REGIONAL POLITICS

CHINA'S APPROACH TO MULTILATERALISM WITH AN EMPHASIS ON ITS INFLUENCE IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Introduction

This research considers that from a regional perspective, multilateralism can be an effective way to understand great power behavior on the international arena. The way emerging great powers interact with neighboring countries, and the way they work with regional powers has always been one of the best indicators of their future intentions as a great power. This concept proves very useful when examining an emerging power's capacity and attempting to predict its future behavior in the international system. There is tremendous speculation around what kind of China we are going to see in the near future, particularly if China surpasses all other states economically. The objective of this research is to contribute to this question by examining China's use of multilateralism in its near neighborhood, more specifically by examining the form of multilateralism China is using to engage with Central Asia.

The author believes that it is counterproductive to examine China's use of multilateralism solely through the lens of western political science concepts. Given China's 3,000 years of historical relations with foreign countries and the way China has been conducting its foreign policy with bordering countries as one single entity, one civilization, Chinese political culture has a very

strong and unique history. Since China opened up to the West, many consider that it shares the same views as the West on international relations and political science. This perception is misleading and has led to confusion among many academics in their attempt to understand China. In order to avoid this confusion when explaining China's approach to multilateralism, this research will use both contemporary and Chinese traditional concepts.

The main research question of this paper is to what extent is China engaging in multilateralism in its relations with Central Asia? After analyzing China's use of multilateralism in today's international system, particularly with the Central Asian states, the analytical part of this research will address the extent to which China's use of multilateralism matches classical multilateralism principles.

Chapter One:
Defining Multilateralism

1.1. Multilateralism as a Theory

From the historical perspective, the concept of multilateralism first appeared in the twentieth century "as a central norm of diplomacy, joining bilateral diplomacy as another key diplomatic-culture norm underpinning the institution and practice of diplomacy."[1] It was also referred to as an alternative and a complement to bilateral relations. Geoff Berridge and Alan James (the authors of the *Dictionary of Diplomacy*) state with respect to multilateralism that "in the wake of real-world practice, the study of diplomacy added a second dimension to the bilateral form to arrive at multilateral diplomacy, which now means relations among three or more states at permanent or ad hoc international conferences."[2]

One of the most widely acknowledged definitions of multilateralism came from the well-known scholar of international relations, Robert Keohane, who defined it as follows: "Multilateralism can be defined as the practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through ad hoc arrangements or by means of institutions."[3]

According to Caroline Bouchard and John Peterson, the literature on multilateralism has not agreed on a common conceptual framework and concrete tools with which to measure the process of development.[4] Neither is there a commonly agreed definition that can explain current day multilateralism. They also argue that multilateralism "can take various forms, but in all cases it constitutes 'the scope (both geographic and functional) over which costs and benefits are spread' when actions are taken that affect collectivity."[5]

After reviewing the literature on multilateralism, the author has decided to choose the following definition of multilateralism as valid for the purpose of this article: "Three or more actors en-

[1] G. Wiseman, "Norms and Diplomacy: The Diplomatic Underpinnings of Multilateralism," in: *The New Dynamics of Multilateralism*, ed. by J.P. Muldoon *et al.*, Westview Press, Boulder, 2011, p. 13.

[2] Quoted from: Ibid., p. 7.

[3] Quoted from: M.G. Schechter, "Systemic Change, International Organizations, and the Evolution of Multilateralism," in: *The New Dynamics of Multilateralism*, p. 26.

[4] See: C. Bouchard, J. Peterson, "Conceptualizing Multilateralism: Can We All Just Get Along," *EU Seventh Framework Program, MERCURY*, No. 1, 2011, p. 29, available at [www.mercury-fp7.net], 10 January, 2012.

[5] J. Caporaso, "International Relations Theory and Multilateralism: The Search for Foundations," *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 1992, p. 602 (quoted from: C. Bouchard, J. Peterson, op. cit., p. 7).

gaging in voluntary and (essentially) institutionalized international cooperation governed by norms and principles, with rules that apply (by and large) equally to all states."[6] In theory, most of the current day multilateral instruments look the same, although there are always weak and strong states with their national interests bound to certain multilateral institutions. In this case, strong states play a decisive role in deciding the direction the institution will follow. For the remaining members, especially for weaker states, "multilateralism thus not only promised benefits but also constrained a hegemon."[7]

1.2. Main Principles of Multilateralism

From a practical point of view, the idea of multilateralism is "a deep organizing principle of international life."[8] For that reason, multilateralism possesses three main properties or three essential features: indivisibility, generalized principles of conduct, and diffuse reciprocity.[9]

Indivisibility

Indivisibility in multilateralism refers to peace and security. For J. Ruggie, indivisibility is a principle embodied in "a collective security system."[10] He basically considers that "it rests in the premise that peace is indivisible, so that a war against one state is, ipso facto, considered a war against all. The community of states therefore is obliged to respond to threatened or actual aggression, first by diplomatic means, then through economic sanctions, and finally by the collective use of force if necessary. Facing the prospect of such a community-wide response, any rational potential aggressor would be deterred and would desist. Thus, the incidence of war gradually would decline."[11]

This means that the core of collective security is the indivisibility of peace and moving toward a declining nature of aggression. This principle initially carried a legacy of Cold War understanding of security and peace. However, indivisibility in today's utilization is openly applicable to other tracks of multilateralism. As noted by A. Kingsley, "the principle of indivisibility, although originally intended only to counteract acts of aggression after the Second World War through collective security, has become indirectly relevant in the context of other issues, such as social, environmental or economic threats making indivisibility and unity also applicable in these cases."[12]

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[6] C. Bouchard, J. Peterson, op. cit., p. 10.

[7] G.J. Ikenberry, "Is American Multilateralism in Decline?" *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2003 (quoted from: C. Bouchard, J. Peterson, op. cit., p. 14).

[8] J. Caporaso, "International Relations Theory and Multilateralism: The Search for Foundations," in: *Multilateralism Matters. The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form*, ed. by J.G. Ruggie, Columbia University Press, New York, 1993, p. 53.

[9] See: Ibidem.

[10] J.G. Ruggie, "Multilateralism: An Anatomy of an Institution," *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 1992, p. 569, available at [http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706989], 7 February, 2012.

[11] Ibidem.

[12] A. Kingsley, *Multilateral Diplomacy as an Instrument of Global Governance: The Case of the International Bill of Human Rights*, Thesis diss., University of Pretoria, 2009, p. 36.

