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Connecting India to the New Silk Road through Kyrgyzstan *

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Introduction

In the last two decades, the world witnessed the rise of Asia, which is expected to continue and result in a shift of the centre of gravity in the global economy. The rise of Asia started with the “Japanese miracle” after 1950s, which was later accompanied by the unexpected rise of South Korea. They were followed by Asian Dragons (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan - also called Asian Tigers) and Tiger Club Economies (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand). Lately the rise of the People’s Republic of China surpassed them all. India’s GDP growth also quickly increased, since 1990s. Following the rise of Japan, South Korea, Dragons, Tigers, China and India the world’s attention is focused towards Asia.

This development was foreseen by Japanese economist Kaname Akamatsu and coined as “flying geese pattern of development” in 1930s. His paradigm was popularized during the Japanese Miracle in 1960s. He underlined that industries are relocated from developed to developing countries in their catching-up process. The leading country is followed by other countries in “the alignment of nations along the different stages of development.”¹ The countries in this hierarchy benefit from each other as in the example of 25 geese flying together and achieving “70 percent energy over a bird flying solo.”²

The rise of economies other than the G7 member countries was not only seen in Asia, and recently a new acronym has been introduced to define the newly developing economies: BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa)³. It is stated that BRICS countries will become leading economies by 2027 or at least by 2050. This will be the real shift of the centre of gravity, and because of the fact that three of these five economies are in Asia, the centre of gravity will indeed shift to Asia.

Although Asia is economically rising, it is early to talk about a rise of Asia. It is not Asia as a continent but separate Asian countries, which are rising. Three BRICS countries of Asia are

* This article is dedicated to Janet Abu-Lughod, who passed away in December 14, 2013, while this article was being written. She brought to our attention the existence of a pre-modern “world system” in Asia before the European hegemony (Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350*. USA: Oxford University Press, 1991)

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¹ Columbia Business School, Center on Japanese Economy and Business, Working Paper Series, October 2010, No: 291, “The (Japan-Born) ‘Flying-Geese’ Theory of Economic Development Revisited-and Reformulated from a Structuralist Perspective”, p. 4, <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/catalog/ac%3A129253>. Originally from Kaname Akamatsu, (1961): A Theory of Unbalanced Growth in the World Economy. In: *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv*, Hamburg, no.86, p. 208.

² Ozawa Terutomo, “The (Japan-Born) ‘Flying-Geese’ Theory of Economic Development Revisited-and Reformulated from a Structuralist Perspective”, New York. Columbia University, Center on Japanese Economy and Business, Graduate School of Business, Working Paper Series, October 2010, No: 291, p. 5, <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/catalog/ac%3A129253>. Originally from Larry Gedney, (1982), “Why Birds Fly in Vees,” Alaska Science Forum (on the web), August 16, Article #559, www.gi.alaska.edu/SkkcienceForum.

³ Alternatively BRICS with the inclusion of South Africa or rarely BRIC-T with Turkey is also used. Another grouping of rapidly developing countries is MINT (Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey).

located on three edges of the continent, but the international relations between these three states are very weak. All rising countries of Asia have turned their faces away from Asia to bigger economies of the US and EU. Improvement of intracontinental relations is necessary to talk about a holistic rise of Asia and create more fruitful synergy on the continent. Similar to “flying geese” paradigm more developed countries of Asia can help developing countries in mutually beneficial relations.

A holistic rise cannot only be limited to economics. It needs to be supplemented by cooperation in other spheres, such as politics, culture, science and education. Asia is home to civilizations with rich cultural legacies. The rapprochement of Asian civilizations and their material and cultural reconnection will further enrich human civilization.

This requires the reestablishment of east-west and south-north trade routes. China and Turkey are on the east-west axis and India and Russia are on the south-north axis of this network of routes to be established. At the focal point of this network lies Central Asia. The development of this network reaching to four directions requires establishing stronger ties with Central Asia. China, Russia and Turkey have already established relations in Central Asia. India’s relations were intended to be improved through “Look North” policy, but it did not bring about changes. In June 2012, Minister of State for External Affairs Shri E. Ahamed announced in Bishkek main points of a new policy of “Connect Central Asia”; recently Kyrgyz-Indian relations took another shape through new agreements in New Delhi in February 2014 and in Bishkek in March 2014.

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are the most open countries to the world and sustain multi-vector foreign policies. Kazakhstan is rich in hydrocarbons, minerals and grain. Kyrgyzstan, on the other hand, is a supplier of electrical energy. Many people in Kyrgyzstan live upon international trade, and the state also aims to develop trade relations with all possible countries. Kyrgyz President Atambayev announced in April 2011 that the American Airbase at the Manas Airport will be closed in 2014, and the Manas Military Airbase will be turned to a civilian transport hub for international trade between Beijing and Istanbul. India can also join this project and connect to the New Silk Road.⁴ Kyrgyzstan at the heart of Asia with open domestic and foreign policy presents a more advantageous region for developing international relations with other Central Asian republics.

India’s relations with Central Asia will create a “strategic depth” for India. Pakistani General Mirza Aslam Beg articulated the term to define a role for the defence of Pakistan against India. Because Pakistan has a narrow territory to defend, the “strategic depth” was supposed to be created in Afghanistan. Former Turkish international relations professor and recent Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu in his book with the same name, *Strategic Depth*, gave the term a new meaning by defining it as the diplomatic/political sphere of influence. In accordance with Turkish foreign policy in practice, the term was redefined within the soft power policy.⁵

India’s presence in Central Asia is also being structured according to “soft power” policy. Joseph Nye offered the use of softer policies as a more successful alternative to “carrot and stick” policies, that is instead of inducement of payments and use of coercion. Nye’s soft power is based upon increasing the attractiveness of a country.⁶ In the last decade, soft power

⁴ The term “New Silk Road” was applied by US Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well, but in this article the use of the term is not a direct reference to the US proposal.

⁵ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Konumu*, İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001.

⁶ Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, New York: Basic Books, 1990; Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: Public Affairs, 2004.

became a more popular policy in diplomacy. Since 2010, soft power is being quantitatively measured.⁷ The ranking is based on the positive image of countries established through their government, culture, diplomacy, education and business/innovation. The soft power policy supports a more holistic rise of Asia through cooperation in all spheres, like politics, culture, science and education

Throughout the “Look-North” policy the legacy of the past as a narrative was used and it was aimed “to remind the new generations in Central Asia that India is not new to them but rather a very old friend if seen in the historical perspective.”⁸ India’s historical ties with Central Asia make it easier to shape soft power policies.

In this article, first it will be summarized what is meant by the legacy of the past achieved at the age of Silk Road. This is also significant to remind that the rise of Asia is not a novelty. Beyond economics there was a vivid cultural interaction, which builds breeding ground for the application of soft power policies in India for Central Asia. The network of trade routes is fragmented by enmities between Asian countries and later Asia is divided by colonial powers. The recent fragmented state of Asia is the outcome of this process. Today, Central and South Asia is sought to be connected through a number of projects, which could not be implemented because of the problems in Afghanistan. The evacuation of the American Manas Air base creates an opportunity to build an air link between India and Kyrgyzstan.

