen traders. This division is further deepened since it recuts at the political level, the first three states being more liberal and the other two distinctly more authoritarian.

On the second schema, it is possible to separate Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where the “Chinese question” has been on the political agenda for more than a decade, from the three other countries, where this question is less developed. In the cases of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan reasons for this delay are mentioned-above; while in Tajikistan the civil

war put the country several years behind the evolutions of its Kazakh and Kyrgyz neighbors. Despite this, it is only a matter of time before China gains a prominent place in political debate in Tajikistan. Dushanbe's relation to China will then almost certainly be modeled on that between Kyrgyzstan and China. On the third schema, it is possible to mark out the poorest and most fragile countries, namely Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, from the other three, which all have potential for development, even if in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan it remains by and large untapped. For the first two countries, the Chinese presence is a more positive thing and a guarantee of additional stability. As such they both automatically support every initiative that involves the major regional powers, and China even more so, whose substantial loans and help in opening up isolated regions are highly appreciated. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, on the other hand, have more structured reservations about Chinese involvement, in particular in the economic domain, and manifest greater ambitions of regional autonomy.

On the fourth schema, it is possible to dissociate Tajikistan from the other Central Asian countries insofar as its own peculiar stance has been shaped by its ethno-linguistic specificities: its fear of Pan-Turkism means that the Tajik elites view the Chinese policy of fighting Uyghur separatism with particular satisfaction, not to mention the proliferation of Chinese texts on the pan-Turkic threat. However, by contrast to the other states in the region, which all prohibit the formation of Islamic parties, Islamist elites form part of the establishment in Tajikistan, even if they are more and more marginalized from the real decision-making process. Although there is no scholarly documentation to support this contention, it may be supposed that Islamist groups in general, and Tajik elites with a "pan-Iranian" sensibility in particular, have very negative opinions of China. The fifth and final schema singles out Kazakhstan out from the rest of Central Asia, on several points: it is the SCO's third largest power; its trade accounts for two-thirds of Central Asian trade with China; its economic dynamism has made it into the motor of the whole region; and it is the only one to have performed a genuine analysis of its relation to China, involving a variety of specialists and lines of argumentation. It is also the most Sinophobe country, both economically and culturally, notably because its sparsely populated areas sparks fears that this "void" might be "filled-in" by Chinese migration. For the Chinese authorities this fact is somewhat disquieting, since the Central Asian country most involved with China, and which knows it best, is also the most Sinophobe.

Whatever the nuances in each country's assessment, in less than two decades China has staged a massive and multiform entry into the Central Asian space: it has peacefully negotiated the settling of border disputes with its Central Asian neighbors, has impressed itself upon them as a

loyal and predictable partner at the level of bilateral diplomacy, and it has received positive appraisal for its capacity to develop multilateral cooperation in the framework of the SCO. China is also and above all a leading economic actor: in the commercial sector, Chinese commodities occupy a large share of the Central Asian markets; in the domain of hydrocarbons, the Chinese state-run companies are assertive and efficient; in that of infrastructure, Beijing is valued for its role in opening up the weakest states. To carry their settlement strategies to term, Chinese enterprises are mainly setting up in the context of inter-state bilateral agreements, that has enabled them to avoid the weak Central Asian business environment. In addition, Beijing grants much importance to an all-too-often-neglected sector, that of banking structures: this has made it possible for Central Asian states, whose banking systems—with the exception of Kazakhstan—are rather unstructured, to embark on financially costly projects with Chinese partnership. As a new market for Chinese products, Central Asia also opens up to the whole of Russia: several propositions to merge the SCO and the Eurasian Economic Community have even been evoked by the Chinese authorities.

China seems destined to become the main economic power in Central Asia in the coming years, but it will have other challenges to deal with: as things currently stand, it will be unable in short term to replace Moscow in the role of security and military power. Lines of competition between the Russian and Chinese powers are slowly starting to take shape, with both seeking to obtain recognition as great powers. The Kremlin knows that Beijing's growing international importance will weigh against it should the two states' geopolitical interests diverge. Their international entente has been based on a mutual rejection of the so-called unipolar world under United States domination, not on a substantive agreement. Moreover, the historical rifts between the Russian Empire and the Middle Kingdom have not vanished from people's mind. Neither has the fact that these two worlds will become rivals for influence in the coming years when China starts to assert itself as a cultural power. The Russo-Chinese entente in Central Asia has been made possible because it is in China's interests to keep Central Asia under Moscow's political and security shelter. However, if the Chinese authorities were to consider, for whatever reason, that they ought to modify their activities in Central Asia and concern themselves more with political issues, and not just economic ones, then Chinese interests could come into conflict with Russia's.

Beijing must also manage to counter the apprehensions that it elicits in Central Asian societies, and therefore to recognize that this theme has to be taken into account in political decision-making. The social phobias linked to Beijing's growing presence are in fact quite advanced in Central

Asia. Discourses on the “yellow peril” have become frequent in the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz newspapers, which regularly announce the development of a “Chinatown” in Almaty and Bishkek, and link the rise in criminality to the clandestine arrival of large numbers of Chinese. These media clichés are direct imitations of those that are currently in force in Russia and very often are merely reproductions without any basis in fact. On the political and cultural level, China is imposing itself on the ideological landscape of Central Asia in a discrete but probably decisive manner; it is slowly starting to shape up as a model of development that bears comparing with Russia and western countries. All the same, Beijing has not yet been able to implement a cultural diplomacy in the region that is capable of fighting against the anxieties elicited by its presence, nor has it been able to formulate a discourse promoting Chineseness (*zhonghuaxing*).

Yet, since 2000, China has indeed become part of the everyday life of many Central Asians. Despite its reputation for producing bad quality products, thanks to China Central Asians have access to products which correspond to their low consumption capacity, products which are also able to satisfy the emergent middle classes’ growing desires for technology, in particular in Kazakhstan. This massive arrival of Chinese products has made it possible for Central Asians to regain their traditional role as a culture of transit. These commodities can be exported as far as Russia, which is something that Kyrgyz migrants settled in the former metropolis are starting to do. However, the shape being taken by the developing relations between China and Central Asia also indicates a future situation of restrictive specialization for the economies: having become virtually only exporters of raw materials, the five states run the risk of seeing their last transformation industries disappear. Such a process of de-industrialization could well become an element of long-term social destabilization.

Nevertheless, the pro-Chinese mood of the new generations, who see pragmatic opportunities in their great neighbor, is liable to modify the state of play over the next decade, a time when China will likely become synonymous with a successful professional career and substantial revenues. The process of replacing the former Soviet elites, in particular through the training of the younger generations of the upper and middle classes abroad, will form one of the driving forces of this change. The current fashion for studying the Chinese language will give rise to a milieu for which China is no longer an inaccessible and incomprehensible foreign country, but instead the very example of successful modernity. Whether these younger generations subsequently come to form pro- or anti-Chinese lobbies, they will at any rate embody Central Asia’s new proximity with China and will see in Beijing a model of development that is capable of rivalling Moscow as much as western Europe. It will be

up to future inquiries to study whether or not the social apprehensions, in particular of a demographic and identity character, come to be modified by this new generation, which will be at once unhooked from old Soviet clichés and on familiar terms with contemporary China.

In addressing this set of issues, the articles presented here focus on three fundamental stakes, deserving of more extensive study. The first is that of social perceptions of China. Reading the articles highlights how much these perceptions depend on the social milieus in question. Central Asia still deems that its fundamental relationship is with Russia, regardless of its good or bad sides. While Moscow constitutes a familiar element of its political and intellectual landscape, China's arrival is actually a rather new thing. Perceptions of China among heads of state, opposition members, economic circles, academic milieus, and institutions of expertise have therefore given rise to multiple, divergent discourses. They usually correspond not only to the actors' specific agenda governing their relations to Beijing, but also to their degree of knowledge about China. The second stake is that of the migrations: even if the phenomenon is often over-estimated, as the authors here show, this theme nonetheless functions as a catalyst of national anxieties. The third stake is that of the cultural and economic mediators between these two worlds which seems so unfamiliar with one another. China-Central Asia trade relations have become a niche including professional but also identity aspects, in particular for groups such as the cross-border minorities. Like the future generations, these minorities are set to become a vector of influence which could turn out to be either Sinophobe or Sinophile, but which, in any case, will contribute to shaping the cultural and social interactions between China and Central Asia in the coming decades.

Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse
Guest Editors

The Central Asian Policy of the People's Republic of China

*Ablat Khodzhaev**

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the PRC policy toward Central Asia with an emphasis on events after independence in 1991, focusing mainly on the influence of the growing Chinese presence on the economic and especially industrial development of contemporary Central Asia. China considers Central Asia to be a vital zone on which its own internal security in Xinjiang depends, but also as a source of income and of low-cost raw materials, a market for its goods, and a corridor to Europe and the Middle East. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization can be a guarantor of a balance of interests in Central Asia only if its activities involve all countries interested in developing relations with the Central Asian region. Considering the growth of China's exports, it is important for Central Asia to develop indigenous production and industries by using means, equipment, and technology of interested countries.

Keywords • Xinjiang • China-Central Asia Relations • SCO • Energy • Trade

Introduction

China's Central Asia policy can be divided into two periods. The first runs from 1949 until 1991, or from the formation of the Peoples' Republic of China to Central Asian independence. During this period, as parts of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian republics were considered to be national regions within a larger space. Thus in the 1980s, Beijing authorized Xinjiang authorities to negotiate with Central Asian leaders in order to implement trade and cultural ties. The second period, which runs from 1991 to the present, is characterized by China's recognition of the independence of the Central Asian states. Beijing therefore identified new strategies for the region, taking into account the realization of its interests in new geopolitical conditions. In this article I will briefly analyze PRC policy toward Central Asia during the Soviet period, then comment on the Chinese scholarly sources on Chinese foreign policy in contemporary Central Asia and finally, scrutinize the impact of the growing Chinese presence in the Central Asian economies. This is

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comprised of the management of many socio-economic tasks, including the development of local production, the preservation of the environmental health of the region, employment issues, and increases in local wealth.

The Attitude of the PRC towards Central Asia Prior to its Independence

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Central Asia¹² experienced major events that changed the course of its history. In the 18th century, the Qing/Manchu Empire (1644-1911) established in China proper³ gradually grew to encompass Mongolia, Tibet, and East Turkistan.⁴ Due to intensified anti-Qing movements in the conquered regions, it was not able to realize its plans of conquering West Turkistan—the territory of the contemporary Central Asian states, which fell under Imperial Russian domination.⁵ As a result of these two major historical events, Central Asia was divided into spheres of influence between the Qing Empire and Tsarist Russia. Thereafter the relationship between Xinjiang and Central Asia was implemented within the framework of Moscow and Beijing's interests. The 1917 revolution in the Russian Empire led to the formation of the Soviet Union, but the 1911 revolution that established the Republic of China did not modify territorial control, except for the creation of the Republic of Mongolia.

The victory of the Communists in the civil war in China led to the formation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the territory of which, with the consent of the Soviet Union, included Inner Mongolia, Tibet, and East Turkistan. The new Chinese state actually became the successor of the Qing Empire. In 1954 and 1955, the Chinese Communist Party granted these three areas autonomous region status. For more than a decade, the Soviet Union was for all purposes the only political supporter of China. Xinjiang and the Central Asian Soviet republics, which since ancient times had played an important role in trade, economic, and cultural relations between Russia and China, became border regions through which a significant part of Soviet-Chinese

¹ In the 19th century, the toponym "Central Asia" was used in a broader meaning that included current Central Asia, but also Xinjiang, Tibet, Mongolia, the northern part of Afghanistan, and the north-west part of Iran.

² Prior to independence in 1991, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan were referred to in Russian literature as "Middle Asia and Kazakhstan" (*Sredniaia Aziia i Kazakhstan*).

³ By "China itself", I mean historical China (*Zhongguo*), which did not include the regions conquered by the Qing empire.

⁴ Since 1760, the East Turkistan was called by Chinese as *Xinjiang*.

⁵ Klara Khafizova, *Kazakhskaiia strategiia tsinskoi imperii* [The Qing Empire's Kazakh Strategy] (Almaty: Institut ekonomicheskikh strategii - Tsentral'naia Aziia, 2007), pp. 93-95.

economic and cultural ties developed. These relations were based on the provisions of a treaty, signed between the Soviet Union and PRC on February 14, 1950, and other agreements concluded between various agencies of two countries.⁶ In 1956, the Chinese government reformed its foreign trade structure and signed several new agreements with Moscow, granting border trade status to economic ties between Xinjiang and Central Asia. These exchanges affected three border crossings: Khorgos in the Ili Valley, Chuguchak/Tachen to the north of the Ili Valley, and Torugart in the Kashgar region.⁷ From 1960 to 1977, as the result of the deterioration of relations between Moscow and Beijing, links between Xinjiang and Central Asia were severed, and all border crossings were closed.⁸

At the end of the 1970s, Deng Xiaoping's rise to power led to economic reforms and substantially altered the general situation of China. The development of industrial forces by all methods and means was declared a priority for economic recovery. Consequently in 1982, the basic principles of China's foreign policy changed. The government sought to definitively prevent another world war, concluding on the need to improve relations with the Soviet Union and the United States in a balanced manner. The theoretical basis for this rapprochement developed into the concepts of a "multi-polar world" and peaceful coexistence.⁹ The same year an agreement was signed to restore economic relations between the foreign trade departments of China and Soviet Union. On December 1983, the Chinese side re-opened the Khorgos and Torugart border crossings, and restored the mutual supply of goods. In 1984, the PRC Ministry of Foreign Trade decided to establish limited border trade. On July 10, 1985, a ten-year Chinese-Soviet trade agreement was signed in Moscow.¹⁰ That same year the first delegation from the Central Asian republics visited Xinjiang. In March 1986, Beijing allowed the government of Xinjiang to conduct trade with Central Asian republics and to directly negotiate economic agreements with Central Asia, and created a new Xinjiang Export-Import Company (*Xinjiang difan maoyi chukou gongsi jing*).¹¹ In late 1987, PRC central authorities decided to open Xinjiang to foreigners.¹²

⁶ Xue Jundu, Xing Guangcheng, Zhao Changqing, Sun Zhuangzhi, *Zhongguo yu Zhongya* [PRC and Central Asia] (Beijing, 1999), p. 23.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 39 and 46.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Beijing Review*, 23 (1988), p. 14.

¹⁰ *Xinjiang dui Su (E) maoyi shi* [The History of Trade between Xinjiang and Soviet Russia] (Urumqi, 1993), p. 679.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 705.

¹² Xue Jundu and others, *Zhongguo yu Zhongya*, *op. cit.*, p. 40; *Zhongya wuguo shigang* [The History of the Five Central Asian States] (Urumqi, 2000), p. 443.

All of these measures contributed to the revival of economic and cultural ties between China and the Central Asian Soviet Republics. Tourist routes and student exchanges opened for citizens of both countries. Tourists, as well as those people visiting relatives, became *de facto* traders. At the beginning China imported from Central Asia metal, cement, vehicles, chemical fertilizers, refrigerators, television sets, clothing, textiles, wool scarves, shoes. It exported to the region textiles, silk fabric, thermoses, and hops for beer production.¹³ But due to successful economic reforms, the flow of products rapidly reversed direction, thereafter making China an exporter of consumer goods. In 1989, trade between Xinjiang and Central Asian republics reached 470 million US dollars.¹⁴

Since 1988, Xinjiang leaders began to establish joint ventures in Central Asia. The first step was the establishment in 1989 and 1990 of a joint venture between a wool textile factory in Shihezi and wool processing plant in Kostanay, with a production capacity of 1.2 million meters of cloth per year. The Chinese annual net income from this joint venture was 4.8 million yuan.¹⁵ Meanwhile a Xinjiang thermos production factory established a joint venture in Tashkent, with a production capacity of 1 million pieces per year. The Chinese side provided equipment, bulbs, and technology. Due to a thermos shortage in the Soviet Union, inventory rapidly sold out. In one year the plant paid out all of the invested funds, or about 6.5 million US dollars, of which more than half belonged to the Chinese side.¹⁶ The request of the Uzbek side to expand the joint venture to the production of flasks was refused and the plant later closed.¹⁷ In 1989 and 1990, another joint venture for the production of thermoses was established in Alma Ata, producing about 500,000 thermoses per year.¹⁸ Another joint venture for the assembly of leather and clothes opened in the Kazakh capital.¹⁹

During this time, together with the creation of joint ventures, 166 Chinese specialists were sent to the republics of Central Asia to engage in economic and technical cooperation with locals.²⁰ In 1989, under a bilateral agreement, teams of specialists and rural workers were sent from Xinjiang to Kyrgyzstan to grow vegetables and restore hotels. By creating

¹³ *Xinjiang dui Su (E) maoyi shi*, p. 672.

¹⁴ *Zhongguo maoyi bao*, June 1 (1990), p. 3.

¹⁵ *Xinjiang dui Su (E) maoyi shi*, p. 705.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 705; Xing Guangcheng, *Zhongguo he xin dili de Zhongya guojia guanxi* [The Relations of China with the New Independent States of Central Asia] (Kharbin, 1996), p. 134.

¹⁷ The author of this article took part in negotiations on this issue as an interpreter.

¹⁸ *Xinjiang dui Su (E) maoyi shi*, p. 705.

¹⁹ Xue Jundu and others, *Zhongguo yu Zhongya, op. cit.*, p. 40; and *Xinjiang dui Su (E) maoyi shi*, p. 706.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 706.

joint ventures in Central Asia, China sought to export inexpensive equipment, considering its rapid payback and high profitability, and to acquire needed raw materials. In 1989, in light of increasing trade between Xinjiang and Central Asia, Moscow imposed a license regime for the export of raw materials, declared Swiss francs as the currency of payment, and mandated balanced volumes of exports and imports. The Chinese side perceived this decision as setting limits for the development of trade and protecting the Soviet market from Chinese products.²¹

Officially, the Soviet Central Asian republics and the government of Xinjiang were authorized to develop their relations with some degree of autonomy from their respective central authorities. In November 1990, a delegation from Xinjiang, headed by the chairman of the autonomous region Temur Davamat, signed with Uzbekistan an agreement on economic and cultural cooperation for the years 1991 to 2000.²² But in reality Beijing and Moscow viewed economic and cultural ties as an element of Soviet-Chinese relations. All issues of bilateral relations beyond border trade were negotiated directly between the Soviet and Chinese Communist Parties. For example, in June 1991 the first official Uzbek delegation visiting Xinjiang invited the local government to open flight service between Tashkent and Urumqi (a route between Almaty and Urumqi was already open). However the Chinese claimed that this issue fell within the jurisdiction of the government in Beijing and refused to include the proposition in the text of the agreement signed between the Uzbek Soviet Republic and Xinjiang.

In order to create better conditions for the development of economic ties, Beijing considered a revival of the Silk Road and mobilized a large group of specialists to study this matter and plan its implementation. China published a number of works on this topic, surveying the issue from various angles. In Central Asia the proposal to revive the Silk Road was greeted with much interest. By the end of 1990, China completed the construction of a 460 kilometer-long railway from Urumqi to the border of Kazakhstan. Its joining with the Kazakh railway took place on September 12, 1990, at the Dostyk/Alashankou border crossing and the transportation of goods began in July 20, 1991.²³ That event enabled China to use this railway network to connect Kazakhstan with the other area countries and Russia.

Formation of a Chinese Policy toward Post-Soviet Central Asia

China did not foresee the collapse of the Soviet Union. From the perspective of Chinese analysts, Central Asia subsequently entered a new

²¹ *Zhongguo mao bao*, June 1 (1990), p. 3.

²² *Zhongya wuguo shigang*, p. 443.

²³ Xue Jundu and others, *Zhongguo yu Zhongya*, pp. 158-159.

geo-political and geo-economic situation. The five independent states that emerged at China's western borders opened up their raw goods markets to the rest of the world. Russia, being in its own difficult political and economic situation, was unable to take effective measures to restore control over the region. Agreements previously signed between Xinjiang and the Central Asian Soviet Republics in the 1980s lost their significance. Although the Central Asian governments were willing to follow through on them, Beijing argued that they had no international standing and that new interstate pacts were needed to frame economic and cultural relations, as well as to manage problems on China's borders with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

For the PRC, a newly independent Central Asia was interpreted as a huge "buffer zone" between Russia and China. Mutual pressure and contradictions on territorial matters between the two countries had disappeared, and thus reduced their defense expenditures. In search of new allies, the Central Asian republics needed to establish direct links with the Asia-Pacific region through Chinese territory, which could increase their dependency on the PRC. In addition, considering its rate of economic development, China needed the additional sources of energy that it could find in Central Asia and expected to use the region as a profitable transport corridor to develop ties with Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia. The independence of Central Asia also affected the status of Xinjiang in the eyes of Beijing. The autonomous region became a springboard to strengthen Chinese presence in Central Asia and an area with favorable conditions for major investments. This raised Xinjiang political and economic clout; it possesses enormous reserves of oil (25.4 billion tons, or 30 percent of all PRC reserves),²⁴ gas (more than 10,000 billion cubic meters, or 34 percent of all PRC reserves),²⁵ the largest uranium reserves in the country,²⁶ gold, precious stones, groundwater, and lands for the development and cultivation of cereals and cotton. The issue of establishing security and stability in Xinjiang became even more relevant as the Chinese authorities grew to see Central Asia as a vital neighboring region.²⁷

The Chinese strategy in Central Asia is framed around the concept of turning Central Asia into an accessible and safe region for the PRC, as well as strengthening its presence in the region without eliciting opposition from Russia.²⁸ In the first years of the post-Soviet period,

²⁴ *Xinjiang Ribao*, April 10 (1998).

²⁵ *Zhongguo Xinjiang lishi yu xianzhuang* [History and Current Situation of the RPC Xinjiang] (Urumqi, 2006), p. 330.

²⁶ Taheri Amir, "The Rumbblings in 'Chinese California'", *The Muslim World League Journal*, 8 (December 1996-January 1997), p. 14.

²⁷ Xing Guangcheng, *Zhongguo he xin duli de Zhongya guojia guanxi*, p. 99.

²⁸ Ablat Khodzhaev, *Kitaiskii faktor v Tsentral'noi Azii* [The Chinese Factor in Central Asia] (Tashkent: FAN, 2007), pp. 56-73.

Beijing's caution was due to uncertainty regarding the political situation in Moscow and its relationship with Central Asia. Having established diplomatic relations with the Central Asian governments, Beijing mobilized a large group of Chinese scholars to complete a comprehensive study of the region, established research centers in major cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Lanzhou, Urumqi, etc.), and funded extended research travel for scholars to the Central Asian republics. Soon Chinese researchers released a large number of works on the region, focusing on the idea that the economic development of Central Asia was sluggish with insufficient security guarantees and on the weakness of relations between the Central Asian states.²⁹ Chinese scholars also identified other negative influences, such as uneven economic development, lack of feelings of unity, ethnic heterogeneity, the availability of highly developed and independent nationalist ideas in each state, and the risk of Islamic extremism.³⁰

According to these Chinese publications, Beijing attached high priority to protecting Central Asia from any excessive growth of influence from the great powers and to turning the region into a beneficial sphere of influence. These scholars also noted that this agenda faced both internal and external constraints. The internal factors negatively affecting a growing Chinese presence in Central Asia were the possible unification of Turkic peoples based on the ideas of pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism.³¹ However, in my view, if in the past pan-Turkism was seen as the building of a united Turkic empire, then transferring this notion into the modern Central Asia would be irrelevant. Nowadays it only indicates an economic commonwealth of Turkic-speaking states based on the principle of equality and on the model of the European Union, and therefore not posing a challenge to China or to other countries.

The most significant external factor is the increasing influence of the West, especially the United States, and the restoring of Russia's position in the region. Nevertheless, these two factors could be mutually exclusive when leading a skillful game. What is more, the Russian factor is considered less dangerous for Chinese interests than the American one for several reasons: China needs to cooperate with Russia to restrain U.S.

²⁹ Ma Manli, *Zhongya yanjiu* [The Research on Central Asia] (Lanzhou, 1995); Xing Guangcheng, "Zhongguo he Zhongya guojia: xin guanxi" [China and the Central Asian States: New Relations], *Dongou Zhongya yanjiu* [Research on Eastern Europe and Central Asia], 1 (1996) pp. 58-64; *Zhongya wuguo gaikuang* [General Provisions of the five states of Central Asia] (Urumqi, 1997); *Zhongya guoji guanxi shi* [The History of International Relations in Central Asia] (Chansha, 1997).

³⁰ Xue Jundu and others, *Zhongguo yu Zhongya*, p. 227.

³¹ Xing Guangcheng, "Zhongguo he Zhongya guojia: xin guanxi"; same author, *Zhongguo he xin dili de Zhongya Guojia guanxi*, pp. 101-102; Xu Tao, "Fan tujue zhuyi xichao lishi fengxi" [Historical analysis of pan-Turkist ideas] in *Shize zungjiao wenti da jujiao* [The Most Painful National Problems of the World] (Beijing, 2002), pp. 90-110.

influence in the region; Moscow accepts the intensification of China's influence within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO); and Russia remains the economic master of the region without which China cannot fully manage Central Asian commerce.³² Strategically Russia understands that its interests may not always coincide with those of China. In the energy sector, Russia is interested in its role as an intermediary in the sale of Central Asian resources, whereas China hopes to access them directly in order to improve its national energy security. But at present China considers Russia to be a partner in improving its own position in addressing global and regional issues. Moreover, China needs to achieve its goals peacefully by developing good neighborly relations with Moscow. In implementing its Central Asian policy, it does not seek to enter into a rivalry with Russia or other powers, or to oppose their interests as long as their presence in the region does not threaten China's own security. At the same time, the PRC supports almost any choice of the Central Asian states in the international arena.³³

Beijing also attaches great importance to Russia in the prevention of any adverse effects on China as a result of a destabilization of Central Asia.³⁴ According to a prominent Chinese scholar on Russia and Central Asia, Xing Guangcheng, this Russian position may curb the stability of the region. The Central Asian states do not yet enjoy sufficient logistical or military bases to manage their own security, and need Russian support to protect their borders and improve their economies. China does not seek to restore Russia's former influence in Central Asia; however, it will not be able to fight against increased United States influence or a political and social destabilization of the region without Russian cooperation. Chinese scholars believe that the excessive strengthening of the PRC position in Central Asia may elicit a negative reaction from Russia and other superpowers. Therefore, the Chinese government must pursue a balanced policy: on one hand, to find an agreement with Russia and other interested countries, and on the other, to appeal to the Central Asian states to take into account PRC interests and to refrain from supporting the "separatist" movement in Xinjiang.

Xing Guangcheng states that China is not looking for special treatment in Central Asia and intends to compete with other foreign countries in the region. Supporting his position Zhao Huasheng noted that China's interests in Central Asia are focused only on three points:

³² Ma Manli, *Zhongya yanjiu*, p. 27; Xing Guangcheng, *Zhongguo he xin dili de Zhongya guojia guanxi*, pp. 98-99; Xing Guangcheng, "Zhongguo he Zhongya guojia: xin guanxi".

³³ Xing Guangcheng, *Zhongguo he xin dili de Zhongya guojia guanxi*, p. 300.

³⁴ Ma Manli, *Zhongya yanjiu*, p. 27; Xing Guangcheng, *Zhongguo he xin dili de Zhongya guojia guanxi*, pp. 98-99; Xing Guangcheng, "Zhongguo he Zhongya guojia".

security, trade, and energy.³⁵ Yet experience shows that Beijing flexibly exercises its Central Asian strategy, adapting to new circumstances, and taking into account the weaknesses and strengths of other countries in the region. According to Chinese experts, several Central Asian specificities might complicate conditions for its stable development, which could adversely affect the strengthening of China's position. A lack of convergence of interests might create rivalry between the Central Asian leaders, which would prevent them from raising regional interests above national ones and complicate the integration process in Central Asia. Or the region could fall under the influence of other Muslim countries that would interfere in the internal policies of each state, in which only five ethnic groups ("nationalities") dominate but their interests do not coincide between them and with their national minorities.³⁶

The perspectives of Chinese scholars allow one to conclude that Beijing wishes to see the region free from the influence of other major powers and aims to strengthen its own presence. Excluding the possibility of unexpected negative changes in China, this raises at least three issues. How will China act when it becomes the region's primary superpower, specifically, will it impose its own rules on everyone? Will the PRC maintain the same attitude towards Central Asia if Russia cannot counterbalance it and if the region ceases to be seen as Moscow's backyard (*houyuan*)?³⁷ What will happen in the future if more ambitious and nationalist individuals rise to leadership positions in China? These issues are quite complex and unpredictable. Currently, no one can answer the question of whether it is possible to permanently reduce the decisive role of personality in the Chinese government, where a tradition exists of absolute authority of the supreme ruler. It is also difficult to answer the question of whether China could continue to grow without any political or economic crises, as one can observe several problematic symptoms (e.g. limited domestic energy resources, growing dependence on foreign capital, increasing complexity of employment problems and food resources that have resulted from ongoing population growth, environmental deterioration due to permanent expansion of industry and use of various unnatural fertilizers in agricultural production, uneven economic growth in the regions, a heterogeneous population, and existence of separatist movements in some regions).

Chinese leaders constantly speak about peace, equality, and justice in international relations. According to the country's declared security

³⁵ Zhao Huasheng, *Daguo boyi - wuzibiekeshitan waijiao zhanlue shize* [The Competition of the Great Powers and the Formation of the Foreign Policy Strategy of Uzbekistan] (Xiangan, 2007), p. 107.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 135-140.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

concept, China seeks to create a worldwide atmosphere of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, and collaboration. It is willing to implement its previously elaborated principle of refraining from any pressure on smaller countries and interference in their internal affairs,³⁸ to implement policies aimed at demonstrating to the world community its fundamental position of great power, to explain the main content of China's foreign policy, which is focused on friendly relations and partnerships with a wide range of states, and to convince the world community that it is actively fighting for peace, equal rights, and justice, and is trying to dissociate itself from the "thesis on the Chinese threat."³⁹ I want to believe that the PRC government's foreign policy concept will remain unchanged when the country achieves superiority over leading world powers. One can hope that the Chinese public consciousness has reached new levels of thinking, and the new Chinese leaders will not follow the past example of their imperial ancestors and will remain faithful in practice to this concept. However, some Russian scholars specializing in the history of China's foreign policy reveal some uncertainty regarding the unity of China's words and practices.⁴⁰ For example, Viacheslav Balakin believes that, "China is likely, if necessary, feasible, and desirable, to take unfriendly decisive action without any hesitation against neighboring states in foreign trade, seizing new markets in a planned manner, providing powerful pressure on its competitors without paying particular attention to the signed treaties on friendship and strategic partnership."⁴¹

China's Central Asian policy is being greatly influenced by its growing population and unemployment problems, which require continuous increases in Chinese production and exports. Due to successful economic reforms completed in a relatively short period of time, China has become a huge factory for the production of low price consumer goods. Chinese industry continues to increase by 8 to 9 percent per year. Together with this process China needs to import more raw materials, as it becomes the largest consumer of oil, gas, cotton, and non-ferrous metals. In this regard, Central Asia will only gain in importance to the Chinese economy.

In the matter of the realization of its political and economic interests in Central Asia, China finds itself in a useful position due to its geographical location. Xinjiang has common borders with three

³⁸ Chuan' Chen', "Novaia doktrina Kitaia v sfere bezopasnosti" [The New Doctrine of China in the Sphere of Security], *Vestnik analitiki*, 3 (2006), p. 121.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Viacheslav Balakin, "Politicheskie priority i investitsionnyi protsess v zapadnoi i kitaiskoi ekonomikakh" [Political Priorities and Investment Process in Western and Chinese Economies], *Vostok-Zapad 2003-2004* [East and West in 2003-2004] (Moscow: RAN, 2005), p. 171.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* Author's translation.

(Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) of the five Central Asian countries, which are connected to it by several roads and by the China-Kazakhstan railway. China thus transports goods via two routes: one to Europe via Russia and Kazakhstan, and the other to Europe via Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran, which will gain in importance with the construction of the Kashgar-Osh-Andijan railroad. Once this project is complete, China will have a second alternative railway line to Europe, regardless of Kazakhstan and Russia, and will be able to access the Indian Ocean and enhance the competitiveness of its exports to the region. According to the latest data, the Chinese government trades with 148 countries and regions in the world through Xinjiang. In 2007, foreign trade through Xinjiang border checkpoints reached a record level of 18.4 billion dollars, an increase of more than 60 percent over the previous year. Exports amounted to 12.3 billion dollars of the total, an increase of 62 percent, and imports of 6.1 billion dollars, an increase of 76 percent. The value of petty border trade amounted to 9.4 billion dollars, approximately 50 percent more than in 2006, and retail trade amounted to 7.4 billion dollars, a two-fold increase. In 2007, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Russia, and Pakistan made up more than 90 percent of Chinese trade through Xinjiang checkpoints. The export of electronics and engineering products significantly increased, while traditional products such as clothing, footwear, and textiles also steadily rose.⁴²

Cooperation in the realm of hydrocarbons also accelerated. China's proximity to Central Asia permits it to quickly build oil pipelines from Kazakhstan to Xinjiang. The joint construction of a Sino-Central Asian gas pipeline is still underway. In June 30, 2008, the first phase of construction of a gas pipeline from Uzbekistan to China began, a project with a total value of over 2 billion dollars. An Uzbek-Chinese joint venture, AsiaTransGas, was also created.⁴³ According to a previously signed agreement between the oil and gas companies of Uzbekistan and China, Chinese companies refine oil and gas reserves in Uzbekistan, and they have preferential access to wells once drilling is complete.⁴⁴ These projects will give China direct access to oil and gas deposits in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, in addition to Azerbaijan and Iran, and will fulfill these countries' willingness to sell their energy directly to China regardless of Russia. Therefore at present, China is intensifying its investments for the exploration and exploitation of new oil and gas fields

⁴² Xinhua Agency, January 18 (2008).