Generalized Principles of Conduct

According to Caporaso, generalized principles of conduct "usually come in the form of norms exhorting general if not universal modes of relating to other states, rather than differentiating relations case-by-case on the basis of individual preferences, situational exigencies, or a priori particularistic grounds."[13] For Ruggie, this principle is the main element that coordinates interstate affairs. He argues that "multilateralism is an institutional form that coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of generalized principles of conduct: that is, principles which specify appropriate conduct for a class of actions, without regard to the particularistic interests of the parties or the strategic exigencies that may exist in any specific occurrences."[14] For the purpose of applying this principle to security affairs, Ruggie gives an example where the generalized principle of conduct is "the requirement that states respond to aggression whenever and wherever it occurs—whether or not any specific instance suits their individual likes and dislikes."[15] This principle once more highlights the equal participation of member states in commonly agreed principles under multilateral institutions.

Diffuse Reciprocity

The term "diffuse reciprocity"[16] was first used by IR theorist Robert Keohane, and further utilized by J. Ruggie and J. Caporaso in multilateralism studies. Ruggie briefly summarizes this principle by saying in "diffuse reciprocity" "the arrangement is expected by its members to yield a rough equivalence of benefits in the aggregate and over time."[17] At the same way, Caporaso more or less supports Ruggie's characterization by identifying the following: "Diffuse reciprocity adjusts the utilitarian lenses for the long view, emphasizing that actors expect to benefit in the long run and over many issues, rather than every time on every issue."[18] For this motive, in terms of international governance, "actors recognize the existence of certain obligations and feel compelled, for whatever reason, to fulfill them."[19] In a few words, states are pleased to face the negative consequences of today's actions as long as there is the hope of pleasing in the future. The diffuse reciprocity principle also facilitates our view about certain states' choice of multilateral institutions, where there might be no significant objectives in the present, but greater gain in the future.

Indivisibility, generalized principles of conduct, and diffuse reciprocity are the main principles for understanding modern day multilateralism. We can also test China's multilateralism toward Central Asia against these three principles, but before doing so it is important to review China's specifics. This research argues that China's multilateralism in Central Asia is deeply rooted in Chinese tradi-

[13] J. Caporaso, "International Relations Theory and Multilateralism: The Search for Foundations," in: *Multilateralism Matters. The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form*, p. 54.

[14] J.G. Ruggie, "Multilateralism: An Anatomy of an Institution," in: *Multilateralism Matters. The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form*, p. 11.

[15] Ibidem.

[16] See: R.O. Keohane, "Reciprocity in International Relations," *International Organization*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 1986.

[17] J.G. Ruggie, "Multilateralism: An Anatomy of an Institution," in: *Multilateralism Matters. The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form*, p. 11.

[18] J. Caporaso, "International Relations Theory and Multilateralism: The Search for Foundations," in: *Multilateralism Matters. The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form*, p. 54.

[19] V. Rittberger, *Global Governance in the United Nations System*, United Nations University Press, New York, 2001, p. 5.

tional thinking, and therefore most of China's policies in the region carry elements of historical interstate relations.

Chapter Two:
China's Understanding of Multilateralism

2.1. Peaceful Development and the 24-Character Plan[20]

Taking into consideration China's uniqueness and its historical past as a civilization, it is necessary to understand China's current-day multilateralism from a Chinese perspective. Similar to claims made by Chinese officials about its path of development, which is "the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics," it can be argued that the same approach should be used in understanding China's approach to multilateralism via a concept of "multilateralism with Chinese characteristics."

Peaceful Development

Today, China's path of development is identified as peaceful development. China claims "a path of scientific, independent, open, peaceful, cooperative, and common development."[21] The last three notions (peaceful, cooperative, and common development) are directly related to China's multilateral attitude toward foreign countries. Under the notion of peaceful development, China claims that it will use diplomacy to create a stable international environment that as a result will enable China's domestic development. Therefore, Chinese diplomacy is trying to persuade those who are suspicious of this peacefulness by stating several "nevers." It says never to aggression, expansion, and hegemonic ambition.[22]

Under the notion of cooperative development, in order to pursue peace China will continue to encourage development and resolve conflicts through different forms of cooperative relations with other countries. Two key elements of the above-mentioned notions, diplomacy and different forms of relations, are inseparable parts of today's Chinese multilateralism in Central Asia.

According to the Chinese understanding, a peaceful international environment and favorable external conditions are a means of continued development. To achieve this peaceful environment, China's relations with other nations are formulated around five focal areas.[23] These five focal areas are very complex in terms of practicality and, by their nature, they are the main driving forces behind modern Chinese multilateralism:

- China's proper relations with the developed countries or major countries;

[20] The popular theory set forth by Deng Xiaoping defining China's development and its relations with the outside world in the 1990s was comprised of 24 characters (the 24-Character Plan).

[21] *China's Peaceful Development*, Information Office of the State Council, Beijing, 2011, p. 3.

[22] See: Ibid., p. 5.

[23] See: Ibid., p. 17.

- China's continued policy of developing good neighborly relations (other Asian countries are also included in this principle);
- Bilateral and regional cooperation to promote peace and stability;
- China's active engagement in global and multilateral issues and contribution to building a more equal and fair international order;
- Development of friendship or "people-to-people and cultural exchanges" between foreigners and Chinese people.[24]

Why did China choose a peaceful development path and is it really peaceful and cooperative? If China's multilateralism is formulated under peaceful development, what are the fundamental principles of and incentives for this specific choice?

China's growth dynamics convince most of us that sooner or later China will become a great power. For now China ranks second in the world economy and military spending. China has achieved the status of an Asian power and most of its activities are highly visible in its immediate neighborhood. China's activities vary from region to region, however, analyzing China's involvement in Central Asia from both present-day and traditional perspectives will help us to some extent to predict China's possible behavior in the future. China has been rising and falling throughout history. Therefore, it has been possible for China's neighbors to approximately predict China's behavior as a weak, rising, and strong power. It is also important to consider what kind of foreign relations pattern China has used in the past and whether or not it is still embedded in today's Chinese political culture.

2.2. The "Tianxia" Concept and China's Traditional Relations with Neighboring Countries

Tianxia *(All-Under-Heaven)*

Tianxia is a purely Chinese, historically important, traditional concept. Until recently, this concept had never been discussed internationally. However, Zhang Yimou's movie, "Yingxiong"[25] (Hero), which came out in 2002, and Zhao Tingyang's academic research, "Tianxia Tixi: Shijie Zhidu Zhexue Daolun"[26] (The Tianxia System: A Philosophy for the World Institution) published in 2005 paved the way to a new school of thought. Zhao's rediscovery of *tianxia* and its application to the modern world order has given rise to a lively discussion both in China and abroad. According to Ren Xiao, "the *tianxia* idea may provide an alternative way to think about various kinds of relationship in the world and to find a new and more constructive way forward."[27] There is no exact definition of *tianxia* as it is deeply rooted in all aspects of Chinese society and it has different implications as *tianxia* in the geographical sense and in the political and cultural sense.