The relations between both countries are being improved, in the last two years. India can help Kyrgyzstan within the “flying goose” paradigm as it happened in other rising Asian countries. The recent enactment of soft power and mutually beneficial economic development processes in the context of Connect Central Asia policy will be a valuable asset for both sides.

The Historical Legacy: Asian Age from Rise to Collapse

For most of the human history, Asia was the centre of scientific and economic achievements. Asia connected through a network of roads, which were later coined as “Silk Road”. This network of roads was stretching on the east-west axis from China to Europe and on the south-north axis from India to the Steppes. They became the breeding ground for the exchange of goods and ideas, which helped in turn to the dynamism of Asian cultures.

Steward Gordon defines the period in his book “When Asia was the World” as follows:

... from 500 to 1500, Asia was an astonishing, connected, and creative place. It had the five largest cities in the world, all at the heart of great empires. A few, such as Delhi, Beijing, and Istanbul, remain major cities today. (...) It was in Asia that mathematicians invented zero and algebra. Astronomers there tracked the stars more accurately than ever before and invented the astrolabe for navigation. Poets and writers produced literature that still touches the heart. Philosophers generated systems of thinking and

⁷ Jonathan McClory, “The New Persuaders: An International Ranking of Soft Power”, *Institute for Government*, 2010, http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/The%20new%20persuaders_0.pdf. For the last report see Jonathan McClory, “The New Persuaders III: A 2012 Global Ranking of Soft Power”, *Institute for Government*, 2012, http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/The%20new%20persuaders%20III_0.pdf.

⁸ Emilian Kavalski, “An Elephant in a China Soup? India’s Look North to Central... Seeing Only China”, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010: 43, originally from B.M. Jain, *Global Power: India’s Foreign Policy, 1947-2006*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008: 7.

justice that influence us today. (...) luxury goods, such as silk, pearls, spices, medicines, glass, and simple things like rice and sugar. Asia produced money and credit that traders knew and accepted from the Middle East to China.⁹

The connection of Asia with Europe starts in the first century BCE, when China established connections with the Roman Empire. At that period, there was already a network between China, Central Asia, the Steppes, Iran and the Near East. India was part of this network even at the time of the first Indian civilization, Harappan Civilization (2600-1900 BCE).¹⁰

This network was established by trade but it was not limited by it. The “Four Great Chinese Inventions”, papermaking, printing, gunpowder and compass spread to the world through the Silk Road; music and dances of West Asia and Central Asia were taken and reshaped by China; grapes, peppers, cucumbers, walnuts, carrots, beans, pomegranates and jewellery went to China in exchange for Chinese silk, porcelain and lacquer. Also religions travelled on the Silk Road. Once established, religious communities also founded monasteries, where traders could rest. The close relationship of rich merchant families and religious communities helped to the establishment of marvellous artworks and buildings with touches of various cultural influences.

The power of Asia lied in the conglomeration of diverse cultures connected through a network of roads, which helped to the exchange of ideas, inventions, their blending in different cultures and improvements. However, political problems, religious and social changes in Asian civilizations, European explorations and the opening of the sea routes connecting India and China to the Atlantic coast led to the decline of the Silk Road.¹¹

Even after the decline of the Silk Road in the 16th century, Asia was still the economic centre of the world, and the south-north route linking India to Central Asia was a significant part of it. It was further developed by a new impetus, when after the second half of the 16th century, Russia started to explore Siberia and found fortified trade post. These forts in Siberia were in need of food stocks, which could be exported from Central Asia. In order to sustain trade links between Central Asia and new Siberian cities, Russia acknowledged some privileges to Central Asian merchants. Central Asians did not only bring food but also trade goods to be further transmitted to the Russian capital by Russian merchants. Indian traders also benefitted from this new opportunity, and Indian diaspora communities emerged in Central Asia.¹²

In the 18th century Adam Smith underlined that “the improvements in agriculture and manufactures seem likewise to have been of very great antiquity in the provinces of Bengal in the East Indies, and in some of the eastern province of China. Even those three countries [China, Egypt and Indostan], the wealthiest, according to all accounts, that ever were in the world, are chiefly renowned for their superiority in agriculture and manufactures.”¹³

⁹ Stewart Gordon, *When Asia was the World*, Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2008: vii.

¹⁰ Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*, Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2012: 166.

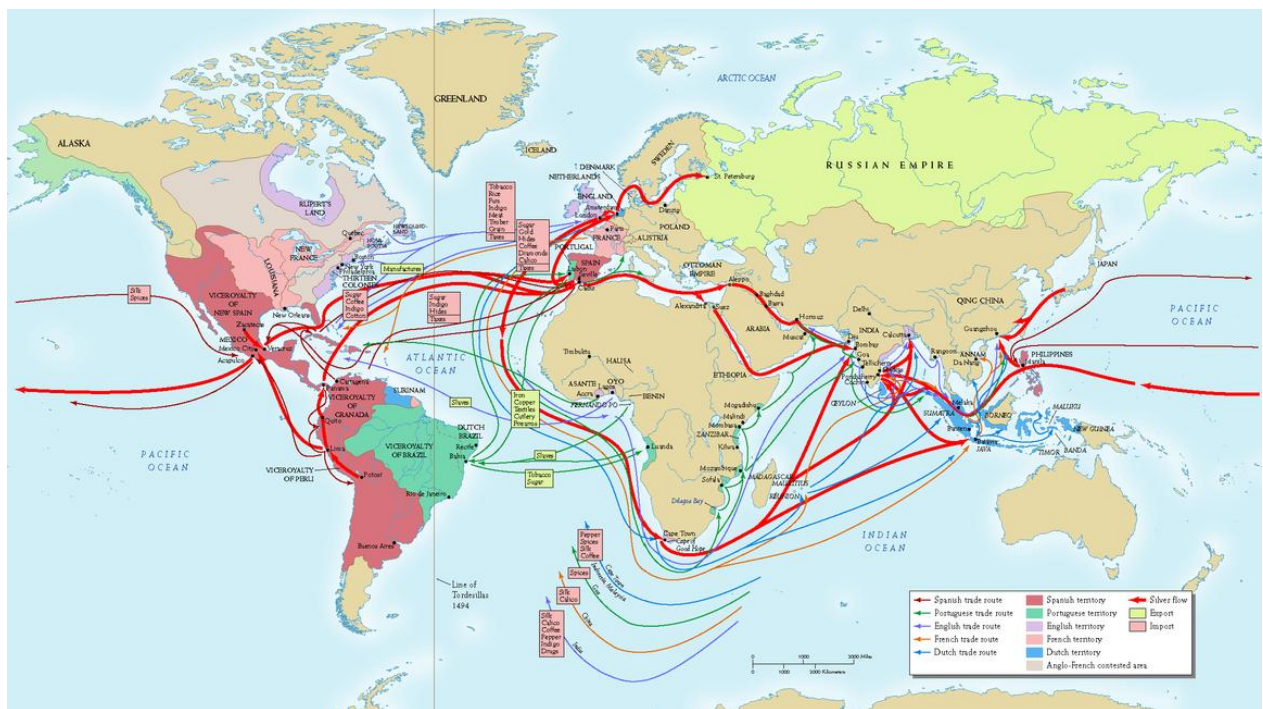
¹¹ Morris Rossabi (1990), *The Rise of the Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early modern World 1350-1750*, Cambridge University Press:351-370.

