

Kyrgyzstan and China: Kyrgyz Views on a Giant Neighbor

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The study resulting in this publication was assisted by a grant from the Undergraduate Research Grant Program, which is administered by Northwestern University's Office of the Provost. However, the conclusions, opinions, and other statements in this publication are the author's and not necessarily those of the sponsoring institution.

This study was also assisted by the generosity of the Social Research Center at The American University of Central Asia, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. This paper is a product of research done in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan from June 26th, 2011 to July 24th 2011.

Introduction

The contrasts between China and Kyrgyzstan are striking. Compared to China's population of 1.33 billion, Kyrgyzstan's 5.5 million is miniscule. While China has been a unified nation-state for over 2,000 years, the country of Kyrgyzstan did not exist more than 20 years ago. China has enjoyed an average of 9%ⁱ economic growth the past two decades, while Kyrgyzstan's economy has primarily stagnated, leaving it with the lowest per capita GDP in Central Asia. These differences add an intricacy to the study of Kyrgyzstan and China's relationship. Added to these intricacies are Kyrgyzstan's status as a post-Soviet state and the differences between Chinese and Kyrgyz culture.

This paper will explore the relationship between Kyrgyzstan and China from the perspective of the Kyrgyzⁱⁱ. While China is the dominant player in many aspects of the relationship, it is nonetheless important to understand how China is perceived within Kyrgyzstan and how these views affect the relationship. In much of the existing research on this topic Kyrgyz views are often left out or delegated to footnotes. It is the author's belief that regardless of the lopsided nature of population or economics, short of military occupation any relationship between two countries requires consensus and cooperation from both sides. It is for this reason that this paper will analyze and emphasize Kyrgyz views.

Kyrgyz views of China fall into three distinct categories: The first involves Kyrgyzstan's place in Central Asia, and how China impacts Kyrgyzstan's relations with its other immediate neighbors. The primary roots of these views are economic factors. The second category involves views on Kyrgyzstan's relationship with other large countries, namely the U.S. and Russia. Historical ties to Russia and financial considerations such as aid drive the views in this category. Finally the third category consists of how Kyrgyz nationalism affects views on the Sino-Kyrgyz relationship. Kyrgyz views of themselves are wide-ranging and dramatically impact how they view outside countries. From these three categories emerges a picture of a people grappling to balance their sovereignty and pride in country with the opportunities and risks that a relationship with China offers.

Background

Interactions between the Kyrgyz people and China date back over a thousand years. As China expanded westward and sought to control the area that makes up modern day Xinjiang province and beyond, Han Chinese bumped up against ethnic Kyrgyz who had wandered the region as nomads for many centuries before. In the Kyrgyz cultural treasure *The Epic of Manas*, an epic poem passed down orally for at least 1,000 years, one of the enemies that the Kyrgyz hero Manas vanquishes is the Chinese. As Chinese influence ebbed and flowed near areas the Kyrgyz roamed, conflicts inevitably occurred. A myriad of battles took place between an ever-changing alignment of ethnic groups, with the Kyrgyz usually fighting against the Chinese alongside other Türkic tribes. A deep-seated mistrust for the Chinese slowly formed through these centuries, which remained until carefully manipulated by the Soviet Union in the 20th century.

In the late 19th century and early 20th century as China dealt with internal struggles and foreign incursions, the Soviet Union expanded throughout the Central Asian region. The Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic (KSSR), the precursor of today's Kyrgyzstan, was created in 1936. The Kyrgyz's mistrust of the Chinese became an

ideologically driven political control tool used by Soviet authorities, particularly beginning in the late 50's when the Sino-Soviet split occurred. By portraying the Chinese as an enemy whom Central Asian ethnic groups, Kyrgyz included, needed protection from, the Soviets maintained stability in the KSSR. Older members of the current Kyrgyz elite were usually educated in Moscow or St. Petersburg, and thus were particularly susceptible to the Soviet Union's worldview. There was a complete blackout on information coming from China, and information about China was carefully crafted to portray it as a hostile enemy that had departed from the true socialist path.

When the Soviet Union collapsed and Kyrgyzstan declared its independence on August 31st 1991, internal struggles dominated the first decades of its existence and China was little more than an after thought. Kyrgyzstan implemented Western style economic reforms and was seen as a potential beacon of democratic freedom in the middle of authoritarian Central Asian states. In 1998 Kyrgyzstan joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), a move that would have an important impact on the economic aspects of the relationship between Kyrgyzstan and China. Kyrgyzstan's economy plummeted in response to the rapidity of privatization. As well democratization eventually stalled under President Askar Akayev, although Kyrgyzstan's initial political uniqueness allowed for it to engage Western countries and court their aid while still remaining close to Russia. Kyrgyzstan was quick to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), an organization composed of primarily post-Soviet republics that wished to remain close to one another and Russia.

