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Core Member and the Success of Regional Organizations: A Study of China's Role in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization



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Abstract: *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), established in 2001, promotes cooperation in trade, economics, scientific technology, and energy. China, a key player in the group, has implemented measures to ensure fair distribution of its gains through regional cooperation and integration. China has proposed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to boost economic cooperation and connectivity in the SCO region. It has also offered financial assistance and technical expertise to other member states to boost infrastructure development and economic growth. China pledges to strengthen cooperation in trade, energy, and security, requiring cooperation and compromise for mutual benefits. These initiatives demonstrate China's commitment to regional cooperation and willingness to make sacrifices. In conclusion, China is now in favour of the SCO playing a bigger geopolitical role. Presently, China portrays the SCO as a vibrant and active alliance that aims to position itself as the protector of regional and international security.*

Key Words: SCO, China, Multilateral, Regional, Cooperation

Introduction

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), founded in 2001, is a political, economic, and security alliance comprising China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, and Pakistan, with the primary goal of countering extremism, separatism, terrorism, and promoting regional peace and stability. It also provides a forum for discussion and collaboration on a variety of topics between its member nations. The SCO has made a cooperative conversation forum available so that members of different sizes can balance their authority and interests. Even while relations within the SCO have contributed to a decrease in interstate animosity, some bilateral conflicts are

too difficult to resolve through consensus-building.

The SCO has made significant progress in non-traditional security cooperation, such as creating an institutional framework for information sharing and operating the RATS blacklisting system. The SCO has ratified a number of conventions and accords pertaining to transnational crime, and since 2002, regular joint military drills have been held. These activities are meant to foster mutual learning and trust while also serving as a deterrent. The SCO Charter, however, prohibits the coordinated deployment of the military forces of more than one SCO member state. Since 2003, trade between SCO members has increased

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dramatically, with China setting the bar for investment in energy and transportation infrastructure. This is because of the bilateral agreements made possible by the SCO. China's low starting position could have facilitated its expansion (Alimov, [2022](#)).

China, as a founding member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), has actively participated in the organization's policy-making and decision-making processes, promoting cooperation and stability among its partner countries through the use of the SCO as a forum for regional diplomacy. China has expanded the SCO mandate to address security, counterterrorism, and energy security issues. As the largest economy in the region, China is pushing for increased economic cooperation among SCO members, focusing on commerce, investment, and infrastructure development to build a prosperous and integrated region.

China now encourages the SCO to perform a larger geopolitical role. The SCO offers China a viable global forum for carrying out its economic plans. The current scope of the SCO now includes a region with a population of over 3 billion, or roughly one-third of the global GDP. As a result, the group—known as the "Shanghai Eight"—entered a new phase of its institutional growth. Since China is still building its complete and multifaceted ways, it has greater freedom to play in this institutional component because of its economic might, worldwide reputation, and credibility. Since China still has to establish the complete and multifaceted methods of its New Diplomacy, it has greater room to manoeuvre in this institutional area thanks to its economic might, diplomatic standing, and credibility (Aghaei, [2019](#)).

China's BRI involves significant investments in infrastructure projects in other SCO members, like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), aiming to improve trade and connectivity amongst Asia, Africa, and Europe, and uses the SCO as a crucial forum for regional cooperation. China utilizes the Security Council of the Pacific for regional security cooperation and diplomacy, fostering closer relations with its neighbours and promoting

stability and security. China's participation is crucial for achieving the SCO's objectives and promoting regional cooperation and development. The star of the SCO depends heavily on China's political and economic contributions, and in the years to come, the nation is predicted to continue to take the lead in determining the organization's goals and agenda.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization

The SCO, also known as the "Shanghai Five", was formed in the mid-1990s by the heads of state of the founding members aimed to reduce military forces in border regions spanning 4,600 miles. The primary goals of these agreements were to foster trust in armed forces and reduce military forces in common border areas. Uzbekistan was granted full membership in 2001 (Oksuz, [2009](#)).

Prior to the 9/11 attacks, in June 2001, the SCO was established, with Uzbekistan being one of the five original members. The group's common goals included resolving border conflicts and security concerns while eradicating terrorism, extremism, and secession from the area. Moscow was confronted with brutal warfare at this time from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Hizb-ut-Tahrir in Central Asia, the Chechen separatist movement, and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement in Chinese Xingjian-Uighur. These militant groups, as transnational supporters, compelled Russia, China, and the other CAR countries to create regional cooperation on counterterrorism and seek to eliminate the threats posed to their regimes (Tugsbilguun, [2008](#)). At the 2017 SCO summit held between June 7 and 10 in Astana (Kazakhstan), Pakistan and India were granted permanent membership.

Objectives and Principles of the SCO

At the St. Petersburg Summit in June 2002, the SCO Charter was signed, and on September 19, 2003, it came into effect. Following the summits' closing comments, a list of goals and tenets from the SCO charter were discussed:

- Promotion of a climate of mutual trust, friendliness, and good neighbourliness among the member countries.