¹² Audrey Burton, *The Bukharans: A Dynastic, Diplomatic and Commercial History 1550-1702*, Richmond Surrey: Curzon Press, 1997. For more information on the Indian-Central Asian trade see: Frank, 1998; Scott Cameron Levi, *India and Central Asia: Commerce and Culture, 1500-1800*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007; Stephen Frederic Dale, *Indian Merchants and Eurasian Trade, 1600-1750*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

¹³ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, New York: Random House, 1937 [1773]:20.

The perception of India and China changed in the second half of the 19th century through colonisation and industrialization. It was followed by subversion of Asia. Until recently, euro-centric view of world history paid little attention to Asia. Since 1990s, through new studies, such as those of Janet Abu-Lughod¹⁴ or Andre Gunder Frank,¹⁵ it is known that there was no European world hegemony before the 16th (Lughod) or 19th century (Frank). Until then, Europe was just a marginal member of the Eurasian world economy, dominated by Asian civilizations. Europe was influenced by achievements in the east, but had little impact on the developments in the east.

The critical change for Asia, which put a distance among Asian countries on different edges of the continent, was the colonization of Asia, and especially the “Great Game” between Russian and British empires, when Russia occupied Central Asia, and Britain South Asia. Colonialism and the “Great Game” resulted in the partition of Asia. The emergence of different power zones in Asia distanced Asian cultures from each other, further diminishing the power of Asia. The closure of relations between different cultures of Asia changed the dynamics on the continent and brought the achievements to an end established by the synergy of trade routes.



1- Main Trade Routes during the Colonisation
<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~cfford/342WorldHistoryModern.html>

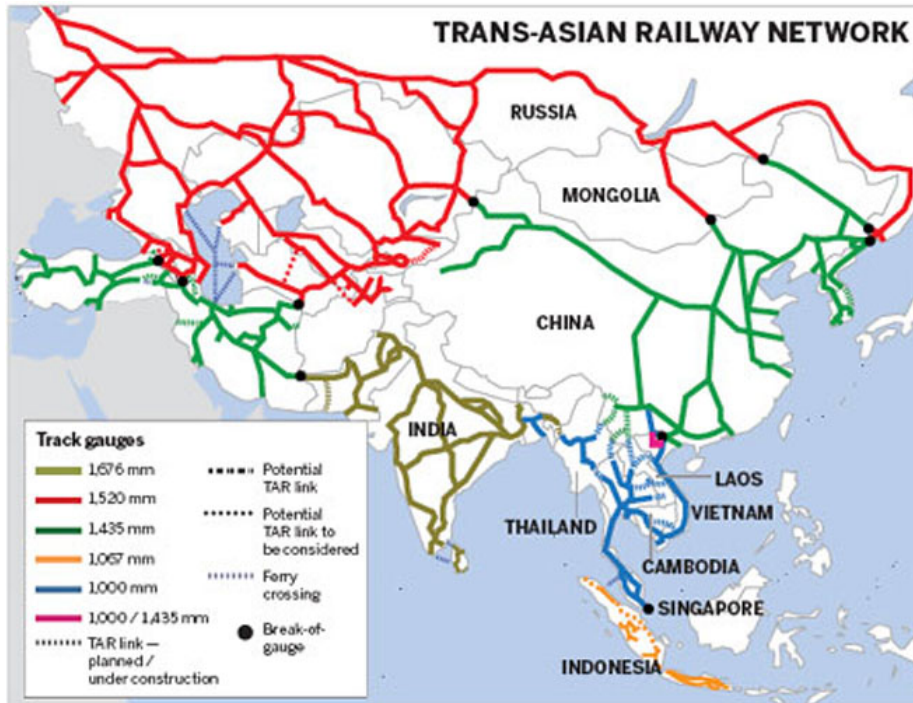
Although colonization separated Asian countries from each other, their relations with the West brought new forces for the further transformation. By the contact with the West, Asia had access to new formulations of ideas or values, such as rationalism, universalism, human rights, democracy, socialism, bureaucracy etc., which were again reshaped within different Asian cultures. They helped to the formation of new states with effective, modern physical and administrative infrastructure. Today, modern technological developments create a much

¹⁴ Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350*. USA: Oxford University Press. 1991.

¹⁵ Andre Gunder Frank, *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

greater potential to revive the Silk Road. This infrastructure is, however, still oriented to the West, and the relationship between Asian countries is very weak – not even a complimentary segment of their relations with the West.

The map of the fragmented Trans-Asian railway network very clearly shows the level of disintegration on the continent.



2- Fragmented Asian Railways (<http://www.nihao-salam.com/news-detail.php?id=NDc4>)

As it is seen on the map some Asian countries are not connected at all. A sheer difference from the ages of Silk Road is that India is connected neither to China nor to Central Asia or Russia. One of the most significant reasons for that is the geographical factor, namely the Himalayas. The map also shows that the Asian railway system has a variety of track gauges in different regions of the continent. The differences in track gauges prove that geography is not the only determining factor, and that the railways were indeed meant to be used for national purpose. Nevertheless the result is disfavoured continental trade in Asia.

The relations between Asian countries are not only weak, but they are also dominated by enmities instead of mutually beneficial win-win strategies. Three of the main Asian countries had territorial disputes in the near past. China and India have border conflicts, which culminated to a war in 1962; USSR had also border conflict with China, which triggered border clashes, in 1969. India has serious territorial disputes with Pakistan in Kashmir, which creates a more significant barrier than the Himalayas for its direct access to Central Asia. The problems with China are also keeping India away from Inner Asia.

Asian countries still have serious territorial conflicts with their neighbours. A result of this problem is reflected in their military might and expenditures. Eight of ten largest armies in the world (China, India, North Korea, Russia, South Korea, Turkey, Pakistan and Iran) are on Asia – except the US, whose troops are also mainly stationed in Asia, and Egypt – a neighbour of Asia. The military expenditures are also highest in Asia.¹⁶ Top five arms

¹⁶ <http://www.mapsofworld.com/world-top-ten/world-top-ten-countries-with-largest-armies-map.html>.

importers, i.e. India, China, Pakistan, South Korea and Singapore, are again in Asia.¹⁷ This does not only prove, how severe the conflicts are, but it also shows the economic burden on the national budgets, which could have been spent for infrastructural projects to connect Asian countries. Instead of developing peaceful relations, Asian countries try to strengthen their military might to prevent war with their neighbours.