Throughout the 1990's China recognized that Russia sought to maintain an active sphere of influence in Central Asia, and saw no reason to contest this influence. Indeed for the most part China was fairly inactive in Kyrgyzstan and the rest of the region during the 90's, with a small amount of economic activity occurring mainly between China and Kazakhstan. The meeting of the Shanghai Five—China, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Tajikistan—in late 1996, marked a slight shift in China's focus as it began to make very measured diplomatic forays into the region. In 1999 agreements were made between China and Kyrgyzstan on the delineation of their shared 858 km border. While these agreements drew an angry response from some Kyrgyz officials and politicians, they removed a thorny issue that could have prevented normalized relations between Kyrgyzstan and China. Even further, the founding of the Shanghai Cooperative Organization (SCO) in 2001, based off of the original Shanghai Five, created a multilateral organization that provided an avenue for regional concerns to be addressed.

After the September 11th terrorist attacks in the United States, Central Asia and Kyrgyzstan more specifically came to the forefront of the United State's attention. This in turn led Russia and China to redefine their own roles in the region and Kyrgyzstan. Some scholars have viewed this as a new "Great Game" where the great powers in the world split up the region into spheres of influence and control. This is not the case however, as the competing powers have sought less tangible goals than the previous "Great Game" in Central Asia over a century earlier between the British and Russians, in which territorial gains were the primary objective.

In the present, Kyrgyzstan has successfully maintained relationship with all three powers involved in the region, and in some cases has been able to play the countries' competing interest off of one another. Kyrgyzstan's relationship with China has reached the point of importance where it could at some point in the future eclipse Kyrgyzstan's

relationship with Russia as the most important diplomatic relation Kyrgyzstan has. Whether this will actually transpire or not largely depends on how Kyrgyz paradigms of China continue to evolve.

China's Gateway to Central Asia?

Geographically Kyrgyzstan lies at the center of Central Asia and this is the foundation for many interactions with China. A quick look at a map of the region reveals tangled borders and tiny enclaves that seem to defy any pattern or planning. The Kyrgyz are distinctly aware of their positioning amidst these national borders. Many Kyrgyz hold the view that Kyrgyzstan can become an important corridor for trade between China and the rest of Central Asia. Much of China's economy is focused on consumer products, and

so a country such as Uzbekistan with over 27 million consumers is an important market. As Kyrgyzstan lies in between China and Uzbekistan, many Kyrgyz view China as an important partner for the future, transporting or selling its products through Kyrgyzstan.



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These views reflect the hard facts on the ground. While official data is lacking, it is estimated that as much as 75 percent of imports from China to Kyrgyzstan are re-exported to the rest of Central Asia, particularly to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan; as well as on a lesser scale to Russia and Afghanistan.ⁱⁱⁱ The re-export business is a massive part of the Kyrgyz economy, affecting almost all consumer product sectors. As the literally miles of stalls at Dordoi bazaar just outside of Bishkek attest to, the re-export business is one of the few bright spots in an economy that is otherwise characterized by massive corruption and a lack of investment. The Kyrgyz do not view this re-export business as entirely positively though. In some cases it is Chinese merchants who are immigrating to Kyrgyzstan to sell their goods to the rest of Central Asia. This has resulted in a backlash amongst local populations against Chinese traders. On March 12th, 2011 this antagonism towards Chinese in Kyrgyzstan manifested itself when two Chinese traders at Bishkek's Taatan-2 market were found stabbed to death^{iv}. The perception that Chinese trade is helping local Kyrgyz, not just Chinese companies and Kyrgyz politicians' bank accounts, is essential for a favorable economic relationship between the two countries to continue. However, as the aforementioned murder of Chinese traders shows, the potential for populist backlash against foreign companies and workers is quite substantial.