- Growth and collaboration in preserving regional security and peace as well as the advancement of the democratic, political, and economic international order
- Working together to battle three evils: illegal immigration, the trafficking of weapons, and illegal drugs.
- The goal of cooperative efforts to advance the region's social, cultural, and economic development on the foundation of just

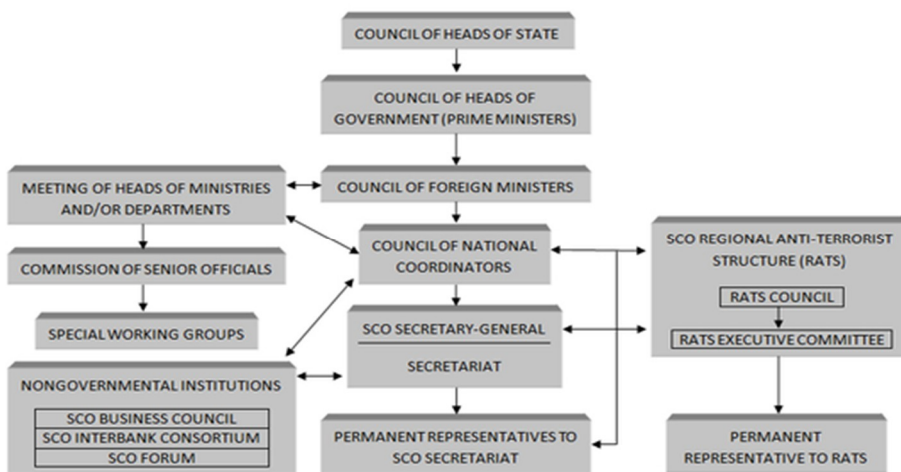
cooperation is to raise member nations' standards of living.

- Human rights respect and global integration coordination
- Working together to stop and end international hostilities.
- Working together to find answers to issues of the twenty-first century (The SCO Charter, [2004](#)).

The SCO's organizational structure

Figure 1

The structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization



Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/e/e7/Structure_of_the_SCO.png/550px-Structure_of_the_SCO.png

The SCO is an intergovernmental body that combines an unofficial cooperative setup with a formal organizational structure. Instead of using a majority vote, the heads of state decide all significant matters by consensus. The Head of State Council, which meets annually, is the highest decision-making body. Since both India and Pakistan are parliamentary democracies, their prime ministers, who have the same duties as the presidents of the other SCO members, attend the Council of Heads of State meetings. The Council of Heads of Government, the second-highest body, confirms the group's budget and convenes regularly to discuss matters

pertaining to multilateral cooperation (HAIDAR, [2020](#); Maduz, [2018](#)). Every year, the Council of Foreign Ministers convenes with the task of debating current affairs and the SCO's relationships with other international bodies ("Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers", [2007](#)). Within the group's framework, the Council of National Coordinators promotes coordination among the participating nations ("The First SCO Council", [2021](#)).

The organization's executive body is the SCO Secretariat. Beijing, China serves as the location of its headquarters. The concerned body's main

responsibilities include carrying out directives and decisions made by the organization, serving as the group's document repository, planning certain activities, and disseminating and promoting organization-related information. The organization's other permanent body is the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) Executive Committee, which has its main office in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Promoting cooperative efforts among the member nations with regard to the "three evils" is the primary duty upheld by the RATS. ("Information on Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure", 2006). The organization's funding pays for the expenses of the Secretariat and RATS, the two permanent entities. The non-charter-based bodies, whose members are non-governmental, were established in 2005 and 2006 (Maduz, 2018). The official language of SCO is Chinese and Russian ("About SCO", 2017).

By harmonizing national practices and laws in areas like cyber security and counterterrorism, the SCO member states may assure cooperation of law enforcement and security. Thus, the Security Council Secretaries meeting of the SCO brings together senior officials and secretaries of national security councils from all member states (Maduz, 2018).

Main Achievements of the SCO

The "Shanghai Spirit" serves as a spiritual home of the SCO for fostering interstate ties, addressing global concerns, and settling disputes internationally.

The core principles of the Shanghai Spirit are equality, mutual trust, respect for cultural variety, consultation, and mutual gain in the pursuit of shared growth. The "Shanghai Five" era began with the adoption of the Agreement on Mutual Reduction of Military Forces in Border Areas (1997) and the Agreement on Strengthening Military Trust in Border Areas (1996) by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. 2018 saw President Xi Jinping deliver the "five views" at the SCO Qingdao Summit. These perspectives include comprehensive civilization interpretation; extensive discussion, collaborative contribution, shared advantages

global governance vision; equality; open, inclusive, mutually beneficial collaboration; and discussion. As the SCO society with a common future built upon the five viewpoints, the economic community, the security community, the peace community, the civilization community, and the ecological community are all merged into one cohesive community.

The non-governmental professional groups, conference bodies, permanent entities, and other entities make up the twenty-year-old SCO. The SCO summit, regular meetings of the prime minister, parliament, defence, and foreign ministers, meetings of the attorney general and the supreme court, meetings of the interior minister and public security, meetings of the minister of culture, meetings of the ministers of economic and trade, meetings of the justice and home affairs ministers, and meetings of the finance ministers and central bank governors are just a few of the mechanisms for meetings that it has established. Expert forums such as the SCO forum tackle problems unique to particular domains, while the dialogue partner mechanism and observer state system encourage global communication and cooperation (Xue & Makengo, 2021).