In recent years, the diplomatic relations between three big countries of Asia - Russia, China and India - are improving. In 2006, the historical Silk Road passage between China and India was finally reopened, and the diplomatic relations are held on peaceful terms, although it is still early to talk about a revival of commercial links, as it was at the time of the Silk Road. Sino-Russian border conflict was also solved, in 2008. Chinese demands for Russian energy sources helps to the development of mutually beneficial bilateral relations between these two countries.

In October 2013, India and China signed a defence pact on counter-terrorism, energy and regional security;¹⁸ no agreement on the Line of Actual Control has been reached yet but both sides aim to smooth the tension through the Border Defence Cooperation Agreement.¹⁹ Apart from diplomacy, Sino-Indian economic relations are also improving. Chinese investment in India started in the late 1990s. In recent years, Chinese investments in India by private equity firms grew considerably from \$991,000,000 in 2009 to \$11,191,000,000 in 2012.²⁰ Political rapprochement between China and India followed intensifying economic relations.

Russia and India pursue their friendly relations under a “Special and Privileged Partnership”. In October 2013, Russian President Putin and Indian Prime Minister Singh met at the 14th Annual Summit. They discussed increasing economic cooperation, and India signed an economic partnership agreement with the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. Russia also supports India’s membership to the Asia-Pacific Economic Union (APEC). In 2012, Russian-Indian trade broke a record with \$11 billion. On the meeting, strengthening industrial cooperation and scientific collaboration on research and development, possibilities for transferring Russian oil and gas, cooperation on defence after the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan were also discussed. Russia and India aim to reach a “fair system of international relations based on equal partnership between states.”²¹ On various occasions India underlines its support for a multipolar world.

Reestablishment of Relations between India and Central Asia

The Indian relations with Central Asia developed after the Indian independence and establishment of bilateral relations with the USSR. This was the real end of the Great Game, and India became one of the few non-Warsaw Pact countries during the Soviet period, which enjoyed some popularity in Central Asia. In 1955, Prime Minister Nehru with his daughter

¹⁷ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), “The Top Ten Arms Importers, 2008-2012”, http://www.sipri.org/googlemaps/2013_of_at_top_20_imp_map.html

¹⁸ “India China signs Defence Pact: All you need to know”, *Firstpost*, Oct 23, 2013; retrieved from <http://www.firstpost.com/world/india-china-signs-defence-pact-all-you-need-to-know-1189305.html>.

¹⁹ “India, China hold flag meeting to ease border tension”, *Firstpost*, Dec 21, 2013; retrieved from <http://www.firstpost.com/india/india-china-hold-flag-meeting-to-ease-border-tensions-1300803.html>.

²⁰ Mansi Kapur, “Why Chinese Investors are Wooing India”, *Fortune India*, January 2014: 88-83.

²¹ “14th annual summit: Singh, Putin focus on trade, energy and defence”, *Russian & India Report*, October 21, 2013; http://indrus.in/politics/2013/10/21/14th_annual_summit_singh_putin_focus_on_trade_energy_and_defence_30281.html.

Indira Gandhi visited Central Asia.²² In 1985 Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited Kyrgyzstan.²³ The constructive relations between India and the USSR opened the doors to India's cultural influence in Central Asia as well. Especially Indian films achieved great popularity, and through movies Indian dances and music also became very popular in Central Asia. Indian-made textile and leather goods were also widely sold in Central Asia.

In the first years of independence, India had an influential position in Central Asia, because:

- a) There were already links and some cultural influence of India during the Soviet period.
- b) India was a leading country in the Non-Aligned Movement, which could become a new field to establish independent international relations for Central Asian republics.
- c) India was a multicultural country with many languages similar to Central Asian republics.
- d) India was the largest democracy in the world.
- e) India was a secular country.

India could become a model for Central Asian republics. This possibility was also perceived by Central Asian leaders and the first international diplomatic visits of the President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov (August 1991), and the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev (February 1992), was to India. They were followed by the President of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akayev (March 1992), President of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov (April 1992) and the Prime Minister of Tajikistan, Abdumalik Abdullojonov (February 1993).²⁴ India was among the first countries to open embassies in new Central Asian capitals.

But these expectations did not materialize. The dissolution of the USSR and independence of Central Asian republics affected India very negatively. The Indian exports to the USSR/post-Soviet republics fell from 10% to 1.5%.²⁵ It is stated that this is the result of the complexity of the geopolitical region of Pakistan and Afghanistan and India's "domestic and political evolutions". The end of the Rupee Trade system, which enabled India to trade in its own currency, privatization attempts in India, diminishing role of the state, rise of a new Indian merchant class, insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir, rise of Hindu nationalism "abandoning the international Nehruvian model" in favour of a South Asian orientation²⁶ were among the factors distancing India from Central Asian politics.

At the end of 1990s India tried to revive its diplomatic relations through "Look North" policy but without success. The table below shows the position of India in terms of import-export relations with Central Asian republics:

	Imports	Rank	Exports	Rank	Total	Rank
Kazakhstan	155.2 (0.5%)	14	138.9 (0.3%)	18	294.1 (0.4%)	15
Kyrgyzstan	25.7 (0.4%)	13	0.8 (0.1%)	21	26.6 (0.3%)	15
Tajikistan	33.5 (1.3%)	15	0.2 (0%)	23	33.7 (0.9%)	16
Turkmenistan	30.3 (0.6%)	17	11.2 (0.3%)	20	41.5 (0.5)	21

²² Asoke Mukerji, "India, Central Asia and the New Silk Road", *International Institute for Strategic Studies* (IISS), July 10, 2012; <http://www.iiss.org/en/events/events/archive/2012-4a49/july-70c4/india-central-asia-and-the-new-silk-road-e4d1>.

²³ "India-Kyrgyz Republic Bilateral Relations", Embassy of India, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, <http://www.embassyofindia.kg/relationpages.php?id=114>.

²⁴ Mukerji, 2012.

²⁵ Mukerji, 2012.

²⁶ Marlene Laruelle, Sebastian Peyrouse, *Globalizing Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Challenges of Economic Development*, Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2013: 96-97.

Uzbekistan	59.7 (0.7%)	13	20.8 (0.4%)	16	80.6 (0.6%)	16
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Table 1- India's Place in Imports, Exports and the Trade Total of Central Asian States in 2010 (in million US\$). (2011 European Commission statistics, in Laruelle, Peyrouse, 2013: 100)

As the figures on the table reflect, India is economically hardly represented in Central Asia, despite the huge size of Indian economy, and its rapid growth. Additionally, the physical distance between Central Asia and India is not long; New Delhi is about the same distance to Central Asian cities and to south Indian cities.

Still India refashioned its policy to reach out Central Asia. The reasons for Indian interest in Central Asia are defined in three categories: access to oil and gas reserves; balancing growing Chinese and Pakistani influence; and stabilization of Afghanistan.²⁷ Another factor, establishment of trade links with Central Asia, also requires special attention.

Together with China, India is one of the most rapidly growing economies, and similar to China, it is in need of energy sources to pursue its development. For the time being, West Asia is the supplier of Indian hydrocarbon demands, but it requires minimizing its dependency on OPEC countries, because of the political turmoil in the West Asia and the fluctuations in their prices. Indian huge gas (7th rank in the world) and oil consumption (4th in the world)²⁸ will grow definitely further, requiring finding more partners. Central Asia is definitely the closest alternative source of energy for India.