[24] See: Ibidem.

[25] See: Zhang Yimou (Movie Director), *Yingxiong*, Beijing, 2002.

[26] See: Zhao Tingyang, *Tianxia Tixi: Shijie Zhidu Zhexue Daolun*, Jiangsu Jiaoyu Chubanshe, Nanjing, 2005.

[27] Ren Xiao, "Traditional Chinese Theory and Practice of Foreign Relations: A Reassessment," in: *China and International Relations. The Chinese View and the Contribution of Wang Gungwu*, ed.by Zheng Yongnian, Routledge, New York, 2010, p. 114.

Literally "*tian*" means sky, heaven, or top. While "*xia*" means what is below, subordinate and lower. Together it has an immense conceptual perspective that refers to "*tianxia*" as a "world order,"[28] as "all-under-heaven,"[29] and finally *tianxia* as "*zhongguo*" (China).[30] As Zheng Yongnian argues, *tianxia* was established based on a natural order that existed between family members, such as between father and son. The same relations applied to public affairs between emperor and minister, and subsequently an equivalent approach was adopted in its foreign relations with nations other than China.[31] Is China's current approach to multilateralism based on old *tianxia* principles or does it follow modern IR multilateralism principles? According to Zheng, "while the *tianxia* and the modern international order are two distinguishable orders, there are also similarities between the two orders in terms of their organizing principles."[32]

Feng-Gong *System* *(Tributary System)*

The tributary system goes back to the northern Hsiung-nu (209 BC-AD 155) nomadic state's relations with the Ch'in and Han dynasties (221 BC-AD 220). Before establishing the tributary system, relations between the two states were based on peace treaties under the ho-ci'in policy (established in 200 BC), whereby Hsiung-nu negotiated peace with goods annually received from the Chinese. In spite of this treaty, Hsiung-nu continued to terrorize the Chinese court by attacking frontier villages in order to increase receipts. Another point of note is that under this policy both China and Hsiung-nu ranked as equals.[33] However, in 133 BC, Han Wu-ti decided to end this unacceptable equal status and destroy Hsiung-nu in order to establish a new type of interstate relations. Hsiung-nu was defeated in 119 BC, but it took the Chinese another fifty years to make Hsiung-nu agree to China's tributary system. The reason Hsiung-nu finally agreed was that it discovered a huge economic benefit in making symbolic tributary submissions to China.

A remarkable period in Tang-Turkish relations unfolded when Tang emperor Li Shih-min practiced a second offensive strategy similar in nature to Han Wu-ti's offensive strategy toward the Hsiung-nu state mentioned above. Li Shih-min stands out among the Tang emperors for his creative foreign policy. When he observed a problematic recurring succession in the neighboring Turkish Empire, he sent Tang troops to conquer the Turks. After invading the Turkish Empire in AD 630, he was creative enough to accommodate Turkish leaders in the Tang system and make them Tang officials by letting them govern their own tribes.[34] In so doing, Li Shih-min used the Turks to expand Tang territory to the west, to what is today Xinjiang, even reaching as far as modern-day Central Asia.

The two offensive cases mentioned above carried out by Han Wu-ti and Tang emperor Li Shih-min, with regards to the northwestern nomads, clearly demonstrated that regardless of their Confu-

[28] Zheng Yongnian, "Organizing China's Inter-state Relations: From '*tianxia*' (All under Heaven) to the Modern International Order," in: *China and International Relations. The Chinese View and the Contribution of Wang Gungwu*, p. 293.

[29] Ibid., p. 301.

[30] Ren Xiao, op. cit., p. 111.

[31] See: Zheng Yongnian, op. cit., p. 302.

[32] Ibid., p. 293.

[33] See: Th.J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier. Nomadic Empires and China*, Blackwell Publisher, Oxford, 2006, p. 45.

[34] See: Ibid., p. 145.

cian education and despite laborious ministerial discussions in the Chinese court, these two Chinese rulers made a decision to change from a defensive to an offensive strategy. Wang Yuan-Kang, who researched Confucian pacifism and the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) security policy, concluded that the Ming strategic choice of power was based on the function of relative power. According to Wang, during powerful periods (1368-1449) of the Ming dynasty, it adopted an offensive policy in its relations with the Mongols. However, during 1450-1548, when Ming became comparatively weaker, a defensive policy was adopted, and "defense became the chosen strategy only after China had lost the capability to launch offensive campaigns."[35]

Today, the United States has a foothold in Central Asia, as well as in Southeastern Asia, which can be viewed as a relative power with respect to China. For China, in terms of external threat, the United States holds the same nature of threat as the Mongols in the 14th-15th centuries. One of the main reasons for China's multilateralism in Central Asia is particularly related to the United States' unilateral policy in the region. China has not yet reached the point where it can challenge the U.S. globally, therefore while it has comparatively sufficient power in the region, China has been pursuing its foreign policy, which is multilateralism, in order to eliminate the U.S.'s power regionally.

Nowadays, for China, multilateralism in Central Asia also means a certain type of defense system, which is traditionally regarded as defense through the tributary system. This will be elaborated on through so-called "*si yi*," which is a concept that means defense through barbarians.[36]

Si Yi *(Defense through Barbarians)*

After a period of offensive relations with neighboring nomads, Chinese officials realized that the best way to secure China from outside forces was to establish tributary relations with neighboring states. A senior official of the Ming dynasty put forward this idea by saying the following: "Mollifying the barbarians with *de* (virtue), convincing them with strength, and making them defend their own territories are the best options China could have."[37] China had cultivated special concepts for dealing with barbarians and the most important ones were to use *de* (virtue), *li* (rites), and *ji mi* (loose rein) instead of using force. Most of the time, using offensive policies with barbarians had led in the past to internal uprisings and state failure, therefore cultural and economic attraction and most importantly making barbarians a "*shu-bang*" (dependent state)[38] ultimately produced better efficiency in maintaining peace.

Wang Yuan-Kang argues that China also had an advantage by making neighboring states economically dependent on China through tributary trade. By suspending tributary relations, China could punish disruptive dependent states and enforce certain behavior, which would be considered economic sanctions in modern-day terms.[39] Once the bordering state became economically dependent on China, the Chinese court had political influence and used that state as a buffer zone to protect its territory from outside powers. One of the periods when *si yi* was used most efficiently was in China's Tang relations with the Uighur Empire (745-840). The reason the Uighurs became the richest

[35] Wang Yuan-Kang, *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2011, p. 114.