Collaboration in the military and security spheres is highly valued by the SCO because it is critical to the organization's growth. Border security, military exercises, exchanges, and other mutually reliable military operations are examples of traditional security cooperation. The main goal of non-traditional security cooperation is counterterrorism cooperation. The Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism was published in 2001 by the Shanghai Five, the organization that preceded the SCO. By fortifying institutional structures, legal frameworks, and counterterrorism training, the SCO has improved cooperation in counterterrorism after the September 11 attacks. In 2020, the presidents of the state councils of the SCO member states published a declaration promising to stop the spread of extremism, separatism, and terrorism over the internet. The SCO has been actively involved in counterterrorism cooperation for the past 20 years, producing incredible

accomplishments and successfully preserving security and stability in Central Asia (Xue & Makengo, [2021](#)).

To improve security cooperation, the SCO must significantly increase the scope of its collaboration. These days, cooperation among the SCO spans several levels and disciplines, with political, economic, and educational cooperation being the most prominent examples. In order to resolve territorial disputes and improve the shared interests of SCO's countries, political cooperation is given high emphasis. Trade and investment, customs, agriculture, taxation, energy, transportation, and economics, are all included in the scope of economic cooperation. Since digital technology has become a key factor in economic growth, the SCO highlights the need to enhance global collaboration in the sphere of digitalization.

To foster educational collaboration, Russian President Vladimir Putin suggested creating the SCO University, and all of the member nations accepted his proposal. 74 SCO universities are included in the schedule; these include 10 from Tajikistan, 20 from China, 9 from Kyrgyzstan, 21 from Russia, and 14 from Kazakhstan. These universities carry out educational projects that concentrate on pedagogy, regional studies, environment, economics, and energy as well as information technology, nanotechnology, and other areas. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the SCO emphasized the need to enhance cooperation in public health, coordinate emergency response plans, and fortify scientific and technological collaboration in the fields of pharmaceuticals, vaccines, and testing supplies. China's rapid release from COVID-19 has helped other SCO members, especially because of the experience it has shared and its involvement in setting up the distribution and sharing of aid, basic supplies, and other items among them (Xue & Makengo, [2021](#)).

Failure of the SCO

Long-standing tensions between Russia and China have been positively reduced by the SCO and the Shanghai Group, which the SCO replaced. However, the organization is comparatively passive in daily operations and

unable to strategically compete with Russian influence. Despite its assurances of security, it is comparatively passive in reality and unable to rival Russian dominance in terms of strategic impact. In terms of trade, the SCO is unable to contend with the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) or the Customs Union. Growing Sino-Russian competition over Central Asian (CARs) resources, namely hydrocarbons and possibly uranium, might further hinder SCO energy-related cooperation in the years to come (Fredholm, [2015](#)).

The SCO has come under fire for its institutional flaws, lack of political will, and internal discord. Implementation issues are related to a lack of funding and the disparate internal and international agendas of members. Members of the SCO are hesitant to give the SCO authority to oversee and uphold group decisions. Examples include the Russian proposal to establish a unified energy market in 2006 and the 2003 global trade and economic cooperation project.

The competition between China and Russia has slowed the integration of the SCO. China has pushed for the establishment of the SCO Free Trade Zone to promote economic integration, while Russia has been eager to deepen SCO-CSTO military cooperation.

Due to its non-interference guiding principle and absence of a collective reaction mechanism, the SCO's low efficiency as a security organization is demonstrated by its inability to constructively react to circumstances like the unrest in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, in 2010. This raises doubts about its purpose as a security institution.

The traditional and unconventional security cooperation inside the SCO, according to analysts, has to be strengthened. They express scepticism on the efficacy of collaborative military exercises in addressing lone suicide bombers or civil unrest. A new non-military collective response mechanism, established by the SCO leaders in 2012, enables SCO countries to interfere politically and diplomatically with other SCO members in the event of internal problems. However, there is a disconnect between the SCO's goals and guiding principles and the members' actual behaviour, which

seriously damages the SCO's reputation and trust. All SCO members did not vote in favour of or against the UN General Assembly's resolution on Crimea, despite the fact that it is obvious that Russia's actions go against SCO statements and ideals (Grieger, [2015](#)).

The SCO Faces Several Major Challenges

The SCO has made significant progress in combating the "three evils", resolving border disputes, and fostering economic cooperation over the last 20 years. However, as it advances, it runs across roadblocks and issues with development.

The Great Power Game's Increasing Intensity

In Central Asia, the SCO is China and Russia's geopolitical counterweight to the US-led Western alliance. It is a well-established framework for regional security cooperation. In the SCO region, China, Russia, and India are the three superpowers. The US maintains forces stationed in Afghanistan and has increased its competition in Central Asia since the formation of the SCO. The two main US regional policies are the New Afghanistan Strategy and the New Central Asia Strategy. In addition to stepping up its attempts to conquer and rule over China and Russia, the US has strengthened its alliance with CARs countries known as "C5 + 1". Consequently, the SCO is presently experiencing never-before-seen geopolitical pressure (Xue & Makengo, [2021](#)).