Balancing Chinese and Pakistani influence in Central Asia is another factor. Both India and China are growing economies in desperate need for energy sources. China has direct access to Central Asia and effectively constructing new pipelines to transport Central Asian oil and gas. Additionally, China has direct access to Russian hydrocarbon sources in Siberia. India suffers from direct contact to Central Asia, and is left behind in political relations established with Central Asian republics. One positive factor for India is that India is more popular in Central Asia in contrast to China. Indian products sold during the Soviet period are still remembered and Indian dances, music and movies are still popular in Central Asia. In terms of soft power, India is much more advantageous than China, which is mistrusted or even feared of being swallowed by its big population. China's proximity to Central Asia and historical struggles trigger this fear. For India it is neither realistic nor fruitful to enter in an antagonistic relation with China in Central Asia.

While Chinese economic influence is growing in Central Asia, Pakistan's influence is weakening in the last decade. Similar to India, Pakistan had also interest in Central Asia and aimed to be considered as a model for Central Asia, but Central Asian presidents were careful supporters of secularism, which was in contrast to Pakistan's image. Pakistan quickly lost ground as a model, especially after 9/11, when Islam was also acknowledged by Central Asian republics as the main threat to their young republics.²⁹ On the popular level, Pakistan has some support through Islamists in the Fergana Valley. Although these Islamic movements are acquiring more and more followers, they cannot be attested to growing Pakistani influence, because they are related to different Islamic sects from different countries, and Pakistan is only one of the contenders. Additionally, they are still marginal groups with

²⁷ Shalini Sharan, "Central Asia: India's real strategic Depth", *Centre for Strategic and International Studies* (CSIS); <http://csis.org/blog/central-asia-indias-real-strategic-depth>.

²⁸ S.V. Kulkarni, "India's Engagement with Central Asia: Exploring Future Directions", *Annual International Studies Convention 2013*: 1; http://aisc-india.in/AISC2013_web/papers/papers_final/paper_137.pdf.

²⁹ Laruelle, Peyrouse, 2013: 102.

strongholds in only some places in Central Asia, and their influence can be restricted, if problems, such as poverty and corruption can be limited.

Today, Pakistan is actually not a real rival for India in Central Asia. Despite the fact that it is not an easy task to establish friendly relations between India and Pakistan, cooperation is mutually beneficial, and in Central Asia it is even obligatory. Both countries need access to Central Asian hydrocarbon sources, and the construction of the necessary pipeline should be undertaken by both countries. Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Pipeline Project is the culmination of this need. It will bring cooperation, security and stability to one of the most challenging regions of the world.

The third reason of India's interest in Central Asia is the need for stability in Afghanistan, which should be rebuilt after years of turmoil. It is known that the instability in Afghanistan creates a fertile breeding ground for terrorist groups, which also affects India. India's solution is to help Afghanistan to turn it to an energy and transportation hub between Central and South Asia. The payments to be made for transportation corridors can bring the necessary capital for investment to rebuild Afghanistan.

Projects Connecting India to Central Asia: Required but not Realized

In the last two decades many projects have been planned connecting Central and South Asia. They were to be implemented to solve Afghanistan's isolation and create financial sources to run the state. They were proposed in 1990s, to counterbalance Russian hegemony in Central Asia by opening alternative routes to Central Asian countries. That was also a period, when Russia was in retreat from its sphere of influence to solve its domestic problems.

Taliban's coming to power in 1996 was supported by the US and Pakistan to create stability in Afghanistan. However, the relations between the US and Talibani government of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan deteriorated after 1997. 9/11 and Taliban's support for al-Qaida brought the end of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, in 2001. The overthrow of the Talibani government did not bring stability to Afghanistan and the construction of the projects could not be realized in the last 13 years.

Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project was the first alternative route between Central and South Asia. Similar to Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project (signed in 1993, completed in 2005) connecting Azerbaijani oil³⁰ through Georgia to the Turkish Mediterranean port, Ceyhan, it was an alternative to the Russia hegemony on hydrocarbon sources. TAPI was announced at about the same period with BTC (signed in 1995) to transfer Turkmen gas through Afghanistan to Pakistan and India. During the first years of the Talibani government, when stability was achieved at a certain level, the construction of the pipeline was brought to the table, but following the worsening relations between the US and Talibani government, in 1998, American oil company cancelled negotiations on pipeline construction. After long discussions between 2008 and 2012, finally the four countries reached an agreement, and it is expected that the pipeline will start functioning in 2016.³¹

³⁰ In the original Project Turkmen oil was also intended to be connected to the BTC Pipeline.

³¹ Abdul Qadir Siddiqui, "Transfer Fee for TAPI Gas Pipeline Agreed", *Pajhwok Afghan News*, April 17, 2012, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2012/04/17/transit-fee-tapi-gas-pipeline-agreed>.



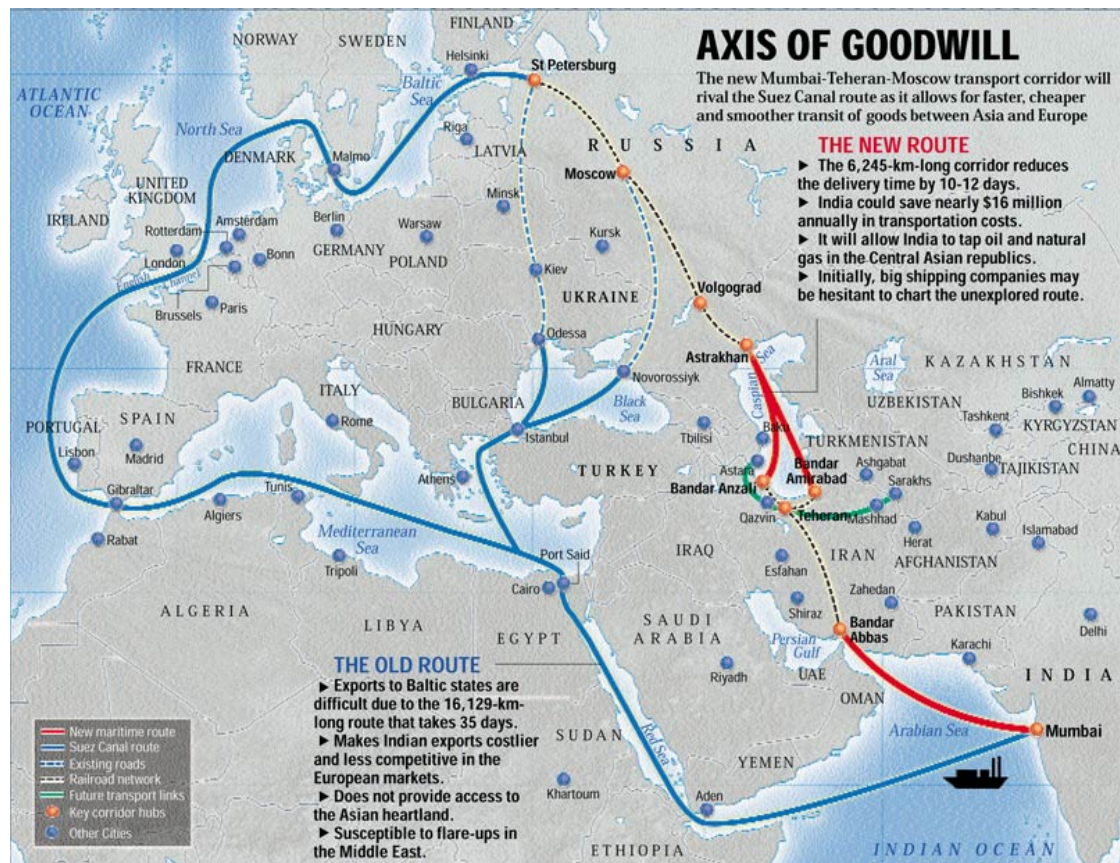
3- Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) and Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) Pipeline Project (<http://eurasianenergyanalysis.blogspot.com/2012/06/after-over-year-of-wrangling-over-price.html>)