The growth of the re-export business and Kyrgyz views associated with this aspect of the Sino-Kyrgyz relationship occurs primarily for two reasons. The first is that China has been looking for more overland supply routes as it has become more concerned with securing how it gets resources from abroad. China became a net importer of oil in 1993 and has only increased its energy imports since then^v. A majority of China's energy imports come from the Middle-East and Africa and have to pass through the narrow Strait of Malacca. By adding transit routes through Kyrgyzstan to the growing transit infrastructure being built across the rest of Central Asia, China is diversifying the paths its imports take. In the event of an international conflict it would be more difficult for China's energy supplies to be cut off if overland routes are added to the equation. The Torugart Pass is the primary border post between Kyrgyzstan and China. While mountainous and somewhat treacherous due to a lack of road maintenance on the Kyrgyz side, the Pass marks an important point of trade between the two countries.

Critical to the future of this overland trade is plans for the construction of a Chinese-Kyrgyz-Uzbek railroad. The above-mentioned roads are inefficient, sometimes becoming impassable during the winter months, and limit the amount of trade between Kyrgyzstan and China. If a railroad were to be constructed it would lead to a trade bonanza between China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. For the Kyrgyz it would allow them to become the center of transit for Chinese products destined to Uzbekistan, preventing Kazakhstan and Tajikistan from playing a role in this trade. While recurring issues such as how the \$2 billion bill is split up and what companies are hired have kept the project solely in the discussion phase, the railroad is viewed by most Kyrgyz as a positive economic move for the country that should occur^{vi}. Mixed with these positive feelings over the economic implications however are suspicions of China having such a direct influence on a project within Kyrgyz territory. These suspicions will be further explored in terms of Kyrgyz nationalism in a later section.

The second and more important factor behind the positive growth of trade between Kyrgyzstan, and consequently to the rest of Central Asia, involves Kyrgyzstan's decision in the 1990's to become the first and only Central Asian state to join the World Trade Organization (WTO). When China was allowed into the WTO in December of 2001, the door was opened for a rapid trade increase between Kyrgyzstan and China. Within the last decade trade between China and Kyrgyzstan has increased from \$118 million in 2000^{vii} to \$4.2 billion in 2010^{viii}.

Year	Total bilateral trade (in millions of \$US)
2001	118
2006	1,640
2010	4,200

Sources: French Institute of International Relations, Zhonghua renmin gong heguo guoji tongji ju, *Zhongguo tongji ninjian 2001*, 619

Indeed, this is the primary reason that re-exporting has flourished in Kyrgyzstan. Traders in Kyrgyzstan are able to import cheap goods from China with low tariffs, and then re-export those same goods to other Central Asian states at higher prices that reflect their non-WTO status. Regardless of viewpoint on whether China is good or bad for Kyrgyzstan, the majority of Kyrgyz realize how economically involved China is in Kyrgyzstan, and how many Kyrgyz are affected by trade with China, whether as consumers or traders.

China seeks to maintain good trade relations with Kyrgyzstan for its own reasons as well. A foremost reason is Chinese concern for the province of Xinjiang. Xinjiang is the furthest West of all of China's provinces, is one of the poorest Chinese provinces, and is home to the Uighur minority, an ethnically unique Muslim population that makes up about 48% of the province's population^{ix}. Violent riots and protests have taken place numerous times by Uighur groups. In the most recent outburst of violence in 2009, it was unofficially reported that more than 156 people had died and over 1,000 were injured^x. One of the main solutions China has used to address concerns over stability in Xinjiang is relying on economic growth.

A stable Kyrgyzstan that China can export products made in Xinjiang to is important to maintain a restive population in Xinjiang. Parts of the Uighur minority have been pushing for an independent state of their own since the early 1930's when the short lived East Turkestan Republic was created to operate independently from Beijing's control. When social conditions in Xinjiang have been lacking, Uighur nationals calling for an independent Turkestan have been able to find larger audiences for their separatist views. When more Uighurs are able to find jobs, the desire to revolt or riot is lessened. This may seem like a simplistic analysis, however Chinese policy in Xinjiang has followed this belief in accelerated economic growth, often times subsidized by investment from the more prosperous provinces on China's East Coast. For this reason China looked on with concern during Kyrgyzstan's political revolutions in 2005 and 2010, worrying that besides political ramifications trade would slow as well. While the revolutions had negative affects on Kyrgyzstan's economy, in both cases long-term economic affects were limited and trade between China and Kyrgyzstan was able to rebound, with the IMF predicting 7% GDP growth in Kyrgyzstan for the year 2011^{xi}.

