

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CHINESE AND RUSSIAN SCIENTISTS' APPROACHES TO STUDYING THE SCO

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Abstract

This article explores how Chinese and Russian scientists study the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and compares their approaches. It looks at how their views have changed as the SCO has evolved, especially given the shifting landscape of international relations.

Chinese and Russian researchers have developed unique perspectives on the SCO's role and future. Initially, both countries had similar views on the organization's goals and functions. However, recent changes have led to different expectations and priorities. Chinese scholars often see the SCO as a key player in regional economic cooperation, fitting into China's larger Belt and Road Initiative. On the other hand, Russian experts emphasize the SCO's importance in strategic and security matters, reflecting Russia's aim to balance Western influence.

The article highlights these growing differences, providing insights into how they might affect the SCO's future. Understanding these perspectives helps us see the broader impact of the SCO on regional and global stability. This comparison shows the complex relationship between national interests and academic research in shaping the future of international organizations.

Keywords Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Sino-Russian relations, Central Asian geopolitics, Greater Eurasia concept, modern international relations, emerging world order, regional cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

Most studies on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), including those by Western scholars, often view the SCO as an initiative by China and Russia to bolster their regional influence in Central Asia. While Chinese and Russian scientists do not dismiss this perspective, their own approaches to the SCO's activities reflect a broader understanding of the organization's role and significance, extending beyond Central Asia to the international stage. Given the substantial contributions of China and Russia to the SCO's formation and development, a comparative

analysis of how Chinese and Russian scientists evaluate the organization's activities is particularly valuable.

The evolution of Chinese approaches to the SCO: from the doctrine of combating the “three evils” to the concept of “a new type of international relations”

The views of Chinese researchers on the SCO are distinguished by the following features.

Firstly, in their fundamental researches one can see the conceptual foundations of the PRC's

strategy towards the SCO. In particular, professor at the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University, Zhao Huashen, points out six priorities in China's strategy in relation to this organization. This is the fight "against the three evils" (terrorism, extremism and separatism); ensuring the security of border areas; promoting regional stability; participation in the economic development of the region; preventing Central Asia from falling under the influence of countries or military blocs hostile to China; opening the way to energy resources of the countries of the region.

Secondly, Chinese researchers note that the conceptual elements of China's foreign policy determined the doctrinal and ideological foundations of the SCO. They point out that, first of all, concepts related to the "Shanghai Spirit" and the fight against the "three evils" are reflected in the SCO Charter of 2002.

Thirdly, the SCO is a product of China's "opening up" diplomacy following reforms launched in the 1980s by Deng Xiaoping. In this context, the opinions of another well-known specialist from the PRC on SCO issues, Pan Dapeng, are noteworthy. He believes that "the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization coincided with the period of the policy of reforms and the implementation of socialist modernization in China. For this reason, the formation of the SCO is inextricably linked with changes in the development of the PRC and its diplomacy... The SCO is the opening of Chinese diplomacy."

Fourthly, recently in China there have been attempts to interpret the SCO as an example of a "new model of international relations", with scientific justification. Thus, expert Wang Xiaoquan argues that the SCO, built on the basis of the "Shanghai Spirit" (mutual trust, mutual interest, equality, consultation, respect for cultural diversity, the desire for common development), is a unique international organization uniting states

with different civilizations and political systems. This allows, unlike other international structures, to promote inclusive cooperation as well as a "harmonious order".

Professor Li Haidong, in turn, views the SCO as an important institution for the implementation of the concept of "new Asian security." The Chinese researcher believes that this concept, being the opposite of the concept of "hard security" adhered to by US-controlled "alliances" (i.e. NATO), represents one of the mechanisms for implementing China's strategy to form a new world order based on multipolarity.

Along with this, Zhou Huasheng, in his latest research on this organization, also emphasizes that "The SCO is the main experimental and practical platform for Chinese concepts of a new international order. The SCO embodies a number of China's core international political concepts - opposing hegemony, unilateralism, Cold War mentality, bloc politics, unilateral sanctions, adhering to the UN Charter and international law, supporting multilateralism and promoting multipolarity. The main ideas proposed by China are reflected in the practice of the SCO, and we can say that this organization is the prototype of a new international order."