⁴³ Erkin Iadgarov, "Nachato stroitel'stvo gazoprovoda Uzbekistan-Kitai" [The Construction of the Uzbekistan-China Gas Pipeline has Started], *Narodnoe slovo*, June 30 (2008), p. 2. The total length of the Uzbek part of the pipeline comprises more than 500 km and its completion is planned for 2011.

⁴⁴ Zhao Huasheng, *Daguo boyi - wuzibiekistan waijiao zhanlue shize*, p. 103.

in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, as well as building infrastructure to deliver energy to its maritime regions.

China has become one of the world's most influential players. If no natural disasters or other *force majeure* conditions occur, in the near future China will rise as the world's greatest power. It is predicted that by 2040, Chinese GDP will surpass that of the United States. But such an optimistic view is disputed in the world press,⁴⁵ considering the great population density, complexity of unemployment issues, land scarcity, improvement of agricultural mechanization, and limited indigenous energy sources. Understanding Central Asian fears about the unpredictable consequences of strengthening China's position in the region, some Chinese scholars believe that building confidence and creating a solid background for cooperation is a priority for the development of Sino-Central Asian cooperation.⁴⁶ China therefore must focus on the following tasks: persuading Central Asian countries that it will always treat them as equals despite differences in power; raising Central Asia's interest in the modernization, development, and enhancement of the Silk Road's international significance;⁴⁷ obliging Central Asian states to support the position of China on the Taiwan issue; and enticing them to fight against separatism.

In describing China's policy towards Central Asian countries, Chinese authors note that the new states do not yet have sufficient experience in maintaining foreign relations, which indicate that they are influenced by external factors. But in terms of prospective development, China views Central Asia as gradually gaining power and autonomy, and encourages it to participate in Asian cooperation.⁴⁸ China also sees Central Asia as a crossroads of political, economic, and cultural ties between East and West. Instability or the emergence of internal conflicts would threaten these relations and cooperation in general.⁴⁹ Some Chinese scholars believe that preventing any power monopoly would guarantee the continued independence of the Central Asian states. In particular, Sun Zhuangzhi writes, "The independence and development of the region often depended on the power of the surrounding largest states and their attitude toward them. The domination of a large state in Central Asia could lead the region to lose independence."⁵⁰ On this basis, he considers it necessary to strengthen the international links of the Central Asian states, to develop their relations with interested world

⁴⁵ Vasili Mikheev, "Kitaiskaia golovolomka" [The Chinese Puzzle], *Pro et Contra*, 3, 30 (2005), p. 6.

⁴⁶ Xue Jundu and others, *Zhongguo yu Zhongya*, pp. 151-153.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-170.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-170.

⁵⁰ Sun Zhuangzhi, *Zhongya xin geju yu diqu anquan* [The New situation in Central Asia and Regional Security] (Beijing, 2001), p. 39.

countries and international organizations, and to encourage the development of relations between them.⁵¹ At the same time, he notes that the increase of China's economic presence is extremely important in order to strengthen the independence and stability of the region. According to him, "a complete orientation of Central Asia towards Russia or the West would create additional pressure and challenges for China, and would be detrimental to its interests."⁵²

In recent years, Chinese publications have unanimously remarked that ensuring regional security and stability is the biggest challenge for China. They also note that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization will strengthen the relationship between Beijing and other members, and develop these countries' relations with other international organizations as a single unit.⁵³ Chinese scholars characterize the establishment of the SCO as a success of Chinese diplomacy and a means to promote its Central Asian strategy. It creates a balance between Russia and China in the region, and is considered to be a Chinese channel for participation in the Central Asian states' affairs.⁵⁴ Implementation of economic ties based on bilateral agreements cannot satisfy all of China's economic needs, especially in the delivery of goods and energy; however, such issues can be solved within the framework of the SCO. Through this structure, China also intends to prevent Taiwan's economic or diplomatic entry into Central Asia. Beijing also aims to use the SCO to control the process of isolating Xinjiang from the influences of Central Asia. The notion of security for the region is thus very far-reaching and multifaceted.

The Influence of Chinese Exports on the Industrial Development of Central Asia

Filling domestic markets through imports can be useful for the initial development phase of an economy that is not in a position to satisfy the demand for its own products. The experience of many countries around the world, including China, shows that a state economy built on imports and exports of raw materials is limited in its growth, although it earns quick results in terms of increased revenue from exports. First of all, this is due to the restricted amount of natural resources and low profitability of renewable raw materials. Consequently, the Central Asia countries are trying to develop their own production based on modern technology and engineering in order to fill their markets with domestic goods and to

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 274.

⁵³ *Guoji zhanlue yu anquan xingshi pinggu* [Analysis and Forecast of International Strategy and State Security] (Beijing, 2003), pp.151, 168-232.

⁵⁴ Muratbek Imanaliev, "Vyzovy globalizatsii v Tsentral'noi Azii i nekotorye aspekty politiki KNP v regione" [Challenges of Globalization in Central Asia and Several Aspects of PRC Policy in the Region], *Tsentral'naiia Azii i Kavkaz*, 3, 51 (2007), p. 112.

increase foreign exchange income through exports of finished goods. It is encouraging to note that since independence, much has been done in the region toward this goal, although with variable results. A level of production that could meet domestic demand has not yet been reached. This explains why the markets and shops in the Central Asian republics are filled with imported goods, most of which are Chinese in origin.

Everyone knows that the promotion of Chinese exports to the countries of Central Asia led to a saturation of their markets. At first, it satisfied the needs of the local population. Many Central Asians have found jobs and new sources of income via the infrastructure supporting Chinese exports. Most Central Asian companies and firms link their businesses to China; Chinese imports have also become a source of income for the states of the region. But if one looks deeper, the development of production in the republics of Central Asia has found itself under pressure from Chinese imports, as they do not allow local manufacturers to compete. For many years the development of small and medium-sized production has been one of the urgent tasks of the governments of the Central Asian republics. Of course, Chinese experts claim that the development of local production depends only on the local government. That is true and, in this regard, I fully agree. Yet as the analysis shows, it is impossible to implement such growth without the necessary external conditions.

Considering the results of Chinese and Central Asian economic interaction over the past 17 years, it should be noted that the region has become an export market for China and a source of raw materials. The region is full of various Chinese mass consumption products that are cheaper than those produced in Central Asia. China has had the opportunity to reduce transportation and raw materials import costs, and to improve the competitiveness of its exports. Within the framework of this strategy, Chinese leaders have implemented several practical steps. The country has opened many routes to Central Asia, simplified its visa regime for foreigners, reduced or completely eliminated customs duties for exports of Chinese production and import of raw materials, invested a large amount of capital to organize transportation and service delivery of export goods, and since 1985, implemented a policy of material incentives for the export of Chinese goods.⁵⁵ In Beijing and several border cities, wholesale markets and trade expositions opened to present Chinese industrial and brokerage firms to Central Asian businessmen. Urumqi was transformed into an air, rail, and road bridge between East and West.

⁵⁵ *Renmin ribao*, September 25 (1998), p. 2; and Ablat Khodzhaev, "Malyi i srednii biznes Kitaia" [The Small and Medium Businesses of China], *Khukuk*, 2 (2005), pp. 56-62.

The increase of Chinese exports to Central Asia is a consequence of the booming economy of the PRC. Hence since the mid-1990s, due to the saturation of the Chinese domestic market for consumer goods, small and medium-sized enterprises that produce textiles, electronics, and household appliances faced the problem of selling their products. "The guarantee of continuous and long-term growth of exports and expansion of its geography"⁵⁶ was then seen as a priority and the Chinese government has taken new steps toward its realization. First, it removed all restrictions and withdrew all taxes on exports of Chinese goods regardless of quantity. Many firms were authorized to arrange for the export of their own products or to work through intermediary organizations.⁵⁷ Once the necessary infrastructure was organized, this gave tourists coming to China from Central Asian countries and the CIS the opportunity to go on shopping tours. In the case of export products of its own industry, Chinese factories and enterprises receive from the state the returned amount of value added tax (VAT), the cost of which is claimed on the exporter's account. In accordance with this policy, the activity of customs agencies also changed. Procedures to export goods were simplified and required only a fee for the legalization and transportation.

The Chinese government also implemented a policy to raise manufacturers' interest in exporting their products. Under this policy, factories and enterprises have been given the right to deal directly with foreign purchasers and to receive tax refunds according to the volume of their exports. If the export volume increased by more than 50 percent, half of the taxes paid would be returned; all would be returned if the export volume increased by more than seventy percent.⁵⁸ Manufacturers were able to earn healthy profits, even if they had to export their products at prime cost. To be sure, this policy applies to goods that are not in shortage in China. Beijing has also implemented a policy to reduce the cost of various administrative services and created better conditions for direct cooperation between clients and manufacturers by opening their offices in different cities and abroad. These measures generally led to the improved competitiveness of Chinese goods production and increase of exports, which negatively affected the development of local production and unemployment in Central Asia. Medium and small-sized

⁵⁶ *1998 nian Zhongguo jingji xingshi fengxi yu yuce* [The PRC in 1998: Analysis and Forecast of the Economic Situation] (Beijing, 1997), p. 95.

⁵⁷ A. Isakdzhanov, *Strany Vostochnoi Azii: ekonomicheskie preobrazovaniia i integratsiia v mirokhoziaistvennye sviazy (opyt, problemy i sovremennye tendentsii)* [The Countries of East Asia: Economic Transformation and Integration in World Economic Relations (Experience, Problems and Current Tendencies)] (Tashkent, unpublished manuscript, 1997), p. 45.

⁵⁸ *Renmin Ribao*, September 25 (1998), p. 2; *Ulumuqi jingji* [The Economy of Urumqi] (Urumqi, 1992), pp. 24-27.

producers suffered the most from China's exports. However, such a phenomenon is observed in other regions of the world.⁵⁹

An analysis comparing China's entry into Central Asia to that of South Korea is an interesting indicator of Beijing's disinterest in the development of Central Asian indigenous production. Shortly following the signing of a bilateral economic cooperation agreement between Uzbekistan and South Korea, the South Korean company *Daewoo* opened a large factory in Andijan for the production of passenger cars. This nurtured Uzbekistan's car export industry, and provided jobs for tens of thousands of people and many newly established enterprises. Unfortunately, China did not act in this way and did not assist Tashkent in the development of its automobile industry. By the end of 2005, 100 Uzbek-Chinese joint ventures were operating in Uzbekistan, 19 of which had total Chinese capital participation.⁶⁰ Previously, the number of firms with Chinese participation reached as high as 130. Consequently, the number of industrial enterprises established with the participation of Chinese capital has experienced no permanent growth trends. By early 2007, Chinese direct investment in this area already totaled up to 30 million dollars.⁶¹ But in Uzbekistan, no large enterprise created on the basis of Chinese investment works on exports. According to Zhao Huasheng, the reason for Chinese passivity on invested capital for the creation of large export-oriented manufacturing enterprises is a lack of willingness on the part of major Chinese companies. They consider Uzbek markets to be new and therefore risky.⁶² It is however difficult to accept such explanations, as almost all large companies in China are state-run and their links with foreign countries determined by government policy.

To illustrate this point, several cases of Sino-Uzbek cooperation can be mentioned. As previously noted, the first Uzbek-Chinese joint venture established before independence was the Tashkent plant for thermos production, which closed due to Chinese reluctance to expand it to produce flasks. After independence the second large Uzbek-Chinese joint venture was a Tashkent plant for the production of color television sets, established by factories in Tashkent and Urumqi. The Uzbek government attached particular importance to this company because it was the first such experiment by the independent republic. However this joint venture did not last long, as China required advance payment in

⁵⁹ Peter Navarro, *Griadushchie voiny Kitaia. Posle bitvy i tsena pobedy. Pervod s angliiskogo i nauchnaia redaktsiia A. V. Kozuliaeva* [Forthcoming Wars of China. Battle-field and Price of Victory. Translation from English and Scientific Edition by A.V. Kozuliaev] (Moscow/St-Petersburg, 2007), pp. 134-137.

⁶⁰ *Narodnoe slovo*, June 28 (2005); *Uzbekiston millii entsiklopediasy* [Uzbekistan National Encyclopedia] (Tashkent, 2005), vol. 9, p. 437.

⁶¹ Zhao Huasheng, *Daguo boyi - wuzibiekistan waijiao zhanlue shize*, pp. 104 and 110.

⁶² *Ibid.*

dollars for the equipment, tools, and parts for the television sets, instead of purchasing them as it had previously promised.⁶³ Uzbekistan is one of the largest cotton and silk producers in the world, but the republic itself can process no more than 25 percent of the raw material it produces. It seems that over the past 17 years, several large, modern export-oriented joint textile factories could have been built. But this did not happen. Meanwhile, China has actively developed its own textile production and increased exports of textiles to Central Asia. For many years China has been buying cotton waste for the production of artificial silk fabric fibers, which are in great demand in international markets. China possesses well-developed techniques and technology for this production. Yet proposals from Uzbek entrepreneurs to establish modern enterprises of this kind were not accepted by the Chinese side, although China believed that it was of interest.

In Tashkent the porcelain factory, created in 1951-1952, was successful not only in Uzbekistan, but also abroad. It closed in 2005, apparently for internal reasons. In reality cheaper porcelain from China became available on the wholesale market *Chinni bozor* (Porcelain Market) and the Tashkent Porcelain Factory then became unprofitable. In conditions of increased export of Chinese porcelain to the regions of Samarkand and Kuvasay, local porcelain factories established in 1970 and 1978 also found themselves in difficult situations. The same process is visible for the shoes factories that could not compete with cheaper Chinese footwear products. Uzbekistan is an important country of orchards and could become a competitive exporter of fruit and fruit juices. However, in recent years the markets of Uzbekistan have become full of Chinese fruit products, cultivated by applying different biological additives and delivered via Kyrgyzstan under a Kyrgyz brand. Local agriculture might also be affected by Chinese exports in the short term. From 1994 to 1997, China began to export wine and alcoholic drinks in plastic bottles. Because of numerous cases of consumer poisoning in China, the Central Asian governments implemented strict preventative measures, stopping Chinese export of vodka and contributing to the development of local production of wine and alcoholic drinks in Uzbekistan.

More than 17 years after independence, it is difficult to find in Central Asia large enterprises based on Chinese capital and engaged in the production of export-oriented goods. Newly organized production involving Chinese capital will not be able to overcome Chinese imports and Beijing itself should not be interested in this. Moreover, Chinese imports to Central Asia led to the formation of an economic niche for a part of the Central Asian population whose economic interests are now connected with importing goods from China. This fact may hinder the

⁶³ The author of this article worked as a translator during these negotiations.

use of the Chinese capital in Central Asia to develop local production. Several internal factors also prevent China from supporting the industrial development of Central Asia.

As a densely populated country, China's foreign policy was always directed by the problems of land shortage and unemployment. Rural China is home to about 900 million people or 70 percent of the total population.⁶⁴ Existing "village enterprises" (*xianzhen qi*) in rural areas could provide jobs, just not in sufficient amounts. More than 250 million able-bodied villagers are in search of employment.⁶⁵ In connection with the development of engineering industries, the mechanization of agricultural production is growing every year, reducing in the short term the number of people employed in agriculture. Moreover, considering the continuing population growth in China, unemployment becomes more complex, creating a natural need for continuous expansion of production. Restrictions on it could exacerbate the political issue. These circumstances will compel the Chinese government to refrain from reducing the volume of its exports and increase investment in local production in foreign countries, including the Central Asian states, so as not to create unwanted competition.

Therefore, one can confidently predict that in Central Asia, Chinese capital will be mainly invested in infrastructures supporting the exploration, production, processing, and delivery of energy resources to China. After creating joint ventures in this sector, Beijing uses them as a means to sell its consumer goods and equipment. The flood of Chinese goods into the region will not only negatively affect the development of local production capacity, but will also transform Central Asia into a useful safe zone for China. This situation raises a challenge related to the difficult relations between the five Central Asian republics. Accelerating the development of export-related production in Central Asia could enhance cooperation between the states, as they have different natural conditions and resources, and thus contribute to the formation of a unified regional economic space. Consequently, China is disinterested in the development of export-oriented production in the region and could be described as negatively influencing the formation of such a unified space. The next challenge is linked to the economic dependence of Central Asia on China. Should a crisis occur in China, Central Asia will find itself in a consumer goods shortage and will not be able to compensate with its own domestic production. Moreover China's Central Asia policy could have a negative impact on the unemployment, as it will lead the demise of local industries and factories that are not working in the raw materials sector.

⁶⁴ *Renmin Ribao*, February 27 (1999).

⁶⁵ Ablat Khodzhaev, *Kitaiskii faktor v Tsentral'noi Azii*, pp. 153-156.

The history of China in the field of trade and investment in Central Asia does not give grounds to conclude that all these problems are being solved at the appropriate level. An analysis of Chinese publications on Central Asia shows that protecting China's interests and consolidating its position in the region remains a strategic objective. Chinese entrepreneurs' activities to establish joint ventures and capital investment in these countries demonstrates China's lack of active interest in major and long-term investment to develop export-oriented industry in the Central Asian states, in spite of having large foreign exchange reserves.

Conclusion

China itself is at a stage of comprehensive development and might soon wield influence over the entire Eurasian continent. Its population grows along with its political credibility. The openness of Chinese society and the liberalization of its economy create the conditions for China to enter the world community. At the present stage of international relations, the development of China will have an increasingly significant political, economic, and cultural impact on Central Asia. The booming economy of China strengthens its desire to expand markets. This will affect its foreign policy and attitude towards Central Asia. Several Chinese social problems—continued population growth, land shortage, unemployment, the need to support small and medium-sized manufacturers by increasing the export of their products, and preventing separatism—also have direct impact on the PRC's Central Asian policy. But as the famous Russian sinologist and diplomat Sergey Tikhvinski notes, "Markets are not a substitute for ethics, religion, and civilization. Markets have never set aims to achieve beauty, or equity, sustainability, and spirituality. The markets' goals are far from a common human mission."⁶⁶

China considers Central Asia to be a vital zone on which its own internal security in Xinjiang depends, but also as a source of income and of low-cost raw materials, a market for its goods, and a corridor to Europe and the Middle East. It invests its capital in energy exploration and in the development of transportation infrastructure to China, but refrains from investing large sums of capital for the development of local production, solving unemployment problems, and increasing local wealth. Beijing looks to the SCO as a mechanism of implementing its Central Asian policy and guaranteeing security in this region. Security, however,

⁶⁶ Z. G. Lapina, K. I. Shilin, "Vzgliad s pozitsii ekologicheskogo budushchego: razmyshlenie po povodu raboty akademika S. L. Tikhvinskogo *XX vek – vzgliad s blizkogo rastoianii*" [Perspectives from the Position of Ecological Future: Reflection on the Work of the Academician S.L. Tikhvinski *XXth Century. A View at Short Range*], *Vostok-Zapad* 2003-2004, p. 317.

largely depends on peaceful coexistence of all great powers. The SCO can be a guarantor of a balance of interests in Central Asia only if its activities involve all countries interested in developing relations with the Central Asian region. Considering the growth of China's exports, it is important for Central Asia to develop the local production by using means, equipment, and technology of interested countries. No less important is the formation of a single Central Asian economic space, achieving balance of interests of all leading countries in the region, increasing their investment, and keeping the region open to all interested countries.

Social Perceptions of China and the Chinese: A View from Kazakhstan

*Konstantin Syroezhkin**

ABSTRACT

In Kazakhstan the official line is supported by rapidly changing attitudes toward China, viewed as a balance to Russia and the West. However, many local articles on “Chinese expansion” and “Chinese migration” paint a darker picture. The exaggeration of the Chinese power, which breeds irrational fears and different kinds of phobias, prevents an adequate assessment of its foreign policy, and reanimates the concept of an economic and demographic Chinese “takeover” of its neighbors. To analyze Kazakh perceptions of China, one must separate several social groups and strata: the political establishment, experts, and the general public. Each of them has a different perception of China and the Chinese presence, as well as a different understanding of the problems of China, its traditions, and the Chinese way of life. These differences can be explained by the amount of information each group has at its disposal and the level of communication each of them have with Chinese people.

Keywords • Kazakhstan • Social Perceptions • Chinese Migration

Introduction

Gauging the attitudes of Central Asian countries, particularly Kazakhstan, towards China and the Chinese is both difficult and easy. On the one hand, it is easy because specific problems between China and countries of the region are seemingly nonexistent. Official Chinese documents on foreign policy prioritize good relations with neighboring countries.¹ In Kazakhstan the official line is supported by rapidly changing attitudes toward China, viewed as a balance to Russia and the West, and a partner in the realms of economic and regional security. Sometimes articles on “Chinese expansion” and “Chinese migration” paint a darker picture; however, they do not have any major impact on social opinions for quotidian reasons. Kazakhstan now imports from China almost everything needed for daily life. Anyone that decides to

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¹ See Hu Jintao’s report on the XVII All-China Congress of CPC, <<http://russian.people.com.cn/31521/6290221.html>> (February 1 2009).

build a house, start a business, or simply furnish his apartment looks primarily to Xinjiang, the border region. On the other hand, it is difficult to estimate attitudes because problems linked to Sino-Kazakh cooperation are mostly concealed and external forces acting as competitors to China exert significant influence on cooperation. Although it should be acknowledged that China is currently prevailing in the battle for the region, its permanent victory remains uncertain. Considering the specificity of current relations between China and the United States, other Western countries, and even Russia, it is difficult to predict how they will evolve in the short term, as China becomes more powerful and competition for energy resources in the region increases.

One of the examples of the paradoxical situation of China in Central Asia is a forecast published in January 2008 by the American analytical center Stratfor. It emphasized that in “creating the infrastructure to make integration with Beijing more attractive in the eyes of the region rather than maintaining the Soviet-era ties with Russia,” China is “taking Central Asia from under the nose of Russia.” According to the report, “the key value is Kazakhstan ... If Astana falls into Beijing’s sphere of influence, other countries in Central Asia will not only find it economically feasible to follow its example but will have Kazakhstan in the role of ... a useful ‘buffer,’ separating them from irate Russia.”² Whether the forecast is correct will not be known in the near term. Nevertheless, it takes into account the trends related to China’s strengthening position in Central Asia in three key sectors: the growing strategic partnership that will make Central Asia the “strategic rear of China,” China’s interest in hydrocarbons and the region’s mineral resources, which is associated with its policy aimed at conquering foreign markets, and finally, the China’s tremendous investment possibilities.

All these factors will increase in the short term and this enhancement will likely play out before the background of tightening competition for hydrocarbon resources and political influence between the West, Russia, and China. It is virtually impossible to predict how the Central Asian states will align. At present these three “centers of power” are equally attractive and equally dangerous. Central Asia should therefore choose very cautiously in order to not jeopardize national interests and state security. One of the main problems underlined by this situation is that each country knows nothing about the other. As for China, most Chinese citizens—with the exception of specialists, politicians, businessmen associated with Central Asia, and neighboring Xinjiang—know virtually nothing about Kazakhstan.³ The citizens of Kazakhstan have heard about

² “Beyond the Jihadist War – Former Soviet Union,” *Stratfor*, Annual Forecast, January 8, 2008.

³ Perhaps the only exception is a reference to the “disputed northern territories” and, among them, to 510,000 km² of the current territory of Kazakhstan. Although the signed

China, but this does not necessarily mean that they are familiar with it. For most, China is just one of their southern neighbors, which in recent years has been active in Central Asia. Even at the expert level knowledge about contemporary Chinese issues and the specificities of Kazakh-Chinese relations leaves much to be desired.⁴

Finally historical memory remains strong, and characterizes China and the Chinese the main danger for the region. Despite the fact that attitudes towards Beijing are changing, myths and phobias in the public consciousness are still numerous for three reasons. Historical memory is a relatively stable process which does not change overnight. Next there is a shortage of objective or statistical information about Kazakh-Chinese relations, as well as of sober analytic assessments. Last and perhaps most important, some of these myths and phobias are backed by actual issues. Social perceptions of China and the Chinese presence are thus connected with the issue of Kazakhstan-Chinese relations. Before addressing this question, I will study what Kazakh citizens know about China and their attitude towards the presence of Chinese on Kazakh territory. Let me first of all note that no research on the subject exists;⁵ therefore the conclusions set out do not claim to be absolute, but are rather a set of questions.

China and the Chinese as Viewed by Kazakhstan Citizens

To analyze Kazakh perceptions of China, one must separate several social groups and strata: the political establishment, experts, and the general public. Each of them has a different perception of China and the Chinese presence, as well as a different understanding of the problems of China, its traditions, and the Chinese way of life. These differences can be explained by the amount of information each group has at its disposal and the level of communication each of them have with Chinese people.

The attitude of political establishment towards China and its presence in the economy of Kazakhstan is amiable, as China is not only one of

agreements on the Kazakh-Chinese border formally closed this issue, in Chinese historical literature and school textbooks, the issue of the “disputed territories” is still being raised among a new generation of Chinese citizens. See *Lishi. Jiu nian zhi yivu jiaoyu keben (shiyan ben). Ba nian di yi xueqi* [History. Course for the first semester of the 8th grade of nine-year secondary school (experimental)] (Shanghai, 2002).

⁴ I was convinced of this fact during my participation in various kinds of round tables and conferences, and through personal contact with experts. See, for example, the discussion in “Chem otlichaiutsia kitaiskaia i kazakhstanskaia korruptsia?” [What is the difference between Chinese and Kazakh corruption?], *Nomad.su*, May 16, 2008, <<http://www.nomad.su/?a=3-200805160517>> (October 16 2008).

⁵ With the partial exception of Elena Sadovskaia’s research which will be quoted later in this article, see footnote 11.

Kazakhstan leading economic partners,⁶ but also a political ally. Among all the Central Asian republics, only Kazakhstan signed with China the “Declaration on Strategic Partnership,”⁷ as well as the “Strategy for Cooperation in the 21st Century.”⁸ However, the pro-China lobby within the government of Kazakhstan seems to be a myth. The real threat is not the existence of lobbies, but Kazakh officials’ lack of aptitude, as they agree to contracts detrimental to the country and its economic security. All investors are therefore playing under rules that are not always beneficial to Kazakhstan. Yet this falls under the responsibility of the government, not the investor. It is also impossible to ignore corruption in foreign economic activity, an especially acute problem in trade with China. Articles published in the Kazakhstani press from 2006 to 2007 denounced the situation at the customs station in Khorgos and confirmed the high levels of corruption. According to the Kazakhstani secret services (KNB), the earned shadow income of organized criminal groups operating at Khorgos amounts to about 3 to 4 million dollars per month.⁹

The expert community views China similarly, though somewhat more cautiously. According to experts, Sino-Central Asian relations are influenced mainly by economics, above all by the Chinese “energy thirst,” and by problems of regional security, as no obvious solutions yet

⁶ This approach is visible in the annual addresses to the people of Kazakhstan by President Nursultan Nazarbaev. In the 2006 address, priority is given to Russia, while about China he said, “Kazakhstan believes that mutually beneficial relations with this dynamically developing country are unavoidable” (*Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, March 2 2006). In the 2007 address, the status of Russia and China were equal: The development of “good-neighbor relations with Russia and China” was viewed as a priority (online at <http://www.akorda.kz/page.php?page_id=33&lang=1&article_id=1732> (October 15 2008)). The 2008 address declared, “We must further strengthen our economic and political cooperation with Russia, China and Central Asian states” (*Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, February 7 2008).

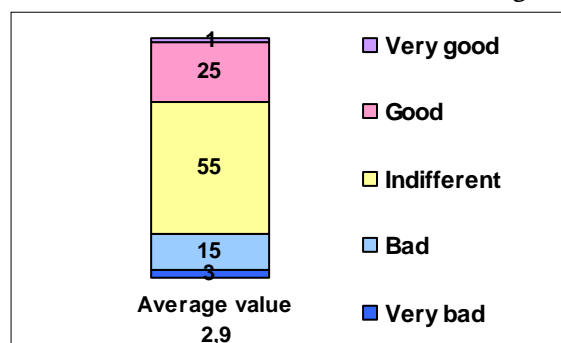
⁷ “Sovmestnaia deklaratsiia Kazakhstana i Kitaiskoi Narodnoi Respubliki ob ustanovlenii i razvitiu strategicheskogo partnerstva” [The Joint Declaration of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the People’s Republic of China on the Establishment and Development of Strategic Partnership], *Biulleten’ mezhdunarodnykh dogovorov Respubliki Kazakhstan* [Bulletin of International Treaties of the Republic of Kazakhstan], Astana, 5 (2005), pp. 108-109.

⁸ “Strategiia sotrudnichestva Respubliki Kazakhstana i Kitaiskoi Narodnoi Respubliki v XXI veke” [Strategy for Cooperation of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the People’s Republic of China in the 21st century], in Chen Yurong and Talgat Bakraev (ed.), *Sbornik dokumentov: 15 let kazakhstansko-kitaiskim diplomaticheskim otnosheniam* [The Collection of Documents: 15 years of Kazakhstan-Chinese Diplomatic Relations] (Beijing: The Embassy of Kazakhstan in China and The SCO Research Center of the China Institute of International Issues, 2007) pp. 340-354.

⁹ *Kazakhstan Segodnia*, January 24, 2006. Other materials reported more shocking figures, for instance Askar Dzhalidinov, “Tamozhennyi sprut” [Customs Octopus], *Liter*, November 15, 2007, <<http://www.liter.kz/site.php?lan=russian&id=150&pub=8851>> (September 22 2008), or Alexander Kaminskii, “Bitva za shlagbaum” [Fight for Roadway Gate], *Express-K*, November 13, 2007, <http://www.express-k.kz/show_article.php?art_id=12929> (September 22 2008).

exist outside the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).¹⁰ In other words, despite the current fear of “Chinese expansion,” Central Asian expert communities view China not only as a counterbalance to Western influence, but as a worthy alternative to Russia, not only in trade but perhaps in sensitive areas of national security. The general public expresses more complicated and nuanced views. On the one hand, myths and phobias regarding China and the Chinese stem from national memory and historical bilateral relations. On the other hand, as the results of a study—which is, unfortunately, the only existing one—show, the Kazakh public is little informed about China and indifferent to Chinese migrants (Chart 1).

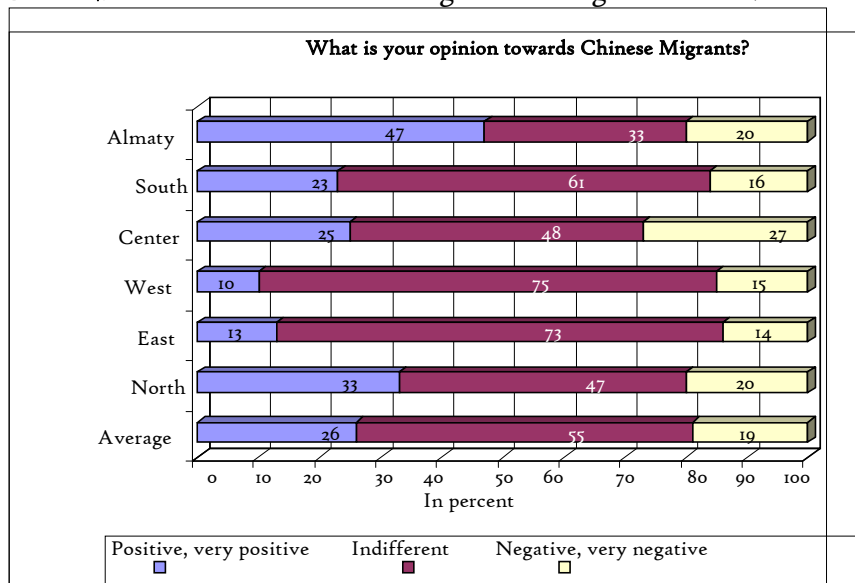
Chart 1. Overall attitudes to Chinese migrants¹¹



In regional breakdown, the most tolerant attitude is demonstrated by respondents in Almaty and in the northern region, whereas the central region of Kazakhstan seems to be less tolerant. The most indifferent are the western, eastern and southern regions (Chart 2). A comparison of these figures with the geography of the Chinese presence in Kazakhstan confirms that positive or indifferent attitudes are shown by the inhabitants of regions where Chinese presence is the most noticeable; and negative, where they are not represented at all. In other words, the more people are familiar with the Chinese, the better their assessment is.