The Kyrgyz know that one of their biggest assets as a country is their geographic position. It is not by coincidence that in ancient times the Silk Road, one of the most important trading routes of all time, crossed through much of the area making up modern day Kyrgyzstan. The majority of Kyrgyz wish to exploit the blessings of their location, primarily by transporting goods from China to the rest of the Central Asian states. Trade plays a huge role in the overall state of relations between Kyrgyzstan and China. However, it is not the solitary factor in how the Kyrgyz view China. Adding to the multiplicity of views on China is the fact that China is not the only world power with a presence in Kyrgyzstan.

Many Potential Friends

It is hard to understate the importance of Russia to Kyrgyzstan, especially in the area of foreign policy. The Soviet Union had such a strong influence on Kyrgyz culture that today many of Kyrgyzstan's elites look to Russia as Kyrgyzstan's leading partner and friend in the world. This is precisely as Russia would like to have it. Russia has been

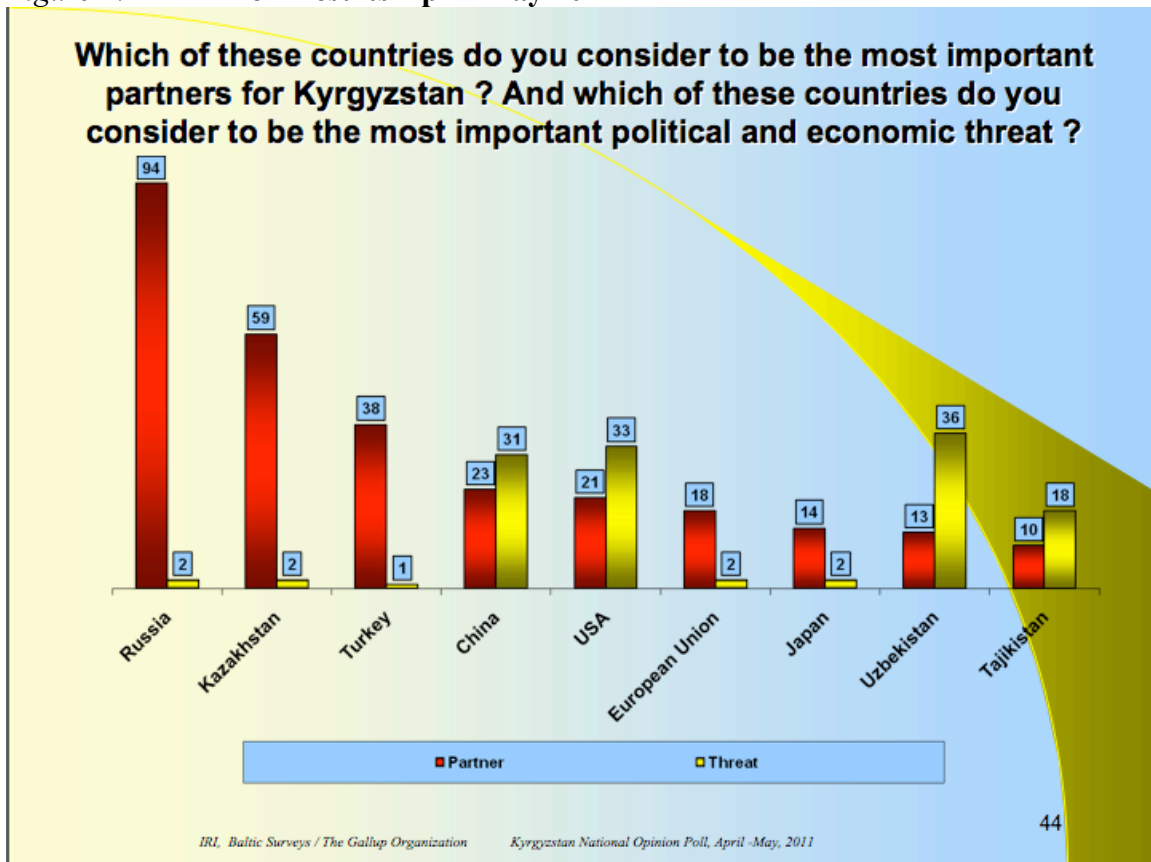
quite defensive over its influence in Central Asia, and Kyrgyzstan is no exception to this^{xii}. As more and more trade shifts from Kyrgyzstan-Russia to Kyrgyzstan-China, it remains to be seen whether political influence will shift along with it. Kyrgyz views on other major countries, and the subsequent impact on their views of China, are varied but primarily fall on two ends of a spectrum.