A different pipeline project was planned for Iranian gas – an alternative to Central Asian gas. In 2007, India and Pakistan agreed to pay Iran for gas. China was also interested in the project and Iran sought to add Bangladesh. Iran-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline Project would be very beneficial for all participating countries. It was supported by Russia as well. However, the US was opposed to the project as part of its embargo on Iran. In 2009, India withdrew from the project after signing a nuclear deal with the US. The project was expected to be completed in 2014, but the pressure on Pakistan postponed its realization, and recently Saudi Arabia donated \$1.5 billion to Pakistan to cancel the project.³²

Another significant project is International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) connecting India through the Persian port Chahbahar to Azerbaijan, Russia, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. The transport corridor will bypass Pakistan by sea and link India via Caucasus and Central Asia to Europe. The main link will run through Iran and Azerbaijan but it will also be linked to Central Asia to join the proposed East-West Corridor connecting China through Central Asia to the Persian Gulf in order to meet the required financial costs. The agreement was signed between Iran, India and Russia, in 2000, but it only gained priority in 2011.³³ This coincided with the US embargo on Iran. It is expected to bring some relief to Iran by turning it to a transport hub, but it found strong opposition from the US.

³² Syed Fazl-e-Haider, "Saudi Grant Kills Iran-Pakistan Pipeline", *Asia Times*, March 21, 2014, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/SOU-02-210314.html.

³³ Sandeep Dikshit, "Despite US Opposition, Iran to be Transport Hub for North-South Corridor", May 31, 2012, *The Hindu*, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/despite-us-opposition-iran-to-be-transport-hub-for-northsouth-corridor/article3473943.ece>; Shubhajit Roy, "North-South Corridor Key to Bilateral Relations, says Iran", *The Indian Express*, January 03, 2013, <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/northsouth-corridor-key-to-bilateral-relations-says-iran/1053726>.



4- International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) (<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/new-north-south-route-to-help-india-tap-into-central-asian-republics-by-circumventing-pak/1/219871.html>)

In the same year, when the implementation of INSTC gained impetus, then-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called for a new Silk Road (July 2011). It was the new policy of the US to create a support basis for Afghanistan's transitions by developing trade infrastructure connections with its neighbours in South and Central Asia. If Afghanistan could be connected to the markets on the east-west and south-north routes it can survive as a stable state. This project is offered as the new US policy in Central Asia and Afghanistan after its withdrawal from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. However, the stability and protection of trade routes remains to possess high security risks, and the actual US support for the project after Hillary Clinton's leave and the US withdraw is uncertain.

Another project connecting Central and South Asia is CASA-1000 (Central Asia, South Asia). In February 2014, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan signed an agreement to transfer Kyrgyz and Tajik electricity through Afghanistan to Pakistan. The construction will start in 2014.³⁴ It is expected to increase Kyrgyz and Tajik revenues by power export and to end electricity shortages in Afghanistan and Pakistan;³⁵ but Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have blackout problems themselves. India is not a participatory country of this not well-defined project.

³⁴ "Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan Sign CASA-1000 Project Agreement", *Pakistan Today*, February 19, 2014, <http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2014/02/19/business/pakistan-kyrgyzstan-tajikistan-afghanistan-sign-casa-1000-project-agreement>.

³⁵ CASA-1000 official Website on <http://www.casa-1000.org/index.php>.

The demand and supply between Central and South Asia push the countries to create energy and trade links. India can offer goods, capital and expertise, which are demanded by Central Asia; and Central Asia can offer energy sources to India. However, there are many problems delaying the realization of these projects. All projects require big capital for investment, and the lack of stable and reliable international and domestic conditions increase the risks of these investments. TAPI cannot be realized without solving the problem in Afghanistan and the formation of peaceful relations between India and Pakistan. INTSC also requires a big amount of money to be invested, and Iran's international relations increase the risk factor of such an investment. The New Silk Road initiative is not even planned yet. Financial sources for the investment, the roads and market connections are not defined; it is only an idea to be structured.

Until the realization of these projects, Kyrgyzstan offers a more feasible option with its Manas Airport to be used as a transport hub for international trade. Although it cannot offer a feasible alternative for the transfer of India's much needed energy sources, it can still establish a viable trade link between India and Central Asia, which is also in demand.

After the withdrawal of the US troops from the Manas Airbase, the airport and its depots are aimed to be used for commercial activities on the east-west (China-Turkey) and Kyrgyzstan-Russia route. The latter should better be extended to India establishing the old south-north route (India-Russia) of the Silk Road. The exchange of commodities on these four directions and their re-exportation to third countries will be beneficial for all countries beyond its economic gains.

President of Kyrgyzstan, Almazbek Atambayev, declared his will to turn the Manas Airport to an international commercial hub, but the transformation of the airport requires more investment. The US and Turkey are already helping Kyrgyzstan to turn Manas Military Airbase to a civilian transport hub. However, a civilian hub is not commercially feasible under the recent low capacity of the airport. The U.S. Trade and Development Agency prepared a business plan for this proposal.³⁶ According to the plan:

Recent statistics would support greater civilian passenger and cargo operations; from 2007 to 2011, civilian passenger traffic increased nearly 175% to nearly 1.6 million passengers per year. General operations increased by 118%, however, total civilian cargo volume (in tons) dropped about 16% to nearly 21,500 tons (which is consistent with the worldwide air cargo decline resulting from the recession). Manas International Airport is expected to share in the general air cargo volume growth in Asia, which is projected at more than 6% annually through 2029.³⁷

Although President Atambayev's proposal is a valuable offer, the possibilities of its realization and its possible benefits are low under given circumstances. Therefore, stakeholders of this project should be increased, turning Kyrgyzstan to the centre of the new Silk Road at the juncture of flight routes to all corners of Asia. India has many products to export from authentic commodities, handcrafts, original textiles to pharmaceuticals and industrial goods, and its participation will only increase benefits to all sides.