¹⁰ Askar Abdrakhmanov, Adil Kaukenov, “Otnosheniia Kitaia i stran Tsentral’noi Azii glazami kazakhstanskikh ekspertov” [The View of Kazakh Experts on the Relations between China and the Countries of Central Asia], *Kazakhstan v global’nykh protsessakh*, 3 (2007), pp. 119-128.

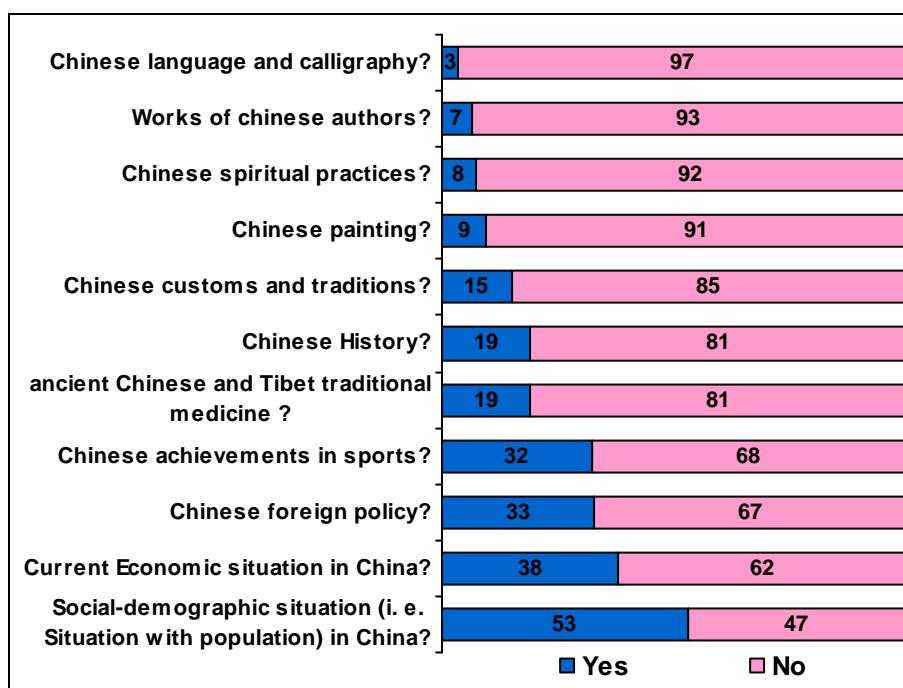
¹¹ Elena Sadovskaia, “Kitaiskie migranty v Kazakhstane: otnosheniia kazakhstanskikh grazhdan (po resul’tatam sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniia)” [Chinese Migrants in Kazakhstan: the Attitudes of Kazakhstan’s Citizens (results of a sociologic survey)], *Analitic*, 5 (2007), p. 22.

Chart 2. Attitudes to Chinese migrants in regions of Kazakhstan¹²

Some differences in relation to Chinese migrants are demonstrated by the representatives of different nationalities. For example, positive opinion towards Chinese migrants is 1.5 times higher among the representatives of national minorities than among ethnic Kazakhs (36 to 24 percent). Russians demonstrate a lukewarm attitude towards Chinese migrants compared to representatives of other nationalities (59 to 45 percent). The percentages of negative opinions about migrant workers are as follows: 21 percent of ethnic Kazakhs, 15 percent of Russians, and 19 percent of other national minorities. Another figure worth mentioning is that, according to the results of the study, young people between 18-29 years of age have demonstrated the most tolerant attitudes towards Chinese migrants, which contradicts the myth of anti-Chinese sentiment among Kazakhstan's youth.¹³ In general awareness of China, its traditions, and customs remains very weak. Public opinion shows a greater interest in the socio-demographic situation, economic development, and foreign policy issues in China, but not in Chinese culture (Chart 3). This is explainable when one considers the peculiarities of the myths and phobias that dominate the public consciousness with regards to China, as well as the interests of Kazakhstan toward China as a supplier of consumer goods and a place to do business.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

Chart 3. What Kazakhstan public opinion knows about China. Do you know:¹⁴

The survey also revealed regional differences in the level of awareness among respondents about modern life in China. For instance, the central and western regions have the lowest knowledge on Chinese culture, history, and traditions and, compared to other regions, seem to be less aware of contemporary social and economic realities other than the demographic issue. Surprisingly, in the eastern region bordering China, knowledge about Chinese history and current events is slightly lower than the average for the republic. In the southern region, knowledge about China is average or higher than that for the republic. In the northern region, citizens interviewed demonstrate better knowledge in virtually all matters, except for Chinese traditions. The city of Almaty is the leader, where respondents' knowledge in some areas is 1.5 to 2 times higher than in other regions due to higher levels of education of the population, the long-term status of the city as a political and administrative capital, and closer political, business, academic, and educational ties with China. Moreover in Almaty people having used traditional Chinese medical treatment are two times more, or 38 percent compared to an average of 19 percent. Knowledge on Chinese customs and traditions comes in at 33 percent (average 15 percent) in Almaty, and on Chinese history 32 percent (average 19 percent). The only figure below

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

the average for the republic is knowledge of Chinese literature (6 to 7 percent).¹⁵

What conclusions should be drawn here? First, one should keep in mind what China is thinking about Kazakhstan. Such material, unfortunately, is virtually nonexistent and the few publications raising this issue are not available to general readers. Second, Kazakh knowledge on the “great southern neighbor” leaves much to be desired and leads to many rumors, fears, and all types of phobias. Excluding some voluntarily alarmist materials, journalist and essay publications in Kazakhstan state the lack of problems between Kazakhstan and China, and explain that no alternative exists to friendship with Beijing. The result is a complete lack of quality research in culture, traditions, and everyday life of the Chinese people and non-Han ethnic groups living in Xinjiang. The only exceptions are about the Uyghurs, though most of the materials published in Kazakhstan on them are tendentious or openly anti-Xinjiang. Finally it is striking that most Kazakh citizens draw conclusions about China and the Chinese either based on hearsay and the stories of their acquaintances, or, as they say, “from the ceiling.” Most of them have never been to China, and have never seen Chinese people or communicated with them. Not disputing these propositions I would like to note that it is better to make friends with open eyes. We must speak openly about existing threats and what we are concerned about, without trying to please everyone.

On Phobias toward China: Myths and Real Threats

The phobias associated with the Chinese presence in Kazakhstan can be reduced to a few postulates. First, during border demarcation Kazakhstan yielded a significant part of its territory to China. Beijing’s interest in the mineral resources of Central Asia would therefore be a part of a “moving to the north” of foreign policy, as Siberia, the Far East, and Kazakhstan have become spaces for Chinese expansion.¹⁶ Second, Xinjiang is considered a bastion for further penetration into Central Asian territory.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁶ M. Adilov, “V politike ne byvaet druzei i vragov, a est’ tol’ko interesy” [There are no friends or enemies in politics, but only interests], *Respublika. Delovoe obozrenie*, November 3, 2006; N. Amrekulov, “Damoklos mech kitaiskogo dragona” [Sword of Damocles of Chinese Dragon], *Svobodnoe slovo*, February 8, 2006; A. Beibarsov, “Kazakhstan-Kitai: vmeste, riadom ili vnutri?” [Kazakhstan-China: together, side by side or inside?], *Respublika. Delovoe obozrenie*, September 16, 2005; Madiiar Safin, “Poglotit li Kitai iugovostochnuiu chast’ Kazakhstana?!” [Will China devour the south-east part of Kazakhstan?!], *Zona.kz*, July 23, 2008, <<http://www.zonakz.net/articles/22681>> (October 15 2008).

¹⁷ “Murat Auezov: Nachalos’ velikoe pereselenie!” [Murat Auezov: the Time of large-scale Migrations has begun!], *Postskriptum*, no. 38, 2005, <<http://www.gorno->

For the most radical, the division of Kazakhstan between China and Russia is already under way.¹⁸ The third phobia is a demographic Chinese takeover of Kazakhstan, which includes the current population growth along the border, the problem of excessive Chinese labor, the “planned relocation” of Hans from inland areas to Xinjiang, the worsening of ethnic competition and “ousting” of Kazakhs and Uyghurs from the region, and the settling of Hans in Kazakhstan through legal and illegal migration.¹⁹ Another phobia involves Chinese economic expansion, in particular the dominance of Chinese goods in the Kazakh market, strategic commodities and currency exports to China, the degradation of domestic industry and agriculture,²⁰ and increasing Chinese presence in the oil and gas sector in Kazakhstan, amounting to a “threat to the national interests of Kazakhstan.”²¹ Yet another is the environmental disaster threatening Kazakhstan as a consequence of ongoing Chinese irrigation projects in Xinjiang.²² Finally suspicion surrounds the presence

altaisk.ru/archive/2005/38/003.htm (September 22 2008); Kalibek K. Daniyarov, *O novoi istorii Kazakhstana* [About new Kazakhstan History] (Almaty, 2004).

¹⁸ Oleg Maslov, Alexander Prudnik, “Kazakhstan nachala XXI veka kak Pol’sha pered 1939 g.” [Kazakhstan at the beginning of XXI century same as Poland before 1939], *Polit.nov.ru*, January 20, 2007, <<http://www.polit.nnov.ru/2007/01/30/kazahstan>> (September 23 2008). To the respect of Kazakhstan authors it should be noted that such ideas have not yet ripened in their minds.

¹⁹ Kalibek K. Daniyarov, *O novoi istorii Kazakhstana*; Zhibek Morzabaieva, “Kazakhstanu grozit ‘kitaiatsiia?’” [Is Kazakhstan threatened by “Sinicization”?], *Nomad.su*, November 6, 2006, <<http://www.nomad.su/?a=4-200611060525>> (September 15 2008).

²⁰ “Vostok aleet vse sil’nee” [East glows increasingly], *Epokha*, February 24, 2006; O. Makushina, “Kitaiskii faktor: mify i real’nost’” [Chinese factor: myth and reality], *Svobodnaia Aziia*, November 6, 2006, <<http://www.freeas.org/?nid=6425>> (September 15 2008).

²¹ M. Adilov, “V politike ne byvaet druzei i vragov, a est’ tol’ko interesy”; Shertolkyn Kaigy, “Nastalo vremia vozvrashchat’sia” [The time to go back has come], *Zona.kz*, <<http://www.zonakz.net/articles/9660>> (September 12, 2008); same author, “Kitaiskaia ekspansiia prodolzhaetsia” [Chinese expansion continues], *Zona.kz*, <<http://www.zonakz.net/articles/9705>> (September 12 2008); same author, “Do vykupka kitaitssami aktsii ‘PetroKazakhstan’ ostalos’ dve nedeli” [There are two weeks left before Chinese purchase of PetroKazakhstan shares], *Zona.kz*, <<http://www.zonakz.net/articles/9833>> (September 12 2008). See also the numerous articles published anonymously by the “Border Watch” (*pogranichnyi dozor*) on *Zona.kz*.

²² N. Aidarov, “O kazakhstano-kitaiskom peregovornom protsesse po transgranichnym rekam” [About Kazakh-Chinese negotiations on Transboundary Waters], *Diplomaticheskii kur’er*, 2 (2000), pp. 102-104; Murat Auezov, “Tsena pogranichnogo spora: Kitai-Kazakhstan” [The cost of the frontier dispute: China-Kazakhstan], *XXI vek*, May 6, 1999; A. Baliev, A. Medvedev, “Reki sami ne umiraiut. Ikh ubyvaiut” [The rivers do not die themselves. They are killed], *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, February 12, 1999; Gul’den Zholamanova, “Rol’ SHOS v uregulirovanii transgranichnykh rek mezhdru Kazakhstanom i Kitaem” [The Role of the SCO in the Regulation of Crossborder Rivers between Kazakhstan and China], *Analytic*, 1 (2007), pp. 34-42, <<http://www.analitika.org/article.php?story=2007050701005068>>.

in the government of Kazakhstan of pro-Chinese lobbies working for and defending China's interests.²³

The Issue of Chinese Territorial Expansion to Central Asia

Among this non-exhaustive list, we shall now question which points can be considered as myths, what are potential threats coming from the Chinese presence in Kazakhstan, and how the public understands and defines them. The first two postulates can be analyzed as mythological. In the near term, China does not intend to attack anyone or to conquer territories outside of its borders. In the current context of globalization, the Chinese policy of "going beyond the limits" (*Zou chuqu*) permits the effective development of economic and political influence without using conventional force.²⁴ Beijing is interested in Central Asia as a resource base, a market for Chinese products, and a transit territory, but does not harbor any intention to develop the region *per se*. This is a reality that, incidentally, is reflected in public opinion, which is mostly indifferent to China.

However, the different points of view feed the myth of the "Chinese threat" or conversely dispute the arguments of those who cultivate it. The first group consists of alarmists who see China and the Chinese presence in Kazakhstan as a direct and obvious threat to national security, who base their discourse on emotions, and blame external forces (whether China or Russia) for all of Kazakhstan's troubles.²⁵ They propose to solve the situation by asserting that "while getting closer with the Russian bear and the Great Dragon within the framework of the SCO, the Kazakh panther should not forget that the counterweight and ultimate guarantor of its independence in extreme situations is no longer the Russian Federation, but the United States and NATO."²⁶ The reaction of public opinion to this kind of materials is ambiguous. Though the support is not as widespread as the proponents of this solution would

²³ "Vostok alet vse sil'nee".

²⁴ This objective was set at the 5th session of the All-China Congress of CPC on March 5th, 2002, by the China State Council Premier Zhu Rongji. It was noted that "domestic enterprises investing abroad and particularly in neighboring countries should be encouraged and supported. The import of advanced technologies, key equipment, and scarce raw materials should be developed, thus diversifying imports of important strategic resources for China". The first objective is to provide the rapidly growing economy of China with desperately scarce forms of energy and raw materials. The second is to establish several dozens of transnational companies that could compete on the world stage with similar giants such as the United States. Finally it seeks a "merging and devouring" strategy to buy world-known brands, thus greatly increasing Chinese exports, which have already reached a very large size, almost comparable to the volume of Chinese GDP. See Ya. Berger, "Vozvyshenie Kitaia" [The Rise of China], *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'*, 9 (2005), p. 56.

²⁵ See Shertolkyn Kaigy's articles and those published by the "Border Watch."

²⁶ N. Amrekulov, "Damoklos mech kitaiskogo dragona".

like it to be, the idea that the “expansion of China in Kazakhstan is a question of time” has a niche.²⁷

The second group looks positively on the presence of China, though not of the Chinese, in Kazakhstan. They state that the problem does not lie in China but in Kazakhstan, more precisely in the “officials sitting on their suitcases,” or the high ranking officials whose families live abroad and who contribute to capital flight from Kazakhstan. They even believe that if Kazakhstan could learn from the experience of Chinese reforms, many problems would be avoided. They insist on the usual overestimation of China’s capabilities, even though it is confronted with many internal problems. They also mention that the ethnic question is not so tense in Xinjiang: “All Xinjiang Kazakhs are still speaking in Kazakh as they used to. None have been assimilated, the alphabet has not changed, and they still use Arabic ligature as they used in the past. Children study in Kazakh, Kazakhs serve in the Chinese army, some even reach the rank of general, and easily enter universities... Their fate is much better than the majority, who have been turned to *Mankurts* during 70 years [*Mankurt* is the name given in Turkic languages to men who have been transformed into slaves, entirely depend on their owner, and who have no memories of their past life].”²⁸ They conclude that the “Chinese threat” is a Russian fable as the “Chinese were historically the allies of the Kazakh people, unlike the Russians.”²⁹ Incidentally, this conclusion is central to a third group of opinions. Their proponents, like Bolatkhan Tayzhan, argue that the idea of China’s expansion in Kazakhstan results from the imagination of Russian political experts and is “exploited by forces that are trying to strengthen Russia’s position in Kazakhstan.”³⁰

²⁷ As an example we can cite one comment signed “the patriot”: “The Chinese are the most treacherous nation, as was mentioned by Genghis Khan. The Chinese do not see us on our land, in the future we are blood and bone dust in the boots of soldiers for them. We have to sound the alarm, tomorrow it will be too late. If the Chinese will come to us, neither America nor Russia will be able to help us. No one will deal with China because of us. No one hunts for a nuclear war because of Kazakhstan, though rich in oil. It is painful to think that on the land of our ancestor-nomads there will walk millions and billions of snotty yellow Chinese, and that our descendants will serve them rice and rice vodka. God forbid! We need to cooperate with China, but it should be done in such a way as to be beneficial not only in terms of economy, but also from the standpoint of national and strategic interests of the country, otherwise in 30 years no one will remember such a country named Kazakhstan. China will devour everything”. Online comment on the “Border Watch” article, “Prisutstvie Kitaiia v Kazakhstane: ‘dostizheniia’ i ‘perspektivy’” [China’s Presence in Kazakhstan: ‘Success’ and ‘Perspectives’], *Zona.kz*, February 10, 2006, <<http://zonakz.net/articles/13774>> (September 21 2008).

²⁸ See comments on Madiiar Safin, “Poglotit li Kitai iugo-vostochnuiu chast’ Kazakhstana?!”.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ This view was expressed by Bolatkhan Tayzhan in *Respublika*, September 16, 2005, and repeated in the comments in various interpretations.

As for the Kazakh-Chinese border, it is delimited and demarcated, and the issue is now relegated to history. However many questions remain, especially among people living in border areas with China, who often worry about the disputed territories that have not been covered by the border demarcation treaty and the possibility that China will “return” in future years. The idea of Xinjiang as a bastion for Chinese expansion is also a myth. The region has undoubtedly changed qualitatively in the past twenty years, as the rest of China has, and this rapid development is indispensable to solving the problem of ethnic separatism. Building highways reaching the Kazakh border can thus be seen not only in the context of preparing infrastructures for “aggression,” but also as a necessary measure to materialize the concept of “going beyond the limits.” The development of Xinjiang is even seen by some Kazakh journalists as a positive factor, which can strengthen the Central Asian states.³¹

Demographic Fears: Myths and Reality

The third and fourth groups of issues are more complex, obviously mixing legend and quite reasonable fears based on Chinese and Kazakh circumstances. The population of Xinjiang is growing steadily. At the end of 2007, it surpassed 21 million, having increased by nearly 5 million people since 1990. The parity achieved in the late 1970’s between Han and non-Han ethnic groups has been preserved. For the period from 1990 to 2007, the increase for non-Hans amounted to approximately 2.5 million people, while the proportion of Hans in Xinjiang has slightly increased from 37.6 to 39.6 percent.³² This is not only a result of the natural growth of Hans living in the region, but also from the migration of Hans from inland areas. This impacts the problem of ethnic competition and “surplus labor force” and consequently creates potential conditions for foreign labor migration and, in a critical situation, refugees from Xinjiang.

We must bear in mind that the internal migration has grown in this decade and, according to the most careful assessments, about 200 million people are currently migrating inside China. Some of them can easily leave the country, as competition in the domestic labor market will inevitably drive them to take such a decision. Moreover the Chinese government changed its standpoint on citizens wishing to leave the country. Now foreign passports are issued freely in several cities.

³¹ A. Dzhililova, “Liubit’ drakona” [To love the dragon], *Novoe pokolenie*, June 2, 2006; Akhas Tazhutov, “Kitaitsy idut?!” [Are Chinese Coming?!], *Zona.kz*, September 28, 2006, <<http://zonakz.net/articles/15651>> (September 23 2008).

³² *Xinjiang nianjian 2007* [Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook for 2007] (Urumqi, 2007), p. 14; *Xinjiang tongji nianjian 1999* [Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook for 1999] (Urumqi, 1999), pp. 57-59.

Chinese communities are thus emerging and spreading in a number of countries in the world where they had never existed: South Korea, Japan, Russia, Hungary, Poland, etc. Nevertheless, this should not yet draw alarmist conclusions. A potential stream of refugees from Xinjiang remains a hypothetical threat. As revealed in polls conducted among Chinese working in Kazakhstan by researchers, such as Svetlana Kozhirova from the Lev Gumilev Eurasian University in Astana, Hans constitute only a small part of the whole number of migrant workers from China. The flow of Chinese migrants is not dominated by people with little education and training, but by those with mid to high levels of education.

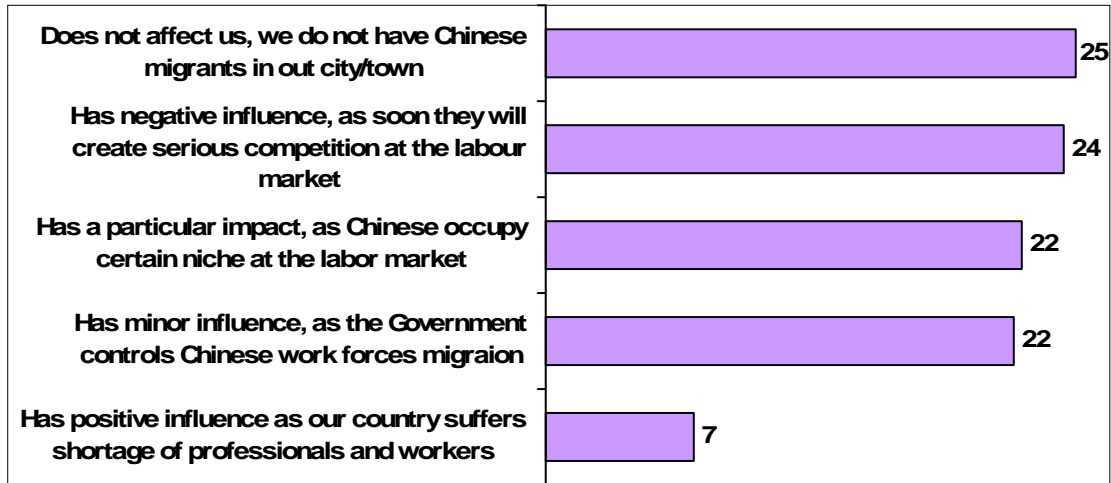
The idea that Hans have flooded Kazakhstan, although very widespread in the Kazakh press, cannot be confirmed by any statistical information. Official figures do not provide grounds for such conclusions. In 2004, there were about 28,000 Chinese citizens entering Kazakhstan, 34,000 in 2005, and 29,000 in 2006. These are low figures compared with the 100,000 to 150,000 commercial tourists from the CIS who annually visit Xinjiang. According to 2005 data, only 1,116 Chinese citizens stayed to live permanently in Kazakhstan, including 1,109 Chinese Kazakhs (Oralmans). The data shows that 3,916 people received Kazakhstan citizenship, including 3,907 Chinese Kazakhs. Based on the survey data, Hans are not inclined to acquire Kazakhstan citizenship and are not attracted to mixed marriages.

This situation seems to be confirmed by the public opinion assessment on the Chinese migrants' presence in Kazakhstan. Although almost the entire population of various regions of Kazakhstan notes the presence of Chinese citizens, more than half (56 percent) believe that there are "few" of them.³³ Regarding perspectives, the majority of respondents (67 percent) believes that immigration of Chinese citizens in the next ten years will increase, 28 percent believe that the migration will remain at the same level, and only 5 percent think that it will decrease.³⁴ More worrying is the assessment of the impact of Chinese migration on Kazakhstan's labor market. Only 7 percent of respondents state that the migration of Chinese citizens has a positive impact because the country lacks professionals. Meanwhile almost 70 percent believe that it has a direct or indirect negative impact on the labor market (Chart 4).

³³ Elena Sadovskaia, "Kitaiskie migranty v Kazakhstane: otnosheniia kazakhstankikh grazhdan (po resul'tatam sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniia), p. 21.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Chart 4. How do you think Chinese migration influences the Kazakhstan labor market?³⁵



We have to conclude here that Chinese labor migration is an objective and normal reality that Central Asia must confront and accept in the coming years because it is a natural consequence of economic globalization. China is a member of the World Trade Organization; all the Central Asian states seek to acquire the similar status, and the rules of the organization include, among other things, free labor movement. The Central Asian public should thus learn to live with labor migration from China and the local governments should consistently defend the interests of their own citizens in all forms of cooperation, as the Chinese do for themselves.

The Issue of Chinese Economic Expansion

With regard to China's economic expansion, the figures are certainly not subject to debate; the growth of trade between Kazakhstan and China is obvious and beneficial. Problems associated with this expansion seem to stem from other reasons. According to official statistics, China's share of Kazakhstan's foreign trade balance is not huge, so far not exceeding 10 percent. Consequently, talks about "Chinese domination" in the consumer market of Kazakhstan would be unfounded. However there is a potentially tremendous margin of error, as anyone visiting a Kazakh market can attest. This is confirmed by the Chinese data, according to which the volume of foreign trade between Kazakhstan and Xinjiang alone exceeds official Kazakh figures by a factor of almost one and a half: 3.3 billion dollars in 2004, 5 billion dollars in 2005, and more than 7 billion dollars in 2006. Officials in Kazakhstan use these Chinese figures. According to the director of the International Institute of Modern

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Politics, Bektas Mukhamedzhanov, trade between the two countries exceeded 10 billion dollars in 2006, which means that the proportion of China's foreign trade balance in Kazakhstan is close to 20 percent, and this is clearly not the limit.

The range of imported goods labeled "made in China" expands each year. This can be explained by the lack of adequate quantity and quality of domestic goods, and the much cheaper prices of imported goods, even taking into account customs duties and unofficial payments. Changing economic interests and consequent changes in social consciousness should also be considered. At present a growing number of people, especially the young and economically active, do not consider China as a potential threat, but as a place that enables them to obtain relatively cheap quality goods and allows them to make money. Hence more and more young Kazakhs study in China and thus find there not only acquaintances, but also business contacts. As revealed by the business practices of Chinese firms in Central Asia, China focuses on short-term investments with quick benefits—specifically on commercial and procurement operations, and recently on the production of construction materials. The establishment and development of local export-oriented production and the employment of locals are not among the priorities of Beijing's economic strategy in Kazakhstan.

This specificity is confirmed by the official statistics on Kazakh companies operating with Chinese participation and on Chinese firms in the country. At the beginning of 2006, only 213 enterprises were active among 4,000 that were registered. Most of them have procurement activities. This fact best describes the specificities of these bilateral economic relations; Kazakhstan is only a market for Chinese products and a transit country. Most curious is that almost 2,600 of all these enterprises are either "temporarily not working" or have "not started yet to work," and more than one thousand of them do not provide any information to authorities. Among the latter two categories, some enterprises were registered in the late 1990s and early in this decade. In other words both the man on the street, noticing the difference from the statistics when visiting a market, and experts have a feeling that the Chinese "are marking their territory." This phenomenon is quite difficult to explain, but it results in all likelihood from the expectations of the development of the domestic market and the specificities of Kazakhstan's laws. It is maybe not worth attracting attention to the presence of Chinese illegal migrants in Kazakhstan, even if this presence arouses and feeds alarmist feelings about "Chinese expansion" and, in some sense, worsens the climate of confidence in Kazakh-Chinese relations.

Kazakhstan's economic relations with China are suffering from many weaknesses: the focus on the export of raw materials, the export of foreign currency, the corruption of foreign trade operations, the loss of

professionals from industries involved in commercial tourism, and a long term potential formation of a “fifth column” in Chinatowns. However the main problem remains filling the Central Asian market with Chinese goods and, consequently, the degradation of domestic food, engineering, construction materials, and light industries. This is particularly alarming. One must also recognize that outside the raw materials sectors, Kazakhstan and Russia, not to mention the other Central Asian states, are absolutely uncompetitive in comparison with China and are therefore doomed to be flooded by Chinese goods in the very near term.

The disappearance of Chinese goods from Kazakh market would spell disaster, as this product shortage could not be covered by any supply from Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, or India. Quite a large part of Kazakhstan citizens, not only those engaged in tourism or commerce, would lose their livelihoods. The prices of spare car parts, electronics, computer components, construction materials, household items, furniture, clothes, and some food items would increase significantly. Finally, some Kazakh enterprises, now working in the “gray” market, would probably disappear. Internet-site commentators seem to agree with this assessment. For example one commentator on an alarmist article published under the pseudonym Border Watch underlines: “We cannot plow for pennies as the Chinese do. We can shout out slogans, but what will this give us? We cannot even produce socks or slippers for ourselves, not to mention building materials, camp-cots, or vehicle parts. I do not think it can be stopped. Our market will immediately die out, and then we will die out ourselves.”³⁶

Most debatable and sensitive issue is the Chinese presence in Kazakhstan’s oil and gas sector. This issue gained particular urgency in the fall of 2006, when China, having purchased PetroKazakhstan assets in 2005, expressed its interest in the Nations Energy Company, another foreign company operating in Kazakhstan’s oil and gas sector. Deputies of the Mazhilis (parliament) Valeri Kotovich and Viktor Yegorov expressed their concern, stressing that the issue directly affects national security.³⁷ Later this subject was picked up by the press (not only the opposition press). The idea that “the presence of China’s oil and gas sector in Kazakhstan threatens its national security” entered in the public consciousness and became a widespread topic of discussion.

³⁶ See online comments on the “Border Watch” article, “Prisutstvie Kitaia v Kazakhstane: ‘dostizheniia’ i ‘perspektivy’”.

³⁷ “Deputaty parlamenta vyrazili ozabochennost’ uvelicheniem doli inostrannogo uchastia v neftegazovom sektore Kazakhstana” [Members of Parliament expressed concern over the increasing share of foreign participation in oil and gas sector in Kazakhstan], *Kazakhstan Segodnia*, November 1, 2006, <<http://www.gazeta.kz/art.asp?aid=82715>> (October 12 2008).

Indeed it is undisputable that the companies with Chinese capital control about 25 percent of the oil production in Kazakhstan. Given the growing shortage of energy sources in China, this figure is likely to grow. But this should not provoke any panic. This figure cannot be compared with the share of other foreign companies in the oil and gas sector. Contracts for royalties, signed with the Chinese, are much more advantageous than those signed with Western companies. Virtually all companies acquired by China currently give shares to KazMunayGas. All the oil produced by China in Kazakhstan will travel in the Sino-Kazakh pipeline, earning considerable transit income. Finally, China has bought registered offshore private companies at very favorable conditions for their owners, so the first question of those concerned about the Chinese presence in Kazakhstan oil and gas sector should be to address how, why, and under what conditions these assets were turned over to private hands.

The real concern is government officials' attempts to undermine the scope of the Chinese presence in Kazakhstan's oil and gas sector. Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Bakhytkozha Izmuksambetov once declared before the Mazhilis that the share of Chinese companies developing hydrocarbon resources in the country stood at 12 percent of all production. Elementary calculations based on open information indicate that this percentage was significantly higher: 13.18 percent in 2005, 25.84 percent in 2006, and 24.67 percent in 2007. Here I cannot disagree with the conclusion of one Kazakh political scholar, according to which, "ultimately, the threat is not in China's economic expansion, but in corruptibility of our officials."³⁸ This threat is the shortage or unavailability of secret information on the nature of bilateral and multilateral relations, breeding rumors and generating negative sentiment, which will be difficult to reverse in the future. The lack of skill and level of corruption of Kazakh officials, who sign contracts that are disadvantageous to the country and negatively affecting its economic security, are increasing with frightening speed. Any investor will ultimately play by the rules of the game that the government sets. The denunciation of China is used only to divert the attention of public opinion from the real perpetrators.

Conclusions

At present discussions or written works about China either evoke its achievements in socio-economic transformations or exaggerate threats resulting from the new role of Beijing in the world. Though such views

³⁸ Dosym Satpaev, "Kitaiskii faktor v ekonomike Kazakhstana: mif i real'nost'" [The Chinese Factor in the Kazakhstan Economy: Myth and Reality], *Svobodnaia Azii*, November 10, 2006, <<http://www.freeas.org/?nid=6425>> (October 12 2008).

have the right to exist, the reality is much more complex and should not be described only in Manichean terms.

To be sure the country is developing dynamically, but one should not focus only on “the growing power of China” and forget the domestic problems that accompany its growth. In my opinion, the possible combination of these problems is a more weighty argument than “the power of China.”³⁹ The exaggeration of the latter, which breeds irrational fears and different kinds of phobias, prevents an adequate assessment of its foreign policy, and reanimates the concept of an economic and demographic Chinese “takeover” of its neighbors. This seems to be pure hyperbole. In recent years China’s economic position has obviously strengthened in Central Asia in general, and in Kazakhstan in particular, but the situation should not be dramatized. Considering the figures showing foreign direct investment and foreign trade operations, the relative role of China in Kazakhstan, not to mention in the other states of Central Asia, is not so great in comparison with other foreign economic partners.

Nevertheless we cannot but take into account the trend of Chinese presence increase in Central Asia. Now more than ever China needs both new sources of raw materials, especially energy, as well as markets for its products. From this point of view, Central Asia and especially Kazakhstan are quite attractive. However, what is observed in trade and economic relations between China and the Central Asian states is a normal process that fits into the worldwide trend of economic globalization. Another issue is that China itself and Chinese specificities, as well as the nature of the relationship between interested players in the region, potentially contain threats to Kazakhstan’s national security. This should always be kept in mind when the presence of China in Central Asia is assessed.

³⁹ For more details, see Konstantin Syroezhkin, *Problemy sovremennogo Kitaia i bezopasnost' v Tsentral'noi Azii* [Problems of Contemporary China and Security in Central Asia] (Almaty: KISI, 2006).