Pro-Russian Perspectives

On one end of the spectrum lies a very Pro-Russian viewpoint. This is embodied by the act passed by Kyrgyzstan’s parliament, the Jogorku Kenesh, on February 17th, 2011 that named a mountain after Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. Earlier in the year Russia agreed to a relaxation of the tax on gasoline imports to Kyrgyzstan, and thus naming the mountain after Putin was viewed by many as an appreciatory gesture. Regardless of what the exact meaning of this act is, the set of the Kyrgyz elite (and the population they represent) who supported it are usually older individuals, educated in Russia or the best of the Soviet education system, who view Soviet times with nostalgia.

The broader Kyrgyz population tends to lean more towards this heavily pro-Russian end of the spectrum. The International Republican Institute’s Bishkek office this past year did extensive polling of the Kyrgyz public. When asked which country was the most important partner for Kyrgyzstan, Russia was the clear winner. China placed near the middle of the possible countries, but also gained more responses that rated it as a threat than as a partner.

Figure 1.1 IRI Poll Results April-May 2011



International Republican Institute, Bishkek. May, 2011. Used with Permission

These results are once again an impact of the many years of Soviet culture. While Kyrgyzstan rapidly implemented changes after it became independent, it did not see the need to distance itself from Russia while these changes occurred. Furthermore, Russia was able to provide security for the region as a whole that Kyrgyzstan was not able to provide on its own. In June 2010 when ethnic fighting broke out in the south of the country, the interim government requested assistance from Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a pro-Russian organization entirely consisting of post-Soviet states. The violence resulted in over 110,000 ethnic Uzbeks fleeing to temporary camps in Uzbekistan, and officially in the deaths of over 400 people^{xiii}. China remained primarily uninvolved in helping Kyrgyzstan resolve the ethnic violence, promising aid but distancing itself from interfering in what it deemed a domestic struggle.

It is important to note that Kyrgyzstan only requested help from Russia and the CSTO. While the previous section discussed the rapid rise in economic relations between Kyrgyzstan and China, Kyrgyzstan's reaction to this event made clear that politically Kyrgyz-Sino relations have not progressed at such a rapid pace. China takes a back seat to Russia politically in almost all cases where the two have competed. The ruling coalition in Kyrgyzstan's parliament is pro-Russian. Many individuals familiar with the October 2010 electoral politics have stated that the opposition party Ata-Meken would have performed better in elections were it not for voters seeing the party as less pro-Russian and more open to the West and other countries. The party placed 5th overall and was the last party to pass the 5% of votes threshold required to win seats in the Jogorku Kenesh^{xiv}.

This lack of political influence in Kyrgyzstan should not be seen as a failure on the part of China. China has not pursued a strong political relationship with Kyrgyzstan with the same rigor that it has pursued building railroads and roads through Kyrgyzstan. Instead China has been much more subtle in its political interactions. In the Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek, buses can be seen with Chinese characters on their side translated into Russian that reads "A gift from the Chinese people to the people of Kyrgyzstan." China's political goals in Kyrgyzstan inevitably tie into its economic goals—namely maintaining strong trade between the two countries. As long as China sees its economic goals in Kyrgyzstan being met, it has no need for more direct forms of political participation or to compete with Russian influence in the country.

Non-Russian Perspectives

On the other end of the spectrum lies a segment of the population, decidedly smaller, that seeks to engage countries outside of Russia and the post-Soviet sphere. This small group see Kyrgyzstan as having an over reliance on Russia. This over reliance weakens Kyrgyzstan in the long term, as the prosperity of the country becomes tied to that of Russia. This segment of the spectrum seeks to engage non-Russian actors in Kyrgyzstan. The primary of these countries would be the United States.

The entrance of the United States into Kyrgyzstan as a political player after the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks dramatically changed the regional dynamics from a two player to a three-player game. While China responded to Russia's influence in the region with indifference, the entrance of the United States posed more of a threat to China and elicited a sharper response. Relations between China and the United States had

been strained the previous years due to incidents such as the accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1998 and the Hainan Island incident in April of 2001 in which a U.S. spy plane and Chinese fighter jet collided near disputed territory. A United States military presence in a country that directly bordered Xinjiang was viewed as cause for concern in Beijing. Consequently, it has widely been circulated that China (and Russia as well) have pressured Kyrgyzstan to limit the U.S. military presence at the Manas Transit Center, or to remove the U.S. military presence from the country completely.