[36] See: Ren Xiao, op. cit., p. 107.

[37] Ibidem.

[38] See: Ibid., p. 105.

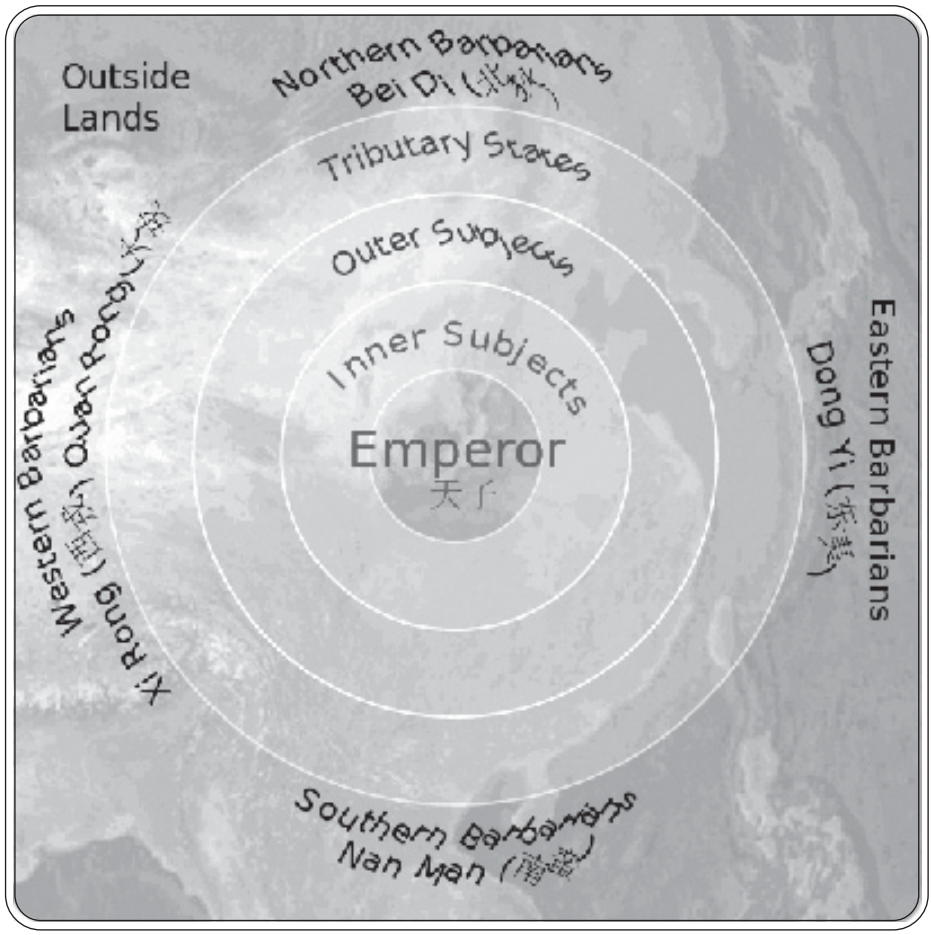
[39] See: Wang Yuan-Kang, op. cit., p. 148.

nomads can be explained by their vital position and support of the Tang dynasty from possible foreign invasions. In return, the Uighurs received annual gifts of 20,000 rolls of silk, honorary titles, and other goods.[40] Today the main parts of the Uighur Empire have been absorbed and constitute the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC), while Central Asia has replaced the Uighurs and become one of the main security challenges to modern China's frontier policy.

For example, for *tianxia* China, states located in the northwestern parts were considered as tributary, dependent, and buffer zone states. Today, through trade and investment, China is trying to make the Central Asian states stronger and at the same time dependent on China. Whereas today some Central Asian states' trade dependency on China has already reached roughly 40%, as is the case for

Figure 1[41]

Sinocentrism and the Role of the Tributary States as Security Actors



[40] See: Th.J. Barfield, op. cit., pp. 150-152.

[41] See: "The Sinocentric System," *New World Encyclopaedia*, available at [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Sinocentrism], 10 March, 2012.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, political dependency is also shifting, at least from Russia to China. For China, it means the threat coming through Central Asia from outside powers, particularly from the U.S., has to some extent been eliminated. This gives China further motivation to develop multilateralism in Central Asia.

Throughout many centuries, the *feng-gong* system of the *tianxia* concept, which ultimately led to *si yi* with neighboring countries, taught Chinese officials to create a systematized way of interstate relations. This can be clearly explained through a detailed comparison of China's traditional and modern foreign policy toward Central Asia. Modern-day China's perception of Central Asia and its security policy strategies are closely tied to the policies that were cultivated during *tianxia* China. The author considers that the ultimate success of modern China's foreign policy toward Central Asia is multilateralism, which can bring guaranteed security to the northwestern part of China only through *si yi*.

Chapter Three:
China's Foreign Policy Toward Central Asia

3.1. China's Perception of the Central Asian Region

From a realpolitik perspective, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian region had no geopolitical strategic importance, it was simply a geographical location. For the United States, Central Asia was strategically unimportant except for oil and gas, and Russia believed Central Asia to be within its traditional sphere of influence. Meanwhile, China looks at Central Asia through the prism of the Xinjiang dilemma. According to D. Kerr, Central Asia is close to "regionalism without a region."[42] However, discovery of Central Asia's energy potential, its increasing geostrategic importance due to Afghanistan's proximity, and China's involvement in Central Asia changed the old picture of the region. China expert Zhiqun Zhu thinks that China's main strategic concern with regards to Central Asia is the stability of the region. Any conflict that might occur in Central Asia is likely to spill over into Xinjiang.[43]

Xinjiang is one of China's three primary internal problems after Taiwan and Tibet. The Xinjiang Province, which is predominantly inhabited by Muslim Turks, was invaded by the Qing Dynasty in 1877, at which point it was named "*Xin Jiang*," which literally means new territory.[44] Since then, even though the Uighurs were under Qing authority, they were always in search of greater autonomy and even sovereignty. For example, the rebellion of 1933 was caused by strong Han involvement and restrictions on making pilgrimages to Mecca, which ultimately led to the foundation

[42] D. Kerr, "Central Asian and Russian Perspective on China's Strategic Emergence," *International Affairs*, No. 86, 2010, p. 143.