China-Central Asia Trade Relations: Economic and Social Patterns

*Sadykzhan Ibraimov**

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to study China's economic presence in Central Asia and its main involvements in raw materials, transport routes, opening of markets and free economic zones, and small and medium-scale projects. It must be noted that over the years from 1992 to 2007, the highest trading volumes were between China and Kazakhstan, which represented from 80 to 86 percent of all Chinese-Central Asian trade. This growing economic cooperation has a social impact on the development of a Central Asian business diaspora based in Xinjiang. China also demonstrates its capacity to use local corruption schemes and internal Central Asian weaknesses in its own interests: From the earliest years of independence, smuggling with China, especially the export of metals and the import of consumer goods, has proved to be a very profitable venture for Central Asian high-level officials.

Keywords • China-Central Asia Trade • Xinjiang • Business Diaspora • Shuttle Trade • Corruption

Introduction

The main difficulty in the study of economic relationships between China and Central Asia is the lack of reliable or complete information. Many reasons can explain this fact. The Central Asian states, first of all, do not publish detailed information on cross-border trade. On this issue they follow the Soviet tradition and prefer not to strengthen the role of China to a public opinion which could be adverse. The Chinese authorities, for their part, do not try to heavily advertise their activities in the region and are quite comfortable with a lack of transparency in economic relations. The next reason results from the fact that nearly the entire trading system of China with the Central Asian republics is based on corruption and criminal schemes involving high ranking political and economic elites. Objective publicity on this issue could openly reveal the flaws in cross-trading mechanisms and paint a real picture of the existing

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political order in Central Asia. This article is therefore built both on the information available to the public and on some confidential information.

Sino-Central Asian Trade Relations

One should first look at China's official data on its economic presence in Central Asia. From independence until 1998, trade turnover between Central Asia and China was quite limited, around 350 to 700 million dollars each year. The volume started growing after the 1998 financial and economic crisis. During the period of 2000-2003, trade between China and Central Asia more than tripled, increasing from 1 to 3.3 billion dollars. From 2004 to 2007, this trend of trade growth became more sustainable: turnover increased by 3.7 times (270 percent), or from 4.3 to 16 billion dollars.¹ Throughout the 1990s, China had a very modest position in the Central Asian states' foreign trade. However in the period 2000-2007, annual Sino-Central Asian trade turnover grew very rapidly, increasing on average more than 15 times compared with the 1990s. At the end of 2007, China's share of Central Asian trade reached about 14 percent, while the region constituted 0.7 percent of China's foreign trade. In 2007, trade between China and Kazakhstan amounted to 12,385 million dollars while the trade between China and Uzbekistan stood at 1,608 million dollars, The corresponding figure was for Kyrgyzstan and China 984 million dollars, Tajikistan and China 84 million dollars, and 377 million dollars between Turkmenistan and China.²

Since the first years of independence, Central Asia has quickly turned into a raw materials base for China. The first phase consisted of the export of commodities: scrap metal, non-ferrous products containing rare metals, plastic waste, etc. Local businessmen quickly discovered how to work in the border regions, especially Xinjiang where mini mills and factories to process the incoming raw materials were built. After privatization virtually all major Central Asian factories and enterprises were subject to reconstitution through the bribery and subornation of local officials, and equipment and raw materials were exported to China. Analysis of Sino-Central Asian trade therefore reflects the growth of China as a supplier of finished products and of Central Asian countries role as suppliers of raw materials. At the end of 2007, the share of raw materials in Central Asian exports to China amounted to 91 percent; ferrous and nonferrous metals at about 6 percent, and raw textile materials at about 2 percent. At the end of 2007, the share of manufactured goods in China's exports to Central Asia amounted to 86

¹ Vladimir Paramonov, Aleksei Stokov, Oleg Stolpovskii, *Rossia i Kitai v Tsentral'noi Azii: politika, ekonomika, bezopasnost'* [Russia and China in Central Asia: Politics, Economy, Security] (Bishkek, 2008), p. 155.

² *Ibid.*, p. 157.

percent of all Chinese exports, with machinery and equipment at about 52 percent, food and consumer goods at more than 32 percent, and chemical products at about 2 percent.³

For a better understanding of the topic, one should review the main transport routes connecting Central Asian republics to China. The main flow of goods from China to Central Asia passes through Kazakhstan. This is due to objective reasons such as convenient geographical conditions allowing transport and communication corridors to function year-round, and the development of a rail link between China and Kazakhstan, connecting the latter with the other republics of Central Asia and Russia. The second means of entrance of China into Central Asia is through Kyrgyzstan. One route connects Kashgar with the northern part of Kyrgyzstan via Naryn, while another way links China, through Sary Tash, with the south of the country, then to the Fergana Valley and Uzbekistan. The third entrance passes through the Gorno-Badakhshan region (GBAO) to central areas of Tajikistan and beyond. However the road through GBAO is difficult to navigate due to its natural environment and is practically impassable during the winter. The rapid creation and development of specific Chinese firms focusing on consumer needs in Central Asia should also be analyzed because they have responded to market changes in the region. More internationalized markets selling Chinese goods and services appeared in the 1990s. In order to accelerate the development of trade, China intentionally arranges flights and routes for entrepreneurs and businessmen, for instance between Bishkek and Torugart, Osh and Irkeshtam, Urumqi and Khorgos, and Urumqi and Bakhty.

At present several major markets and free economic zones have opened especially for trade between China and Central Asia. One of the major markets is Dordoi, near Bishkek. Low taxes and customs duties in Kyrgyzstan, and its location on the border with Kazakhstan have turned Dordoi into a popular market not only in the Kyrgyz Republic, but also in neighboring Kazakhstan. Each day thousands of buyers of retail and wholesale goods from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and the other Central Asian republics come to Dordoi to purchase imported Chinese goods, often marked as "made in Poland" or "made in Turkey." In the south of Kyrgyzstan, not far from the Uzbek border, the Karasuu bazaar is the largest market in all Central Asia, exporting Chinese goods to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and beyond. In Tajikistan several major Chinese and joint markets also operate, such as Amindzhan, Shahrabe Abreshim (the Silk Road), Bunyad-Shengong, Mostafa Artush, and Shanghai. In Kazakhstan, a network of wholesale markets supplies Chinese goods not

³ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

only to the Central Asian republics, but also to bordering regions of Russia.

In the Chinese Chuguchak suburb, located a few kilometers from the Kazakhstani customs post of Maikapchagay, and at the Khorgos post, free economic zones operate within the framework of a treaty signed by the foreign affairs ministries of Kazakhstan and China, effective since March 2006. According to the document residents of Kazakhstan can purchase goods from Chinese manufacturers on the territory of Chuguchak without visa but within one day. Permission for “free” transportation through the customs posts of the two countries is granted to goods weighing no more than 50 kilograms and worth no more than 1,000 U.S. dollars. Kazakhstani entrepreneurs are also allowed to carry goods for domestic trade in China. In the future the Kazakhstani authorities intend to build warehouses, hotels, and other related infrastructure near these free trade zones. They also plan to rebuild roads going from Ust-Kamenogorsk, via Zaysan, to Maikapchagay, in order to ensure that inhabitants of the Altai region of the Russian Federation also use these trade corridors.

China has also proposed small-scale projects for the construction of mini mills and factories to replace old ones in Central Asia. For example, in the Osh region, two mini-factories for the production of bricks were built. Chinese-produced flour mills work in the main areas of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. Such firms were opened with the help of migrants from China, who were supported through financial and technical assistance from the Chinese government. These small businesses are meant to satisfy only Central Asian domestic needs, and should in no case rise to the regional or international levels. Specialists in China always keep an eye on them to ensure that this type of product is produced according to the needs of only the Central Asian market. At this point in Kazakhstan, Chinese trains are launched, with components and technical support to them being provided by the Chinese side.

The next phase is the construction of strategically important roads in Central Asia. In Kyrgyzstan the Chinese took over the construction of the 400 km Irkeshtam-Osh road. China is in charge of 60 km of the already constructed Osh-Uzgen road and has also built more than 100 km of the Madaniyat-Shamaldysay-Tashkumyr-Razan road to the Krupsai hydroelectric station. At first construction firms hired local workers, but by August 2006, replaced them with Chinese migrants. The related Chinese strategic objectives include the construction of large cement-asbestos sheeting production at the Kyzylkiisk plant in order to compete with the already existing Kuvasai cement-asbestos sheeting plant in Uzbekistan, which is located 40 kilometers from the border with Kyrgyzstan.

As for Tajikistan, China is its main investor in the domestic transport and communications industries. By investing funds and ensuring construction of power lines, providing roads and railway with equipment, and moving material and human resources, China pursues several important geopolitical and geo-economic objectives. If Tajikistan seeks to participate in the Karakorum highway, China intends to redirect the transportation and communication flows in a north-south direction through its territory. China's presence at strategic Tajik sites will also allow Beijing to control the domestic transport and electricity infrastructures. China has additionally opened a new alternative land route to the Fergana Valley, Afghanistan, Iran, and South Asia. And finally China has given itself a rare opportunity to obtain minerals and metals extraction in the GBAO: fluorites in Agadzhan and Duncheldyk, tin and tungsten in Buguchi-Dzhilga, boron in Akarhar, monocytos (an alloys additives) in Baygumbez, and tantalum and niobium in Kuristik.

In addition China has reconstructed a part of the Dushanbe-Khodjent-Chanak highway connecting the center of the country with the north and allowing for year-round vehicular traffic. It built the Shar-Shar road tunnel, which facilitates and reduces significantly the time it takes to transport people and goods between the Dushanbe, the Kuliab area, and the GBAO. In 2004, China built a road through the Kulma pass at the Sarykolsk ridge, connecting the territory of Xinjiang and GBAO. Since the summer of 2007, China started construction on roads from its border to Dushanbe, through the southern outskirts of GBAO and Khatlon region, and further from the capital to the Fergana Valley and the border with Uzbekistan. The Asian Development Bank has grant money to build the road from Dushanbe to Kyrgyzstan via Rasht and Dzhirgital. The China Theban Electric Apparatus Stock (CTEAS) is also constructing high-voltage transmission lines from Tursunzade to Khodjent, and to Lolazor-Khatlon from Dangary to Kuliab. The construction of 500 kW power transmission lines is also in the works. These north-south projects will be crucial in electricity distribution in the Central Asian region, which will not only permit the connection of all regions in Tajikistan to a single power grid, but also the export of electricity to Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan.

Thus China has turned Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan into economically dependent areas, and bases to expand its capabilities in other states, such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. China has moved closer to the region's energetic centers—the Krupsai, Tashkumyr, Toktogul, Nurek, Rogun and Sktudin hydro-power stations—as it intends to develop the water capabilities of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. In the next ten to fifteen years, China will be in great need of drinking water. Beijing is therefore interested in the water-energy potential of Central Asia and started implementing a program of development in the Fergana Valley in

Kyzylkiisk, Osh, Jalalabat, Kochkorata, and Andijan. The Chinese authorities are indeed convinced that by mastering the Fergana Valley region and its hydropower, they will effectively influence the policy of the Central Asian states.

The China-Kazakhstan Trade Axis

China is today a major trading partner for Central Asian countries. Over the years from 1992 to 2007, the highest trading volumes were between China and Kazakhstan, which represented from 80 to 86 percent of all Chinese-Central Asian trade.⁴ China joined the four leaders in the list of economic partners of Kazakhstan several years ago and even started confidently replacing other players in this group, such as Russia. China's share in the foreign trade of Kazakhstan from 1996 to 2004 almost doubled, from 4.8 to 8.3 percent, in terms of value. Kazakhstan is the second largest partner of China among CIS states (Russia is first). Given the exponential growth of trade between the two countries, the existing plans to increase the turnover by 15 billion dollars, from the current amount of 13.9 billion dollars, by 2015 seem quite modest.⁵ The situation determines that the total foreign trade of Kazakhstan is barely 70 billion dollars, and that Kazakhstan's trade growth with China is one of the highest.

Since 2005, both sides have decided to pursue a bilateral strategic rapprochement. The legal framework of this process was included in the Declaration on Strategic Partnership signed by the presidents of Kazakhstan and China in July 2005. Since then, the process of convergence has been quite consistent, and the two states have taken important steps toward it. In the Joint Declaration signed at the end of the visit, the two countries expressed willingness for the "continuous deepening of bilateral relations and enhancing coordination and cooperation in solving international problems based on the principle of friendship from generation to generation, good-neighborliness, mutual trust, and close cooperation."⁶ According to President Nursultan Nazarbaev, the strengthening of relations with China is one of the main strategic priorities of Kazakhstan's foreign policy.⁷ Hu Jintao, in turn, confirms that China should pay special attention to the development of

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁵ The amount of 13.9 billion dollars, representing the volume of Sino-Kazakhstan trade turnover in 2007, was mentioned by the Chinese side at a joint business forum carried out during the visit of Karim Masimov.

⁶ As President Nazarbaev stated in January 2008, during his visit to China.

⁷ "President Kazakhstana vstretilsia so spetsposlannikom glavy KNR" [The president of Kazakhstan met with the special envoy of the head of the PRC], *Kazakhstan segodnia*, January 8, 2008, <<http://www.kz-today.kz/index.php?uin=1133168007&chapter=1153435961>> (September 12 2008).

relations with Kazakhstan and considers the strengthening and deepening of the Sino-Kazakhstan strategic partnership as a priority in his foreign policy.⁸ All of this diplomatic rhetoric would not deserve so much attention if it was not supported by essential prerequisites, confirming that the turnaround in relations results not only from political will and geopolitical environment.

During a meeting with the Kazakhstani Prime Minister Karim Masimov on April 11, 2008, Hu Jintao explained that “the potential for bilateral business cooperation is enormous, the parties should seize opportunities, based on sincerity and mutual profit to implement agreements.” The Kazakhstani Prime Minister responded that Kazakhstan intends to strengthen bilateral cooperation with China in the investment, finance, energy, agriculture, and infrastructure construction sectors in order to facilitate the joint development of both countries’ economies. Kazakhstan is more subjected to and thus focused on specific economic problems. Nevertheless considering the interests of the parties, Kazakhstan and China should be satisfied with the results of the visit.

It seems that Astana has no other choice than the PRC if one considers its geo-economic characteristics, the great potential of China’s economy, and the weaknesses of Kazakhstan’s other neighbors. Factors that have emerged in the course of bilateral relations also play a role, such as the successful cooperation of Kazakhstan and China in the infrastructure sector. In early 2006, an Atasu-Alashankou oil pipeline was launched, allowing for the annual transport of up to 20 million tons of oil from Kazakhstan’s Caspian coast to the western, and thus eastern, provinces of China. This Kazakhstani-Chinese project, despite its difficult history, has become the main success in the interaction between the two countries and could be the key to their large-scale energy cooperation. As Astana receives practical benefits from the pipelines, it is easier for it to decide on similar new projects, such as the implementation of the Sino-Central Asian gas pipeline.

Considering the transit potential of Kazakhstan and the new opportunities for Chinese trade with Europe, the transportation and communication projects are also important for the development of Kazakhstani-Chinese cooperation. It is a well-known fact that one of the Chinese railways’ weaknesses is their low participation in the transportation of foreign trade goods, a situation that could be changed through cooperation with Kazakhstan. Meanwhile the situation regarding railway service both in the Chinese and Kazakhstani territories is far from ideal, and much remains to be done in order to turn Kazakhstan into a transcontinental bridge between Asia and Europe. To date the

⁸ Hu Jintao’s Declaration during a meeting with the speaker of the Kazakh Parliament, Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev, which took place in China on January 24, 2008.

current railway line going through Dostyk/Alashankou primarily carries goods for Chinese trade with Central Asian states.⁹ Out of 101 existing cross-border passenger and cargo routes between Xinjiang and its eight neighboring countries, more than sixty connect it to Kazakhstan. In addition to the existing highways between China and Kazakhstan, four new direct road routes for freight transport have opened at the end of 2008: Urumqi-Khorgos-Karaganda, Urumqi-Maikapchagay-Karaganda, Urumqi-Baketu-Karaganda and Urumqi-Dostyk/Alashankou-Karaganda. Three direct passenger routes will also be open on the same lines, except that of Khorgos.

Kazakhstan and China also initiated a new form of trade cooperation by developing the unique Khorgos Sino-Kazakhstani international center for cross-border cooperation, viewed by both sides as the second largest project of their strategic cooperation, after the pipeline. Situated 670 kilometers from Urumqi and 378 kilometers from Almaty, Khorgos is the largest road checkpoint in this region and the Chinese checkpoint closest to the countries of Central Asia, West Asia, and Europe. Khorgos therefore has the opportunity to become the main gateway to western China, with a current annual transit capacity of 3 million people and 2 million tons of cargo.

It is thus clear that China has achieved a significant advantage over any potential competitors and created an important infrastructure base, which in a few years will probably be more modern and more powerful than that of Kazakhstan and Russia. It seems that even the intensification of Kazakhstani foreign cooperation with Russia or the West will no more change this trend of increased interaction and convergence with China, as it will always be one step ahead of other interested parties. Another advantage in Beijing's favor is its ability to satisfy requests for the economic development of Kazakhstan. Focusing on the differentiation of its economy and the redirection of commodity-oriented manufacturing, as well as the realization of innovation and industrial development programs, Astana has faced foreign investors' reluctance to help its domestic manufacturing industry. In this regard China has proved more flexible and far-sighted, a situation that is well received by Kazakhstani leaders as a means to promote long-term plans.

The Central Asian Economic Niche in Xinjiang

According to Chinese customs statistics, the volume of foreign trade between Xinjiang and Kazakhstan reached record levels in 2008. This is mainly due to the growth of the total external trade of the Xinjiang

⁹ Igor' P. Azovskii, "Vneshnetorgovye perevozki zheleznykh dorog Kitaia: segodnia i zavtra" [Foreign Trade Railway Transit of China: Today and Tomorrow], <http://www.ivran.ru/library/view_edition.php?edition_id=54> (September 12 2008).

Uyghur Autonomous Region (SUAR), which in the first quarter of 2008, ranked first in the country.¹⁰ The Chinese authorities are now using their growing economic relations with Central Asia to develop Xinjiang, an underdeveloped region of the country. Beijing's "open door policy" has contributed to the inflow not only of foreign capital, but also of human resources into the country. Comparing the costs of border crossing and living in China to the possible business income, many consider it cheaper to live in China and earn in Kazakhstan. In cities such as Beijing, Guangzhou, Urumqi, and Yining, entire neighborhoods have appeared in which immigrants from Central Asia live. Such choice is motivated by geographical centers for the wholesale trade of Chinese products. Yet the favorite city is Urumqi, where many people can speak Russian or Kazakh, making easier the lives of those who chose to stay in China.¹¹

In Xinjiang and especially in Urumqi, many Central Asian nationals have found their social niche. Some of them are current or former "shuttle traders" and have long experiences in such missions. Some of them open travel agencies to help the new generation of commercial tourism. Others called *kubovshchiki* deal with cargo transit. They control the price lists of Chinese consumer goods, have complete information on the tax and customs policies of Kazakhstan and China, closely monitor staff changes at customs, and handle the timely delivery of goods to Kazakhstani businessmen traveling in Urumqi or other Chinese cities. They thus work as unofficial regulators of cross-country trade and as key elements of the customs business and of corruption. Another area developed by Central Asians in China is the restaurant business, as "Muslim food" is quite developed in all of China thanks to the Hui minority.

In addition, some Central Asian citizens are engaged in the agriculture, mining, and processing industries, and try to take advantage of the "Far West" development project.¹² According to this program, foreign nationals are allowed to invest in any type of industry from water management to power engineering or the chemical and mining industries. Foreign investment companies are exempted from local income taxes for ten years. Those involved in agriculture and extractive industries, except in oil and gas, are exempt from taxes for five years. They do not pay taxes on their real estate and transportation costs, including maritime transport, for the five first years of business.¹³

¹⁰ The foreign trade turnover volume of Xinjiang has increased up to 90.4 percent during the first quarter 2008, in comparison with the corresponding period of the last year, having amounted to 3.45 billion dollars.

¹¹ Sofia Ushurova, "Zhit' pod nebesami" [To live under the skies], <<http://www.liter.kz/site.php?lan=russian&id=167&pub=11419>> (September 12 2008).

¹² "Xinjiang Strategy of Economic Development", *Investment Directory on Xinjiang, China* (Urumqi: Press-secretariat of the representation of People of Xinjiang, 2004), p. 191.

¹³ "The Policy of Investment Attraction", *Ibid.*, p. 207.

Corruption as the Reality of Sino-Central Asian Trade

However, Central Asia's success in attracting investment from China is linked more with Beijing's understanding of the specifics of economic life in post-Soviet countries, and its use of local corruption schemes and internal weaknesses in its own interests. It should be noted that the Chinese government provided various sized grants for Central Asia at low interest rates or even free of charge. Chinese grants were mainly used for the construction of mini-markets or roads connecting remote regions with central cities, thus contributing to the development of trade routes for Chinese goods. But the lion's share of these grants went into the pockets of local officials.

Sometimes the legal decisions taken by the government left the door open to corruption. For instance the Kazakhstan Ministry of Transport and Communication issues each year an order to reduce the load on the axles of trucks by almost one quarter (3 to 4 tons). But no one would drive a half-loaded truck from abroad through the whole country, at a significant economic loss. Entrepreneurs are therefore forced to pay bribes to all those working in the customs posts in order to increase the load. Without preferential treatment one can also transport across the border only 10 tons of goods; any entrepreneur carrying more must register them under an assumed name. Otherwise the goods will automatically be considered smuggled. In order to avoid this situation, entrepreneurs are ready to bribe the custom officers. While the goods travel over the country toward the destination, each traffic police patrol car will determine the existence of accompanying documents, permits, certificates, and correspondence of the load to type and weight. After checking and often receiving "fees," the patrol transmits information about the truck to the next post, so entrepreneurs must pay bribes all along the road. Kazakhstan regulations and laws are justified to protect the interests of the country, although they in fact adversely affect the rights of private firms. These laws apparently make Kazakhstani citizens become bribers and beneficiaries. Therefore it is impossible to work legally, as the whole system is corrupted.

The first option for Chinese or Kazakhstani businessmen going to Kazakhstan is to declare less than what they have and let Kazakhstani customs officers take the "fee." The second one is to register products under another category, requiring a minimal fee, and to pay customs so that the trucks' contents are not checked. Activities of carrier companies are also apparently subject to legal regulation. Ideally they propose service for the delivery of a consignment from the initial location to the destination, including the border crossing. In reality these companies tend to draw attention when they pass through customs. By law the owner of the goods must submit documents for the customs declaration, but he might not have them because Chinese vendors, working under

preferential tax treatment, often do not issue invoices for their purchases. Therefore intermediaries take over the delivery of someone else's goods via illegal schemes. They do not conclude contracts with load owners on the supply of goods and do not give the addresses of registered companies in Kazakhstan or China, so that the owners can protect themselves if the load is seized due to contraband. If the carrier cannot reach agreement with the customs, consignees become hostages of the situation and the goods are considered smuggled. Entrepreneurs then start looking for officials willing to clear the goods in exchange for bribes. In the worst-case scenario, the carrier disappears, throwing away the product, and the owner cannot find it. Thus high-ranking custom officers do not want to introduce a system of contractual relations between shuttle-traders and carriers in order to legalize the relationship, because confiscated products benefit them.

The Chinese side has a grudge against Kazakhstan because of the level of transit and trade corruption. According to Chinese businessmen anyone crossing the border, even if he is a mid-level official or influential figure, is forced to give a bribe three times. The first, about 50 dollars, goes to customs, even when passing without the goods, so that personal belongings do not get confiscated. The next, about 20 dollars, goes to border guards and then varying amounts to policemen. These "tariffs" are applied even if the Chinese citizen has all required documents. For a few years some Central Asian states, including Kazakhstan, have declared their intention to fight corruption, which has provoked a reverse reaction. As a consequence the customs points at the Kazakhstani-Chinese border partially stopped taking bribes, but the price of illegal taxes increased almost fourfold. Businessmen are now forced to address their requests to the central customs office and ministry officials, which are in the regional centers or the capital, and charge more expensive "fees." Because of this situation, most medium-sized Chinese businesses have shifted to corruption methods of trade with Kazakhstan. In 2007 and 2008, according to some Chinese businessmen, corruption became intolerable, with Chinese businesses losing a lot of money due to Kazakhstani corruption.

In the growing competition between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan for the transit of Chinese goods, many small Central Asian entrepreneurs now prefer to deliver Chinese goods across Kyrgyzstan. Goods are sent in transit to Kyrgyzstan, where they clear customs and then return to Kazakhstan. It thus seems to be advantageous to go an extra 500 kilometers than to clear customs in Kazakhstan, even if the corruption situation works with similar schemes in Kyrgyzstan. Bishkek uses the mistakes of Kazakhstani officials in its favor. If the fee increases in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan reduces or removes it completely. When the tax committee of the Kazakhstan Ministry of Finance decided to introduce

changes in the workings of markets, Kazakhstani businessmen settled in Dordoi. Now up to 60 percent of Almaty wholesalers work there, and the transit of loads and passengers in Khorgos partially fell. According to local unofficial sources, one cubic meter of cleared load on the Urumqi-Almaty route accounts for 280 dollars, but on the Khorgos-Bishkek-Almaty route, it does not exceed 160 dollars.

For all these reasons information on trade between China and Kazakhstan differs. The Chinese side honestly registers the volume of products leaving the country, while Kazakhstani customs officials record the volume of officially passed goods. In 2006, Finance Minister Natalia Korzhova mentioned a difference in trade of about 3 billion dollars a year. An inter-governmental commission thus visited China to standardize Chinese and Kazakhstani statistics under the personal request of the vice-Prime Ministers of both countries.¹⁴ However, the situation has not changed. In 2007, according to Chinese data, Kazakhstan brought 9 billion dollars in Chinese goods, while Kazakhstan's data mentions only 1.5 billion dollars.

Trade with China is actually built on two schemes, called red in Russian when conducted through state authorities, and black when conducted through underground and criminal schemes. However either option still relies on influential figures in power. For instance at the Kazakhstani customs post in Dostyk, smuggling processes were monitored by the so-called brothers Karimov, known by another name as the Rybachinsk group, and in Khorgos by the "four brothers." The Krykbaev group controlled the transit of Chinese goods over the Kyrgyz-Kazakhstan border. In 2007, Marat Adbuali, and Ergali and Kayrat Krykbaev were sentenced respectively to 25 and 18 years in prison for an array of criminal activities. Incidentally one of the Krykbaev brothers was once a deputy of the presidential Nur-Otan party. In Uzbekistan two famous criminals, Gafur Rakhimov and Salim Abduvaliev, manage illegal trade. In Tajikistan control over all Chinese business and trade is in the hands of Hassan Saidullaev, the president of the "Ismaili Somoni 21st Century" holding company and relative of President Rakhmon. In Kyrgyzstan, the dominant group is that of Kolbaev Kamchibek, but Kydyraliev Sanzharbek, a former member of the Kyrgyz parliament, controls the south part of the republic. Earlier criminal affairs were monitored by the deputy Bayaman Erkinbaev, and by Ryspek Akmatbaev, who ran for parliament but was killed before acceding to this position.

¹⁴ "Minfin nameren ustranit' raskhozhdeniia v statistike Kitaia i Kazakhstana po vzaimnoi trgovle" [The Ministry of Finance wants to eliminate differences in Chinese and Kazakh trade turnover statistics], November 2006, <<http://ru.government.kz/site/news/2006/11/95>> (September 13 2008).

All these Central Asian criminal groups work closely with each other, thus creating a transnational criminal network. Moreover they often have very close relations with political authorities, as some relatives of the presidential families are personally engaged in business with China. For instance, in Kyrgyzstan, the spouse of the ex-president, Mairam Akaeva, processed the export of scrap metal. In the south of Kyrgyzstan, the export of raw materials, mainly colored metals, was monitored by the late criminal authority Bayaman Ereimbaev, whose business was intercepted by other groups. In Uzbekistan, part of trade with China seems to be under the control of the eldest daughter of Islam Karimov, Gulnara Karimova, with the help of her aunt Tamara in the Fergana region. All kinds of raw materials from Uzbekistan are freely exported to China via Kyrgyzstan. In Kazakhstan, the main actors of this process also surround the president.

Conclusion

One can infinitely draw nuances and give examples on trade ties and schemes between China and Central Asia. However this economic relationship is still at an early stage of development and for this reason, there is some randomness in commercial processes and relationships. This can be partly explained by the reality of corruption in Central Asia and the high level of interaction between business and politics. From the earliest years of independence, smuggling with China, especially the export of metals and the import of consumer goods, has proved to be a very profitable venture for high-level officials. This now makes it difficult for the implementation of effective customs legislation. Yet this is the condition for the average Chinese firms, which even with in-depth knowledge of the situation, agreed to enter a Central Asian market denounced as too corrupt and too risky.

The Multifaceted Chinese Presence in Tajikistan

Saodat Olimova^{*}

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the multifaceted Chinese presence in Tajikistan and its reception by Tajik society, especially on the migration issue. After briefly presenting the history of relations between Tajikistan and China and their growing current relationship, I study China's public image in Tajikistan. It has undergone tremendous changes; however, many archetypes, symbols, and signs continue to persist in the new image. Referring to the image of China reflected in public opinion polls, one can also notice a huge difference between mass consciousness and that of the political, economic, military, and intellectual elite. The growing experience gained from interaction with the Chinese and stronger trade ties with China help Tajik society to generate new images, and develop new stereotypes and myths about it. At present the attitude of Tajiks to Chinese ranges from neutral to positive, despite the vast cultural and religious differences between Chinese workers and local Tajik populations.

Keywords • Tajikistan • Chinese Migration • Tajik-Chinese Relations • Public Opinion Polls

Introduction

The rapid development of relationships between China and Tajikistan in recent years has been accompanied by surging growth of Chinese migration into Tajikistan. This intensification of economic, political, and cultural connections has broadened the Tajik population's images and understanding of China and the Chinese migrants among them. Until now the details of Chinese migration have been neglected by researchers. Nevertheless, it can be studied as a separate phenomenon with its own specificities. Questions include who the Chinese workers in Tajikistan are, what they do, what their living conditions are, and how they interact with the local population. In order to answer these questions, I will first refer to the history of relations between Tajikistan and China and then analyze the attitude of inhabitants of Tajikistan to China and its population.

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History of Tajik-Chinese Relations

Areas now included in modern Tajikistan began to develop contact with China long ago. The first Chinese to write a description of the Pamirs was Izhan Qian. In 140-135 BC, he visited Davani (Fergana Valley), Toharistan (Dahi), Kang (Khorezm), and Ansi (Parthia).¹ These contacts became systematic and lively during the Silk Road era, especially under the Tang Dynasty (618-907). However, the level of contact dropped significantly after the Battle of the Talas River in 751, when the troops of Arab caliphate defeated the Tang army. Since then, political and cultural ties with China were diminished, but trade remained active.² Tajiks reactivated their relations with China when it became part of Genghis Khan's empire and during the Ming dynasty in China (1368-1644). But eventually, the great maritime discoveries of the European nations led to abandonment of the Silk Road and the territory of modern Tajikistan lost most of its contacts with China. Chinese activity in Kashgar in 1760, and the subsequent long struggle between the population of East Turkistan and Qing empire, did not contribute to the revival of relations. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Tajiks viewed China almost exclusively through the prism of the peoples of East Turkistan, as well as through another important channel of communication, trade with the Kashgar region. The Kokand Khanate (1709-1876) was the most deeply involved in Kashgar, as its ruling class was connected to Kashgar elite through close family ties.³ Some authors even believe that the rulers in Kashgar and Kokand came from a unified elite.

The Emirate of Bukhara also had strong trade links with Kashgar.⁴ Baron von Meyendorf noted that Kashgar was the second largest foreign trade partner of the Bukharan emirate after the Russian Empire. He described 700-800 fully loaded camels that would cross the Terek pass from Bukhara to Kashgar in two or three weeks.⁵ Merchants from Bukhara, Kokand, and Khodjent exported to Kashgar fabrics, pearls, jewelry, furs, leather, sugar, and metal products, and imported tea, porcelain dishes, Chinese silk, and silver coins. They used these coins to

¹ Viktor Dubovitski, "Tadzhikistan-Kitai: ot nastorozhennogo otnosheniia k strategicheskomu partnerstvu" [Kazakhstan-China: from Cautious Relations to Strategic Partnership], *Ferghana.ru*, January 25, 2007, <www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=4862> (September 15 2008).

² *Vostochnyi Turkestan v drevnosti i rannem srednevekov'e. Ocherki istorii* [East Turkistan—Ancient and Medieval Times. An Historical Essay] (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), p. 305.

³ V. Nalivkin, "Kratkaia istoriia Kokandskogo khanstva" [A Short history of the Kokand Khanate], *Istoriia Srednei Azii* [History of Central Asia] (Moscow: Eurolins – Russian Panorama, 2003), p. 298.

⁴ B. Ismailova, *Bukharskii emirat pri emire Khaidare* [Bukhara Emirate under Emir Haydar] (Khodjent: State University Law, Business and Policy, 2000), p. 70-73.