The views of the Kyrgyz people on these events are difficult to gauge for two reasons. The first is that a disconnect exists between popular opinion and what Kyrgyz politicians have actually done. In 2009 amidst popular discontent with the U.S. presence at the Manas air base just outside of Bishkek, the Kyrgyz parliament moved to evict the United States from the air base. A short period of time later though the Jogorku Kenesh voted to extend the U.S.'s lease on the base, with a dramatic increase in the price of rent from \$17.1 million to \$60 million plus additional aid requirements totaling around \$120 million^{xv}. Clearly money was one of the primary factors that dictated this turnaround. A small minority of individuals supported the financial advantages U.S. rent payments brought to Kyrgyzstan. However, there was expressed a wide discontentment with how easily the government was persuaded through financial means.

The second reason that Kyrgyz views on the three powers involved in Kyrgyzstan are hard to gauge is that many individuals view Kyrgyz politicians as corrupt, and thus opinions of Kyrgyzstan's interactions with other countries are tainted with disdain for the politicians on the Kyrgyz side of the table. The rapid switch between ending the U.S.'s lease and then renewing it once more money became involved hardly left a good impression on the Kyrgyz people. Similar deals involving aid money from Russia and China correlating to favorable parliamentary acts hardly instill confidence in a population that has endured corruption on a widespread scale over the past 20 years. Because of this many Kyrgyz have expressed that most of the official agreements between Kyrgyzstan and China (as well as Russia and the United States to an extent) are just lip-service to the people, with the real details negotiated behind closed doors and more often than not benefiting individual politicians' financial interests. China has shown a willingness to participate in this kind of political game, more so than the U.S, and thus any new business venture or mining license gained by a Chinese company is viewed with suspicion by Kyrgyz citizens.

The dueling outside powers make Kyrgyzstan an interesting piece of the geopolitical puzzle in Central Asia and add complications to the relationship between Kyrgyzstan and China. To many Kyrgyz, both elites and average citizens, the benefits of these competing powers have been few and far between. Rather, most Kyrgyz view Kyrgyzstan as being taken advantage of by larger powers, often with the help of its own politicians. The continued importance of the political relationship between Kyrgyzstan and Russia has held the attention of the Kyrgyz and successfully distracted them from China. The entrance of the United States into the region added a further twist to this dynamic, with the Kyrgyz often finding themselves either pro-Russian or pro-West, with very few turning their attention eastward towards China. This further shows the distinction between the economic relationship between China and Kyrgyzstan, and the political relationship between the two. While the economic relationship has risen rapidly,

the political aspects of the relationship take a clear second place to Kyrgyzstan's relationship to other countries. Besides Kyrgyzstan's interactions with China, Russia, and the U.S, it is important to note how the Kyrgyz view their own country and national identity, and how these views affect the Kyrgyz-Sino relationship.

Kyrgyz Nationalism: Sovereignty Meets Necessity

Kyrgyz nationalism is undoubtedly the most complex factor of Kyrgyz views of the Kyrgyzstan-China relationship. Kyrgyz nationalism has appeared in various forms, particularly since the overthrow of Kurmanbek Bakiyev in April 2010. Debates over school classes being taught only in Kyrgyz, protests at mines operated by foreign companies, and discussions over the role of Islam in Kyrgyzstan all have their basis in differing definitions of Kyrgyz nationalism.

Because Kyrgyzstan has only been an independent state for 20 years, nationalism has developed on a varied and unique trajectory. Kyrgyzstan is a hodgepodge of ethnic groups who prior to the creation of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republics would not have been commonly governed. This was done intentionally to help stifle any form of local nationalism that would have been detrimental to Soviet control^{xvi}. Thus in some communities in Southern Kyrgyzstan, ethnic Uzbeks find themselves in the majority yet surrounded by predominately ethnic Kyrgyz areas. For both of these sides to feel a common unity and pride in their country has been a struggle.

Yet Kyrgyz nationalism has developed nonetheless, as the giant flag flying in the central square in Bishkek attests to. An October 2009 decision by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Inter-governmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage that attributed *The Epic of Manas* to the Chinese, induced a unified outrage throughout Kyrgyzstan at the perceived loss of one of their most precious cultural items^{xvii}. The government has sought to foster this nationalism derived from cultural pride by emphasizing it in public events. In 1995 Kyrgyzstan celebrated the 1,000-year anniversary of *The Epic of Manas*, and throughout Bishkek numerous sculptures and statues depict historical figures as well as literary icons and famous *manaschi*, or poem reciters. Nationalism was also apparent in a series of recent protests over a foreign company running the Kumtor gold mine in northeastern Kyrgyzstan, with the protesters demanding the Kyrgyz government have more control over the mine and its profits^{xviii}.