[43] See: Zhiqun Zhu, *China's New Diplomacy. Rationale, Strategies and Significance*, Ashgate, Surrey, 2010, p. 117.

[44] See: M. Oresman, "Repaving the Silk Road: China's Emergence in Central Asia," in: *China and the Developing World. Beijing's Strategy for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by J. Eisenman *et al*., M.E. Sharpe, Inc., New York, 2007, p. 81.

of the Turkish Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkestan. The second major attempt to create an independent state followed the Uighur uprising in 1944 and led to the establishment of the East Turkestan Republic in 1945.[45]

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the creation of the independent states to the West of Xinjiang further contributed to the existing Xinjiang issue. The main trouble for China was the Uighur diaspora and its activities in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan is home to 50,000 Uighurs, while Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan host 180,000 and 30,000 Uighurs, respectively.[46] At the same time, there are 1.24 million Kazakhs, 150,000 Kyrgyz, and 30,000 Tajiks living in Xinjiang (figures from 2003).[47]

Beijing had no other option than active diplomatic involvement in the newly independent Central Asian republics. Immediately after Central Asia gained its independence, the Uighur diasporas took an active stance in supporting Uighur independence in Xinjiang. In the case of Kazakhstan, the Uighurs formed the Uighur Liberation Organization and even registered it in April 1991. A year later, the Uighurs in Kyrgyzstan successfully established the Free Uighuristan Party.[48] At the same time as these Uighur organizations were forming, Central Asia was becoming a hub for other radical movements, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Hizb ut-Tahrir, and other extremist movements of Ferghana Valley.

Despite Beijing's exerted efforts over two decades to resolve the Xinjiang issue, the July 2009 ethnic clash in Xinjiang proved that it is still very crucial and sensitive. Another critical concern is that approximately 300 to 700 Uighurs were detained during the U.S.-led operation in Afghanistan.[49] Moreover, feasible links between the Uighurs and al-Qa'eda confirm that Central Asia is an important security concern for China and will become an even more critical issue after the U.S. withdraws from Afghanistan in 2014.

The evolution of Chinese foreign policy toward Central Asia can be viewed in three major phases.

- The first phase occurred between 1991 and 1995, when China was heavily involved in building strong diplomatic relations with the Central Asian states. During this period, embassies were established in all the Central Asian countries and the main consultations on border issues began.
- The second phase was conducted between 1996 and 2001 and was focused on economically driven diplomacy. It was a period of economic development in Xinjiang and at the same time a period of booming bilateral trade relations with the Central Asian countries (see Table 1).

The two above-mentioned phases were important prerequisites for China's ultimate political objective, which is frontier security, focused on in the third phase. This phase covers the period from 2002 until the present. It concentrates on stabilizing the region using all possible means. Beijing's third phase diplomacy is all about securing the region from internal conflicts and conflicts that might be caused by foreign involvement. In order to achieve its objectives effectively, Beijing has decided to be creative and has therefore chosen multilateralism as a guiding principle. The first multilateral organization initiated and created with China's the support in Chinese history is the SCO.

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[45] See: H.H. Karrar, *The New Silk Road Diplomacy. China's Central Asian Foreign Policy since the Cold War*, UBC Press, Vancouver, 2009, p. 34.

[46] See: J. Eisenman, E. Heginbotham, D. Mitchell, *China and the Developing World. Beijing's Strategy for the Twenty-First Century*, M.E. Sharpe, Inc., Armonk, New York, London, 2007, p. 67; R. Dwivedi, "China's Central Asian Policy in Recent Times," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, No. 4, 2006, p. 142.

[47] See: H.H. Karrar, op. cit., p. 20.

[48] See: Ibid., p. 71.

[49] See: J. Eisenman, E. Heginbotham, D. Mitchell, op. cit., p. 66.

Table 1

Chinese Trade Turnover with Central Asian Countries since 1991

Year	$m
1991	—
1992	422
1993	512
1994	360
1995	486
1996	674
1997	699
1998	588
1999	733
2000	1,041
2001	1,478
2002	2,798
2003	3,305
2004	4,337
2005	8,297
2006	10,796
2007	16,038
2008[50]	25,000
2009[51]	25,900

Source: V. Paramonov, A. Strokov, O. Stolpovskiy, *Rossia i Kitai v Tsentralnoi Azii: politika, ekonomika, bezopasnost*, Printhouse, Bishkek, 2008, p. 158.

[50] See: Zhiqun Zhu, op. cit., p. 114.
[51] See: E. Wong, "China Quietly Extends Footprints into Central Asia," *The New York Times*, 2 January, 2011.

3.2. Analyses of Modern Chinese and Traditional *Tianxia* Foreign Relations

After studying China's traditional understanding of the world and China's relations with its northwestern neighbors in the context of *tianxia*, the author would like to compare its main elements with the current-day Chinese approach to foreign relations with Central Asia. The author will argue that there is no fundamental change between *tianxia* and the modern Chinese approach. To support this argument, the author would like to draw your attention to the chart provided below, as well as its analyses:

Table 2

Modern Chinese and Traditional *Tianxia* Foreign Relations

Stages	Four Stages of Modern Chinese Foreign Relations with Central Asia	Four Stages of *Tianxia* Chinese Foreign Relations with its Northwestern Neighbors
1	Diplomatic Relations	Receiving Envoys
2	Economic Relations	Entering into Tributary Trade Relations
3	Security Relations	Mollifying and Civilizing Neighbors through Titles
4	Multilateralism	Defense through "*si yi*" (barbarians)

First Stage

The modern Chinese diplomatic approach in the initial phase of interstate relations was also practiced by ancient Chinese emperors. The only difference is that this time China took the initiative to approach other states first, whilst in ancient China it was always neighboring states that came and asked for diplomatic relations.

At this first stage the two sides came to an agreement on further development of their relations. As already mentioned, the deal was to acknowledge the Chinese ruler as the ruler of the world, accepting ritual ceremony where *kowtow*[52] was performed, and finally accepting its own tribute status by paying material tribute. In return, China promised trade, support in the event of attack, and noninterference in each other's internal affairs. A comparable scenario occurred in the early 1990s, when China, during its diplomatic negotiations, assured its Central Asian partners of equality, support, and respect for each other's sovereignty. Even though at the time some politicians in Central Asia were feeling intimidated by their giant neighbor, the Chinese government once again provided reassurance by accepting consensus decisions and not projecting its power.

[52] See: Lingvo Dictionary definition "to touch the forehead to the ground as a sign of deference: a former Chinese custom."