⁵ E. K. Meyendorf, *Puteshestvie iz Orenburga v Bukharu* [Trip from Orenburg to Bukhara] (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), p. 128.

pay for goats' fleece, which they bought in Tibet and transferred to Kashmir for the manufacture of shawls, which were then sold to other countries, including Russia.⁶ As a result until the beginning of the twentieth century, Bukhara and Kokand's merchants played the role of trade intermediaries with Tibet and Kashmir and of exporters of goods from these areas to the Russian Empire. Although the population of the territories that now makes up northern Tajikistan, and which were parts of Kokand Khanate and the Emirate of Bukhara—Khodjent, Isfara, and Ura-Tiube—were engaged in contacts with China through East Turkistan, the population of what is now central Tajikistan, southern Tajikistan, and Badakhshan had no links with China. They were separated from it by impassable mountains and territories inhabited by Turkic peoples. This explains why Tajiks formed an image of China as a distant country, which lies beyond the "country of Turks."

In the Soviet era, almost no relations existed between the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic and China. Beijing began to engage in direct relations with the independent republic of Tajikistan only within the framework of border issues, and mostly after 1997, when the civil war formally ended. From 1997 to 2002, relations developed steadily and slowly, primarily through the Shanghai Five and, then, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Included were a few small private projects and assistance China provided to strengthen Tajik armed forces. The situation has changed since the events of September, 11, 2001, as Beijing has given more attention to Central Asia. Since that time, China has strengthened its economic presence in Tajikistan and became one of the top five leading trade partners of Dushanbe. From 2002 to 2006, the volume of trade between the two countries has grown by a factor of 25, reaching 524 million U.S. dollars in 2007.

In January 15, 2007, the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Tajikistan signed the Treaty on Good Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation, effective for 25 years with the possibility of extension for five-year periods.⁷ The treaty stresses the idea of "combined development," including the principles of mutual respect, national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security, especially as it applies to the fight against international terrorism, separatism, extremism, and drug trafficking. The treaty covers various areas of bilateral cooperation in the political, military, economic, commercial, cultural, and educational fields. Particular attention is paid to strengthening trade, energy, transport, scientific, technological, agricultural, humanitarian and environmental cooperation between China and Tajikistan.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 129-130.

⁷ See the Ministry of Foreign Affairs article, <<http://www.mid.tj/index.php?node=article&id=315>>/<www.mid.tj/index.php?node=article&id=315> (September 15 2008).

Major Aspects of Tajik-Chinese Relations

Borders

The 430 kilometer Tajik-Chinese border is the result of division of the territory of the Pamirs between the Russian Empire and Qing China. Treaties establishing the border were revised several times in the middle and late nineteenth century. But the geographical indications that established the boundary lines were partly inaccurate, leading to misunderstanding and mutual claims. China claimed three disputed sites in the territory of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO), totaling to an area of over 20,000 square kilometers.⁸ In 2001, after a long period of coordination, Tajikistan agreed to transfer more than 1,000 square kilometers of this territory to China. In June 2006, work began on border demarcation; it continued until the end of 2008. The general public tends to be indifferent towards these transfers. One exception is in the GBAO, where some herdsmen protested against the transfer due to loss of their pastures after the demarcation of the border and geologists expressed concern that the Rangkul mines were being given to China.⁹

One of the most important outcomes from the resolution of the border issue for the two countries is the emergence of direct transport corridor from Tashkorgan to Khorog via the Kulma Pass (4,363 meters) at Sarykol Ridge. It provides direct access to Tajikistan from Xinjiang, and indirect access to Pakistan and then the Indian Ocean. The first result was the rapid development of border trade between Xinjiang and the GBAO. Although this part of Tajikistan had no relations with China until 2004, the Kulma Pass rapidly became a lively junction for transporting people and goods to both countries. In 2006, trade between Tajikistan and China through the Kulma Pass was valued around 4.5 million dollars and the volume of transferred goods, estimated to be more than 9,000 tons, significant numbers if one keeps in mind the difficulty of shipping along this mountainous route.¹⁰

Economic Relations

Tajik-Chinese relations began to develop rapidly after the signing of the Treaty on Good Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation. The base for these relations is joint implementation of major infrastructure

⁸ Viktor Dubovitski, "Tadzhikistan-Kitai: ot nastorozhennogo otnosheniia k strategicheskomu partnerstvu".

⁹ "Tadzhikskie pastukhi pokidaiut 37 gornyx ushelii, ustuplenykh E. Rakhmonom Kitaiu" [Tajik Herders leave 37 Mountain Ravines, let by E. Rakhmon to China], *CentrAsia*, May 27, 2008, <<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1211964420>> (September 12, 2008).

¹⁰ Viktor Dubovitski, "Tadzhikistan-Kitai: ot nastorozhennogo otnosheniia k strategicheskomu partnerstvu".

projects being undertaken under the auspices of the SCO. Within this multilateral framework in 2006, Tajikistan obtained from China a preferential loan of 608 million dollars. It was mainly used for the construction of the north-south high voltage lines project, LEP-500, for the Lolazor to Khatlon LEP-220 project in the Khatlon region, and for the construction of a tunnel under the Shar-Shar pass on the road between Dushanbe and Kuliab. The construction of this transport corridor joining China and Central Asia is a key factor for maintaining Chinese interests in Tajikistan. For Beijing, Tajikistan is both a market for its exports, a gateway to Southwest Asia, as well as a prospective buffer zone to provide safety to Chinese borders.

On an official visit to Tajikistan in August 2008, Hu Jintao noted that the companies and institutions of both countries should concentrate on the successful implementation of projects such as the highway between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.¹¹ Through the SCO the Export-Import Bank of China loaned to Dushanbe funds to finance this project, which includes the full rehabilitation of the Dushanbe-Aini-Istaravshan-Khodjent-Buston-Chanak road on the border of Uzbekistan, the construction of new detour roads into settlements, new bridges, a tunnel at Shahrstan, and roads to link the tunnel under Anzob pass, which is being completed with the participation of Iran. In the area of hydropower development, Tajikistan is the main partner of China among all Central Asian states. There are currently plans to build several hydro and thermal power plants with Chinese participation. In total since 2005, Chinese investment into the Tajik economy has amounted to 1 billion dollars. Between 2006 and 2007, trade with China increased by 62 percent, or from 323 million to 524 million dollars.

Several institutional and policy elements have contributed to making economic relations so dynamic, including a week-long visit to China by President Emomali Rakhmon in January 2007, the forum on investments and trade cooperation, and other business meetings at the Second Eurasian Economic Forum in Xi'an, and the State Development Bank of China opening an office in Dushanbe. The outcome has been large for the small Tajik economy: more than fifty joint projects are being undertaken, over forty Tajik enterprises have Chinese participation, and by the middle of 2008, 80 Chinese companies were recorded as operating in Tajikistan.¹² However, one of the main problems of the Tajik economy is

¹¹ Akkram Abdukakhkharov, "Investitsii iz Podnebesnoi" [Investments from China], *Stan.tv*, September 11, 2008, <<http://www.stan.tv/news/6935/?print=1>> (September 14 2008).

¹² Rashid Alimov, "Tadzhiksko-kitaiskie torgovo-ekonomicheskie otnosheniia razvivaiutsia po nastaraiushchei" [Tajik-China Trade-Economic Relations are Increasing], ANTSK, September 7, 2007, <<http://www.anctc.ru/inform/textnews/2007-09-07/?site=6>> (September 15 2008).

the worsening of trade balance with China. According to the State Statistical Committee, the total volume of trade with China in 2006 was 158.5 million dollars, of which imports from China were 148.5 million dollars and exports to China were only 10 million. This raises the question of undermining domestic production, which cannot compete with the Chinese economy.

Increased economic contacts affect the development of mutual interest in culture, history, tradition, and of course, language. In May 2007, for the first time, China organized days of Tajik culture. The number of Tajik students who enrolled in Chinese universities with the support of the Ministry of Education of China increased two-fold in one year. So far in 2008, about 200 Tajik students are in China, primarily studying Chinese language, according to the Tajik ambassador to China, Rashid Alimov.¹³ He mentions that economic subjects are also very popular, as is traditional Chinese medicine. China also helps Tajikistan in training workers in various sectors of the economy, culture, education, and in the training of armed forces, border troops, and National Guard.

Competition with Russia?

China's rapid strengthening in Tajikistan causes concerns among observers and within the population of Tajikistan. One of the most pressing questions is how Tajik-Chinese relations can influence Tajik-Russian relations and whether the active role of China in Tajikistan is a reflection of global rivalry or cooperation between Russia and China. For instance on May 2008, the Tajik Aluminum Company (TALCO) and the Chinese National Corporation for Heavy Machinery (CHMC) signed a 30 million dollar agreement for the construction of two factories in the Yavan district to supply TALCO with raw aluminum for further refinement. In addition the Chinese partners are negotiating with TALCO for the construction of a factory to produce coal and graphite.¹⁴ Currently inputs for TALCO are supplied by Russia, China, and the Baltic states. In this case China directly replaces Russia as promoter of projects. In 2004, the Russian aluminum company RUSAL intended to build factories for TALCO, but disagreements concerning the Rogun hydroelectric plant caused the cancellation of the agreement.¹⁵ As a major

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Nargiz Khamrabaeva, "V Tadzhikestane poiaviatsia zavody po proizvodstvu ftoristogo aliuminiia i kriolita. Pekin obeshchal" [Beijing promised to open factory for production of aluminum and cryolite in Tajikistan], *CentrAsia*, May 20, 2005, <<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1211338860>> (September 12 2008).

¹⁵ Alexandr Shustov, "Rossiia i Kitai v Tsentral'noi Azii - konkurentsii ili sotrudnichestvo?" [Russia and China in Central Asia: Competition or Collaboration?], *Fond strategicheskoi kul'tury*, May 28, 2008, <<http://www.fondsk.ru/article.php?id=1410>> (September 14 2008).

investor and a possible political partner, China could thus take over Russia's current position.

China's Public Image in Tajikistan

Keeping the state of economic and political relations in mind, one must also present a brief overview of the perception of China in Tajik society. Here, the image of a country is defined as a set of stable and stratified perceptions of political, historical, cultural, and geographical space. At the same time it is also a means of self-identification. In the past two decades, the identity of the Tajik population, as well as that of several surrounding countries, has undergone tremendous change thus transforming the image of China. At the same time, many important archetypes, symbols, and signs continue to persist in the new image, creating difficulties in terms of understanding the new reality. What is China in the minds of current Tajiks? How do they see its geographic, cultural, and economic appearances, and how do they relate it to the identity of Tajiks and the citizens of Tajikistan? The word "China" itself elicits many contradictory responses resulting from the complex history of Sino-Central Asian relations and from the sensitive ethnic history of the local population. In the Tajik language there are two names for China, *Hitoy* and *Chin*. The first is the political-geographical designation of China as state, whereas the second has three different meanings: China, Chinese Turkestan or Xinjiang, and people of China or the Chinese.

In addition to the uncertainty of geographical designators, the modern image of China combines notions of different eras and thus three different groups of images, symbols, and concepts. The first traditional group is recorded in classical Farsi literature, where the main themes are dominated by the following phrases: distant country, the seat of strange people and magical creatures, production of porcelain and tea, and birthplace of skilled artists, craftsmen, and beauties. Traces of these archetypes can be found in modern Farsi/Dari/Tajik language. For example *Chin* to describe China or porcelain dishware, *nigorgari Chin* to refer to a peerless artist or Chinese artist, and *surat chini* to illustrate a charming person or a Chinese painting. The second group formed when Tajikistan was part of the Soviet Union. Its dominant concepts include brotherly people, the Communist Party, and struggle against imperialism. The third modern set formed after independence. Its basic concepts and associations include great neighbor, huge territory, many, successful reforms, cheap low-quality goods, incomprehensible and alien culture, and hardworking and unpretentious people.

In order to define the image of China in Tajikistan in its multiplicity, one must divide the image of China into its separate components. These

components might be cultural or historical, linked to geographical representations, political and socioeconomic perceptions, or to the memory of the civil war. Public opinion polls are able to measure these components, as they gauge collective perception of people about themselves and about each other. I first look at the overall tone of the image of China as perceived by the people of Tajikistan. In recent years the Sharq Research Center has collected data about political orientations and the images of foreign countries among the citizens of Tajikistan. These polls demonstrate that they have positive attitudes toward China and its people. Their attitudes toward other countries such as Russia (Dushanbe's main strategic partner), Iran (a country with a shared language and culture), and France (an example of a Western country) serve as points of comparison (Table 1).

Table 1. Attitude to some countries in Tajikistan in May 2008¹⁶

	China	Russia	Iran	France
Very friendly	33.6	79.5	69.6	16.3
Typically benevolent	48.2	18.0	26.4	63.2
Typically not benevolent	16.1	1.9	3.1	12.9
Very unfriendly	2.1	0.3	0.2	0.9
No opinion	-	0.3	0.7	6.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Comparing the results with similar surveys conducted in 2006, the number of respondents who had a *positive* attitude toward China fell by 7 percent and those whose attitude was *very friendly* toward it also decreased in 2008.¹⁷ One can assume that the cause lies in the fact that Tajikistan transferred to China more than 1,000 square kilometers in the process of border dispute resolution.

¹⁶ Research Center Sharq Survey, May 2008, Dushanbe, based on national representative sample, 1,000 respondents, percent of error - 2,5 percent.

¹⁷ In 2006 89 percent respondents referred to the very positive and rather positive impact of China. Research Center Sharq Survey, October 2006, Dushanbe, based of national representative sample, 1,800 respondents, percent of error - 2,5 percent.

According to a public opinion poll which took place in November 2007, more than 90 percent of respondents believe that China has an overall positive impact on Tajikistan. Among them, 41 percent indicated that the impact of China is very positive and 49 percent that it is rather positive, whereas only 6.8 percent consider it as rather negative and 1.4 percent as very negative. Comparing the assessment of the impact on Tajikistan by China and other countries, it appears that people of Tajikistan consider China provides the most favorable impact on their country, after Russia and Iran, which are traditional political and cultural partners of Tajikistan. Nevertheless, Tajik citizens believe that the degree of Chinese impact is low. Only 8 percent affirm that China currently has the greatest influence on Tajikistan, whereas 89 percent believe this to be the case regarding Russia and 9 percent regarding Iran. However, when asked which countries will have the greatest impact in a decade, the results are quite different. Fifty percent believe that Russia will still have the biggest influence, 22 percent predict that China will be first, and 16 percent think that it will be Iran. Public opinion thus tends to see China and Iran as growing partners and Russia as having a declining influence.

A majority of citizens of Tajikistan also think China plays a stabilizing role in international relations: 87 percent of respondents mostly like peaceful Chinese behavior in the international arena, 32 percent value China's economic system, and 11 percent admire Chinese culture. The lowest number of respondents, about 9 percent, appreciated the political system of China. However, when the military image of China is assessed, the results differ as Tajiks clearly do not trust it. Only 6 percent of respondents affirm that China is the closest ally of Tajikistan, while 59 percent indicate that the closest ally of Tajikistan is Russia and 11 percent say the same for Iran.¹⁸ At the same time, public opinion does not see China as a threat to Tajikistan's security and stability in Central Asia. Just 3 percent fear China, while 13 percent fear Russia. In conclusion this survey implies that Tajik society is yet not aware of the growing presence of China and has consequently not yet formed an attitude toward the new reality. China is still viewed neither as an ally, nor as an enemy.

Nonetheless, referring to the image of China reflected in public opinion polls, there is a huge difference between mass consciousness and the conscience of the political, economic, military, and intellectual elite. This difference can be explained by the various foreign policy orientations of elite groups, but also by the different levels of interaction with China. For instance the Tajik ruling elite has the most positive

¹⁸ Research Center Sharq Survey, November 2007, Dushanbe, based of national representative sample, 2,000 respondents, percent of error - 2,5 percent.

attitude toward China and part of it seems ready to replace Russia with China. The common attitude of the Chinese authorities and the Tajik elite towards pan-Turkism plays a very important role in this positive perception. Fear of Uyghur separatism helps to foster a negative attitude toward pan-Turkism in China. The idea of Turkic solidarity also causes concerns in Tajikistan as the only Persian-speaking country in Central Asia. But China can also arouse negative sentiments in Tajikistan. Part of the intelligentsia from Northern Tajikistan cannot forget the Chinese claim on the Fergana Valley and the lessons of the defeat of Kashgar ruler Yaqub-Bek (1865-1877).¹⁹ Another group is oriented toward Iran with “pan-Persian” sensibilities. Islamist groups have also a very negative attitude toward China. It can be assumed that the position of the latter will become a major obstacle for advancing China’s interests in Tajikistan, which is entering a period of post-secularism and identifying itself as an integral part of the Muslim world.

The Issue of Chinese Migration

During the Soviet era Tajiks had no contact with China. Until 1991, there were only three or four Han Chinese families and a small Uyghur community of 566 people in Dushanbe. According to the 2000 census, this Uyghur community shrank to 379 individuals.²⁰ The strengthening of trade and economic ties between the two countries encouraged labor migration and non-labor visitors from China. The visits of Chinese officials, students, merchants, contract workers, and tourists have increased, resulting in the development of air travel (29,700 passengers in 2007, 25,360 passengers in 2006), doubling the number of air routes from China to Tajikistan and opening up of new routes connecting Dushanbe to Urumqi. Labor migration from Tajikistan to China has been growing as well. According to an April 2008 study of returnee migrants in Tajikistan by Sharq and the International Organization for Migration, more than 8,000 citizens of Tajikistan were employed in China in 2006-2008.²¹ Although there is currently a visa regime between the two countries, it is relatively difficult to collect data on the exact number of Chinese citizens in Tajikistan, and their occupation and composition.

¹⁹ D. Vasilev, “Vzaimootnosheniia Osmanskoi imperii i gosudarstva Iakub-Beka” [Interrelations between the Ottoman Empire and Yaqub-Bek state], *Vostok/Oriens*, 2 (2007), pp. 15-22; E. V. Bunakov, “K voprosu o politicheskikh i ekonomicheskikh svyazakh sredneaziatskikh vladanii tsarskoi Rossii s Vostochnym Turkestanom v pravlenie Iakub-Beka (1865-1877)” [On the Political and Economic Contacts of the Central Asian Properties of Russian Tsar with East Turkistan under Yaqub-Bek government (1865-1877)], *Biulleten’ Akademii Nauk Uzbekskoi SSR*, 5 (1945), p. 39.

²⁰ “The Population of the Republic of Tajikistan 2000. Results of the Census 20-27 January 2000”, State Committee on Statistics Republic of Tajikistan (2002), p. 156.

²¹ *Migration and Development*, Sharq Research Center and IOM, Dushanbe (2008).

There are no expert estimates, since migration from China has not yet attracted attention of researchers. In this study we use interviews with employees of the Interior Ministry Migration Service, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, merchants, local authorities, and questionnaires given to Chinese migrants employed in transportation projects in Tajikistan.

The Number of Chinese Workers in Tajikistan

The accounting of foreign employees from non-CIS countries is overlooked by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Interior Ministry Migration Service, on the basis of reports from employers in Tajikistan. Until 2007, the task of accounting for foreign workers was undertaken by the Migration Service of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection. According to it in 2006, there were 1,300 Chinese migrants in the country²² and in 2007, 4,000 Chinese citizens obtained Tajik visas.²³ However this number is based on the number of Tajik visas issued to Chinese citizens, and consequently does not give a correct picture of migration. The data from the Interior Ministry Migration Service are more reliable. They show that about 3,000 Chinese labor migrants were working in Tajikistan in 2006. Additional numbers of Chinese migrants entered Tajik territory from Kyrgyzstan. According to the Interior Ministry Migration Service, in July 2008, there were more than 10,000 Chinese laborers in the country.²⁴ In September 2008, the detention and deportation of illegal migrants from China were recorded for the first time.²⁵ According to this data, some of them had absolutely no documents or just expired visas. It is still difficult to estimate the number of latent migrants; however it is clear that the number of illegal migrants is not yet large. Given these considerations, the total number of Chinese migrants in Tajikistan is estimated to be between 11,000 and 13,000 people.

Classification of Migration Flows from China

The largest section of Chinese migrants to Tajikistan is workers, engineers, and contracted employees by the Sinohydro Corporation and China Roads companies. The rest are either workers and engineers brought to Tajikistan by various Chinese companies to staff brick factories, concrete-producing companies, and other facilities, or

²² Rashid Alimov, "Tadzhiksko-kitaiskie torgovo-ekonomicheskie otnosheniia razvivaiutsia po nastaraiushchei".

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Report of the Deputy Head of Migration Service of the Ministry of Interior prepared for the Seminar on Labor Migration, Dushanbe, June 19, 2008.

²⁵ "Na severe Tadzhikistana vyjavleny gastarbaitery iz Uzbekistana i Kitaia" [Labor migrants from Uzbekistan and China Expelled from the North of Tajikistan], *Central Asia News*, June 4, 2008, <<http://www.ca-news.org/news/31446?from=ya>> (September 16 2008).

merchants, drivers, and employees engaged in services who enter Tajikistan independently. These individuals arrive in Tajikistan and remain there from several days up to several months. Usually, visas are issued for one to three months and then are extended. Most of these individuals are located in Chinese markets, which are often used as channel of transmission and adaptation for newcomers. As most migrants are employees of state companies, the organized pattern of migration dominates in Tajikistan, which differs from other Central Asian countries. This pattern of Chinese migration can be seen as a part of a new strategy to stimulate more trans-border mobility of goods and individuals from China.²⁶ Since 2000, Chinese authorities have been encouraging trans-border mobility, and Chinese migrants have become an integral part of the trade and productive structure of China, since they remain under relatively strict control of the Chinese authorities.²⁷

Working and Living Conditions of Chinese Workers in Tajikistan

The majority of Chinese workers take part in reconstruction and building of big infrastructure projects. This determines where they tend to concentrate. Their camps are established far from settlements and close to construction sites along the roads from Dushanbe to Chanak, in Uzbekistan, and from Dushanbe to Sary Tash, in Kyrgyzstan. For instance on the road from Dushanbe to Sary Tash, whose reconstruction is being financed by a loan from the Asian Development Bank, two camps, Sari-Pul and Somonion, have been established in the Nurabad region. The residential areas consist of tents and trailers with few modern conveniences. About forty Chinese engineers, mechanics, and workers might live in each location. Chinese cooks prepare food for workers. There are road building machines—bulldozers, graders, tractors, heavy dump-body trucks, and cranes—in the camp. Chinese workers rotate every six months, and they rarely talk to local people, since they do not know the Tajik language. Only three or four persons from each camp can understand Russian.

In central and southern Tajikistan, Chinese migrants are employed in private factories that belong to either Chinese or Tajik-Chinese joint ventures. These factories are situated in small cities, which emerged in

²⁶ This strategy was announced in spring 2008 at the third session of the All-China Convention of Public Representatives. One of the methods of this new strategy is the use of growing Chinese migration and Chinese communities around the world to strengthen Beijing's positions on the international labor market.

²⁷ This feature of Chinese migration was emphasized by Vilia Gelbras while analyzing Chinese migration in the Russian Far East. Vilia G. Gelbras, "Perspektivy kitaiskoi migratsii na Dal'nem Vostoke" [Perspectives on Chinese migrations in the Far East], *Otechestvennye zapiski* 4 (2004) <http://magazines.russ.ru/oz/2004/4/2004_4_9-pr.html> (September 15 2008).

the Soviet era along with the construction of big industrial facilities. These facilities stopped operating after the break-up of Soviet Union. However, now after fifteen years of abandonment, Chinese businessmen are starting to create new small production plants staffed by Chinese workers on the sites of abandoned Soviet factories. As a rule Chinese labor migrants employed in manufacturing have worse living conditions than Chinese construction workers employed in infrastructure projects. For example, laborers at the brickworks in Hissar, workers of the foundry factory in Dushanbe, and employees of the chemical factories at Yavan and Kurgan-Tiube are underfed and have few modern conveniences. The sanitary conditions in workers' living sites are below sanitary norms. At the same time, Chinese engineers and office workers reside in decent residences in the cities, where they rent apartments.

Another important place of concentration of Chinese migrants is in Tajik cities. A large number of them reside in the capital Dushanbe, for example the representatives of Chinese firms in Tajikistan. For Chinese traders, the pattern of migration is virtually identical to that of Kyrgyzstan. In September 2008, a Chinese market opened in Dushanbe and the number of Chinese laborers in the service sector in the capital continues to grow. In northern Tajikistan Chinese petty traders also work in Khodjent, Kayrakkum, and Istaravshan in the Sodg region, where local markets are connected to the neighboring Chinese market of Karasuu in the Osh region.

A Profile of Chinese Migrants According to the Construction Workers Survey

A survey of Chinese and Tajik workers was conducted in Tajikistan in June 2007, within the framework of an Asian Development Bank project on HIV prevention in the transport infrastructure sector in Central Asia. Ninety-six Chinese migrant employees of Synohydro filled out questionnaires in two construction camps along the Dushanbe-Jirgatal road. The Sharq Research Center analyzed the collected data and LeeNah Hsu developed the questionnaire.

Male workers prevail among people employed in the transport sector in Tajikistan. Among migrants from China covered in the survey, 77.6 percent were men and 13.3 percent were women. People from urban areas also prevail in number among Chinese migrants. According to the survey data, 69.4 percent are natives of urban areas and only 24.5 percent are from rural areas (6.1 percent refused to answer). The largest group of labor migrants from China belongs to the 25-34 years age group (45.9 percent). Youth under 25 years makes up 11.2 percent of the total number of migrants, people aged 35-44 years make up 24.5 percent, and people above 45 years of age make 10.2 percent. About half (52 percent) of surveyed migrants are married and 37.8 percent are single. Others live with a single partner (3.1 percent), 1 percent are divorced, and 6.1 percent

refused to answer. Only 14.3 percent live in Tajikistan with their spouses. About 75.5 percent live in a hostel provided by Synohydro, 3.1 percent rent some dwelling on their own expense, and 7.1 percent of respondents live with their families in the apartments rented for them by the company (14.3 percent refused to answer). The results of the survey indicate that Chinese migrants usually visit their families living in homeland: 54.1 percent go once every 12 to 18 months, 24.5 percent once every 6 months, and 7.1 percent go once every 3 to 6 months. Only 8.2 percent of respondents had not visited their homes for over 18 months (6.1 percent refused to answer).

The level of educational attainments is high among Chinese respondents: 51 percent hold a university diploma or some degree, 33.7 percent have completed secondary education, 8.2 percent have some secondary education, and 3.1 percent have only an elementary education (4.1 percent refused to answer). These results can be explained by the fact that the employees who agreed to complete questionnaires occupy relatively high positions at the construction sites. In regard to occupation there are two numerically strong groups of migrants from China: technicians at 33.7 percent and employees of the company administration (managers, accountants, administrators, chief engineers) at 25.5 percent. The employees of the company administration include drivers and cooks (14.3 percent), construction workers (11.2 percent), and foremen (1 percent), 13.3 percent refused to answer.

The overwhelming majority of Chinese migrants, 83.7 percent, are employed abroad for the first time. Only 12.2 percent had a previous work experience abroad (4.1 percent refused to answer). The length of stay in the Republic of Tajikistan varies from 1 month to 3.5 years. About 21.4 percent of respondents had worked there for about 1 to 6 months, 28.6 percent between half year and one year, 23.5 percent between 1 to 1.5 years, and 24.5 percent between 1.5 and 3.5 years (2 percent refused to answer). The largest number of migrants stated that they planned to stay in Tajikistan for a limited period of time and then go back to China or move to another country, a quarter of them plan to stay in Tajikistan for a period of up to 1 year, 28.6 percent from 1 year to 1.5 years, and 34.7 percent for more than 1.5 years. Around 7.1 percent of respondents plan to stay here for the long term. This can be explained by the habit of road engineers to often change countries of employment. These individuals view Tajikistan as a temporary place where they can improve their standard of living. The migration of Chinese citizens to Tajikistan is primarily economically driven. The majority of migrants, 60.2 percent, went abroad to earn money. Another main goal, the attainment of professional work experience in Tajikistan, appealed to 26.5 percent. About 5.1 percent of respondents accompanied their spouses, while 8.2 percent of respondents arrived with other motivations.

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of Chinese migrants

Age	Percent
18-24	11.2
25-34	45.9
35-44	24.5
45-54	8.2
55-64	2.0
No response	8.2
Education	
Secondary (10-11 years of schooling)	41.5
Secondary special	28.3
University and incomplete university	23.1
Incomplete secondary (8-9 years of schooling)	7.1
Type of employment	
Manager/Administration	25.5
Worker in Administration	14.3
Technician	33.7
Construction Workers Supervisor	1.0
Construction Worker	11.2
Length of stay abroad	
Up to 6 months	14.0
7-12 months	53.6
Longer than 1 year	28.7
Several years	3.7
Marital status	
Percent of married respondents	78.1

The income of migrants from China varies widely from 70 to 7,000 RMB. The larger groups are those earning income of 3,000 RMB (17.3 percent) and 4,000 RMB (25.5 percent). The group earning up to 3,000 RMB makes 29.6 percent of workers, those earning from 3,000 to 4,000 RMB makes up 32.7 percent, between 4,000-5,000 RMB is 11.2 percent, and over 5,000 RMB is 3.1 percent. The level of migrants' expenses also varies highly from 70 to 3,500 RMB. The larger groups are those spending monthly 151-200 RMB – 21.4 percent and 500-1,000 RMB – 22.4 percent. About 26.5 percent of migrants spend only up to 150 RMB monthly.

The basic sources of information for Chinese workers in Tajikistan are television (66.3 percent), newspapers (38.8 percent), and magazines

and books (32.7 percent). These Chinese workers do not know Tajik or Russian language and are limited in access to sources of information from their native land. Therefore, the value of information from printed sources and radio is relatively high. Chinese migrants are young and characterized by a good level of health: 71.4 percent of them claimed to have no problems with health during their stay in Tajikistan. Others had diseases related to cold during the winter. Migrants often do not ask for medical aid. Fifty-two percent of respondents preferred self-treatment, 5.1 percent has no access to doctors, 1 percent worries about costs of treatment, and 1 percent fears that disease can negatively affect their position at work. Of those surveyed, 56.1 percent have medical insurance from Synohydro.

Most migrants live in Tajikistan without their families and outside of their usual language and cultural environment. The overwhelming majority, 79.6 percent, spend their free time watching television, 33.7 percent watch films on video, 21.4 percent sing karaoke, 20.4 percent play cards, 19.4 percent surf the Internet, and 14.3 percent have other hobbies. Migrants' circles of friends are usually limited to the Chinese community. Ninety percent reported that they usually spend their free time communicating only with their fellow countrymen. Only 5.1 percent communicate with local friends and 4.1 percent did not answer this question. The majority of migrants drink alcohol and 2 percent admitted to using drugs (15 percent refused to answer this question). Thirty-one percent of respondents had constant informal sexual partners. On the basis of indirect questions, the survey indicates that in 2007, at least 15.3 percent of respondents used commercial sex services.

Attitude toward Chinese People

It is difficult to define attitudes toward Chinese migration in Tajikistan, as many people are uninformed about it. Mostly those working at markets, in factories, or on construction sites employing Chinese workers, or people living close to roads under construction are aware of it. Newspapers do not give much information about Chinese migrants in Tajikistan. While preparing this article we made a personal trip along a road under construction to collect the opinions of the local population. According to local officials, the roads built by Chinese workers give life and hope for future prosperity to the local population. Tajik farmers view China as a friendly power, and Chinese people as very hardworking. "They [Chinese workers] help Tajik people with building roads and other important objects," says an engineer from the Obi Lurd village, in Rasht region. The local population also notes that Chinese workers are very obstinate, abide by rules and procedures, and are people of principle. Construction sites where Chinese workers are employed tend to be located in mountainous regions with harsh conditions. Tajiks notice that

Chinese people are very brave and explain it by their professionalism. They admire them for their hardworking abilities and their fearlessness. "I have been working with Chinese people for five years. It is difficult to be like them, because they work very quickly. They do everything on time and very carefully. They always pay salaries on time," says Nurullo Zhonoff, a worker at a brick factory in Hissar. But other Tajiks, especially from villages in the Rasht region, think that Chinese workers are prisoners who have to build roads as punishment.

Local people notice that Chinese obey their managers and live separately from locals. Villagers from Sari Kosh and Obi Lurd, where Chinese companies built two bridges, did not communicate with Chinese. Some views of migrants demonstrate the huge cultural differences between Chinese and Tajik people. Tajiks primarily note the difference in food preferences. Local farmers are Muslims who maintain very strict dietary rules. These individuals are surprised that Chinese workers eat almost everything, especially food products that are viewed as extremely taboo in Central Asian cultures. Sometimes Tajik newspapers also give information about clashes between Chinese workers and local people. According to this information, fights take place because of conflicts between Chinese migrants and local criminal groups, or between construction workers and local communities over women or criminal events like theft. The interesting feature of these conflicts is that Chinese migrants participate in these conflicts in organized groups.