Central Square, Bishkek

It should therefore be noted that a sense of nationalism does exist in Kyrgyzstan, with a strong foundation in a rich cultural history. In regards to China though this nationalistic feeling becomes split into two competing schools of thought. The first is a nationalistic view that sees China as a threat to the future of Kyrgyzstan. The second is a nationalistic view that is pro-China due to Chinese respect for Kyrgyz sovereignty.

As was discussed in the introduction, the Kyrgyz have a mistrust of the Chinese that has developed over centuries, and it is this mistrust that lies at the heart of the

nationalist school of thought that views China as a threat. Many individuals expressed sentiments that can best be described as a mixture of hyperbolic paranoia and select facts from actual events. When pressed about growing Chinese influence, a recurring response was the rumor that the Chinese government was intentionally sending Chinese males into Kyrgyzstan as workers, who then marry Kyrgyz women in an attempt to slowly take over parts of Kyrgyzstan. To outside observers this is easily seen as absurd, however to some even well informed individuals, this kind of irrational fear was present. The post-Backiyev government's focus on Russia has done little to alleviate fears of a subtle Chinese plot to gain control of Kyrgyzstan.

Besides some of the more fringe conspiracy theories, many individuals—including a surprising number of NGO workers, political figures, and academics—view China as a threat to Kyrgyzstan's future. All of these individuals expressed a nationalist pride in Kyrgyzstan, but in most cases were realists to the point that they recognized the difficulties a country of 5.5 million people with a fragile economy has when dealing with a country such as China. This did not dampen their pride in Kyrgyzstan though; rather it was funneled into the aforementioned anti-Chinese sentiment. Most individuals who were very pro-Russian tended to fall into this camp, with Russia seen as the amiable friend and China the cunning future enemy^{xix}. It was therefore logical for Kyrgyz nationalism and an antagonistic attitude towards China to compliment each other.

The other school of thought involving Kyrgyz nationalism and China is clearly the more surprising of the two. In this school of thought it is viewed that China has done a remarkable job of politically staying uninvolved in Kyrgyzstan. This stands in stark contrast to Russian and Western countries that are perceived as constantly meddling in Kyrgyzstan's affairs. Therefore, because China respects Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty more than the other major powers, it is a friend of Kyrgyzstan. While this viewpoint was less common than the anti-Chinese viewpoint, it was prominent among individuals who were less pro-Russian than other Kyrgyz elites.

This school of thought is quite intriguing, yet it should be emphasized that Kyrgyz expressing these views were in the far minority. This is due to two main factors, namely that most Kyrgyz are preoccupied with focusing on other international players, and secondly that China not interfering with Kyrgyz affairs naturally does not garner attention. It is also hard to move beyond the distrust that most Kyrgyz have for the Chinese and to look at the relationship objectively without emotional impulses that instinctively lead to fear and a more anti-Chinese view.

Kyrgyz nationalism is the trickiest factor to gauge in regards to how the Kyrgyz view China, since the Kyrgyz themselves have a diverse interpretation of what Kyrgyz nationalism is and how it is expressed. The Kyrgyz have a very strong sense of cultural pride, and in most cases this translates into a strong sense of pride in Kyrgyzstan as a nation. However to some individuals this pride in Kyrgyzstan creates a sense of disgust in the current political environment, with politicians seen as squandering Kyrgyzstan's prospects and future prosperity. For others, Kyrgyz pride leads to a desire to not fall under the influence of outside countries. It is this diversity in the range of Kyrgyz nationalism that explains why there is such a split between the views of China that result from Kyrgyz nationalism.