India's "Connect Central Asia" Policy

³⁶ Joshua Kuchera, "U.S. Helping Kyrgyzstan Plan Civilian Transport Hub at Manas", The Bug Pit, October 24, 2012; retrieved from <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66099>.

³⁷ Kuchera, 2012.

In 2012, when India was celebrating 20 years of the establishment of diplomatic relations with Central Asia, its policies with Central Asian countries were revised, and India redefined its Central Asia policy in its “Connect Central Asia” Policy. The priorities of India did not change over the past twenty years, but they are more crucial today than before. This new policy is closer to soft power policies.

India’s Minister of State for External Affairs Shri E. Ahamed in his keynote speech on June 12, 2012 evaluated the past and present situation of India-Central Asia relations and also summarized the Connect Central Asia Policy in twelve points. This was the first India and Central Asia Dialogue, and it was realized in Bishkek.³⁸

Here, Ahamed underlined the historical legacy and that they “are bound by the silken bonds of centuries of common history”.³⁹ He mentioned that:

India's cultural heritage is deeply rooted in the Eurasian past. Indian traders and travellers had actively traded along the Silk Route and Buddhism had flourished across the vast Eurasian steppe. History is full of friendly interactions between India and Central Asia, through movement of people, goods and ideas, including spiritual interfaces that enriched us both. The fondness for Indian culture is expressed in Central Asia’s deep interest in Indian cinema, music, and art. This interest intensified further in Soviet times.⁴⁰

As mentioned above, beginning with the reference to the common bonds during the age of Silk Road was also a common feature during the Look-North policy as well. History is a useful starting point to revive the good relations between two regions and to introduce soft power policy upon the already existing historical legacy. Although the policy of Look-North failed, India is strengthening its relations in Central Asia, under the recent precept of “extended neighbourhood” as the key element of Indian foreign policy.⁴¹ The ambassador underlined the constructive character of India’s engagement in Central Asia as follows:

Our policy has been marked by deepening relationships based on political, economic and technical cooperation as a partner, rather than a mere contender for the region's vast oil and gas resources. We have shared our experiences and expertise, built capacity and focused on training through our ITEC⁴² and other assistance programmes.

(...) Central Asian countries could also gain from the techno-economic potential of India, which could be accessed in cooperative, mutually beneficial partnerships. Central Asia’s desire for diversifying hydro-power and energy export routes would correspond with India's quest for diversifying imports. India will be keen to invest in setting up downstream production facilities, instead of exporting raw materials out of the region through expensive pipelines. The approach could differ from those seeking exclusively to pump out Central Asia's riches.

³⁸ “Keynote address by MOS Shri E. Ahamed at First India-Central Asia Dialogue: India’s Connect Central Asia Policy”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Government of India, June 12, 2012, <http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/19791/Keynote+address+by+MOS+Shri+E+Ahamed+at+First+IndiaCentral+Asia+Dialogue>.

³⁹ “Keynote address by MOS Shri E. Ahamed” on June 2012.

⁴⁰ “Keynote address by MOS Shri E. Ahamed” on June 2012.

⁴¹ “Keynote address by MOS Shri E. Ahamed” on June 2012.

⁴² ITEC: Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme, which is a bilateral capacity building programme active since 1964. ITEC invited 161 countries from Africa, Asia, Latin America, East Europe and Pacific to share in the Indian experience. It is funded by the Government of India and conducted by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India; see for information: <http://itec.mea.gov.in>.

It is also important to remember that India has never been prescriptive in its political approach. We represent our unique liberal democratic values, particularly in the Asian context. We believe in a nation-building model based on participatory democracy, economic growth, building civil societies, pluralistic structures, ethno-religious harmony and the rule of law.⁴³

India is not applying conventional realpolitik diplomacy and it does not create anxiety among the people as China does. The constructive messages of India with a more active policy and more visibility will be received by Kyrgyzstan positively. Kyrgyzstan is the closest example to the Indian model as a pluralistic and democratic country.

When Ahamed announced Connect Central Asia Policy in Bishkek, he defined the main points of this foreign policy in twelve points. This points can be summarized as follows: continuation of “high level visits”; strengthening of “strategic and security cooperation and focusing on military training, joint research, counter-terrorism coordination and close consultations on Afghanistan”; stepping up “multilateral engagement through existing fora like the SCO, Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) and the Custom Union” also by the proposed “Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement to integrate its markets with the unifying Eurasian space”; “partnership with Central Asian countries in energy, and natural resources”, including cooperation in “production of profitable crops with value addition”; cooperation in the medical field and “setting up civil hospitals/clinics in Central Asia”; “setting up of a Central Asian University in Bishkek that could come up as a centre of excellence to impart world class education in areas like IT, management, philosophy and languages”; “setting up a Central Asian e-network with its hub in India to deliver, tele-education and tele-medicine connectivity, linking all the five Central Asian States”; building “world class structures at competitive rates”, including setting up “several medium size steel rolling mills” with “limitless reserves of iron ore and coal, as well as abundant cheap electricity”; “bridging the missing links” in the “reactivated International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)”; assistance in overcoming the problem of “absence of a viable banking infrastructure in the region”; improvement of the “air connectivity” and “opening tourist offices in India to woo Indian tourists”, offering in Central Asia “attractive holiday destinations for tourists and for the Indian film industry”; “exchanges between youth and the future leaders of India and Central Asia” by encouraging “regular exchanges of scholars, academics, civil society and youth delegations to gain deeper insights into each other’s cultures”.⁴⁴

Most of the above mentioned points have already been enacted. India conducts high level visits with Central Asian republics, Russia and China, under the SCO and in bilateral meetings. In the last six months till March 2014, Kyrgyzstan and India signed many agreements. The problem in Afghanistan and US withdrawal pushes for a solution by countries in the region. Although it has to be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned solution, it necessitates support of foreign participatory countries and their coordination. This coordination for counter-terrorism can also facilitate the establishment of partnerships in other spheres like trade and energy. At the end of 2013, an agreement was signed for military training in Kyrgyzstan.

Assistance in the agriculture is initiated in the Talas region with the construction of potato chips factory. An agreement on metalworking and another agreement on shooting an Indian movie on Kyrgyzstan’s touristic spot, Yssyk-Kol have been signed.

⁴³ “Keynote address by MOS Shri E. Ahamed” on June 2012.

⁴⁴ “Keynote address by MOS Shri E. Ahamed” on June 2012.

The air connectivity, which was mentioned by Ahamed, is on the agenda of Kyrgyzstan as well. The future of INSTC is indefinite. Until its realization, the air link can play a crucial role in developing intracontinental relations. Not only trade, tourism can also develop, and bring people and cultures closer.