Lack of a Strong Sense of Community

The "Shanghai Spirit" and a common future serve as the SCO's guiding principles. However, competition among China, Russia, and India has diminished the SCO's sense of coherence. The five smaller SCO republics prioritize national interests and development, while the four free states of Central Asia value their independence and sovereignty more than granting the SCO more authority. Pakistan joined the SCO for growth and security. The SCO's internal organizational structure has hindered its sense of community, making it difficult to respond swiftly

to member nations and regional political developments. China and Russia are leading the "2 + 4" pattern, calling for equitable participation from all member states (Xue & Makengo, [2021](#)).

The expansion of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has fundamentally changed the internal power dynamics inside the SCO. The "two-engine" approach of China and Russia broke down with the admission of India and Pakistan into the SCO in 2017. In terms of their connections with other significant SCO members, the "two presences" of China and Russia have therefore given way to the "strategic triangle" of China, Russia, and India. In order to deter China from becoming "dominant" in Central Asia, India has strategic requirements for joining the SCO. However, despite the SCO's expansion and the resulting complexity of ties between important member nations, the essential principles by which the "two presences" of China and Russia mutually guide the organization's evolution have not changed much (Xue & Makengo, [2021](#)).

Political unrest in Afghanistan contributes to rising opium prices and the export of 320 metric tons of pure heroin to international markets. The SCO partners should establish a unique anti-drug organization, such as an operational headquarters for the struggle against drug trafficking, to handle this issue. At its summit in Dushanbe, the SCO presented its vision for the future of Afghanistan. None of the SCO member countries digress from the advanced political stance that served as the basis for the UN Security Council resolution despite aggressive efforts. This would make it easier for Afghanistan to take part in regional infrastructure and transit initiatives, promoting peace and economic recovery. In response to transnational challenges coming from Afghanistan, the SCO was established. The Ukrainian issue has made it necessary to assess fresh problems and dangers, and cooperation in the areas of trade and commerce has to be given top priority. The next SCO summit in Uzbekistan is anticipated to be a turning point in the organization's operations and significantly advance peace, collaboration, and global growth in Eurasia (Alimov, [2022](#)).

The Interests of the Member Countries

The first regional intergovernmental and multilateral organization was established in a Chinese city favoured by China in order to reduce US influence in Central Asia, along with spreading access to CAR's energy sources. Economic and security have two kinds of interest for Beijing from the SCO: economic interest and fighting separatism (Riel Cohen, [2006](#)). The BRI involves the laying of roads and railway lines in the region, and the SCO is an important forum for China to pursue its security and economic recovery in relation to the BRI. By using the SCO platform, Beijing creates majestic regional connectivity and establishes bilateral and multilateral relations while providing encouraging opportunities through the BRI (Rab & He, [2019](#)).

At the start, China saw the SCO for a number of reasons, like border management between China and its neighbours in the SCO and security confidence-building measures; settlements of the disputed islands in the Amur and Argun Rivers with Russia; the SCO would help to reduce the growing security pressure on China from the US following the Hainan air collision incident; and it hoped that the group could assist in other areas of cooperation such as joint actions against the "three evils", transnational crimes, economic relations, and cultural exchanges. With a vast foreign currency reserve, a large and developing market, and a swiftly escalating global political power, China has an increasing potential to assist other SCO members. As a result, in addition to the \$1 billion in loans already announced, China is also enticing its businesses to grow in the area (Qingguo, [2007](#)).

China now supports multi-polarity, and the SCO serves as a regional organization for non-traditional security. Xi Jinping's proposal for SCO development:

- To promote mutual trust and benefits, respect for cultural diversity, equality of member states, consultation, and shared development.
- Mutual protection of regional security and stability.

- Development of pragmatic cooperation; conveying the spirit of BRI; facilitating international road transport between the Pacific and Baltic seas, as well as between Central Asia and the Indian and Persian Gulfs; food security cooperation; strengthening cooperation in agricultural fields
- Increasing people-to-people contracts and other non-governmental exchanges; establishing strong social and public opinion foundations for the growth of the SCO (Serikkaliyeva, [2017](#)).

Russia's presence in the group to strengthen and improve its ties with China and CARs for regional trust and partnership. After the post-Cold War era, Russia pursued "repair fences" with Beijing in the former Soviet CARs areas. Along the way, Russia starts working with the SCO to enhance its role at the regional and international levels. On one side, the SCO boosts Russia's image externally, while on the other, she gains the opportunity of equal decision-maker alongside China in the grouping (Scepanovic, [2022](#)). SCO is the best forum for Russia to restore its global position and its vision of a multipolar world. Russia wants to put into practice its motivations using the SCO platform to overcome the influential international order that is comprised of powerful Western nations. Moscow and Beijing's discontent with the current UN-based international rules-based system and its gradual erosion by the Western world The SCO enables both nations to voice their grievances through a multilateral forum that includes almost half of the world's population (Scepanovic, [2022](#)).