Conclusions

Labor migration from China is in its beginning stages in Tajikistan. The history of its formation reflects interstate relationships between Tajikistan and China. Chinese migrant workers are employed as an organized workforce, which the Chinese government uses in the construction of strategic items on Tajik territory. Because of strict control on the part of Chinese authorities, most Chinese laborers have legal status. At the same time, the number of Chinese migrants who enter Tajikistan illegally from other Central Asian countries is growing rapidly. Tajik society has been actively collecting and digesting information about China and Chinese workers. The growing experience gained from interaction with the Chinese and stronger trade ties with China helps Tajik society to generate new images, and develop new stereotypes and myths about China. At present the attitude of Tajiks to Chinese laborers ranges from neutral to positive, despite the vast cultural and religious differences between Chinese workers and local Tajik populations.

The Issue of Chinese Migrants in Kyrgyzstan

*Amantur Zhaparov**

ABSTRACT

Perestroika and the collapse of the Soviet Union opened a new era of relations between China and independent Kyrgyzstan. Geographic proximity and dynamic socio-economic development played essential roles in the establishment of good neighbor relations. Interstate treaties were signed and diplomatic relations initiated deeper development of bilateral relations. But the major part of trade ties with China is related to Chinese migrants, legal as illegal. This article therefore focuses on these Chinese migrants and petty traders working at Kyrgyz markets, in commercial centers or small enterprises. Chinese migrant entrepreneurs feel Beijing's support in promoting their business plans through various mechanisms of social and financial incentives. This plays an important role in their activities in the Kyrgyz market, where local citizens cannot compete and some of them feel compelled to migrate to other countries.

Keywords • Chinese Migrants • Kyrgyzstan • Shuttle Trade

Introduction

The issue of Chinese migration to Kyrgyzstan must be analyzed within the context of historical relations between Central Asia and China. During the early Middle Ages, both areas actively developed diplomatic, economic, and cultural relations. However in the 18th and 19th centuries, the Kyrgyz experienced a difficult period in their relations with China. Several waves of migration from Kashgaria to Central Asia complicated relations with the Qing Empire. The first took place at the beginning of the 18th century, when Xinjiang was experiencing civil wars that ended in its subordination to the Djungar state. In the middle of the 18th century, the latter fell under the domination of the Qing Empire, initiating significant waves of new migration to the Kazakh steppes and Russia.¹ Migrations also occurred during the 19th century. In 1877, the Chinese defeated the Yakub-Beg state, forcing thousands of people to

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¹ Sergei Abashin, *Natsionalizm v Srednei Azii* [Nationalism in Central Asia] (Saint-Petersburg, 2007), p. 53.

escape to Tsarist Central Asia. As recorded in the report of a Russian official, “At the end of 1877 (...) around 12,000 Kashgaris and Dungans immigrated to our territories. Approximately 7,000 of them went to Semirechie region whereas the others went through Osh to the Fergana Valley.”²

Migratory movement from China continued through the early 20th century. Referring to the problems of resettlement to the Fergana Valley, Sofia S. Gubaeva stated that thousands of Uyghurs, Dungans, and Chinese came there in search of employment. They worked as day laborers in coal mines and cotton mills, and as seasonal workers in cotton and rice fields. Many of them settled in the Fergana Valley permanently, started families, and brought back relatives from Kashgaria.³ At the same time migratory flows moved in the other direction. Some of the population of present day Kyrgyzstan (Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, Dungans, and Uyghurs) fled to China, seeking to flee Tsarist persecution during the 1916 rebellion and Communist oppression during 1930s collectivization.⁴ After the Second World War, Soviet-Chinese relations developed unevenly, with good neighbor relations until the beginning of the 1960s and mistrust thereafter.⁵ In 1950s and 1960s, the failure of the “Great Leap Forward” policy in China provoked a new wave of migration to the Soviet Union of the population living in border areas.⁶ Most of these migrants from Xinjiang worked on rented land and grew crops, and some were employed by collective farms in Soviet Central Asia. Many did not have passports.

Perestroika and the collapse of the Soviet Union opened a new era of relations between China and independent Kyrgyzstan.⁷ Geographic proximity and dynamic socio-economic development played essential roles in the establishment of good neighbor relations. Interstate treaties

² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

³ Sofia S. Gubaeva, “Uigury i Dunganе Ferganskoi doliny” [Uyghurs and Dungans of the Fergana Valley], *Sovremennoe razvitiе etnicheskikh grupp Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana* [Contemporary Development of the Ethnic Groups of Central Asia and Kazakhstan] (Moscow, 1992, vol. 2), pp. 121-122.

⁴ K. Usunbaev, *Vosstanie 1916 g. v Kirgizii* [The Rebellion of 1916 in Kyrgyzia] (Frunze, 1967), D. M. Budianskii, *Istoriia bezhentsev-kyrgyzov (1916-1927 g.)* [The History of Kyrgyz Refugees (1916-1917)] (Bishkek, 2006).

⁵ Muratbek Imanaliev, *Ocherki o vneshnei politike Kyrgyzstana* [Essays on the Foreign Policy of Kyrgyzstan] (Bishkek, 2002).

⁶ Kh. Yusupov, *Pereselenie dungan v Semirech'e* [Dungan migration to Semirechie] (Frunze, 1961).

⁷ Nur M. Omarov, “Kitai vo vneshnei politike suverennoгo Kyrgyzstana: osnovnye tendentsii i perspektivy” [China in the Foreign Policy of the Independent Kyrgyzstan: Basic Tendencies and Perspectives], *Vestnik Kyrgyzsko-Rossiiskogo Slavianskogo Universiteta*, 4 (2004); R. K. Sabirov, “Stanovlenie kyrgyzsko-kitaiskikh otnoshenii v nachale 1990-kh g.” [The Formation of Kyrgyz-Chinese Relations at the Beginning of the 1990s], *Voprosy Kyrgyzskoi istorii*, 2 (2007).

were signed and diplomatic relations initiated deeper development of bilateral relations. The development of trade ties during this decade was promoted by the creation of many Kyrgyz-Chinese joint ventures within the framework of intergovernmental agreements. For instance in August 2000, the joint Kyrgyz-Chinese enterprise Aoolon started to produce domestic matches. The corporation Dunyuy invested almost 800,000 US dollars in equipment and raw materials. Another example of a joint partnership is the stock company Salkyn, the former Belovodsk brewery that a Chinese businessman transformed into a modern production facility. The Chinese also expressed interest in the mining, metallurgical, and fuel industries.⁸ At present Kyrgyz-Chinese joint ventures are mainly based in the Chui and Osh regions, as well as in the cities of Bishkek and Osh, involving both local and Chinese workers. But the major part of trade ties with China is related to Chinese migrants and the Kyrgyz market economy.

Migrants and Traders after the Collapse of the Soviet Union

In the late 1980s migration from China to Kyrgyzstan intensified. Migrants coming mainly from Xinjiang rented irrigated land to work as farmers, cultivating vegetables. They spent a few months in Kyrgyzstan before returning to their homeland. These migrants established themselves in some parts of the Chui region and areas close to Bishkek. In particular Chinese people worked in the state farms Kuibyshev and Tash Moynok in the Alamedin district. Large losses of crops and the incapacity to fully furnish agro-industrial complexes prompted the Ministry of Agriculture of the Kyrgyz Soviet Republic to attract workers from neighboring countries on three years contracts. It aimed to improve the country's vegetable supply. At this time Chinese workers coming to Kyrgyzstan under such contracts were staying from spring to autumn and returned back to China after the harvest. This was therefore a temporary migration related to the growing season.

Other Chinese migrants were engaged in commercial activity, especially in shuttle trade. They sold clothes and other everyday consumer goods "made in China" and did not stay in Kyrgyzstan for a long time. The first stores with Chinese goods, such as Artush and Kashgar, opened in Naryn, which is on the road to the Chinese border Torugart. Migrants and traders brought shortage products like sugar and rice, and made high profits from Chinese spirits like vodka and beer. Some of them also purchased clothes and household items from the Kyrgyz population. For example in the early 1990s, in the Spartak stadium in Bishkek, they organized the purchase of thick Astrakhan coats

⁸ T. Koychuev, "KNR – strategicheskii partner Kyrgyzstana" [The PRC is Kyrgyzstan's Strategic Partner], *Vestnik ISITO*, 2 (2004).

and hats (considered as prestigious gifts during weddings or other festivities) to be sold in Xinjiang. These Chinese traders were actually the first to establish trade and economic ties with the Kyrgyz population and contributed to the development of local Chinese markets. The details of their migration included a short-term stay abroad and a floating kind of migratory movement.

At the same time at the beginning of the 1990s, shuttle traders from Kyrgyzstan started to discover China. They often traveled by buses or airplanes to buy goods in order to provide local markets with clothing, and audio and video equipment. Using the wealth they earned, some of these businessmen were able to launch political careers. Karganbek Samakov, originally from Naryn, first came to China as a part of an official delegation. He then established business contacts to fulfill many orders from acquaintances, relatives, and friends, some of whom paid in advance. In addition to clothing and other consumer goods, he started bringing in televisions, tape recorders, telephones, and other equipment. This shuttle trade helped him to build initial capital, and played an important role in his further economic and political plans when he became a deputy in the Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament).⁹

These shuttle trade activities engaged many women, compelled to take up this business because of the dramatic impoverishment of families during this period.¹⁰ The growing presence of women in this activity also resulted from the fact that they could pass more easily through customs than men, who were subject to more detailed searches. To pass the customs checkpoints at Torugart and Irkeshtam, Kyrgyz traders, often with only 300 or 400 dollars to spend, usually created a group of traders crossing together the border by bus to transport their Chinese goods. During the mid-1990s, shuttle traders have developed a higher level of organization. Kyrgyz merchants began to cooperate as eight to ten person groups, sending only one person to purchase goods, which was more rational. They started hiring trucks to transport goods purchased in China and special companies providing transportation services then appeared.

However since the second half of the 1990s, it became more difficult for Kyrgyz traders to compete with Chinese businessmen who had signed trade contracts with manufacturers in China and were therefore able to deliver goods at a cheaper price. The Chinese were present in shuttle trade with Kyrgyzstan since 1989, but rapidly became more organized. Small-scale Kyrgyz entrepreneurs thus lost their economic niche, and traveled less frequently to China. Some began to buy Chinese goods from

⁹ Interview by the author with Karganbek Samakov.

¹⁰ A. Kh. Karasaeva, K. A. Kushnazarova, "Chelnochnaia torgovlia sel'skikh zhenshchin Kyrgyzstana" [Shuttle trade business of country women in Kyrgyzstan], *Vestnik Kyrgyzsko-Rossiiskogo Slavianskogo Universiteta*, 4 (2004), p. 52.

Chinese traders based in Kyrgyzstan, other were forced to give up this business due to its lack of profitability. Leili Zhaparova, who transports goods from Urumqi to Karasuu and is engaged in wholesale trade, explains that this concurrence continued to grow during the current decade. “Over the past year, the number of Kyrgyz traders has decreased considerably, resulting from the fact that the Chinese bring and sell their own products. Obviously, they sell goods much cheaper than our businessmen, it being easier for a Chinese to get products from his own country. And Kyrgyz entrepreneurs were forced to close their business and go to Russia, freeing up space for the Chinese traders”.¹¹

Chinese Migrants at Kyrgyz Markets

Chinese migrants have been trading for nearly a decade at major Kyrgyzstan markets such as Dordoi, located in the city of Bishkek, and Karasuu, near Osh, which became the main vector of economic development for the Kyrgyz part of the Fergana Valley. At Dordoi shopkeeper migrants from China are concentrated in the part of the market that sells household appliances and electrical goods, this area being called Dordoi-Dzhunkhai. In most cases, local Dungans work as assistants to Chinese traders. Since 2002, Madina, a specialized market of textile products manufactured in China, has also become one of the most important commercial centers of Bishkek. Here Uyghurs from Xinjiang engage in commercial activities. Uyghur traders have a relatively long experience in Kyrgyzstan, as they began to engage actively in trade there just after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They came to Madina in 2001, after the freight center at Turbaz burned down. A similar fire occurred in April 2008 in the Chinese section of Dordoi-Dzhunkhai. Madina has a direct impact on other markets of Bishkek, primarily on Dordoi. Indeed, the textiles sold at Madina are used to manufacture a large portion of the clothing delivered for sale in Dordoi. This means that the garment industry—some of the products of which are exported to Kazakhstan, Russia and other countries—depends to a certain extent on the successful performance of Madina.

At the Madina market, Uyghurs usually participate as a part of a group of merchants who work together and take turns. Some of them are sent to Kyrgyz markets for four to eight months and then go back to Xinjiang to supply goods for Central Asia. During the interviews I conducted in Madina, almost all Uyghur respondents explained that all the goods they sell are brought from the interior provinces of China, Xinjiang being only a platform of re-exportation. The majority of small

¹¹ Ulugbek Babakulov, “Svoimi glazami. Velikii shelkovyi put’ segodnia. Kitaizatsiia” [With my own eyes. The Great Silk Road Today. Sinicization], *Ferghana.ru*, November 30, 2007, <www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=5498> (October 12 2008).

groups of Uyghur businessmen consist of closely related people. For instance a Uyghur trader born in Artush (Xinjiang) engaged in commercial activity in Madina, came to Bishkek through his uncle from mother's side, who had started trade activity in Turbaz during the second half of the 1990s. He usually works at Madina for three to four months, after which he spends the same amount of time with his family in Artush. During these months his brother replaces him at Madina. During their stays in Bishkek, Uyghurs merchants live together in rented apartments with colleagues in the "East-5" suburb of Bishkek. Uyghurs thus serve as mediators between Han Chinese and Kyrgyz sellers; their Turkic-speaking language has helped them to enter the Central Asian business sector. Loaders and other workers tend to be Kyrgyz citizens.

The most significant figures of entrepreneurial activity in the Madina market are businessmen from China, mostly Hans, who own and supply large quantities of goods. These people engage in only leadership and coordinating activities. Many small traders buy goods from them at wholesale prices and sell them at the market, or even borrow from them the amount of money equivalent to a given product they will sell. Such large businessmen are called *loben* or *bashlik*. They are extremely difficult to find at the market, as they operate at higher levels. They have partners from the Kyrgyz side who have political and economic networks, and are able to solve problems related to customs, administrative, and financial issues. The patronage-client phenomenon is therefore reflected in trading activity.

Unlike Kyrgyz traders, the Chinese ones have real support from their state. This is reflected in the liberalization of economic activity, free access to soft loans, ability to buy goods at cost, low taxes, and financial incentives for successful businessmen. As a result Chinese traders have excellent opportunities to expand the market of manufactured goods in Central Asia. This directly impacts the numbers of Chinese migrants in the region, including those employed as unskilled laborers. In Karasuu, for instance, numerous migrants from China work to load and move freight. The increasing presence of the Chinese elicits negative reactions from local Kyrgyz merchants, who organized rallies to protest against this trend and called on government agencies to react. It therefore seems that the competitive environment and the better position of Chinese migrants partly influence the migratory movement of Kyrgyz abroad.

There is a similar problem concerning the issue of the transportation of goods. The overwhelming majority of products are brought in large trucks from China via Xinjiang, and through the two custom posts of Torugart and Irkeshtam. The new Kyrgyz government, which formed after the events of March 24, 2005, allowed Chinese heavy vehicles to deliver goods from China to their final destination in Kyrgyzstan, whereas Kyrgyz drivers do not have the right to drive their vehicles into

Chinese territory. Under President Askar Akaev, Chinese trucks were allowed to drive to the capital. In the south of Kyrgyzstan, Chinese drivers can go only to the customs terminal Irkeshtam-Dorozhnyi, where supply companies load the cargo and send it to Karasuu and Osh.¹² These rights of entry granted to Chinese cars actually leave the majority of Kyrgyz large vehicle drivers without jobs. This is due to the decisions of political authorities, but also to the technical limits of their vehicles. The towing capacity of Kyrgyz drivers' vehicles is up to 20 tons, but Chinese trucks can transport goods weighing from 50 to 70 tons. In such circumstances traders prefer to hire powerful cars that are much more efficient in all respects, including financial costs related to the payment of the drivers and loaders. Protests of drivers involved in the transport of Chinese goods in the south of the country did not bring any positive results. Many Kyrgyz drivers have thus been forced to find niches in other economic sectors at home and abroad. Some of them are now involved in delivering private orders, and shipping Chinese construction materials such as stone, gravel, sand, clay, and brick.

Chinese Migrants and Commercial Centers

Migrants from China have opened commercial centers, cafes, restaurants, and casinos. Many Chinese citizens concentrate near the GOIN and Taatan shopping centers, the latter of which specializes on the sale of furniture. Customs clearance of these goods enables merchants to sell goods through a network of outlets in Bishkek, at Dordoi, and in the commercial complexes of Taatan and GOIN.

Usually Chinese traders employ citizens of Kyrgyzstan, especially Kyrgyz students. The latter appreciate the workplace and spend all their free time in the markets, even though Chinese entrepreneurs have more official rather than friendly attitude to local employees. These students have the opportunity to earn money and therefore take over a part of the financial costs of university. They also expect to improve their Chinese language through everyday practice with their employers. Their first and foremost interest is in the Chinese language, which can give them the opportunity to work in China. Many graduates of the state universities who completed the course of Chinese study then try to go to Urumqi, Guangzhou, and Shanghai. They are attracted by the working conditions for foreigners and laws considered to be much better than those at home. Security is an important element that drives educated youth to choose such a path.

¹² Ulugbek Babakulov, "Svoimi glazami. Velikii shelkovyi put' segodnia. Doroga" [With my own eyes. The Great Silk Road today. The Road], *Ferghana.ru*, November 21, 2007, <<http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=5480>> (October 12 2008).

Many Chinese businessmen hire young people from the local Dungan population as their assistants.¹³ This preference is likely due to the fact that linguistic closeness enables them to understand each other without a translator. Dungans also tend to speak Russian well, which is important for business. Moreover in recent years the Dungan part of the population of Kyrgyzstan has increased commercial activities with their Hui counterparts in China.¹⁴ In Kyrgyzstan they sell goods produced mainly in China, open shops, cafes, and restaurants, and endeavor to establish small businesses for processing vegetables, which can bring in a decent profit.

Labor contracts between Chinese employers and employees from Kyrgyzstan are usually based on verbal agreements. They mainly discuss wages, a commission on sold goods, and the work schedule. Students working here earn about 100 dollars per month plus 4 percent of the value of each product sold. In the commercial center of Taatan, Chinese traders and employees have one day off per month. There are safety issues, sometimes resulting in serious injuries, for which employers do not bear legal responsibility. No trade union protecting the interests of the personnel has been established yet. Almost all those to whom I spoke pointed out that Chinese migrants tolerate a very limited number of holidays and have a high capacity for work. Qualities such as endurance, hard work, and the ability to tolerate less than comfortable conditions are a decisive factor in making the Chinese competitive in the labor market. In fact our respondents told us that in China, the attitude is more respectful toward those who like working.

The Taatan shopping center, a Chinese-Kyrgyz joint venture, has a representative office in the south of the country, in Osh, and sells various types of furniture, household appliances, and other products that are manufactured in Guangzhou, Shanghai, and other cities in China. In summer 2007, President Kurmanbek Bakiev visited the Taatan-Osh center during its construction. At that time the representatives of the Kyrgyz-Chinese joint venture reported that they had invested 50 million dollars in it, which enabled them to establish 500 trading areas inside the building, and to create enterprises for the production of construction

¹³ On the Dungan history and culture, see M. H. Sushanlo, *Dungane* [The Dungans] (Frunze, 1971); L. T. Shinlo, *Kul'tura i byt sovetskikh dungan* [The Culture and Everyday Life of Soviet Dungans] (Frunze, 1965); A. A. Dzhon, *Obychai, obriady i pover'ia dungan* [Social Practices, Rituals and Belief of Dungans] (Bishkek, 2007); Elisabeth Allès, "The Chinese-speaking Muslims (Dungans) of Central Asia: A Case of Multiple Identities in a Changing Context", *Asian Ethnicity*, 6, 2 (2005), pp. 121-134.

¹⁴ Din Khun, M. Kh. Imazov, *Khueitszu Kitaia* [The Hue in China] (Bishkek, 1999); Rashid U. Yusupov, "Chislennost' i rasselenie dungan (khueitszu) v Kitae" [The Population and Migration of Dungans (Hui) in China], *Dialog uchenykh na velikom shelkovom puti* [The Dialogue of Scholars on the Great Silk Road] (Bishkek, 2002), pp. 39-47.

materials and assembling of agricultural and household appliances.¹⁵ One Chinese businessman at Taatan noted that in 2008, the demand for almost all types of goods decreased compared to the previous year. The narrowness of the Kyrgyz market means it is supplied only with essential goods. Therefore some Chinese businessmen seek to develop new and broader markets in Kazakhstan and Russia, even if they are less attractive for foreign investors and the rights of foreign workers. According to the scholar Rashid U. Yusupov, from the National University in Humanities, the investment climate is better in Tajikistan, where Chinese entrepreneurs strive to migrate to expand their activities in commerce, production, and the delivery of services to the population and other sectors of the economy.

Chinese Migrants and Small Enterprises

Small and medium-sized enterprises producing bricks, cement, and iron products also employ Chinese migrants. According to a young trader named Yusup, who works at Taatan, there are a dozen of small brick factories, and six or seven small businesses for smelting iron in Chui region. No more than twenty or thirty people work in each of them. Citizens of Kyrgyzstan working in these companies deliver melted scraps of metal, stack bricks, and guard the facility, whereas only Chinese workers perform the most dangerous tasks. There are two reasons for this. The Chinese do not reveal the technological features of production, which are important in the competition for implementation of these products. In addition if a Chinese migrant worker is heavily injured because of safety issues, or even dies, it will be easier for the firm to manage the problem. Chinese migrants are more ready to accept the risk of an accident; some are illegal, and their safety and health issues are not considered to be a problem. If a tragedy happens to a Kyrgyz citizen, a trial asked by the victim's relatives would be unavoidable.

The Chinese have also started working on construction sites. In particular the government asked Chinese constructors to quickly build public facilities for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) leaders' summit in August 2007. At a press conference, President Kurmanbek Bakiev praised the Chinese builders, noting that they have been working day and night without rest while the local Kyrgyz builders could not meet the deadline because they were relatively lazy. This presidential speech provoked a mixed attitude from society. Some felt the leader of the country unduly underestimated the ability of the workers, revealing a degree of nihilism. At that time Chinese construction

¹⁵ "President Kurmanbek Bakiev posetil v Oshe stroitel'stvo kompleksa Taatan-Osh" [In Osh President Kurmanbek Bakiev visited the Taatan Complex], *Akipress*, July 7, 2007, <www.fergana.akipress.org/_ru_f_news.php?id=24224> (September 22 2008).

companies were the only ones who offered to construct low income housing complexes.

Chinese Migrants' Attitude to Corruption

Chinese traders complain about the corruption of Kyrgyz officials, which according to some, prevents Kyrgyzstan from rapidly improving its socio-economic situation. One of the businessmen interviewed complained of having been fined 300 dollars, saying he simply did not understand the reason and deeply doubted that this amount would be paid to the state treasury, believing that it would be rather kept by the corrupt official. According to the admissions of some Chinese entrepreneurs, officials of different levels and representatives of law enforcement agencies often find ways to get their money. They mention this factor to their Kyrgyz employees, stressing that it is difficult to develop the country in such a way. At the same time, migrants do not always appeal to the official structures of the executive and judiciary, believing that this would be a waste of time and fearing that these officials would also request bribes. In addition, some of these entrepreneurs do not have all of the necessary legal documents to run their businesses in Kyrgyzstan. One Chinese entrepreneur, Hayrulla Samat, petitioned the court regarding extortion by the 9th Main Office of the Kyrgyz Republic Ministry of Internal Affairs. In this case, two police officials demanded a fine of 250 dollars under the pretext that his passport was not stamped in the Madina market. The entrepreneur-migrant refused to pay this amount and appealed to the Chinese Embassy to get a new identity card and then returned to China.¹⁶

Several of respondents reported that, as a consequence of minor harassment and a decline in purchasing activities, some Chinese traders have gone back to China. Since the opening of the Kyrgyz-Chinese border, businessmen from neighboring countries have often faced threats, extortion, and fraud. An attack on a group of merchants was reported and some Kyrgyz businessmen were accused of not returning money that they had taken from Chinese entrepreneurs. The establishment of joint ventures did not insulate the migrants-entrepreneurs from such risks, as some Kyrgyz co-sponsors strove to oust their Chinese partners using various illegal tactics. They attempted to grasp all the profit and become full founders and owners of the businesses. As a result many Chinese businessmen have refused to establish joint ventures; however, some Chinese that have lived in Bishkek for about ten years have a greater

¹⁶ "Grazhdanin Kitaia napisal zaiavlenie o tom, chto u nego vymogol den'gi nachal'nik 9-ogo Glavnogo Upravleniia MVD Kyrgyzstana" [A Chinese citizen complained that the head of the 9th section of the Interior Ministry asked him for a bride], *24.kg*, September 12, 2008, <www.24.kg/investigation/2008/09/12/92393.html> (September 28 2008).

influence among their countrymen. They play an important role, as they have already adapted to new environments, have a lot of friends among pertinent officials, and know the channels through which to promote their projects. Corruption at various levels, adversely affecting investment incentives, does not prevent many Chinese businessmen from succeeding in Kyrgyzstan. This is achieved due to their skill of acquiring and expanding their networks of social relations, in particular with officials of medium and high rank.

Numbers and Locations of Chinese Migrants

When the Kyrgyz border opened to Chinese citizens, mainly Turkish-speaking peoples crossed, among them Kyrgyz and Uyghurs from Xinjiang. The presence of Uyghur relatives or friends in Kyrgyzstan might have helped these migrants. There were 29,817 Uyghurs in Kyrgyzstan in 1979, and 36,779 in 1989. The number of Chinese registered there during the same years was respectively 489 and 576 people.¹⁷ Most Chinese who moved to Kyrgyzstan during the Soviet era dispersed all over the country, although there were a few compact groups living in small areas. At one session of the Jogorku Kenesh on migration, labor, social assistance, and health care, the chairman of the Border Service of Kyrgyzstan informed the deputies that there were about 60,000 Chinese people living in Kyrgyzstan at the beginning of 2008.¹⁸ According to the State Committee for Migration and Employment, during the same period about 8,000 Chinese were in the country illegally.¹⁹ Although the majority of migrants were at one time Uyghurs, the number of Han migrants has sharply increased during the last four to five years.

These Han migrants enter in the country on a tourist visa and often attempt to stay. They generally settle in Chui and Osh regions. Most of them are in the cities of Bishkek and Karasuu, and live together in groups of five or six people in rented apartments. One can explain the desire to live compactly in a single block mainly by the need to ensure security, so that each businessman feels more secure than he would in a dispersed settlement. In their free time Chinese migrants call relatives and friends living in China, listen to music, go to restaurants, and go out for tours. Some of migrant entrepreneurs also gamble in casinos. Most of them have lunch or dinner in a restaurant owned by compatriots, such as in the

¹⁷ *Kyrgyzstandyn kalky. Kyrgyz Respublikasynyn 1999-zhyldagy birinchi uluttuk el kattoosunun zhyiyntyktary tablitsalarda* [The Population of Kyrgyzstan. Results from the 1999 first national census of the Kyrgyz Republic] (Bishkek, 2000, vol. 2), p. 70.

¹⁸ "V Kyrgyzstane nakhoditsia bole 60,000 grazhdan Kitaia" [More than 60,000 Chinese citizens are in Kyrgyzstan], *24.kg*, January 30, 2008, <www.24.kg/community/2008/01/30/75133.html> (September 30 2008).

¹⁹ Information given by Taalai Azimov, senior researcher at the Department for External Labor Migration of the State Committee for Migrations and Works.

restaurant located on Prospect Chui, in the “East-5” neighborhood. Some Chinese migrants have residence cards.

It is said that some young Chinese marry local Kyrgyz girls, though these relationships are not always openly displayed. Such a marriage would naturally provide an opportunity to obtain Kyrgyzstani citizenship. However, it should be mentioned that such inter-ethnic marriages remain rare today. Chinese Migrants from China working in the Taatan and GOIN commercial centers try to rent apartments near their working places. A small Chinese town seems to be emerging near the GOIN center, where in most cases apartments are purchased through Kyrgyz fronts. These facts related to marriage and the purchase of private homes or apartments in multi-occupancy buildings are plausible and, to some extent, natural in the context of globalization. It is still difficult to argue that some Chinatowns are permanently establishing themselves in Bishkek, especially compared to the large settlement of Chinese migrants in Western Europe and the United States.

Conclusions

The migratory movement of Chinese citizens to Kyrgyzstan is influenced by several factors: historically rooted Kyrgyz-Chinese relations; the geographic location of the two countries, which share a border and customs points on highways; the collapse of the Soviet Union and the severe economic crisis of the 1990s, which objectively led to further development of trade involving Chinese migrants; and the consequences of economic development in China and globalization process in general. The narrowness of the Kyrgyz market is not a barrier to Chinese migrants, since Kyrgyzstan is often just a transit place for export products to other countries such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Russia. At the same time goods re-export, mainly in the form of raw materials, flow in the opposite direction thanks to the networks of high level officials who organize business with China and have transnational contacts with Chinese firms in search of raw materials.

Chinese migrant entrepreneurs feel Beijing’s support in promoting their business plans through various mechanisms of social and financial incentives. This plays an important role in their activities in the Kyrgyz market, where local citizens cannot compete and some of them feel compelled to migrate to other countries. The high levels of corruption of Kyrgyz officials and other factors prevent the Kyrgyz state from carrying out protectionist policies to support its national entrepreneurs. Paternalism is also present in the establishment of business projects, where bureaucratic, visa, financial, and other issues are resolved by important people using their Kyrgyz counterparts. This increases the number of illegal migrants, helps them to stay longer, and prompts

Chinese entrepreneurs to solve problems through bribery and kickbacks, which is detrimental to the Kyrgyz economy in the long-term.

Cross-border Minorities as Cultural and Economic Mediators between China and Central Asia

*Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse**

ABSTRACT

Sino-Central Asian trade is for the most part in the hands either of large state-run enterprises, or of the Hans from Xinjiang—particularly the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps—or lastly of private entrepreneurs from Zhejiang. The Uyghurs, Dungans, and China's Central Asians minorities have therefore a limited room for trade and their competitiveness remains modest. However, these cross-border minorities play, have played, or might be called upon to play a role in the development of Sino-Central Asian economic relations and in the cultural mediations between the two worlds. Even if this niche remains humble compared to the overall Sino-Central-Asian relations, it constitutes a key element in the social strategies of trans-nationalization being put into place by these minorities.

Keywords • Xinjiang • Trade • China-Central Asia • Cross-border minorities • Cultural Mediation

Introduction

In Central Asia, the trade boom with China is coupled with a paradoxical situation of virtually complete ignorance of Chinese culture as a whole and a rise in Sinophobia, revealing the identity and demographic anxieties provoked by China's rapid rise in the region. However, the Central Asian and Chinese worlds have not always ignored each other. To the contrary, throughout the 19th century, numerous population flows between the Central Asian and Chinese worlds have taken place, a phenomenon that continued into the 20th century. From the 1870s up until the 1960s, hundreds of thousands of people crossed the border from Xinjiang to settle in the Russo-Soviet space. This article focuses on these cross-border minorities, which play the role of cultural go-betweens and economic mediators. Even if the trade-related niche remains modest by comparison to overall Sino-Central Asian commercial flow, it constitutes

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an important element in the social strategies being put into place by these minorities.

The trans-nationalization of minority groups is not a new thing for either of the two zones: the national minorities in China have been part of processes of globalization,¹ as have the Koreans, the Greeks, the Germans and the Russians in Central Asia, all of whom started up trading links with their countries of origin during the transition to the market economy in the 1990s. Nonetheless, even if relations with the kin state are complex or conflict-ridden, the host state often views these cross-border groups as a threat. In this paper, then, our main line of inquiry will be to examine more closely the role that not only the Uyghurs, but also the Dungan and the Chinese Central Asians play, have played, or might be called upon to play, in the development of Sino-Central Asian economic relations and in the cultural mediations between the two worlds. These interactions occur as much in Central Asia as in Xinjiang, or indeed in Gansu and Shaanxi, and they implicate diverse populations, belonging to diversified social groups, with results that are at the very least contrasting.

The Uyghurs: Commercial Opportunities Hampered By Political Suspicions

In Xinjiang, the Uyghurs came under Deng Xiaoping's period to benefit from a certain liberalization on the cultural and economic levels, with the reopening of mosques and Uyghur-speaking schools.² However, with fall of the Soviet Union, political stakes rapidly came to the fore and halted the prospects of autonomy. Bolstered by the independence of the neighboring Central Asian states, the dream of an independent Uyghur state came to life through the play of mirror reflections. However, this led to new political tensions, since Beijing objected to all autonomist ideas and to any undermining of its territorial integrity. These tensions intensified in the 2000s in the international context of the "war against terror", which allowed Beijing to play on the so-called threat of Islamist Uyghur terrorism.³

In Central Asia, the Uyghurs comprise a very specific minority: by contrast to the other minority groups, who can draw on their kin state, the Uyghurs are in no way supported by China and find themselves in a hostage-like situation due to the friendly relations between Chinese and

¹ Colin Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities and Globalisation* (London - New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003).