Second Stage

In *tianxia* China, once an agreement was reached at the first stage, states entered into the tributary trade system. It was voluntary for states to enter and they were not forced. Instead, as it was economically beneficial for barbarians, most of the time it was the northwestern nomads who pressed China to accept their request for a tributary system.

Tributary trade relations were performed only between tributary states and the Emperor through the Chinese court. Today the picture has changed slightly compared to this period, however similarities still remain. Right after the successful establishment of diplomatic relations, bilateral trade between China and Central Asia skyrocketed. Total trade turnover between the two increased from $527 million in 1992 to $25.9 billion in 2009.[53] To date it has not slowed, in 2011 Central Asia's main trade province XUAR increased its foreign trade by around 33%, whereby XUAR's export amounted to $16.8 billion and import to $6 billion. In the same year, the five Central Asian states accounted for 78% of the XUAR's foreign trade.[54]

According to Zhiqun Zhu, "trade between China and Central Asia has been favored by both sides throughout history. The only change today is that the traders have replaced jade, tea, silk, and rhubarb with oil, gas, weapons, and other consumer products."[55] Of course we cannot compare the exact value of the silk or the quantities of silk rolls with today's finished products coming from China, but the point here is the pattern of trade relations has more or less remained the same.

Third Stage

Once diplomatic and economic relations have become institutionalized and systematized, China strives for what should be considered the ultimate goal, the third stage—security. This has been, and still is, the core of China's approach to foreign relations. Having effective diplomatic and trade relations with barbarians was considered a slow transforming process from barbarianism to a more or less civilized culture. China assumed that in doing so it would mollify the barbarians and eventually turn them into civilized cultures close to the Chinese level of civilization. Ultimately the intention of this transformation was to create a peaceful neighborhood.

The so-called "good neighborly policy," "harmonious world," and "public diplomacy" concepts of today's modern China are very close to what is mentioned above and intended to create a stable environment around China's immediate neighborhood. In addition, modern day China's support of, or at least warm relations with the authoritarian regimes in Central Asia is very similar to the way in which traditional China dealt with local rulers. For example, in *tianxia* times being recognized by China as a local ruler and receiving titles from the Chinese emperor advanced the legitimacy of those rulers in their home country. This kind of support from the Chinese Emperor was especially helpful for local rulers during periods of rivalry over power.[56]

Since independence, most of the authoritarian presidents of Central Asia have been very proud of being invited to Beijing by the Chinese government and hosting Chinese officials. Both were considered actions that further legitimized their power. The behavior of the Kazakh and Uzbek presidents stand out as being most comparable to the *tianxia* tribute state rulers in their relations with the PRC.

[53] See: E. Wong, op. cit.
[54] See: "Xinjiang Foreign Trade Rises 33 pct in 2011," *China Forum,* 8 February, 2012.
[55] Zhiqun Zhu, op. cit.
[56] See: Wang Yuan-Kang, op. cit., p. 150.

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev has had the most interaction with the Chinese government. His visits were viewed as a big achievement and represented as such in the Kazakh media, especially compared with other Central Asian states. Unlike Nazarbaev, Uzbek President Karimov did not visit Beijing, instead he seemed to be waiting for an important reason before taking the opportunity to go to Beijing. When the Andijan insurrections occurred in May 2005, Karimov was heavily criticized by the West, especially by the United States. Later in November 2005, Uzbekistan asked the U.S. to leave the Karshi-Khanabad base as soon as possible. The feeling of being marginalized by the international community motivated Karimov to make his long-awaited trip to Beijing. In doing so he regained his legitimacy at home and made a strategic shift toward China and Russia.

It is worth noting that the Central Asian rulers have much more to share with the PRC than with the Western states. In contrast to Western credits and loans, Chinese loans have no binding human rights fulfillment or democracy requirements behind them. It is unfortunate that this trend will continue to grow in the future and is likely to become one of the serious obstacles in Central Asia's democratic transformation.

Fourth Stage

Why did China opt for multilateralism in its most recent relations with Central Asia? Is it, as many China experts argue, really an untraditional and new foreign relations approach for China? In light of the information provided above,[57] it is valid to argue that from a security perspective today's multilateralism approach chosen by modern China is comparable to the traditional concept of *si yi*. The ultimate objective of Chinese officials was to use the barbarians living in the surrounding countries as a defense orbit (see Fig. 1) in order to fully assure China's physical safety. In so doing, they hoped to guarantee the preservation of a long-lasting civilization and further prosperity was hopefully guaranteed.

Basically, the idea behind *si yi* was to secure China from possible outside forces. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the close relations between Tang and Uighur in the 8th-9th centuries was mainly focused on defending China from other small and medium size nomadic tribes living in the far northern parts of the Uighur Empire. In Turkic historical sources, there are many cases when nomadic kingdoms, such as the Khirghiz khaganate and others, attacked the Uighurs but often failed to break through to China. However, *si yi* does not always work as it is supposed to. An exceptional situation arose when China was invaded by the Mongols in the 13th century and *si yi* failed.

According to Chien-peng Chung, the broader prerequisite for a state's decision to choose a multilateralism approach is as follows: "When national objectives cannot be achieved, or cannot be achieved satisfactorily, either unilaterally or through bilateral arrangements, states turn to collective arrangements such as multilateral regimes."[58] The security aspect of China-Central Asian relations is still the predominant core driving force. One example, argued by Zheng Yongnian, about the SCO's nature is that "the SCO brings together China, Russia, and the Central Asian states for the first time in history in a multilateral mechanism of regional security, and economic and cultural cooperation."[59]

Since the Western invasion of China in the early 19th century, mainly by Great Britain, the second time (after the Mongols) in its history, the Qing officials understood that there are other

[57] See: Chapter Two, Section 2.2. of this article.

[58] Chien-peng Chung, *China's Multilateral Cooperation in Asia and Pacific. Institutionalizing Beijing's "Good Neighbor Policy,"* Routledge, New York, 2010, p. 9.

[59] Zheng Yongnian, op. cit., p. 316.

superior nations and therefore their foreign policy should be re-evaluated. Before it became aware of the technological supremacy of the West, China was confident in its interstate relations pattern. It was very hard for China to accept this humiliation, but there was no other choice. It took nearly a century (roughly 1850-1950) to merge into the existing international interstate relations pattern created by the West. It took China another fifty years (1950-2000) to learn the system and to achieve the "super state level" to which it had been accustomed centuries before. Currently China is very close to making the process of living together with the Western powers and with the rules set by the West a fait accompli. Therefore, multilateralism can be viewed as a strategic choice made by Chinese officials as the final stage necessary to complete the above-mentioned process. Central Asia could be viewed as an experimental region in China's further development of multilateralism elsewhere in the world.