Russia's aspiration is the elimination of three evils and other regional issues with the help of the SCO (Scepanovic, [2022](#)). In this regard, Iranian writer Hamid Golpira visualizes the concept of [Zbigniew Brzezinski's](#) theory as control over Eurasian landmass means global domination and control over CARs is the domination of Eurasian landmass. He says that the main purpose of the emergence of this multilateral group is the enhancement of border security and curbing three evils in the region, but apparently, both Russia and China use SCO as a

vehicle for counterbalancing the US influence in CA (Golpira, [2008](#)). The SCO joint military exercises clearly started in 2002 and were later known as "Peace Missions," conducted by the member states on an annual basis. It consists of air-to-air missile practice exercises, offshore blockade drills, anti-terror exercises, and a range of simulated missions. Moscow's willingness to participate in joint military exercises cannot be ignored (Scepanovic, [2022](#)). The priority of Russia's Presidency of the SCO promotes strong foreign policy for developing a common position on global and regional matters ("Priorities of Russia's Presidency", [2020](#)).

Most of the CARs except Turkmenistan (which has a neutral position) are member states of the SCO (De Haas, [2017](#)). Like the rest member of the SCO, these countries join the grouping based on their respective interests. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, CARs shared many issues, including a sluggish pace of democratic development, concerns about radicalization within Islam, the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), drug trafficking, slow market-oriented economic reforms, unfavourable business and investment climates, widening income disparities, and widespread poverty. Numerous initiatives, including the Central Asian Economic Community (CAEC), the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) established in 2000, and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), were undertaken in an attempt to address these shared issues (Azarkan, [2010](#)). However, because of internal rivalries, conflicts, and disagreements among the participants, the Russian-Chinese leaders of this multilateral organization—which was viewed as a potential alternative forum for CARs—joined out of good intentions.

The CARs of the SCO have a wide range of objectives, such as managing and efficiently using natural resources, maintaining good neighbourliness, securing borders against external and internal threats; enhancing access to international economy and commodities markets, enhancing trade and commercial relations, and the growth of local and national

transportation networks. They clearly have the furthestmost care for the SCO's useful initiatives for regional security and development, like as counterterrorism efforts, drug trafficking enforcement, and confidence-building (Azarkan, 2010).

From the standpoint of the CARs, the formation of the Organization may be able to address four crucial demands: First and foremost, the organization supports the preservation of the political equilibrium between China and Russia, two of Central Asia's most significant and important neighbours, as well as the restraint of Uzbekistan's aspirations for regional hegemony, maintaining a political balance between Central Asia and regional stability and security that the SCO can afford. With better economic cooperation and aid, as well as open investment by Chinese and Russian companies that could be sponsored by the SCO, the SCO may advocate the continued existence or maintenance of CARs governments. It can help regional cooperation, water sharing, and border disputes (Azarkan, 2010).

The second most significant instrument after the SCO Charter, the SCO Treaty on Long-Term Good Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation, gives Pakistan the ability to address its concerns with Afghanistan and India, which makes it delighted to be a member of the SCO (Zahid, [2017](#)). Improved ties with the Shanghai SCO, whose goal is to foster economic cooperation amongst SCO members, are Pakistan's top priority. The primary rationale is that counterterrorism interests coincide with those of Pakistan and the SCO (Rahman, [2007](#)). Pakistan desires that the SCO foster collaboration with other nations in the areas of banking, tourism, energy, investment, and transportation. In this arena, Pakistan desires positive relations with Russia. Fundamentalism and extremism have always been popular in Pakistan. Pakistan is determined to resolve the matter with the SCO (Khetran, [2019](#); Zeb, [2018](#)). The SCO's RATS can provide help in cooperation with Pakistan. One of Pakistan's main SCO goals is to increase trade with the Gwadar port, strengthen ties with neighbouring nations, and use SCOs to help resolve the

Afghanistan conflict. Since it is the simplest trading route for CARs, Pakistan's Gwadar port can open trade gates for them (Zeb, 2018). Additionally, the SCO gives Pakistan the chance to expand trade and fortify its connections with European nations, something that was previously unthinkable (Khetran, 2019).

To overcome and meet the energy crisis India has strong expectations from the SCO to strengthen its energy cooperation with CARs. In addition, India also has energy interests in Russia and Kazakhstan, both outside (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) OPEC and members of the SCO. India has fewer economic ties with the CARs than successful political and strategic ones. For these, India can be facilitated through the SCO mechanism for energy, building trade, infrastructure, establishment of new transit routes, and maintenance of old routes through China, which can enhance India's economic cooperation with the region (Roy & Roy, 2019). After the American departure from Afghanistan, there will be a power vacuum in the country, which China will try its best to overcome through the mechanism of SCO. India cannot tolerate China's free run in Afghanistan. India can achieve this strategic interest by expanding its engagement with the SCO. It will provide a forum for India where it will underscore the ongoing disputes with China and Pakistan (Kumar, 2013). India also considers the SCO an important forum for preventing the rapidly changing situation in Afghanistan and the spread of religious extremism and terrorism in the region (Roy & Roy, 2019). India is seeking regional stability so its trade and export volumes can meet its high GDP growth potential, the highest in the world (Zahid, 2017). India will also be able to gain access to Central Asia via Lahore and Kabul and ultimately link up with the New Silk Road project (Amin et al., 2013).