² Dru Gladney, *Dislocating China: Reflections on Muslims, Minorities, and Other Subaltern Subjects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

³ We thank Rémi Castets for his help and advice during the writing of this chapter and for the information he shared with us on the Uyghur issue.

Central Asian governments. The Central Asian Uyghur diaspora includes about 300,000 persons, although it is impossible to obtain exact figures due to the coercion exerted by some Central Asian states to make minorities assimilate into the national majority. Only a few hundred Uyghurs live in Turkmenistan, and there are about 2,000 in Tajikistan.⁴ In Uzbekistan, according to the 1989 census, as many as 23,000 people claimed to be Uyghurs. They are divided between those of the Tashkent region and those of the Fergana Valley, including several relatively densely packed villages in the Pakhbad district close to Andijan.⁵ By contrast to the Uyghurs in Kazakhstan and in Kyrgyzstan, those in Uzbekistan are largely integrated: the linguistic and cultural proximity with the Uzbek majority, the many mixed marriages, the absence of Uyghur-speaking primary schools and of active cultural centers, and, lastly, the national policy of giving preference to ethnic Uzbeks are all factors that have contributed to reducing Uyghur national feeling.

According to a census carried out in 1999, there are 46,000 Uyghurs in Kyrgyzstan. Two-thirds of them are dispersed among the regions of Chui, Bishkek and Issyk-Kul in the north of the country, one-third in those of Osh and of Djalabad in the south, where they are also largely assimilated with the Kyrgyz-Uzbek majority. Kazakhstan, with a total population of around 210,000 (according to a 1999 census), is actually the Central Asian country with the largest Uyghur diaspora. The Uyghurs here live in relatively dense groupings, 95 percent of them having settled in the Almaty region, where they constitute 9 percent of the population and have fifteen Uyghur-speaking primary schools at their disposal. They make up a majority of the Uyghur autonomous district, and are also numerous in that of Panfilov, situated close to the Khorgos border post, and in that of Enbeshikazakh.⁶

To speak of the existence of a Uyghur diaspora in Central Asia raises several methodological problems. First, the term Uyghur first appeared in the region only with the Soviet census of 1926 and only thereafter did it gradually come to replace the terms commonly in use—*Kashgari* (those originating from the Kashgar region) and *Taranchi* (all the Turkish-speaking Muslims originating from the Ili valley)—which have now altogether disappeared.⁷ During the decades of the Soviet regime, persons

⁴ Figures provided by Guzel Maitdinova, representative of the Uyghur community of Tajikistan, Dushanbe, 27 March 2008.

⁵ Ablet Kamalov, "Uighur Community in 1990s Central Asia: A Decade of Change", in Touraj Atabaki, Sanjot Mehendale (ed.), *Central Asia and the Caucasus: Transnationalism and Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 148-168.

⁶ William Clarck, Ablet Kamalov, "Uighur Migration Across Central Asian Frontiers", *Central Asian Survey*, 23, 2 (2004), pp. 167-182.

⁷ For more details see, Assale Khamraeva-Aubert, *Migration, colonisation et formation d'une identité nationale chez les Ouïgours d'Asie centrale* (Thesis, Paris: EHESS, 2005).

identified as Uyghur were able to benefit from minority rights (cultural centers, primary schools, publications, television and radio programs in their native languages, etc.) and a Uyghur intellectual elite took shape, which maintained very few links with Xinjiang. In Kazakhstan, the community is divided into two groups each with its own strong identity: the *yerliklär* (locals), born in Kazakhstan, whose parents or indeed grandparents first settled in Semirechie at the end of the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th; and the *kegänlär* (new arrivals), who arrived during the last waves of migration in the 1950s-1960s and who often still have family links with Xinjiang.⁸ The *yerliklär* consider themselves to be indigenous Kazakhstani, no longer have any familial links with Xinjiang, and in the 1970s often dreamed of obtaining an autonomous republic in the Kazakh Soviet Republic. This feeling of belonging in Semirechie, and indeed of autonomy, provoked fierce reactions among the Kazakhs. The symbolic rivalry that developed between the Uyghur and Kazakh Soviet elites in fact still stamps attitudes today, underscoring their mistrust of one another.⁹

The largely russified Uyghurs of Central Asia, stamped by the cultural golden age that they enjoyed in the late Soviet period, are mostly secular and Europe-oriented, and are hence very distant from the Uyghurs of Xinjiang. For many decades, they regarded themselves as rightful members of the Soviet space and had no desire to play the role of the diaspora in exile, except for the *yerliklär*, with their sights set on the fatherland, but they were marginalized. Not until the 1991 declarations of independence and the resumption of relations with China did the idea that they were not only a Soviet people like any other, but also a diaspora with links to Xinjiang, become widespread and fracture the community. Still today, many Central Asian Uyghurs are little concerned by the situation in Xinjiang and look upon the Chinese Uyghurs, their ruralness, their strong religious practice, and their Chinese-influenced culture with condescension.¹⁰ In a similar way, the Xinjiang's Uyghurs who came in Central Asia for trade-related reasons, are shocked by the westernized lifestyles of the post-Soviet Uyghurs, whom they call *sovietlik* (the Soviets), and by whom they are in their turn called *kitailik* (the Chinese).¹¹ Both groups are largely hampered from understanding one another via written language, since Chinese Uyghurs use the Arabic alphabet, the post-Soviet ones the Cyrillic, and others the Latin alphabet.

⁸ Sean R. Roberts, "The Uighurs of the Kazakhstan Borderlands: Migration and the Nation", *Nationalities Papers*, 26, 3 (1998), pp. 511-513.

⁹ Interview with Hamid Khamraev, Almaty, 15 mars 2008.

¹⁰ See Konstantin L. Syroezhkin, *Mify i real'nost' etnicheskogo separatizma v Kitae i bezopasnost' Tsentral'noi Azii* [Myths and Realities of Ethnic Separatism in China and Security in Central Asia] (Almaty: Daik-Press, 2003).

¹¹ Anonymous interviews with members of the Uyghur community, Almaty, February-March 2008.

Even more impacting, the widespread entry of Russian and Chinese terms into daily language contributes to underlining their differences and acts as a reminder to the ideologists of the “great Uyghur nation dispersed throughout the world” that the Uyghur populations are largely assimilated and integrated into their host culture.

Lastly, many fraught political divisions have long worked to impede the emergence of a unified diasporic scene.¹² The Chinese Uyghurs are often suspected of working for Beijing, those settled in Arab countries or who support Saudi Arabia are considered too Islamized, and the community based in Turkey is often accused of being too pan-Turkist and of having a superiority complex. They are therefore scarcely followed in Central Asia, where local Uyghurs have preferred to focus on nationalist, not pan-Turkist, issues. These divisions are reflected in the 2004 debates surrounding the creation of a World Uyghur Congress led by Erkin Alptekin: some wanted to call it the East Turkistan World Congress, thereby including territorial belonging in the definition and giving a place for the other minorities, but the majority rallied to a definition expressed in ethnic terms without any territorial reference.¹³ In Central Asia itself multiple political divisions among the Uyghur community have been intensified by the political pressure that is exerted by the local authorities in their efforts to respond to Beijing’s demands. In Uzbekistan, there is effectively no functioning Uyghur association, and the Uyghur-Dungan Cultural Center only organizes occasional folkloric activities. In Kyrgyzstan, Uyghurs are divided between the Union of the Uyghurs of Kyrgyzstan, founded by Nigmat Bazakov and today led by Rozimet Abdulkakiev, and the Committee of Human Rights of Bishkek, currently presided by Tursun Islam.

In Kazakhstan in the 1990s many rival associations coexisted that either championed the idea of independence for Xinjiang or, on the contrary, were won over to the Kazakhstani and/or Chinese authorities. The Organization for the Liberation of Uyghurstan (OLO), led by Hashir Wahidi, included several thousands of members, while the United Revolutionary Front of East Turkistan led by Yusupbeg Mukhlissi was less known in the region, as was the Regional Organization of Uyghur people, whose aim was to unify the entire diaspora of Central Asia. These associations, more or less publicly dreaming of a greater Uyghurstan, have gradually disappeared due to the joint coercive efforts of Astana and Beijing. Some survive only in a clandestine manner, financed by businessmen who support the cause of

¹² Rémi Castets, “Opposition politique, nationalisme et islam chez les Ouïghours du Xinjiang”, *Les Etudes du CERI*, 110 (2004), p. 45.

¹³ *Ibid.*

independence.¹⁴ The others have been encouraged to gather in official associations, such as the Cultural Center of the Uyghurs of Kazakhstan which, established in 2003 and won over to Nursultan Nazarbaev, organizes depoliticized activities (publications, financing of cultural operations, the translation of the Koran into Uyghur, etc.), and the Society for the Culture of the Uyghurs, which is a member of the People's Assembly.¹⁵

Though there were limited exchanges between the Soviet and Chinese Uyghurs in the 1980s, the opening of the borders at the end of perestroika enabled many of them to visit family members and to combine this with a modest shuttle trade. In China, Soviet products were considered of higher quality than the national ones, while the Central Asians expressed an interest in certain Chinese household appliances and plastics that could not be found in the USSR. Despite strong suspicions on the part of the central authorities, Beijing had every interest at this time in playing up the Uyghur card, since it wanted to make its border economy more dynamic and to invest in a market in which it was as yet unable to invest great means. Moreover, Deng Xiaoping's reforms encouraged the ethnic minorities, not to mention the Hans, to set up small private companies for the transit of commodities, and to launch into the retailing or restaurant business. The breaking of economic relations between Central Asia and Russia, the total disorganization of production and of transportation, and the rapid process of privatization carried out in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were therefore perceived by China and its citizens as opportunities up for the taking.¹⁶

From the start of the 1990s, the main flea market (*barakholka*) of the then Kazakhstani capital, Almaty, located at the city limits on an abandoned site, was transformed into a site for the resale of Chinese goods transported from Xinjiang. It was quickly taken over by Dungan and Uyghur traders, since it was located nearby a former kolkhoz, *Zaria Vostoka* (The Dawn of the Orient), which had a Dungan majority at the time of its foundation in the 1930s, but then came to be numerically dominated by Uyghurs arriving from China in the 1960s. These latter, who maintained close familial relations with Xinjiang, set up in the cross-border trade by investing in the *barakholka*, or by developing related businesses, such as in the restaurant sector, the hiring out of warehouses,

¹⁴ B. Bekturganova, 'Uigurskii ekstremizm' v Tsentral'noi Azii: mif ili real'nost'? (sotsiologicheskii analiz problem) [Uighur Extremism in Central Asia: Myth or Reality? (a sociological analysis of the problems)] (Almaty: Kompleks, 2002).

¹⁵ Natsuko Oka, "Transnationalism As a Threat to State Security? Case Studies on Uighurs and Uzbeks in Kazakhstan", in Tomohiko Uyama (ed.), *Empire, Islam, and Politics in Central Eurasia* (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2007), pp. 351-368.

¹⁶ Konstantin L. Syroezhkin, *Problemy sovremennogo Kitaia i bezopasnost' v Tsentral'noi Azii* [Problems of Contemporary China and Security in Central Asia] (Almaty: KISI, 2006).

or the supplying of lodging for travelling traders.¹⁷ While Kazakhstan was in the full process of economic transition and people were trying to offset the end of the subsidies that the Soviet structure had afforded, the bazaar became a preferred site for wholesalers as much as retailers.¹⁸ Smaller markets selling Chinese goods were also set up on both sides of the border in Zharkent and Yining, allowing smaller traders to be able to commute between the two towns without having to cross the entire Ili valley from Almaty to Urumqi. Some small agencies were also established that specialized in organizing the travel and transport arrangements. Similarly in Kyrgyzstan, cross-border trade rapidly boomed in the Naryn region and then developed around the bazaar of the capital, Dordoi. At this time, Uzbekistan was little affected by the opening onto the Chinese markets, nor was Tajikistan, which was in the midst of civil war.

Uyghur trade was rapidly rationalized. The cross-border shuttle services came into competition from the Almaty-Urumqi railway line, which extends to the great regional centers and so enables trade across greater distances. As a result, trade practices became more diversified: the Central Asian Uyghurs started to spend less time in Xinjiang, where they went only to purchase goods, while the Chinese Uyghurs who went to Central Asia stayed longer to try to establish their own stands at the *barakholka* or at one of the other bazaars of the region. Lastly, so as to reduce transport costs, Uyghur traders moved to get larger quantities of goods freighted. They organized whole containers to enable the storage of significant quantities of goods, which then became sites of sale in their own right—something that is still observable today.¹⁹ Apart from purchasing the container, at a price estimated in the 1990s between 2,000 and 15,000 dollars (depending on the location on the bazaar), the sellers were also obliged to pay a weekly tax. Cross-border movements were also reduced by structuring networks that made it possible for a trader to establish links with a permanent contact in Xinjiang for the purpose of buying the required goods and freighting them, and by establishing a method of payment that involved the mutual reimbursing of diverse types of debt and avoided the transfer of massive sums of money.²⁰

¹⁷ Sean R. Roberts, *Uyghur Neighborhoods and Nationalisms in the Former Sino-Soviet Borderland. An Historical Ethnography of a Stateless Nation on the Margins of Modernity* (PhD, Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 2003), p. 287.

¹⁸ Konstantin L. Syroezhkin, "Kitai i Tsentral'naia Aziia: politicheskoe otnosheniia i torгово-ekonomicheskoe partnerstvo" [China and Central Asia: Their Political Relations and Economic-Commercial Partnership], *Kazakhstan-Spektr*, 1-2 (1997), p. 109

¹⁹ Sean R. Roberts, *Uyghur Neighborhoods and Nationalisms in the Former Sino-Soviet Borderland*, *op. cit.*, pp. 289-290.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

In the second half of the 1990s, many factors stood in the way of Uyghur trade. First of all, the cross-border character of the trade diminished as it increased in magnitude at the regional, and then at the state level with the development of Sino-Central Asian official commercial relations. Kazakhstani businessmen also quickly became aware of the economic stakes and put pressure on the authorities to alter the rules of the game in their favor. Hence, beginning in 1995, the Kazakhstani government passed a series of laws that aimed at making cross-border trading more difficult for small traders and at preventing the importation of specific products (Chinese beer, for example) to safeguard local production.²¹ The country's trade with China took a steep decline, which Kyrgyzstan took full advantage of by not applying protectionist measures. Preparing for the emergence of new competition, Uyghur traders on both sides of the border strove to define their objectives with more precision. Some tried to specialize in specific niches, such as imitation products of brand names like Adidas, Reebok and Nike, but they were rapidly outstripped by the arrival of companies owned by Han Chinese, who received their supplies directly from large production centers in the Chinese south-east. Others have tried to open larger enterprises in collaboration with the authorities of Urumqi and the Central Asian capitals, but the general suspicion to which the Uyghurs are subject has cut down on their success, as have the fact that the Dungans, the Hans and the titular nationalities of Central Asia have all targeted the same market.

A small number of Chinese Uyghurs continue to be motivated by reasons that are more political than commercial, and therefore do not envisage ceasing their business activities, not even when they become less profitable. In Xinjiang as in Central Asia, such activities make it possible to become a notable in one's region or town, to set oneself up as a sponsor for the construction of mosques and schools, or as a financier of Uyghur-related cultural activities, all of which provide the community with more visibility.²² Lastly, transnational trade provides the opportunity to travel to foreign states, whether those of Central Asia, Turkey or of countries further away, to return with new experiences that can be capitalized upon both immediately, particularly by criticizing the presence of the Chinese, and indirectly, by militating in favor of independence. Fostered by international trade, the trans-nationalization

²¹ Valerii Khliupin, *Geopoliticheskii treugol'nik. Kazakhstan-Kitai-Rossia. Proshloe i nastoiashchee pograničnoi problemy* [The Geopolitical Triangle of Kazakhstan-China-Russia: Past and Present of the Border Disputes] (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi evraziiskii institut ekonomicheskikh i politicheskikh issledovaniï, 1999), <http://www.iicas.org/AIBOLIT/publ_VX_Tr.htm> (June 12 2008).

²² Jay Dautcher, *Folklore and Identity in a Uyghur Community in the 1990s Xinjiang China* (PhD: Berkeley, University of California, 1999), pp. 22-29.

of the Uyghur communities and the development of links with the diaspora were therefore quickly seen to be a dangerous phenomenon by Beijing and the Central Asian capitals. China has thus dissuaded many Uyghurs suspected of harboring separatist sympathies from engaging in cross-border trade. The Chinese authorities were afraid that they would take advantage of it to collect money from the diaspora or to smuggle arms into China. The Central Asian press, for its part, often makes reference to the harmonious relations between the Uyghurs and the Chechens, a hidden sign of their supposed common Islamist separatism, or else pretend to be searching out every last trace of the “Uyghur threat” in the region.²³

In the 2000s, the good relations between China and Central Asia, not to mention the presence of other transnational communities in the same commercial niche, meant that the Uyghur became marginalized. They found it increasingly difficult to find a Central Asian or Han partner willing to associate with them. They have therefore been reduced to engaging either in very small-scale, low-profit trading or to working as assistants, translators or intermediaries for Han businessmen settled in Central Asia (although the latter prefer the Dungan) or for Central Asian businessmen who trade with Xinjiang. Nonetheless, they continue to have a strong presence on the Madina market in Bishkek, which is specialized in textiles and sanitary products. There they operate using a rotation system (several months in Central Asia followed up by several months in Xinjiang) with the help of networks of family and friends that enable them to secure money transfers, commodities transit, and the family’s supervision during their absence.²⁴

In addition, the Uyghurs are often forced to take sides during tensions between the Central Asian traders and the Hans, since they are generally assimilated wholesale to the Chinese, which gives them the feeling of suffering discrimination from both sides. They are also placed under particular pressure from the local mafias, especially in Kazakhstan, since the authorities do not hasten to come to their aid. Several deliberately lit fires have struck the Uyghur and Chinese sections of bazaars, in particular at Dordoi and Madina in Bishkek, and in Kurgan-Tiube, while in Uzbekistan in 2002 the authorities brutally closed a large Chinese market of the capital, Hippodrome, and started a campaign of persecuting Uyghur businessmen settled in the country. Some Uyghurs have thus tried to switch to employment in more specialized infrastructures, such as traditional so-called Muslim catering, a domain from which the Hans are excluded.

²³ B. Bekturganova, ‘*Uigurskii ekstremizm’ v Tsentral’noi Aii : mif ili real’nost’?*.

²⁴ Amantur Zhaparov, “The Issue of Chinese Migrants in Kyrgyzstan”, *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2009), pp. 79-91 (this issue).

Lastly, another category of Uyghur businessmen has preferred to play the game of officialdom by integrating into much more state-regulated commercial networks. For example, one of the main Chinese businessmen of Tajikistan is himself a Uyghur, a native of a small town close to Urumqi. The Kazakhstani and Kyrgyz markets being already well under the control of the Chinese, this businessman has aimed at more difficult markets, first of all Uzbekistan, where he had controlled the Hippodrome before the Uzbek authorities closed it down and expelled him, and today Tajikistan. In order to avoid attracting any political suspicions, not to mention pressures from the mafia, he has entered into an alliance with one of the son-in-laws of the Tajik president, who provides him with all the necessary protection and also enables him to give guarantees of loyalty to Beijing. Practically alone on the Tajik market, this Uyghur runs the Chinese part of the central bazaar of the capital, as well as the adjacent Uyghur restaurants. He opened the country's first wholesale bazaar in 2008, and has also opened Chinese bazaars in Khodzhent and Kuliab. Some of his products, like construction materials, come from Xinjiang, but the remainder of his sales, be they household appliances (televisions, refrigerators and freezers) or clothing and shoes, come from the littoral regions of China, where he negotiates bulk sale deals with Han businessmen. He also intends to set up in the construction market by opening his own company, and wants to take advantage of his political links with the presidential family by taking on new assignments, including the catering for the section of road between the Chinese border and Khorog.²⁵ It is therefore possible to be an important businessman and to be Uyghur, provided one knows how to use contacts at the state level—on both sides of the border—and how to collaborate with the majority nationalities.

In Xinjiang itself, the Uyghurs have had difficulties in preserving their role as economic mediators. At the beginning of the 1990s, Bianjiang, the first Central Asian neighborhood of Urumqi, took shape in the heart of the Uyghur part of the old city. With its “Russophone” hotels and stores and its “Muslim” restaurants, it attested to the Uyghurs' role as mediators in this emerging trade with Central Asia. It was nevertheless quickly taken over by Han sellers, themselves often students practicing their Russian language skills, and then outstripped by their setting up of the Center for Foreign Trade and of several commercial malls in the new town, which are completely dominated by the Hans.²⁶ In Kashgar, the bazaar still largely remains controlled by the Uyghurs, but it now only plays a minor role as a commercial crossroads for Kashgaria. The basic consumer goods for sale are destined for a few

²⁵ Off-the-record interview with the Uyghur businessman, Dushanbe, 27 March 2008.

²⁶ Fieldwork observations and interviews, Kashgar, September 2008.

Central Asian, mainly Kyrgyz, but also Pakistani, businessmen; however the entire household appliance and technology market is restricted to the industrial parks of Urumqi and of border zones. In addition, the Pakistani businessmen are now tending to avoid Kashgar and to go directly to the Chinese maritime regions to replenish their stocks, while their Central Asian colleagues are going mainly to Urumqi to negotiate with Han wholesalers. This leaves the Kashgar mythic bazaar only a very modest role limited to small-scale cross-border trade flows.²⁷

In two decades, the Uyghurs have therefore partially lost the unique niche on offer to them, and this has occurred on at least three levels: first, Sino-Central Asian trade has been brought under state control, with the greatest share going to the titular nationalities—Hans and Central Asians—and not to the minorities; second, even among the cross-border minorities themselves, the Uyghurs have been marginalized by the political suspicion that weighs on them and impedes their ability to make use of the transnational networks customary of diasporic peoples; and third, in Xinjiang, the Uyghurs have been outstripped by the Hans, who themselves now enjoy the advantages of having the regional median position. In its relation to Central Asian trade, Xinjiang is divided into two zones, Kashgaria in the south, which is largely marginalized, and Dzungaria in the north, which is at the heart of the current Sino-Central Asian economic dynamism. This division works to consolidate the exclusion of the Uyghurs, since a majority of them are settled in Kashgaria, while in Dzungaria they are dominated by the Hans and also partly by the Kazakhs, who are regarded as being more loyal to the central authorities. The extreme political acuity of the Uyghur question, which Beijing is coping with less well than even the issue of Tibet, has therefore dispossessed the Uyghur of their historical role, while the other cross-border minorities are in the process of taking up all the advantages that the trade dynamism between China and Central Asia has to offer.

The Dungans: A Double Bet on Ethnic Business and State-Level Activism

The historical encounter between Islam and the Chinese world gave birth to a population of Chinese people converted to Islam. In China these latter are called Hui, and in post-Soviet space Dungans, based on an old Chagatay term. Islam arrived in China via two routes: one maritime via the Indian ocean, and a terrestrial one via the Silk Road. In the 7th century, the first Muslims settled in the Guangzhou region, which is home to the Huaisheng Mosque, the first of China's mosques; but the phenomenon of conversion did not become widespread until the end of

²⁷ Fieldwork observations and interviews, Urumqi, September 2008.

the 12th century under the domination of Kubilay, the grandson of Genghis Khan and founder of China's Mongolian Dynasty. With the transition from the Yuan (1280-1368) to the Ming (1368-1644) dynasties, Islam became one of the main religions in the contemporary provinces of Gansu, Shaanxi, Ningxia, Qinghai and Yunnan. In these Chinese provinces, the Hui practiced a form of Islam largely influenced by the precepts of the Sufi brotherhoods Kubrawiyya, Qadiriyya, and Naqshbandiyya.

After the 1861-1877 uprising against Qing domination, several tens of thousands of Hui from the provinces of Shaanxi, Gansu and Xinjiang went into exile on the territory of the Russian empire. They were recognized as a national minority by Soviet power in the 1920s and thereby obtained protection for their language and, in densely populated zones, the possibility to send their children to Dungan-language primary schools. In the PRC, they also obtained the status of minority (*minzu*), making up one of the 56 ethnic minority groups recognized by the Communist regime. Today, China includes 10 million Hui, who live in various situations and in complex relations with the Han majority. Considered as a national minority due to their religious specificity, they endure social, cultural and religious marginalization, which occasionally leads to open conflicts; they are also subject to processes of acculturation, but are much better integrated into Chinese society than the Uyghurs.²⁸

Approximately 100,000 Dungans live in Central Asia. They are mostly settled in Kyrgyzstan (51,000 persons at the 1999 census²⁹), where they constitute the country's fourth largest nationality, and are concentrated in the North in the regions of Chui, Bishkek, Tokmak and Karakol. Along the Chui river, which is home to more than 80 percent of the country's Dungans, villages such as Alexandrovka, Ivanovka, Milianfan and Kenbuluk have large majorities of Dungans.³⁰ They are also settled in Kazakhstan (36,000 persons in the 1999 census), in particular in the Dzhambul region, and also, but in smaller numbers, in those of Almaty, Akmolinsk, Karaganda, Aktiubinsk and West-Kazakhstan.³¹ In Uzbekistan, their presence is minimal (about 2,500 persons) and they are sparsely populated, having settled mostly in the

²⁸ Osman Chuah, "Muslims in China: the social and economic situation of the Hui Chinese", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 24, 1 (2004), pp. 155-162.

²⁹ *Itogi pervoi natsional'noi perepisi naseleniia Kyrgyzskoi respubliki 1999 g.* [Results of the First National Census of the Kyrgyz Republic in 1999] (Bishkek: Natsional'nyi statisticheskii komitet, 2000), <<http://www.stat.kg/Rus/Home/census.pdf>> (December 14 2008).

³⁰ "Chislennost' i razmeshchenie dungan v respublike Kyrgyzstana" [Number and Distribution of the Dungans in Kyrgyzstan], *Dungane*, 1 (2001), pp. 40-43.

³¹ Alexandr N. Alekseenko, "Respublika v zerkale perepisei naseleniia" [The Republic in the Mirror of the Censuses], <<http://www.ecsocman.edu.ru/images/pubs/2005/06/13/0000213102/010Alekseenko.pdf>> (December 11 2008).

Tashkent region and in the Fergana Valley (Andijan). Interethnic tensions between Dungans and Kyrgyz, in particular in the Chui region, are frequent. In 2006, violent clashes in the small town of Iskra drove hundreds of families to seek political asylum in Kazakhstan, while the Kyrgyz government set up a special commission to investigate the matter.³² The elderly members of the community as well as the imams succeeded in calming the tensions and the majority of Dungan families that were refugeed in Kazakhstan ended up returning.³³

Like all the peoples of the Soviet Union, the Dungans were forced to undergo heavy social transformations which altered their cultural and identity references.³⁴ Many of them, in particular in the Osh region, assimilated with the Uzbeks, while others intermarried with the Kazakhs and the Kyrgyz. In addition, the linguistic unity reportedly at the basis of their identity in the Soviet Union proved partially mythical. Knowledge of Chinese writing was in fact lost very rapidly and today the immense majority of Dungans (more than 90 percent of them) are unable to write it. Moreover, Dungans are divided between the Gansu and the Shaanxi dialects, while nearly half the young generation has no mastery at all of Dungan and can only speak Russian, sometimes also Kazakh or Kyrgyz. Lastly, the few still existing Dungan-language primary schools (approximately fifteen in Kazakhstan and in Kyrgyzstan) are lacking in means, textbooks, and teachers, and once again are divided in their linguistic strategy: some want to maintain the learning of the Dungan language, which since 1958 has been written in Cyrillic (and between 1929 and 1958 in Latin), and therefore the dialects of Northern China; others want to see a shift to *putonghua* (Mandarin). But here, once again, there is a division between those who endorse the learning of pinyin (Romanized Chinese) and those who prefer Chinese characters.³⁵ The stake is not exclusively cultural; it is also economic: having writing skills in Chinese opens multiple prospects for work with China, where the preservation of the Cyrillic writing hinders breaking out of the Soviet framework.

Traditionally, the Dungans are known for their agricultural skills, which assured the success of their *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes* in the Soviet

³² "Stolknoveniia na severe Kirgizii: konflikt mezhdru kirgizami i dunganami" [Riots in the North of Kirghizia: The Conflict Between the Kyrgyz and the Dungans], <www.regnum.ru/news/kirghizia/585294.html> (December 12 2008); "Dungane begut. Sozdana Kir. Pravitel'stvennaia komissiiia po uregulirovaniia situatsii v sele 'Iskra'" [The Dungans Flee. A Kyrgyz Governmental Commission Created to Solve the Situation in the Village of Iskra], *CentrAsia*, 8 February 2006, <<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1139379480>> (December 12 2008).

³³ Interview with Husei Daurov, Almaty, 6 June 2008.

³⁴ Elisabeth Allès, "The Chinese-speaking Muslims (Dungans) of Central Asia: A Case of Multiple Identities in a Changing Context", *Asian Ethnicity*, 6, 2 (2005), pp. 121-134.

³⁵ Interview with Ali Dzhon, a researcher in the section of Dungan Studies at the Academy of Sciences, Bishkek, 22 February 2008.

era, by contrast to the Kazakh and Kyrgyz transhumant and non-sedentary cultures. The Dungans are specialized in two domains, rice growing and market garden produce, and have also gradually set up in a new commercial niche, that of fresh produce and mixed salads sold on Central Asian markets. Since the privatizations of the 1990s, many Dungans have invested in the restaurant business, as their “Muslim” cuisine is reputed in Central Asia and they entertain special relations with agricultural farms that are reliably able to supply them with fresh produce. Still today, half of the Dungans of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan continue to work in agriculture, while approximately 20 percent are reported to have been employed in the state administration since Soviet times. In Uzbekistan and Tajikistan the Dungans tend to be limited to agricultural activities. However, in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan a new economic niche has appeared—trade with China.

According to one of the members of the Dungan Association of Kazakhstan, approximately 30 percent of Dungans from Kazakhstan and from Kyrgyzstan work in the area of trade with China.³⁶ Four types of profession have taken form. Some of the Dungans, especially those from the border towns, have set themselves up in the shuttle trade. The geographical proximity to China exempts them from having to obtain a visa, so they are able to visit the Chinese shopping centers situated on the other side of the border, where they can buy products and then re-sell them back home. This trade, which is dominated by rural milieus trying to escape from the agricultural crisis, is of a very modest scale and is often organized in the framework of the family. Other Dungans have gone into the tourist agency sector: using their linguistic competences and their contacts in Xinjiang, they organize “shop-tours” for their compatriots in China and look after the administrative formalities as well as the arrangements for the stay. Some specialize in medical tourism in China, an area enjoying growing success in Central Asia.³⁷ A third group has found employment with Chinese businesspeople set up in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, since their oral abilities in Chinese, even at the dialectal level, enables them to serve as assistants, intermediaries or as translators, all the more so as they are often both Russian-speaking *and* Kazakh or Kyrgyz-speaking. The Dungans in these last two categories come mostly from urban milieus and are chiefly represented by the younger generations.³⁸

Lastly, a fourth group, and one that is destined to increase in scope, has launched into commerce by opening stands at bazaars. This has occurred in several, privileged domains: the shoes sector in Almaty, for

³⁶ Interview with Nurik Ma, representative of the Dungan Association of Kazakhstan at Xi’an, Xi’an, 11 October 2008.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Amantur Zhaparov, “The Issue of Chinese Migrants in Kyrgyzstan”, *op. cit.*

example, is considered to be a Dungan specialization. Some Dungan traders attempt to get agreements signed directly with Chinese clothing and shoe factories based in Shenzhen and Guangzhou. Others specialize in construction materials, this time coming from the Urumqi area.³⁹ Others have set up in the transportation (road but not railway) of commodities as far away as Russia, taking advantage of their transnational networks that sometimes extend to Western Europe.⁴⁰ In China the Dungans trade either with the Hui, or with the Hans, but very little with the Uyghurs. Historically, the relations between Uyghurs and the Hui from Xinjiang have been conflictual. The two peoples do not in the least foster Muslim solidarity; indeed the Hui/Dungans are keener on working with the Hans. In addition, although the Dungans from Kyrgyzstan are mostly originally from Gansu and those of Kazakhstan mostly from Shaanxi, the relations to their region of origin have been reduced to nothing by the history of Sino-Soviet relations in the 20th century. It is therefore very rare that the Central Asian Dungans are able to re-establish familial links in China and can use them as a driver of trade. In confirmation of this absence of family networks, the Dungans involved in trade work almost systematically with Xinjiang, in particular via the Urumqi industrial park and the free-trade zones at the borders, or in the Pearl River Delta, but they do not venture as far as Gansu and Shaanxi.⁴¹

The Dungans have an association in each of the four Central Asian republics (Turkmenistan excepted), but they are often limited to the organization of folkloric activities (songs, dance, cuisine) and, in Almaty and Bishkek, to the editing of association newspapers. The Dungan association of Kazakhstan also finances the publication of new language and literature textbooks, which it sends to the neighboring republics. Like all the other minorities, the Dungans are dependent on their environment: in Uzbekistan, they are forbidden from engaging in political activities whereas in Kyrgyzstan, many associations competed against one another prior to unification in 2008, but this multiplicity impeded the Dungans from organizing and seeking out private sponsors. Moreover, relations between the associations are relatively bad, in particular those between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Yet, despite these difficulties, the niche open to associations has shown itself to be full of promising economic prospects. As such, at the beginning of the 1990s, the Dungan association of Uzbekistan tried to develop contacts with the Chinese embassy by receiving teachers of

³⁹ Interview with Husei Daurov, Almaty, 6 June 2008.