The multilateralism initiatives taken by China vis-à-vis Central Asia are the same as adopting the "*si yi*" doctrine. Outside threats coming from Afghanistan to unstable Xinjiang and the intensified U.S. military presence in bordering Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan were the main motives for adopting the current day multilateralism policy toward Central Asia. Ancient China never had such a policy due to distance, technology, and the wars among the nomads in the region.

To summarize, by drawing a comparison with the tributary policy and contemporary foreign policy in Chinese-Central Asian affairs, we mostly see continuity in economic relations and security cooperation. Chinese *tianxia* tributary trade and defense policy understanding through *si yi* are still more or less unchanged. We mostly see modification in the field of diplomatic and leadership relations. In this field, Chinese officials have become more innovative and mastered Western-type interstate relations, specifically multilateralism. China's strategic approach toward Central Asia, the way in which it structures its policies and goals, expectations and interests, and the preferred policy outcomes are all deeply calculated and firmly rooted in traditional *tianxia* thinking.

In order to see this clear connection between modern and *tianxia* China, the author would like to briefly describe the main goals and objectives of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). As stated earlier, economic and security cooperation are the two main courses of China's policy toward Central Asia, which are doubtlessly the key components of SCO multilateralism. Therefore, it is important to understand how these two components are being implemented and what directions they are taking.

Chapter Four:
The SCO and Multilateralism Principles

4.1. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization

On 15 June, 2001 in Shanghai, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan created the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The main objectives of the SCO are good neighborly relations among the member states; mutual confidence; and promoting effective cooperation in politics, trade, and the economy. At the international level, the SCO actively participates in making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, preserve security and stability in the region, and move toward

the establishment of a new, democratic, just and rational, political and economic international order.[60] Additionally, its foreign policy is conducted in accordance with the principles of nonalignment, not targeting anyone, and openness.[61]

It has two main decision-making bodies. The Heads of State Council (HSC) is the highest decision-making body in the SCO. It meets once every year to take decisions and give instructions on all the important issues of SCO activity. The Heads of Government Council (HGC) meets once every year to discuss strategy for multilateral cooperation and priority directions within the Organization's framework. This body mainly works on security and economic cooperation issues and adopts the Organization's annual budget as well.

Besides sessions and meetings of the HSC and the HGC, there are also mechanisms of meetings on the level of Speakers of Parliament, Secretaries of Security Councils, Foreign Ministers, Ministers of Defense, etc. The Council of National Coordinators of the SCO Member States (CNC) is in charge of coordinating interactions within the SCO framework. Moreover, the Organization has two permanent bodies – the Secretariat in Beijing and the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) in Tashkent. As its supreme representative, the Secretary-General is appointed by the HSC for a period of three years. The heads of the SCO member states also appoint the director of the RATS executive committee.[62] After gaining an understanding of SCO from the historical, political, and economic perspective, it is logical to divide its development into three main periods.

Even though the SCO is aimed at multilateral cooperation, there are several existing barriers within the Organization. The serious ones are imbalance among the member states and the clash between Russia and China. Many observe that the decisions made within the framework of the SCO do not satisfy all of the member states and there are disagreements between countries. However, as matter of fact, in the SCO structure any initiative and any decision has to be made jointly. So, before coming to a common agreement all the member states confirm that they fully agree on the decision made. And if one of the member states does not agree on some issues, the right of veto can be used to vote down the proposal. As a result, in the field of economic cooperation the SCO already has functioning economic institutions that have been created jointly, such as the SCO Business Council, SCO Interbank Consortium, and Development Fund. Nonetheless, a serious clash of interests and conflicting aims still exist among member states, which might affect the peaceful development of SCO economic cooperation.

4.2. Is China Following the IR Principles of Multilateralism? The SCO Case

The indivisibility principle in the SCO main documents is perfectly projected. China, together with other member states, was able to accept that peace and security in the region was and still is indivisible. Chinese policies, such as peaceful coexistence, good neighborly relations, and the Shanghai spirit doctrine are the foundation of China's multilateralism in Central Asia. China, in addition to

[60] See: Chen Yurong, 稳步向前的上海合作组织 (The Steadily Advancing SCO), ed. by Ma Zhenggang, World Affairs Press, Beijing, 2006, p. 301.

[61] See: Ibid., p. 341.

[62] See: "Director of EC RATS," SCO RATS website, available at [http://www.ecrats.com/en/director_of_rats/], 20 March, 2012.

Table 3

Implementation of Multilateralism Principles in the Activity of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

Main Principles of Multilateralism	Key Aspects	Fulfillment by the SCO
Indivisibility	(1) peace is indivisible in a collective security system	(1) Shanghai Five-Shanghai Spirit[63]
	(2) indivisibility can also be applied in the context of economic and social issues	(2) Peaceful Coexistence[64]
Generalized Principle of Conduct	(1) general regulations that coordinate interstate affairs	(1) Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization[65]
	(2) equal participation	(2) Decision-Making Procedure and Status of Equality (Arts 2, 16)
	(3) common response despite individual interests	(3) SCO Charter Arts 1, 2, 3: The main goals, principles, and areas of cooperation
Diffuse Reciprocity	(1) benefits in the aggregate and over time	(1) SCO membership shall be open to others (Charter, Art 13)
	(2) Utilitarian: to benefit in the long run and with respect to many issues	(2) To cooperate in the prevention of international conflicts and in their peaceful settlement (Charter, Art 1)
	(3) no significant objectives in the present, but greater gain in the future	(3) To jointly search for solutions to the problems that arise in the 21st century (Charter, Art 1).

[63] The Shanghai spirit doctrine stands for mutual trust and mutual benefit, respect for cultural diversity, mutual consultations, equality, and striving for joint development.

[64] The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are: mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual nonaggression; mutual noninterference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; peaceful coexistence (for more detail, see: "China's Peaceful Development," *Information Office of the State Council, the People's Republic of China*, Foreign Languages Press Co. Ltd, Beijing, September 2011).

[65] See: Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, available at [http://www.sectsco.org/EN/show.asp?id=69#], 21 March, 2012.

demonstrating the indivisibility of peace, is also reassuring its neighbors about China's peaceful rise. The only concern of the Central Asian states is the extent to which peace is going to be equally indivisible among all the member states. The rapid influx of Chinese companies to Central Asia has already created doubt among politicians in Central Asia. Since Chinese companies are so much more efficient than post-Soviet companies in the region many local companies are becoming uncompetitive and eventually disappearing from the market. Doubt about China's peacefulness is increasing not due to China's assertive power projection, but due to China's economic expansion in Central Asia. For instance, the only reason for the endless discussions on the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railroad project for the last three years is fear and suspicion from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan about China's peacefulness.