China's Status in the Eurasian Region

East Asia's country is home to around 1.4 billion people, it is the third largest country in the world, covering around 9.6 million square kilometres (3,700,000 sq. mi.). The country is composed of 22 provinces (Hong Kong and Macau), five autonomous regions, four municipalities, and

two special administrative regions. The capital of the country is Beijing, although Shanghai is the largest city and a major financial hub.

China features five-year strategic plans in addition to industrial projects, a mixed socialist market economy, and a populace that is primarily middle class. By nominal GDP, it is the second-biggest economy in the world, but in terms of purchasing power parity, it is the greatest since 2016 ("World Economic Outlook", 2022). China's nominal share of the global economy in 2022 was close to 18%, although its GDP share was 18.6%. (Textor, 2023). China's economy is composed of public sector companies, state-owned corporations, and companies with a combination of private and public ownership. It surpassed the European Union's economy in 2021 ("China's economy surpasses", 2022). China's main drivers of economic growth are exports and private investment, even if the Chinese government has recently put a lot of focus on domestic consumption. However, China is well ahead of Russia and India in this area.

In terms of education, China spends a lot of money on education. China has a 96.84% literacy rate. Based on this study, [China](#) received the highest scores, followed by other SCO member countries ("Education Ranking by", 2023).

China controls 37 of 44 key technologies, according to research by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), while Russia and India trail in terms of scientific and technological development. Some of the major industries that China leads include drone manufacturing, artificial intelligence, electric batteries, nuclear energy, and quantum sensors. The fact that China is home to all 10 of the top research institutions in the world serves as evidence of its dominance (Jazeera, 2023).

Role of China in the Respective SCO

China became a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2001. The criteria for membership were based on mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, respect for cultural diversity, and pursuit of common development. China met these criteria and became a full member of the SCO in 1996. The SCO aims to promote regional

cooperation in different areas such as security, economy, and culture. The SCO was formed in Shanghai, China, and was given its name since China was one of the principal founding nations of the organization. This shows the special historical links between China and the SCO that China is proud of. Without a doubt, China has made it a priority to further the SCO's growth and it has been one of the organization's most powerful promoters (Huasheng, [2022](#)). China's accession was driven by its desire to enhance cooperation with its neighbouring countries in the CARs region and to use the SCO as a platform to address regional security challenges. Overall, China's membership in the SCO has been beneficial for both the country and the organization as a whole.

China's Relations with SCO Members before and after its Creation

The SCO was established in 2001, and before its creation, this leading country had close and smooth ties with the member states of the organization. China maintained diplomatic relations with several of the founding supporters of the grouping prior to the organization's creation in 2001. These countries include Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. As part of China's broader foreign policy strategy, it sought to strengthen ties with neighbouring countries to promote regional stability and economic development. China also engaged in bilateral and multilateral initiatives with these countries to address security issues, combat terrorism and extremism, and promote cross-border trade and investment (Fei, [2010](#)). The creation of the SCO further formalized and expanded China's relationships with these countries and provided a platform for deeper cooperation on a range of issues.

The country has been involved in various regional cooperation initiatives, such as the CAREC program and the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program (GMS). China has also pursued policies aimed at promoting regional stability and development. For example, it has provided economic assistance and infrastructure projects to many SCO member states, including Russia,

Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan (Linn and Pidufala, [2008](#)). Overall, China's ties to member countries have been characterized by an obligation to mutual cooperation, diplomacy, and peaceful resolution of disputes.

The creation of the SCO has had a significant impact on China's relations with its member states. As one of the founding members, China has strengthened its ties with all the SCO members. China has seen the SCO as a platform for expanding its influence in the entire region and promoting economic cooperation, trade, and investment. According to Saidkasimov Saidmukhtar, a former Uzbek deputy prime minister and former minister of international affairs, China's contribution to the foundation and continued growth of the SCO is considerable. China's trade with other SCO members increased by 40% year over year in 2021 to \$343.1 billion. SCO members' total international trade hit \$6.6 trillion, a 100-fold increase from 20 years prior. By the end of August, the China Development Bank (CDB) had finished 63 cooperative projects under the auspices of the SCO Interbank Consortium, providing member banks and partner banks with loans totalling \$14.6 billion. These and other evidence demonstrate China's important support to the growth of this international organization (Wenting and Xiaoyi, [2022](#)). China has implemented various policies to enhance economic, political, and cultural cooperation with other SCO member states. For example, China has provided financial assistance and investment in infrastructure development projects in many SCO member states (Qingguo, 2007).

The China-led BRI is a significant example of China's economic cooperation policy with SCO member states. The SCO platform will provide China with the chance to influence its bilateral and international relations as well as speed up the BRI planning process. China will actively participate in the national development and regional cooperation programs, as well as continually enhance the BRI's policy and contented for cooperation (Rab, & He. [2019](#)).