⁴⁰ Interview with a Dungan businessman who runs a company that transports Chinese goods to Western Europe, Astana, 13 March 2008.

⁴¹ Interviews conducted with researchers and businessmen from the Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries of the Gansu province, Lanzhou, 3 October 2008.

Chinese language as well as an aid for agriculture. However, Uzbek authorities' suspicions of all collaborations that are not under their control quickly put paid to these special relations. In Kyrgyzstan, Esen Ismailov, current president of the Dungan association, built himself career as the founder of the first kung-fu school in the Soviet Union, where he went on to become the director of a large martial arts training center at Bishkek, and later obtained the title of Kyrgyzstan's national artist. His relations with political and economic milieus were instrumental in his being elected a deputy between 1995 and 2000,⁴² not to mention in his becoming one of the Republic's 100 wealthiest men.⁴³ He therefore plays the role of cultural mediator between China and Central Asia by promoting Asian martial sports, which are currently in vogue among the post-Soviet urban youth.

However, it is in Kazakhstan that the career of the president of the Dungan association is the most revealing of the commercial niche that is in the process of being constituted. A former engineer and member of the Communist party in his village of Shortiube, Husei Duarov has, since 1992, built up a private company called Shensi (Shaanxi), which promotes solar-powered glass-house agriculture. His multiple trade activities in Kazakhstan have given him the occasion to meet Nursultan Nazarbaev, in 1999, and then in 2000 to get elected to the head of the only Dungan association of Kazakhstan, which gathers about ten small cultural regional centers. Without any contact to the descendents of his family in China, he first undertook genealogical research to try to find his relatives in Xi'an. Since the end of the 1990s, he has organized cultural exchanges between Kazakhstan and the provinces of Shaanxi and of Gansu for Dungans searching for their roots, has tried to develop scientific exchanges between specialists of Hui/Dungan culture, and has financed studies in China for Dungan students. This cultural cooperation quickly took on an economic aspect. The Shaanxi province, for example, financed the transfer of technologies related to green-house culture, which was the first specialization of Husei Daurov's company. He then expanded his domain of competence to construction materials with the opening of a joint-venture for the fabrication of bricks near Tokmak in the 1990s and another around Dzhambul in the 2000s, once again thanks to Chinese financing.⁴⁴

⁴² Esen Ismailov, "Narod Kyrgyzstana – odna sem'ia" [The People of Kyrgyzstan Forms a Single Family], *Kabar*, 6 March 2007, <<http://kabar.kg/internetconference/index.php?vop=27&dop=1>> (December 8 2008).

⁴³ "Sto samykh bogatykh liudei Kirgizii. Opros kirgizskoi gazety *Fergana*" [The Wealthiest One Hundred People of Kirgizia. Survey of the Kirgiz newspaper *Fergana*], *Fergana.ru*, 20 October 2002, <<http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=1004>> (December 8 2008).

⁴⁴ Interview with Husei Daurov, Almaty, 6 June 2008.

In the 2000s, with the boom in Sino-Kazakhstani trade exchanges, the Dungans came to occupy a key intermediate position which leads to the dissociation between Husei Daurov's private company and the association as a whole, which today only manages the university and cultural exchanges. Daurov served as an intermediary between the Kazakhstani authorities, the state-owned rail company Temir Zholy and China Railway New Express Transportation Equipment Co. from Shaanxi during the 2006 negotiations for the purchase of Chinese wagons. He also contributed to resolving the scandal which followed this purchase, since some of the wagons did not adhere to Kazakhstani security norms.⁴⁵ He then participated in the negotiations between Astana and China's National Development Bank over the construction of a hydroelectric station in Moynak, the first turnkey station of independent Kazakhstan. Today, he aids several Kazakhstani businesspeople to find trade partners in China and for this purpose he opened an agency in Xi'an in 2003, followed by others in Shenzhen, Beijing, Shanghai, Lanzhou, Urumqi and Yinchuan between 2005 and 2007.

His company has become a shareholder in several joint-ventures specialized in construction materials (tiles and bricks), in nanotechnologies, and in plastic packaging. He also continues to participate in the transfer of agricultural technologies from China, which have been experimented with by many mostly Dungan farms in the Kordai district, near Dzhambul. Finally, he has set his sights on the tourist industry in order to provide rural milieus with the chance to earn supplementary incomes: Chinese companies are presently in charge of constructing hotel infrastructure of modest scale in two densely Dungan populated regions, near Dzhambul and in Shortiube. This tourism is based in a folklorizing of Dungan culture: the hotels are to be constructed in Chinese style from the Qing era and are to offer "traditional" activities such as feasts in traditional Dungan clothes.

Husei Daurov has skillfully turned himself into the virtually obligatory intermediary for Sino-Kazakhstani relations, not only thanks to his status at the People's Assembly, which gives him access to administrative networks, but also thanks to his familiarity with economic circles. In fact, he is a member of the Sino-Kazakhstani interstate council of entrepreneurs, and was part of Nursultan Nazarbaev's delegation to China in 2004.⁴⁶ In 2001, he organized the visit of Dzhambul's governor to Xi'an, and the return visit of a delegation from Shaanxi headed by the

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Vadim Makhin, "Narodnaia diplomatiia v deistvii" [Popular Diplomacy in Action], *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 21 April 2004, <http://www.kazpravda.kz/index.php?uin=1151984397&act=archive_date&day=20&month=4&year=2004> (December 15 2008).

province's president of the Committee for Minorities Affairs, who is himself also a Hui.⁴⁷ He was also the main organizer of the Kazakhstani pavilion at the Xi'an commercial expo in 2004. In fall 2008, he accompanied the father of Prime Minister Karym Masimov, Kazhymkhan Masimov, on a non-official visit to China for the purchase of new technologies. He now wishes to implement collective strategies not limited to Kazakhstan and to extend his dynamism to the whole of Central Asia. In 2005, the Gansu province welcomed an official delegation of Dungan representatives from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.⁴⁸ In 2008, for the one hundred and thirty year jubilee of the arrival of Dungans in Central Asia, Husei Daurov canvassed the idea of creating a World Association of Dungans, whose principal objective would be to develop contact not just with the Hui of continental China, but with those of Malaysia and Hong Kong, once again with a view to economic development.

Husei Daurov's principal partners are not solely Hui or Han businesspeople but also the Associations for Friendship with Foreign Countries of Gansu and Shaanxi provinces. Created in 1984, these associations work under the auspices of the Foreign Affairs Ministry: that of Gansu, for example, has a Central Asia-Southern Asia section comprised of five persons. These associations lend their support to the local authorities by searching for international partners, serving as intermediaries for foreign businesspeople who want to establish themselves in the province, and studying the cooperation projects with foreign countries. In 2007, the trade exchanges between Gansu and Central Asia were at around 500,000 dollars, of which three-quarters were with Kazakhstan. Except for the metallurgy trade between Lanzhou and Astana, especially the joint-venture between Alexander Mashkevich's Eurasian Natural Resources Corp. and the JISCO metallurgic complex based in Jiayuguan,⁴⁹ the commercial exchanges of more modest extent are partly in Husei Daurov's hands. As such, in 2009, Daurov hopes to put in place the sale of fodder for livestock by a Gansu company and a Sino-Kazakhstani joint-venture specialized in the fruit and vegetables sector, which would be imported to Kazakhstan via Xinjiang.

We can conclude that a significant numbers of Dungans is now involved in the trade niche with China. First, by contrast to the Uyghurs, they are not suspected of Islamist activities and do not elicit the

⁴⁷ "Vystuplenie prezidenta assotsiatsii dungan Kazakhstan Kh. Daurova" [Speech of the President of the Dungan Association of Kazakhstan H. Daurov], *Dungan*, 2 (2001), p. 34.

⁴⁸ Kemar Mashanlo, "Dungane - khueistzu : prikosnovenie k istokam" [The Dungan - Hui: Return to the Source], *Baiterek*, <<http://www.baiterek.kz/index.php?journal=6&page=216>> (December 18 2008).

⁴⁹ Svetlana Abrashitova, "My ochen' zhdali etoi vstrechi!" [We have long waited for this meeting!], *Ekspress K*, 153, July 21 (2007), <http://www.express-k.kz/show_article.php?art_id=11218> (December 17 2008).

reprobation of either the Chinese or the Central Asian governments. Being a “politically correct” minority, which, besides, is well integrated in Central Asia and often viewed favorably, they benefit from an environment that is ripe for developing their economic niche. Even if this niche remains modest by comparison to overall Sino-Central Asian trade, it constitutes an important element in the social strategies being put into place by the community. Secondly, entrepreneurial figures such as Husei Daurov have been skillfully able to take advantage of their associative positions. In the space of a few years, Daurov has succeeded in transforming cultural exchanges into commercial partnerships, and in going from the non-governmental sector to the governmental one. He has played the hand of ethnic solidarity, recreating from scratch the links between the Kazakhstani Dungan diaspora and its provinces of origin. But he has also managed to avoid getting stuck in too restrictive a Dungan/Hui framework, by convincing the administrations of Gansu, Shaanxi, Dzhambul, and also Kazakhstani authorities in Astana, to utilize him as a cog in state-level commercial relations. Thirdly, many Dungans take full advantage of their role of cultural mediator between the two worlds: their linguistic abilities and their capacity to serve as intermediaries for people not familiar with China are currently being promoted. In turn this encourages a sort of retraditionalization of the Dungan community, insofar as it is urged to point up its “Chinese traits”, for instance its traditional houses, clothes and martial arts customs. The strategy of the Dungan Association of Kazakhstan to become a necessary link in university exchanges has also given them a place of choice in the mapping of Sino-Central Asian cultural relations.

China’s Central Asian Minorities: The Rise of the Kazakhs

When seen in relation to the two large populations that are the Uyghurs and the Hui/Dungans, China’s Central Asian minorities, paradoxically, compare rather badly. They benefit only very little from the economic and cultural niche that has opened up by the proximity of the Central Asian states. Just as in the Uyghur case, Xinjiang’s being divided into two zones, Kashgaria and Dzungaria, turns out to be relevant: the Central Asians around Kashgar have very little contact with post-Soviet Central Asia, only those in Dzungaria and in Urumqi are in a position to take advantage of border trade. Some Kazakhs in Urumqi and in the Ili valley are now well involved in the economic niche opened by relations with Central Asia.

China’s Central Asians are barely involved in Sino-Central Asian commerce due to multiple reasons which are as much cultural as economic and political. First of all, they mostly live in remote areas, with the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Tajiks chiefly inhabiting mountainous regions.

Their mobility is therefore confined to their region and the Chinese authorities are very reticent to issue them with passports, which is the pre-condition for crossing borders and obtaining a commercial export licence.⁵⁰ On the economic level, they live from agriculture and breeding in the main, do little business in urban milieus, have not developed any tradition linked to the Soviet world for a century, and above all do not have the means to accumulate a starting capital that would enable them to set up in business. Culturally, their linguistic knowledge of Russian is almost inexistent and they are subject to a forceful process not only of Sinicization but of Uyghurization: the Tajiks, without written language, are schooled in Uyghur, similar to the Uzbeks, while the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs re-transcribe their language into the Arabic alphabet, not into Latin or Cyrillic, which weakens their contact with the post-Soviet world even further.⁵¹

In 2007, China's Uzbeks counted no more than a small minority of around 16,000 persons, half of whom were settled in the Ili autonomous prefecture, while the other half was distributed between Kashgar, Urumqi, and the Changji Hui prefecture.⁵² Mostly urban, they are largely assimilated with the Uyghurs, to whom they are very close linguistically and culturally. They appear not to have developed any commercial contact with Uzbekistan.⁵³ Almost 80 percent of the Tajik population, which numbers around 44,000, lives in the autonomous Tajik district of Tashkorgan, while the others are distributed between the autonomous Kyrgyz prefecture of Kyzylsu, or in districts with a Uyghur majority in the Kashgar prefecture. They traditionally live from breeding and under Chinese domination have gone into agriculture. China's Tajiks are relatively distant from the Tajikistan Tajiks and are closer to the Pamiri, both in terms of their language (the two main dialects being Sarikoli and Wahani) and of their Ismaili, and not Sunni, religious practices. In the 1990s, the Chinese authorities tried to move them to the site of a new town close to Kashgar called Tajikabad, but without much success.

Despite Tashkorgan being situated on the Karakorum Highway which leads to Pakistan, and despite the Sino-Pakistani border's having been open for trade since the 1990s, the city is by no means a center of resale or transit; its modest markets cater uniquely for local consumption.⁵⁴ Pakistani traders only stop there on the rare occasion and usually go directly to Kashgar and Urumqi. The links with Tajikistan are

⁵⁰ Anonymous interviews conducted in Kashgar, Urumqi, Turfan, September 2008.

⁵¹ Fieldwork observations, Xinjiang, September 2008.

⁵² *Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook 2007* (Urumqi, 2007) pp. 74-79. All the other statistics on China's Central Asian minorities are taken from the same source, unless indicated otherwise.

⁵³ Fieldwork observations, Xinjiang, September 2008.

⁵⁴ Fieldwork observations, Tashkorgan, September 2008.

therefore minimal: the two border regions, those of Tashkorgan and of Badakhshan, are frequented by Chinese trucks, which go through the border pass post of Kulma/Kalasu, but the Tajiks/Pamiri have no part in this trade. Indeed, no amount of local cross-border trade has as yet taken shape: familial relations seem to have been cut; Beijing considers the zone a highly strategic one; the Tashkorgan Tajiks live without passports and therefore are unable to go abroad; and the Pamiri, who are moving into the trade business with China, serve as intermediaries with the rest of Tajikistan, but do not cross the border in the direction of China.

The Kyrgyz are in a similar situation. Estimated to number 181,000 persons in 2007, 77 percent of them live in the autonomous district of Kyzylsu,⁵⁵ while the remaining minority is dispersed throughout the rest of Xinjiang, in particular around Ili, Aksu, and Kashgar. They mostly live from traditional breeding. Those of Kyzylsu are denied passports, have almost no familial ties with the Kyrgyzstan Kyrgyz, and are not situated on the trade flows: the Kyrgyzstani traders that pass through the region go directly to the Kashgar bazaar or to Urumqi and have no particular interest to engage in trade with the Chinese Kyrgyz.⁵⁶ Whereas the Kyzylsu Kyrgyz are largely cut off from their Kyrgyzstan neighbors, the Urumqi Kyrgyz and those from the Ili region are more involved in the contacts with Bishkek. A small flow of China's Kyrgyz heading North has even taken shape. Once settled around Bishkek or Naryn, these latter try to use their linguistic abilities in Uyghur and Chinese to get work as translators at bazaars or to develop a shuttle trade. In 2006, Bishkek set up a repatriation program for ethnic Kyrgyz from abroad, referred to as Kairylmans, which is better organized than previous programs and which is supposed to enable them to obtain Kyrgyzstani citizenship and minimal social rights.⁵⁷ Principally from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, these Kairylmans reportedly number around 22,000 but only a few thousand of them come from China, and very few from Kyzylsu.

By contrast to the other Central Asian minorities, the China's Kazakhs, with their demographic dynamism (440,000 persons in 1949; 900,000 in 1982; 1.5 million in 2007), are potentially the most concerned by the Sino-Central Asian commercial niche. Two-thirds of them live in a compact manner in the Ili Kazakh autonomous prefecture (which includes those of Tarbagatai and of Altai), while the others are distributed in the Changji Hui autonomous prefecture (132,000), which

⁵⁵ *China Statistical Yearbook 2005*, "Geographic Distribution of Minority Nationalities", <http://www.allcountries.org/china_statistics/2_10_geographic_distribution_of_minority_nationalities.html>. (November 25 2008).

⁵⁶ Fieldwork observations, Kyzylsu region, September 2008.

⁵⁷ "Kirgiziia priniala Gosprogrammu po repatriatsii 'kairylmanov'" [Kyrgyzia adopted a State Program for the Repatriation of the Kairylmans], *CentrAsia*, 24 October 2006, <<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1161636120>> (December 3 2008).

counts a Mori Kazakh district, and in the Hami autonomous prefecture (49,000), which counts a Barkol Kazakh district, and finally in the Bortala autonomous prefecture (44,000). More sparsely populated groups of a few thousand persons are to be found in the provinces of Gansu (Aksai autonomous district) and of Qinghai (Haixi Kazakh, Mongol and Tibetan autonomous prefecture). Under the Communist regime, some Kazakh populations, faced with the arrival, around Ili, of numerous Han Chinese, but also of other minorities, including the Uyghurs, migrated and re-settled in the Altai and Tarbagatai prefectures. China's Kazakhs are confined to sectors of traditional activity: more than 80 percent of the active population works in breeding, fishing, or agriculture, while the remaining 20 percent is distributed between factory work, in particular the extraction of minerals, and public administration.⁵⁸

In the border areas, more and more Kazakhs are seeking to open small stands along the roads that the busses of traders from Kazakhstan travel in order to sell basic consumption goods as well as traditional Kazakh foodstuffs (milk products, etc.). Others have become intermediaries in the cross-border traffic of metal, buying metal scraps transported by Kazakhstani and then selling them to larger intermediaries who take them to Chinese factories.⁵⁹ Some try to get employment as translators in the shopping centers and industrial parks that are multiplying along the edge of the Sino-Kazakhstani border. However, being proficient in Kazakh does not suffice to get a start in this type of job since many Kazakhs from Kazakhstan, not to mention the non-Kazakh Kazakhstani, only speak Russian. This is why, like the Uyghurs, more and more China's Kazakhs learn Russian, either by means of private courses given by former Soviet citizens, or by Chinese compatriots who have lived in the former USSR, or by going to stay in Kazakhstan for a few months, in order to later open a small tourist agency offering "shop-tours" to Central Asians as well as to Russians from the Barnaul region. The current fashion of learning Russian seems to have really taken off in the North of Xinjiang and above all in the Yining region, an already historically russified region. Numerous small private schools have opened in order to host volunteers, often Hans, and the teaching of Russian seems to have turned into a promising professional niche.⁶⁰

Some Kazakhs from China also left to settle in Kazakhstan. The repatriation program for ethnic Kazakhs from abroad, called Oralmans, was launched in 1993 with the aim of modifying the country's

⁵⁸ Konstantin L. Syroezhkin, *Kazakhi v KNR: ocherki sotsial'no-ekonomicheskogo i kul'turnogo razvitiia* [The Kazakhs of the PRC: An Essay on Their Social, Economic and Cultural Development] (Almaty, 1994).

⁵⁹ Interview with researchers and businessmen of the Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries of the Gansu province, Lanzhou, 3 October 2008.

⁶⁰ Interviews conducted in Xinjiang, September 2008.

demographic equilibrium to the disadvantage of the Slavic populations. The 1993 Constitution, which refuses the principle of dual nationality, nonetheless made an exception for Kazakhs from abroad (art. 4), who were able to obtain Kazakhstani citizenship without a minimal duration of stay in Kazakhstan and were allowed to keep that of their country of origin, provided that the latter recognized the principle of dual citizenship. The 1995 Constitution abrogated this right but, in 1998, the authorities drafted a “Concept for the Repatriation of ethnic Kazakhs in their historical country” which has been complemented, in the 2000s, by programs borrowed from the Russian model for giving support to “compatriots living abroad” and a law on migrations. About 4.5 million persons living outside of Kazakhstan are regarded as Kazakhs, the majority of them to be found in Uzbekistan and China (1.5 million persons each), but also in fewer numbers in Russia (800,000), Turkmenistan (90,000), Mongolia (83,000), Kyrgyzstan (40,000), and Iran (30,000).⁶¹

Each year the state program announces the quota of persons in each country that are permitted to obtain the status of Oralman and the regions in which they are authorized to settle. They all receive some thousands of dollars enabling them to buy housing in a rural zone, are reimbursed for their transport costs, are exempted from military service, and—before receiving Kazakhstani citizenship (which takes about 6 months)—have their medical expenses paid, receive free Russian language courses, as well as exemption from a variety of administrative fees. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the quotas have largely been reduced (they have gone from 10,000 families in 1993 down to 600 in 2000 and back up to 1,500 in 2008).⁶² In addition, the quotas are only ever filled up by half to two-thirds, paradoxically because several tens of thousands of families are reported to have settled in Kazakhstan without taking up the program.⁶³ In total, between 1991 and 2007, more than 600,000 Oralmans have settled in Kazakhstan, including 60 percent from Uzbekistan, 14 percent from Mongolia and only 7.7 percent from China, or about 42,000 persons.

Repatriation from China is made more complicated by the complex procedures involved in obtaining authorization from the Chinese authorities, who are reticent to let qualified specialists, representatives of the intelligentsia, as well as the young, simply leave. On the other hand, the China’s Kazakhs have relatively few reasons to leave: their homeland

⁶¹ Gulnara Mendikulova, *Kazakhskaiia diaspora i irredenta: istoriia i sovremennost'* [The Kazakh Diaspora and Irredentism: History and Actuality] (Almaty, 2005).

⁶² Elena Iu. Sadovskaia, *Migratsiia v Kazakhstane na rubezhe 21 veka: osnovnye tendentsii i perspektivy* [The Migrations to Kazakhstan at the Turn of the 21st Century: Basic Tendencies and Perspectives.] (Almaty, 2001), pp. 108-124.

⁶³ In 2000, 22,000 families out of 42,000 are alleged not to have taken advantage of it. *Ibid.*

is China, not Kazakhstan, and a number of them see in the development prospects offered by Xinjiang multiple opportunities that they will not find in Central Asia. In addition, it turns out that the Oralman have had a hard time integrating in Central Asia: they speak a dialectical Kazakh different to that taught today in Kazakhstan, cannot read written Kazakh in Cyrillic, and above all do not speak Russian. Lastly, their daily culture is very different to that in Kazakhstan, their religious practice more devoted than that of the Kazakhstani, and their misrecognition of the Soviet past a hindrance to integration. Moreover, their obtaining of special aid from the state elicits jealousy and has given rise to a negative discourse that casts them as social security recipients who have flocked to take advantage of the Kazakhstani young state.⁶⁴ It seems that nearly half of the Oralmans are unemployed, and that some of them have even decided to return to their countries of origin.⁶⁵

According to the statistics of the association of Oralmans of Kazakhstan, created in 2005, more than 10,000 Oralmans have a tertiary education, and half of those latter were teachers prior to leaving.⁶⁶ If the Oralmans from Uzbekistan or Mongolia often come from rural milieus, a non-negligible part of the China's Kazakhs belong to the intelligentsia. They have completed higher education degrees in Urumqi but were unable to find a position fitting their competencies. The reason for this is that Beijing has been refusing the indigenization of Xinjiang administrative instances, whether by Uyghurs or other minorities; instead it prefers to award them to the Hans, since the fidelity of the latter is not doubted. For these university trained academics, Kazakhstan comprises a real opening and migration a guarantee of social promotion. The kazakhization of the state administration that Astana has implemented requires persons that master the Kazakh language. Given that an insufficient number of the Kazakh elite in Kazakhstan is Kazakh-speaking, China's Kazakhs have helped fill the linguistic quotas of state employees, and they are able to compensate for the administration's inability to translate all of its documents from Russian into Kazakh.

The China's Kazakh intelligentsia is also specialized in a specific niche, that of the teaching of Chinese, which is booming in Kazakhstan. The majority of teachers of Chinese language at Kazakhstani universities

⁶⁴ "Oralmany: realii, problemy i perspektivy" [The Oralmans: Realities, Problems and Perspectives] (Almaty: Tsentr sotsial'nykh tekhnologii), published on *Zona.kz*, 7 October 2005, <<http://zonakz.net/articles/9865>> (December 7 2008).

⁶⁵ "Kazakhstan stanovitsia privlekatel'noi dlia immigratsii stranoi" [Kazakhstan is becoming an attractive country for immigration], *KazInform*, <www.kazaag.kz/showarticle2.php?id=19279> (December 7 2008).

⁶⁶ "Programma podderzhki Soiuzu Oralmanov Kazakhstana" [The Program of Support of the Union of Oralmans of Kazakhstan], *Seimar Social Fund*, 19 August 2007, <http://www.gd.kz/client/seimar/2007/08/19/programma_podderzhki_soiuza_oralmanov_soiuza_kazakhstana.html> (December 8 2008).

are therefore Oralman.⁶⁷ This situation presents a certain number of problems: first of all, the Chinese language of these Oralman is often only of average quality, or even rather mediocre or dialectical, and does not conform to the standards of *putonghua*; and second, these teachers are not Russophones, which means that Chinese courses are only accessible to Kazakh-speaking students and not to Russian-speaking ones, who form the large majority, or else they are obliged to combine both languages, which thus diminishes the pedagogical efficacy. All the same, this linguistic advantage also has its downside, since the Oralman regularly complain of the fact that it is impossible for them to obtain positions of high responsibility due to their lack of Russian skills.⁶⁸

In addition to this specific social niche occupied by the Oralman elite coming from China, the majority of China's Kazakhs settled in Kazakhstan, like the Oralman coming from other countries, have experienced difficulties in integrating in the country. However, once again by contrast to those from Uzbekistan or Mongolia, the China's Oralman are able to make use of the trade between the two countries to find work. During the months preceding their receiving of Kazakhstani citizenship, China's Kazakhs with Oralman status are permitted to bring goods across the border without having to pay customs duties, as part of their right to re-locate. Many of them take advantage of this by starting up a trade in automobile parts and small electronics goods. This allegedly produces tensions with customs officials, who, upset at not being able to control these cross-border flows, often accuse the Oralman of being speculators.⁶⁹ In 2008, they apparently got to enjoy their role as traders in an even more effective manner: with the Olympic Games approaching, the Chinese authorities closed land crossings at the borders and limited the cross-border flows from Central Asia, but allegedly permitted the Oralman businessmen to continue their trade.⁷⁰

With their Chinese language-skills and their familial links with China, some Oralman have specialized in petty trade. Many of them work at the bazaars, either for themselves, or for Chinese businessmen, in particular at the *barakholka* in Almaty, which is a regular cause of

⁶⁷ Fieldwork surveys conducted in the Departments of Chinese in Almaty and Astana, February-March 2008.

⁶⁸ "Oralmanam postsovetskogo perioda otvetstvennye posty ne dostaiutsia" [The Post-Soviet Oralman Are not Acquiring High-Level Positions], *Zona.kz*, 28 May 2008, <<http://www.zonakz.net/articles/22102>> (December 6 2008).

⁶⁹ "Rodina vstretila na tamozhne" [The Fatherland Meets You at Customs], *31-yi kanal*, 8 November 2005, <<http://www.31.kz/31channel/print.php?uin=1103077523&chapter=1131475487>> (December 6 2008).

⁷⁰ Damir Mukhametov, "Tovarooborot s Kitaem" [Trade with China], *Biznes i vlast'*, 26 August 2008, <<http://www.and.kz/197/tovarooborot>> (November 13 2008).

protest by Kazakh traders.⁷¹ Some are also specialized in legal advice on export matters: their familiarity with Chinese formalities makes it possible for them to sell their services to Kazakhstani businessmen, who are generally not up to date with the Chinese administrative system.⁷² Those at the bottom of the social ladder, who often received an intermediate technical education in China, do not find any work in their area of specialization and are therefore constrained to petty street trade: this is the case, for example, in the village of Baibesik in a suburb of Almaty, where numerous Oralman families are settled,⁷³ while others open phone call centers to enable the population to make calls to China at a reduced price.⁷⁴ Once again, tens of small-scale jobs have been formed thanks to the development of relations with neighboring China, but they remain marginal and fragile. The same holds equally for the Oralmans and for the Kazakhs who have remained in China. The niche of teaching Chinese in Central Asia or Russian in Xinjiang is set to expand over the long-term but this is by definition a limited opportunity.

Conclusion

Trade with China has become a promising professional niche in Central Asia, particularly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and having Chinese language-skills is viewed as a guarantee of rapid social promotion. Although it is of a limited scope, a similar phenomenon is also noticeable on the other side of the border. As is the case in the province of Heilongjiang, where Harbin has recaptured its historical role as a contact zone with Russia, the population of Xinjiang is trying to revive a whole series of trades related to its regained proximity with Central Asia. Throughout Dzungaria, and in particular around Yining, having skills in Russian language opens professional opportunities similar to those having skills in Chinese on the other side of the border, although such opportunities remain limited to low-level professions as intermediaries. The complexity of the situation of the national minorities in Xinjiang and the political negative image of the region make the appropriating of

⁷¹ “U strakha glaza neveliki. Deputaty mazhilisa napugany rostom migratsii v Kazakhstan grazhdan KNR” [The Fear has Small Eyes. The Deputies Fear the Increase in Migrations of Chinese Citizens to Kazakhstan], *Liter*,

<<http://www.liter.kz/site.php?lan=russian&id=151&pub=9324>> (November 11 2008).

⁷² Aleksei Ikonnikov, “Mesto pod solntsem” [A Place in the Sun], *Kontinent*, 3 (188), 27 February 2007, <<http://www.continent.kz/2007/03/12.htm>> (September 24 2008).

⁷³ “Nashli delo po dushe” [They found the work they were looking for], *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, October 30 (2004),

<http://www.kazpravda.kz/index.php?uin=1152853640&chapter=1099106461&act=archive_date&day=30&month=10&year=2004> (December 9 2008).

⁷⁴ “I dym otechestva im sladok i priiaten?” [Is the smoke of the Fatherland sweet and pleasant to them?], *Liter*, <<http://www.liter.kz/site.php?lan=russian&id=165&pub=1685>> (December 10 2008).

that niche more complex than in Heilongjiang. Sino-Central Asian trade is for the most part in the hands either of large state-run enterprises, or of the Hans from Xinjiang—particularly the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (*Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan*)—or lastly of private entrepreneurs from Zhejiang, leaders in international commerce and having direct relation with the main production centers of the Chinese maritime front. As a result, the Uyghurs, Dungans, and Central Asians have a limited room for maneuver and their competitiveness remains modest.

A professional niche is nevertheless in the process of being constituted for these minorities. The Uyghurs, who were the first to see and develop it at the beginning of the 1990s, were quickly dispossessed of it, while the other, less-politically dangerous minorities like the Hui/Dungans and the China's Kazakhs, only really began to enter it in the 2000s. Small other interconnected networks appear also to be emerging, for example between the Dungans and Koreans, in the direction both of China and of South Korea.⁷⁵ As part of one of the great world flows of persons, commodities, and ideas, these marginalized communities are able to insert themselves in the new phenomena of globalization, develop transnational and cross-border strategies, and use the migration flows and diasporic communities as a bridge between two worlds. These minorities are not going to alter radically the evolution of Sino-Central Asian relations and instead remain the hostages and pawns of diplomatic relations which surpass them. However, at the sociological level they are nonetheless undergoing profound evolutions and are actually regaining their historical role as trans-nationalized mediators between the Central Asian and Chinese worlds.

⁷⁵ Fieldwork observations, Kazakhstan, February-March 2008.

Submission Guidelines and Process of Selection

Many of the articles are solicited, but authors are encouraged to send their work directly to the Editor who will suggest changes and determine the relevance of the articles for each issue. Articles can also be sent to any of our senior advisors, but the Editor has full responsibility on accepting or refusing individual articles. Shorter articles will be responded to within a week, whereas the response to longer analytical pieces could take up to three weeks. Some articles will be dealt with by the editors immediately; most articles are also read by outside referees. Copyright of articles remains with *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program*, unless another agreement has been reached.

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Regular Articles: Articles should be in-depth and offer a long-term analysis of the particular problem. References are preferred to support your evidence according to the Chicago system. The articles should aim at 7000 words. Each article should be summarized in an abstract of not more than 150 words and include keywords.

Commentaries: Commentaries require a three to four sentence introduction to the article based on a news hook. Rather than a general, overarching analysis, the article must offer considered and careful “judgment” on the issue supported with concrete examples. Recommended length is 2000 words.

References. All authors should adhere to the Chicago reference system in their articles. These should appear in the form of footnotes. References to books and articles should be contained in the notes and not in a separate reference list. Provide translations of non-English language titles.

Articles from Journals: Phil Williams, “Transnational Criminal Organizations and International Security,” *Survival* 36, 1 (1994): 96.

Books: Patrick L. Clawson and Rensselaer W. Lee III, *The Andean Cocaine Industry* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998)

Newspapers, News-agencies & Magazines: Toby Harnden, “Drug Trade ‘Reaches to Afghan Cabinet,’” *Daily Telegraph*, February 5 2006.

Electronic Sources: George Bush, “Principles of Ethical Conduct for Government Officers and Employees,” Executive Order 12674, April 12 1989, pt. 1, <www.usoge.gov/exorders/eo12674.html> (October 30 1997).

Subsequent references: a reference to a single source in the previous note should be replaced by ‘*Ibid.*’; in later notes by author’s surname, title and page number.

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Affiliation. On the title pages include full names of authors, academic and/or professional affiliations, and the complete address of the author to whom correspondence and hard-copies should be sent.

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