The generalized principles of conduct principle can be explained by the main articles of the SCO Charter. The Charter includes various mechanisms of coordination among member states. The Charter also guarantees equal participation of the member states in the decision-making process. From a regulatory perspective, one state cannot dominate another and in order to pass specific proposals states need the agreement of all the other members. The SCO's regulatory aspects are all accepted by the United Nations and the SCO is recognized as an organization that supports peace and stability in the region. So, in general, the SCO as a new multilateral organization has been able to adjust its institutional structures to the main requirement of multilateralism—the generalized principles of conduct.

The diffuse reciprocity principle in the SCO is based on China's long-term policy toward Central Asia and Russia. Based on the region's reality in the future, once the SCO's institutionalization process is complete China can use this Organization for various purposes. It may not be seen now, but China has grand plans for the SCO in the future. At the moment, China is opening up the doors for possible maneuvering in the future. For China, the SCO will accumulate its strength slowly by maximizing China's leverage, not only in Central Asia, but also in Greater Asia. SCO membership and partnership aspects will also increase gradually and China will eventually try to establish strong ties between ASEAN and the SCO. In this case, this cooperation will start with strong economic cooperation and will eventually end up with strong economic and security relations. This will ensure China significant benefits in the long run and with respect to many issues. At present, the Central Asian states are enjoying the SCO's economic and, to some extent, security benefits by receiving credit loans and participating jointly in antiterrorist exercises. China is not losing at present, instead pumping energy resources and freezing the Xinjiang issue are fully covering China's sacrifices in the SCO.

To conclude, Chinese-led SCO multilateralism in Central Asia corresponds to the classical multilateralism principles. Indivisibility, generalized principles of conduct, and diffuse reciprocity principles are all being neatly cultivated. The only delicate part of SCO multilateralism is the crucially innovative proclamation stated in Art 1 of the SCO Charter, "to consolidate multidisciplinary cooperation in the maintenance and strengthening of peace, security and stability in the region and promotion of a new democratic, fair and rational political and economic international order."[66]

Unquestionably, this clause is not referring to the Central Asian states' concerns and more or less matches Russia's global interests, but is something down to earth. However, this is what diffuse reciprocity means for China. Multilateralism in Central Asia does not go beyond regional thinking for Russia and the Central Asian states, but for China it is a provisionally experimental form of interstate relations in which hegemonic long-term ambitions undoubtedly dominate. If China succeeds in mastering Western-classical multilateralism, it is likely to see the SCO type of multilateralism elsewhere in China's neighborhood.

[66] Ibid., Art 1.

Chapter Five:
Findings

Five main findings that are applicable to Central Asia:

1. The understudied *tianxia* system and failure to draw its relevance to contemporary China-Central Asian relations might cause serious miscalculations in adopting state foreign policies toward China.
2. China's multilateralism approach in Central Asia is the product of a cultivated, adjusted, modernized, and transformed *tianxia* tributary interstate relations pattern.
3. By strengthening multilateralism in Central Asia, China will exert every effort to make the Central Asian states acknowledge China's superiority and continue the transformed and adjusted tributary relations under the *tianxia* concept.
4. China will continue making exerted efforts to convince the United States to recognize China's supremacy in Central Asia.
5. Through multilateralism, China will continue killing two birds, even three, with one stone. (Stability in Xinjiang, countering the U.S. in the region, and energy and trade deals.)

Five findings and their implications for the China studies IR discipline:

1. There is a greater need to further study *tianxia* and its influence on Chinese foreign policy preferences.
2. Drawing on the research findings based on China-Central Asia multilateral relations, the author assumes that if China does develop its own non-Western IR Theory, it is highly likely that *tianxia* will be central to it.
3. The recently developed non-Western IR Theory studies and their publications in Asia recommend that Western institutions develop a specific approach that researches China's traditional world view and its possible transformations and adjustments.
4. The same approach needs to be carried out in researching China's interstate relations with its eastern and southern neighbors. After specific and detailed research about *tianxia* China's relations with its eastern, western, northern, and southern neighbors, broader conclusions can be drawn about modern-day and future China's attitude in the international system.
5. Based on the findings, this research also reflects that one of the key indicators of China's rise will be China's multilateral relations with Central Asia. Therefore, the approach taken in this research needs to be further developed and could also be applied to other regions' relations with China.

Conclusion

China's foreign relations with Central Asia are just one aspect of China's foreign policy. Present-day China is engaging with almost all other regions of the world, predominantly in the fields of economic and political relations. By drawing a comparison with the tributary policy and contemporary

foreign policy in Chinese-Central Asian affairs we mostly see continuity in economic relations and security cooperation. Chinese *tianxia* tributary trade and defense policy understanding through *si yi* are still more or less unchanged. We mostly see modification in the field of diplomatic and leadership relations. In this field, Chinese officials have become more innovative and mastered Western-type interstate relations, specifically multilateralism. Nevertheless, China's strategic approach toward Central Asia, the way in which it structures its policies and goals, expectations and interests, and the preferred policy outcomes are all deeply calculated and firmly rooted in traditional *tianxia* thinking.

Today's Chinese multilateralism in Central Asia is well-suited to classical multilateralism requirements. Chinese-led SCO multilateralism neatly corresponds with the classical multilateralism principles of indivisibility, generalized principles of conduct, and diffuse reciprocity. The Chinese multilateralism approach to Central Asia is a provisionally experimental form of interstate relations in which *tianxia*-hegemonic long-term ambitions undoubtedly dominate. If China succeeds in mastering Western-classical multilateralism, the SCO type of multilateralism is likely to be seen elsewhere in China's neighborhood. If China becomes a great power, it is also likely to apply the SCO's main concepts and ideas to the new international order.

Contemporary Chinese policies, such as peaceful rise, peaceful coexistence, good neighborly relations, and the Shanghai spirit doctrine are the fundamental principles of China's multilateralism in Central Asia. The same policies are indisputably connected with the notion of peace under traditional *tianxia* concepts such as defense through tributary trade, *si yi*, and sinocentrism. If China, together with other member states, officially claims the need to establish a "new, democratic, just and rational, political and economic international order" in the main document of the SCO, where will China get this new order? This research has provided an answer to this question from the Chinese-Central Asian perspective. In order to receive a full answer to this question further development of this approach to other regions and a general analysis are very crucial.