Furthermore, China has been cooperating with SCO member states to combat three evils. The

SCO's RATS is an important mechanism that coordinates regional cooperation in the fight against terrorism. China has also used the organization to enhance its security cooperation with other member states, particularly in the areas of counter-terrorism and regional stability. Li Shangfu, Chinese State Councilor and Minister of National Defense, declared that China is in a position to create effective and long-lasting security design. He noted that significant agreements were made at the SCO Council of Heads of State gathering in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, in September. China is prepared to execute the Global Security Initiative, strengthen strategic mutual trust, broaden areas of collaboration, and increase channels for cooperation to support peace and stability. The defence ministers agreed to increase strategic communication, concentrate on reaching a consensus, deepen SCO cooperation, and work together to maintain regional security and stability (Xinhua, [2023](#)).

Overall, China's policies towards SCO member states are aimed at deepening mutual trust, promoting cooperation, and maintaining regional stability. China's relations with SCO member states have been positive since the organization's creation, with both sides benefiting from increased cooperation and collaboration.

The creation of the SCO in 2001 had a significant impact on China's relations, behaviour, and policies towards other member states. China saw the SCO as an opportunity to promote stability, security, and economic development in the region, which led to closer cooperation with other members. China seeks to build smooth and strong political and economic relations with member states which has strengthened its position in the region (Xinhua, [2023](#)).

China's behaviour towards other states outside of the SCO has also been influenced by its membership in the organization. It has been more willing to engage with other countries in the region and promote regional cooperation in trade, investment, and security-like areas. Overall, the creation of the SCO has had a positive impact on China's relations, behaviour,

and policies towards other states and has helped to promote greater stability and cooperation in the region.

Economic Cooperation

Even in the face of obstacles to the global economy's recovery, officials and analysts think that increased collaboration in the fields of digital commerce, green development, and the services sector would strengthen China's economic and commercial ties with other SCO members. According to data supplied by the Ministry of Commerce, over the past few years, the SCO member nations have accelerated regional economic cooperation in digital sectors like smart manufacturing, telemedicine, and smart cities, following the trend of digital development.

According to Li Fei, the assistant minister of commerce, digital trade reduces asymmetries and transaction costs by enabling governments to link their information networks. Li said as much during the early September China-SCO Digital Trade Roundtable Seminar in Beijing. "We think that mutually beneficial collaboration in digital commerce, with the aid and effort of all parties involved, can help build an environment of thorough consultation, collaborative effort, and shared benefits, substantially promoting regional stability and sustainable progress," Li said ("SCO ties closer", [2022](#)).

China's trade with SCO members reached a record high of \$343.3 billion in 2021, up 40% from the previous year. Chinese businesses had made over \$70 billion in investments in other SCO members by the end of July 2021, and the value of their contractual projects in other nations exceeded \$290 billion. As a result, associated companies may collaborate with China to strengthen trade agreements and expand environmental, climate change, biodiversity, and low-carbon economic initiatives. For their economies to thrive, several SCO members mostly rely on trade in agricultural and commodity goods.

Many SCO member nations have incorporated the BRI into their regional cooperation programs and national development goals. Therefore, the BRI will continue to be an

essential part of the SCO's business growth. Members of the SCO should keep collaborating in order to contain the epidemic and enhance service collaboration, especially in the fields of education, logistics, and the development of intelligent and environmentally friendly infrastructure. In Qingdao, Shandong province, China built the China-SCO Local Economic and Trade Cooperation Demonstration Area in 2018. This space essentially creates a type of SCO-incubator by allowing companies from the SCO to collaborate in one place and share goods, technology, and expertise to develop new manufacturing techniques and areas of business (“SCO ties closer”, 2022).

Conflicts between China and SCO States

China's already experienced various disputes and difficulties inside the grouping. China and the other SCO members have been actively managing and resolving disputes and tensions. China has been addressing these issues through a variety of diplomatic channels, including high-level discussions, negotiations, and consultations with other SCO members. The border disputes between China and other SCO members, such as India and Kazakhstan, are one instance of this. China and India have had territorial conflicts with Kashmir, which is located in the Himalayas. Furthermore, some SCO members have expressed alarm over China's expanding political and economic sway in the area. These nations have reached agreements and resolved these concerns as a result of the SCO mediating talks and negotiations between them (Saini and Jacob, 2022). China, according to Zhao Huasheng, a professor at Fudan University in Shanghai and the centre's director, is essential to maintaining the political balance and harmonizing the interests of the other members. When it comes to domestic matters, China tries to stay out of the way and engages in dialogue with other members in order to reach a consensus (Grace, 2016). Nonetheless, as the SCO was established on the tenets of equality, respect for one another, and non-interference in the domestic affairs of other nations, its member nations endeavour to settle disputes amicably through communication and negotiation. Tensions have decreased and a

cooperative attitude among member states has been fostered by the organization's emphasis on economic cooperation and regional stability.

China's Policies towards SCO Member States

Numerous domestic and external variables have influenced China's policy toward SCO member nations. Some of the internal motivations include China's aim to enhance its regional influence and its goal of promoting stability and security in Central Asia. China has also attempted to further its energy and economic interests through the SCO. China's external policy towards the SCO has been shaped by the geopolitical environment of the region, namely in relation to the US and Russia. China has attempted to keep a balance in its ties with these two superpowers by using the SCO as a tool (Song, 2020).