Conclusion

It is difficult to accurately portray all aspects of Kyrgyz views on Sino-Kyrgyz relations since there is such a broad range of opinion about the many different facets of the relationship. This is a good thing for the Kyrgyz people, as a wide range of opinions hopefully leads to healthy debate on Kyrgyz foreign policy. As this paper has shown, Kyrgyz views are primarily influenced by the economic aspects of the relationship with China, Kyrgyzstan's relationship with other major powers, as well as Kyrgyz nationalism and how the Kyrgyz view themselves. These three categories are often times contradictory, as many Kyrgyz expressed positive views of trade with China while simultaneously expressing distrust and suspicion towards the Chinese. The future of the relationship between China and Kyrgyzstan depends on which of these three categories is viewed as most important to the Kyrgyz. Likely the sheer size of the economics involved in the relationship will dwarf the other two and lead to a relationship in which Kyrgyzstan depends on China for most of its GDP. The possibility exists that Russia retains its strong influence in Kyrgyzstan far into the future, or that Kyrgyzstan successfully manages to continue playing all three major powers off of one another. The hardest factor to make a prediction on is how Kyrgyz nationalism matures. While it would be very difficult for Kyrgyzstan to go in an isolationist direction, a move by the Kyrgyz to focus on their own internal problems before all other ones, while unlikely, could occur if dissatisfaction with internal problems trumps issues involving China. Moving forward though, the relationship between Kyrgyzstan and China is full of enormous potential rewards, as well as numerous risks, for the Kyrgyz people. While the eyes of the world may not be watching the interactions between these two countries, it is a relationship that nonetheless will have implications for the region. But for the Kyrgyz people, it is a relationship that will increasingly affect their daily lives.

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ⁱ Hanson, Stephanie. "China, Africa, and Oil." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Council on Foreign Relations, 06 JUN 2008. Web.

ⁱⁱ The term *Kyrgyz* has two distinct meanings: one referring to the Kyrgyz ethnic group, and one referring to citizens of the country of Kyrgyzstan. Throughout this paper the term *Kyrgyz* will be used to indicate a citizen of Kyrgyzstan regardless of ethnicity with the exception of descriptions in the Introduction section that refer to the Kyrgyz group in pre-Soviet times.

ⁱⁱⁱ Peyrouse, Sébastien. "Economic Aspects of the Chinese–Central Asia Rapprochement." *Silk Road Paper*. September. (2007): 18. Web PDF.

^{iv} "Markets Closed After Chinese Traders Killed In Bishkek ." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 14 MAR 2011. Web.

^v Hanson, Stephanie. "China, Africa, and Oil." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Council on Foreign Relations, 06 JUN 2008. Web.

^{vi} "Kyrgyzs, Uzbeks holding railroad talks, Chinese ambassador says." *Central Asia Newswire*. Universal Newswires, 08 JUL 2011. Web.

^{vii} Karrar, Hasan. *The New Silk Road Diplomacy*. 1st ed. Vancouver, BC: UBCPress, 2009.

155-56. Print.

^{viii} *China Daily*, June 15, 2011.

^{ix} George, Paul. "Commentary No. 73: Islamic Unrest In the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region ." *Canadian Security Intelligence Service*. Canadian Intelligence Service , 25 FEB 2011. Web. <<http://www.csis-scrs.gc.ca/pblctns/cmmntr/cm73-eng.asp>>.

^x Ramzy, Austin. "After Deadly Riots, Ethnic Tensions Heat Up in Urumqi." *Time* 07 JUL 2009: Web.

^{xi} Ahmed, Masood. *Regional Economic Outlook: Middle East and Central Asia* . Washington D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 2010. Web PDF.

^{xii} An exception that does exist is Uzbekistan, which initially was not as close to Russia as the other Central Asian states, choosing instead to side with Russia on some issues and to distance itself on others. After September 11, 2001 Uzbekistan agreed to host a U.S. military base against Russian wishes. However, politically the country is incredibly different from Kyrgyzstan, and thus there was little correlation between both countries engaging states outside of the Russian sphere and the relation between the two states . Within the past few years Uzbekistan has swung back towards the Russian fold and seems to be continuing on this path for the foreseeable future.

^{xiii} UNHCR. *Final Report on UNHCR Emergency Operations in the Republic of Uzbekistan*, July 23, 2010

^{xiv} *Al Jazeera English*. "No Clear Winner in Kyrgyzstan Poll" October 11, 2010

^{xv} Tynan, Deirdre. "Kyrgyzstan: US Armed Forces to Remain at Air Base for Afghan Resupply Operations." *EurasiaNet*. The Open Society Institute , 22 JUN 2009. Web.

^{xvi} Smith, Dianne. United States. *Opening Pandora's Box: Ethnicity and Central Asian Militaries*. U.S. Army War College, 1998. Print.

^{xvii} Bakesheva, Meri. "Kyrgyzstan protests UNESCO's listing of Epic of Manas as Chinese." *Central Asia Online*. N.p., 20 FEB 2010. Web..

^{xviii} "Kyrgyz Protesters Demand Revision Of Gold-Mining Contract." Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 16th, 2011.

^{xix} It should also be noted however that these feelings tie into the larger feeling of conflict inevitability many in Russia and China have towards each other.