Fifthly, another group of Chinese experts is trying to prove that the SCO is a means of implementing the PRC's "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) initiative. Therefore, in their opinion, the SCO should be "harmonized" with the OBOR initiative. Following this logic, supporters of this group of scientists believe that within the framework of the organization's activities it is necessary to strengthen, mainly, economic cooperation. In practical terms, the SCO is regarded as a platform for improving the quality of planning and promoting the B&R initiative.

Russian approaches to the SCO: from Central Asia to “Greater Eurasia”

In Russian political science, the scientific school of researching the SCO is also quite developed. At the same time, the majority of Russian scientists and experts representing the first group (A.V.Lukin, A.I.Nikitin, M.L.Titarenko, E.P.Bazhanova, Yu.M.Galenovich and others) consider this structure as the result of strategic cooperation between Moscow and Beijing, which began mainly with resolving border problems and strengthening confidence-building measures in border areas.

The second group of Russian scientists (D.V.Gordienko, Yu.A.Nikitina, D.A.Borisov, E.Koldunova and others) characterize the SCO mainly as an organization on security issues. They believe that the formation and development of the association was determined by the political, military and economic situation in Central Asia at the end of the 19th and 20th centuries. These views are based on the idea that “the SCO is a mechanism that serves to ensure the strategic interests of Russia and China in Central Asia.” This includes not only the problem of competition between the SCO and the United States and NATO, but also the idea of strengthening cooperation between the SCO and other regional security mechanisms in Central Asia under the leadership of Russia and China.

In particular, the memorandum signed between the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure and the CIS Anti-Terrorism Center (ATC), as well as the CSTO Secretariat in 2018, is one example of the implementation of this idea.

The third group of Russian researchers argues that the SCO differs from Western regional organizations with its uniqueness. This feature lies in the fact that it is a structure that develops on the basis of different political and economic models, and also includes states that differ significantly from each other in their power and international

status. Representatives of this approach (V.V.Voronovich, M.Troitsky, M.G.Shilina, V.B.Mantusov, G.V.Podbiralina, T.E.Migaleva and others) see in the SCO an organization that not only deals with issues security and stability, but also has a much broader agenda.

At the same time, recently the influence of the concept of “Eurasianism” has been increasing in Russian studies devoted to the SCO. Scientists such as S.Karaganov, A.V.Kortunov, S.G.Luzyanin, A.V.Lukin, V.I.Yakunin, E.I.Safronova, Yu.V.Kulintsev, A.G.Larin, T.F.Bordachev, K.P.Kurylev are actively promoting the idea that the SCO in the near future should become one of the participants in the formation of a multipolar world order in Eurasia, cooperating with such regional structures as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the CIS, ASEAN and the CSTO. The SCO should act as one of the leading mechanisms for implementing the Russian Federation's Greater Eurasian Partnership initiative.

It should be noted that the “Eurasian” approach to the SCO is becoming increasingly popular among the Russian academic and analytical community in light of the deep crisis in relations between Moscow and the West due to the Ukrainian crisis. Thus, T. Bordachev believes that the implementation of the strategy of “Russia’s historical turn to the East”, currently promoted by the Kremlin, determines the further promotion of the Greater Eurasian Partnership project, including with the involvement of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. “Strengthening cooperation mechanisms within the SCO, maximizing the use of the opportunities inherent in the nature of the CIS, the development of Eurasian economic integration in new conditions and its interaction with ASEAN countries form the agenda of Greater Eurasia.”

In general, a comparative analysis of the scientific approaches of Chinese and Russian research to the

study of the activities of the SCO allows us to note the following.

First. Schools of thought in political science both in the PRC and the Russian Federation have a common understanding of the SCO as a structure created with their support to ensure stability and security in Central Asia at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, as well as to counter the geopolitical expansion of the West in the region;

Second. At the same time, as the SCO evolves, there is an increase in differences in the approaches of scientists from the two countries regarding the priority tasks of the organization in the new geopolitical conditions. Thus, if Chinese experts largely view the SCO as a model of "international relations of a new type" and a platform for promoting Beijing's foreign policy and geo-economic concepts and initiatives at the global level, then their Russian colleagues believe that the SCO should become one of the key mechanisms for building "Greater Eurasia".

Third. Based on an analysis of these growing differences in the perception of the future role of the SCO on the part of Chinese and Russian scholars, it can be assumed that such polarization may complicate the process of modernization and reform that has begun within the SCO.

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