From an ideological standpoint, China has worked to advance a multipolar global order, and the SCO is a vital forum through which China can establish alliances and advance regional cooperation with other nations. China is driven by geopolitical interests to strengthen its SCO membership and strengthen its strategic stance in Central Asia and China has attempted to deepen its economic connections with the SCO member nations in order to promote economic growth and development in the region. This has included making investments in trade and investment, supporting infrastructure projects, and fostering regional economic integration through programs like the CPEC.

The Distribution of Benefits of Cooperation among Members

The distribution of gains/benefits of cooperation among partners of this organization is a mix of equal and unequal. Some member states may benefit more from certain initiatives or agreements than others, depending on their level of development, resources, and other factors. However, the member states have expressed satisfaction with the progress made so far in promoting regional stability and cooperation through the SCO. In terms of economic cooperation, the benefits are distributed

relatively equally, with some countries benefiting more from specific projects or initiatives. In terms of security cooperation, there is a greater emphasis on sharing intelligence and coordinating efforts to oppose three evils. However, there may be differences in opinion or concerns over specific issues that could affect perceptions of the distribution of gains/benefits.

The SCO is committed to mutual benefit and cooperation, and it is hoped that the benefits of cooperation will be shared equally among all members. However, there may be areas where some member states feel they are not benefiting as much as others, which could lead to dissatisfaction. Despite this, the spirit of cooperation remains strong and member states continue to work together towards shared goals.

China's Contributions to the Member Countries

China has made significant efforts to promote regional cooperation and integration, including participating in initiatives and projects aimed at promoting economic, cultural and political cooperation among SCO member states. It has also taken measures to ensure equitable and just distribution of gains through regional cooperation, such as providing financial assistance and support for infrastructure developments. These efforts have been widely recognized and appreciated by other member states (Alimov, [2018](#)).

China has consistently proposed important initiatives in security, politics, the economy, and the humanitarian sphere during the existence of the SCO. Top Chinese officials frequently make thorough recommendations. So, after the PRC's leadership, Xi Jinping announced significant initiatives to advance the SCO's growth at the historic SCO Summit in Qingdao. They include China's readiness to launch a targeted 30 billion Yuan credit programme as part of the SCO Interbank Association, to train 2,000 law enforcement personnel for the SCO countries over the next three years, to offer member states 3,000 grants for human resource development over the next three years, and more. All of this demonstrates China's dedication to maximizing the SCO's potential and promoting the

socioeconomic development of its member nations (Norov, [2019](#)).

The majority of SCO members have endorsed and supported the BRI, which is being headed by Chinese President Xi Jinping, in part because it is founded on long-standing traditions of friendliness, respect for one another, and cooperative relationships that benefit all parties involved. Real opportunities for engagement in transport, a fundamental area of SCO activity, have also been made clear. Progress in trade and economic cooperation is directly impacted by an effective transit infrastructure, which also helps to forge enduring ties between nations.

China's foreign policy, which has been successful for 70 years, gives the SCO high-level exposure. Chinese diplomacy is struggling for global peace and upholding peoples' and countries' rights to secure and maintain their development. China's influence in resolving local and international conflicts also grows as it develops peacefully and gains economic strength (Norov, [2019](#)).

As the biggest and most influential member of the organization, China has contributed positively to the advancement of regional cooperation. China's BRI has provided significant funding and resources to improve infrastructure and connectivity in the region, facilitating transportation and trade, and promoting economic growth and development. This has helped to facilitate transportation and trade and promote economic growth and development among member states.

At the same time, China has also been criticized for its assertive behaviour in the region, particularly in relation to territorial disputes in the South China Sea. China's growing military and economic influence in the region has also raised concerns among some member states about its intentions and motivations. Despite these challenges, China's overall impact on the process of regional cooperation within the SCO has been largely positive. Its engagement in regional initiatives and efforts to promote economic growth and development has helped to bring member states closer together.

Conclusion

The SCO was founded primarily by China to address energy demands, ease tensions with CARs, and reduce threats of "three evils". The SCO is a global forum for China to carry out its economic plans. The current scope of the SCO now includes a region with a population of over 3 billion, or roughly one-third of the global GDP. China has been promoting economic cooperation between SCO states to promote shared support and trust and has been committed to maintaining regional stability through active participation in regional security mechanisms. China's efforts to manage, address, and control conflicts and tensions with other SCO states have been focused on promoting economic cooperation, maintaining regional stability, and using diplomatic channels to resolve issues through peaceful means. The SCO is committed to promoting regional cooperation and stability, and its member states work together to address any conflicts or tensions that may arise.

China's policy towards the SCO has been formed by a variety of aspects, with its economic

and strategic interests, its relationships with other major powers, and its desire to promote regional security and stability. China wants to improve the organization's economic standing, protect its infrastructure investments, and offer public amenities that the US formerly delivered. China has expressed backing for Iran's permanent membership in the SCO as China-Russia ties have grown more competitive inside the organization and Iran's geopolitical role has become more significant. China has taken several initiatives to ensure an equitable and just distribution of gains through regional cooperation and integration, such as the BRI, which aims to promote economic cooperation and connectivity among countries in the region. China has also provided financial assistance and technical expertise to other SCO member states to help them develop their infrastructure and increase economic growth. These initiatives demonstrate China's commitment to regional cooperation and its willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of others.

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