Recent Developments between India and Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyz-Indian diplomatic relations gained impetus with the “6th India-Kyrgyz Republic Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation held in Bishkek in July, 2013”, and especially after the appointment of new Ambassador Jayant Khobragade, in August 2013. In September, during his augmentation, Ambassador Khobragade underlined the importance of “establishing close and friendly relations between peoples”. He aims to create language centers in India and in Kyrgyzstan to enhance bilateral relations between two peoples. “Thus, the younger generation will have every opportunity to learn the language, culture and customs of our country”.⁴⁵

In November 2013, Indian ambassador and Speaker of Kyrgyz Parliament Asylbek Jeenbekov met and Jeenbekov announced the need for the implementation of joint investment projects; to enhance cooperation in economic, cultural, humanitarian water and energy spheres. The priority areas were identified as healthcare, tourism, agriculture and processing, training and technology parks.⁴⁶

The year 2014 started as a very active year for Kyrgyz-India relations. Many official meetings are organized and agreements are signed. The improving relations between both countries are in accordance with soft power. In February 2014, two sides agreed on the “visa-free regime for holders of diplomatic, official and service passports”.⁴⁷ Visa-free travel is one the indicators of soft power in the “Soft Power-New Persuaders III” report.⁴⁸ Right afterwards, India donated books to Kyrgyz National Library and “opening of an Indian culture center within the library (...) [to] play an important role in the promotion and propagation of Indian culture, as well as carrying out various joint activities, presentations and meetings” was discussed.⁴⁹

In February, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyz Republic visited India and two sides agreed on the implementation of following issues: “cooperation in mining, pharmaceuticals, textiles and garment industries, transport and communication, education, health and tourism, as priority sectors for promoting bilateral investment”. A visit of an Indian business delegation to the Kyrgyz Republic was also planned for a meeting of the India – Kyrgyz

⁴⁵ “Posol Indii predlozhit sozdat yazykovye tsentry v Kyrgyzstane i Indii dlya tesnogo sotrudnichestva mezhdou stranami”, *Kabar.kg*, September 26, 2013, <http://kabar.kg/index.php/society/full/63552>.

⁴⁶ “Toraga Jokorku Kenesha i posol Indii obsudili voprosy realizatsii sovместnykh investitsionnykh proektov”, *Kabar.kg*, November 26, 2013, <http://www.kabar.kg/rus/politics/full/67072>.

⁴⁷ Kanykei Masanova, “Kyrgyzstan and India Ratify Agreement on Visa-Free Regime”, *24.kg*, January 25, 2014, <http://www.eng.24.kg/culture/168807-news24.html>; The visa-free agreement was signed during the visit of Foreign Minister of Kyrgyz Republic on February 14, 2014; see: <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/22927/List+of+Agreements+signed+during+the+visit+of+Foreign+Minister+of+Kyrgyz+Republic+to+India+14+February+2014>.

⁴⁸ McClory, 2012: 17.

⁴⁹ Kanykei Masanova, “India Donates Books of High Artistic Value to Kyrgyz National Library”, *24.kg*, January 29, 2014, <http://www.eng.24.kg/community/168884-news24.html>.

Republic Joint Business Council,⁵⁰ which was realized in March. Two sides also spoke about founding Kyrgyz-Indian Institute of Education in Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyz-Indian Centre of Information Technologies at the Osh State University, high-tech IT-park, Kyrgyz-Indian Centre of Multimedia Training.⁵¹

March saw the busiest period for Kyrgyz-Indian relations. The above mentioned Kyrgyz-Indian Institute of Education it is announced to be opened at the International University of Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek.⁵² The university signed a deal with Indian Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences and Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology. Osh State University, which is the second biggest city in Kyrgyzstan, also signed a deal with both universities.

On March 20, a business forum is organized with over 50 companies from India in the sectors of electrical equipment, IT-technologies and electrical power transportation. It was also declared that the commodity turnover between two countries reached to \$37 million in 2013⁵³ from \$26.6 million (2011). Still these figures are considered as far below the economic potential of both countries. The relations will most probably intensify in coming years.

Not only officials of the government but mayors of Yssyk-Kol region and Osh city also met the Indian ambassador to talk about investment. This also reflects the importance of relations on all levels.

In addition to these steps, India has a well-developed and relatively cheap education infrastructure. India can also support Kyrgyzstan to turn it to “back office” of Russian speaking countries, based on the Indian example functioning as the world’s back office. India is also developed in pharmacies and metalworking.

Reactivation of INSTC will be a very critical step for Kyrgyzstan, which can turn to a meeting point for east-west and south-north trade routes. The Kyrgyz people, which have already turned to able tradesperson from China to Turkey and from Dubai to St. Petersburg, will benefit from this development. With the help of the continuation and strengthening of exchange programmes, Indians will also benefit from this, who have been educated in Kyrgyzstan and know the country from within. They can become valuable intermediaries in developing trade between two countries. Today more than 2.000 Indian students are educating in Kyrgyzstan.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, not only diplomatic relations between states but human to human relations can flourish. Small or medium entrepreneurs can mediate between Asian countries as merchants or investors to consolidate once again international relations in Asia.

India’s announced aims are significant steps to recreate a new Silk Road under very different conditions. Technological developments, air connectivity, mass education and student exchange, tourism etc. create new opportunities not seen on the age of Silk Road. The fragmentation and distance of people between South and Central Asia can be closed in a short period.

⁵⁰ “Official Visit of the Official Visit of the Foreign Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic to India”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, February 14, 2014, <http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/22925/Official+Visit+of+the+Foreign+Minister+of+the+Kyrgyz+Republic+to+India>.

⁵¹ “Kyrgyzstan i India dogovorilis bybesti dvustoronnee sotrudnichestvo na bolee vycokiy uroven”, *Kabar.kg*, February 15, 2014, <http://kabar.kg/rus/politics/full/71651>.

⁵² “Tilek Asanaliev: ‘My namereny otkryt Kyrgyzsko-Indiyski institut obrazovaniya ha baze MUK’”, *Kabar.kg*, March 12, 2014, <http://kabar.kg/rus/society/full/72914>.

⁵³ Darya Sytenkova, “Commodity turnover between India and Kyrgyzstan comprises \$37 ml”, *24.kg*, March 19, 2014, <http://www.eng.24.kg/culture/168807-news24.html>.

⁵⁴ “Uchurda Kyrgyzstanda 2 minden ashuun indiyalyk student bilim aluuda”, *Kabar.kg*, Mart 12, 2014, <http://kabar.kg/kyr/society/full/58150>.

Conclusion

When Asia was home to advanced civilizations of the world, Silk Road was functioning as a busy network of roads. Central Asia as a transport hub on the east-west and north-south direction was at the centre of this network connecting different cultures of Asia, and both benefitting from and helping to the formation of rich Asian civilizations by the exchange of ideas and inventions. Since the rise of the West the face of Asian countries is turned to other parts of the world. Today, Asian cultures are enriched through combinations with Western cultures and globalization. The links between Asian countries, however, still needs to be re-established for the revival of Asian cultures, and for enriching and reshaping the world culture.

India, which is the fourth pillar on the east-west and south-north routes in Asia, is the weakest link for the time being, and its participation in this network is very crucial. India with its rich culture, economic potential, scientific achievements and democratic experience can connect to other Asian countries – including Russian Federation – through Central Asia. If Asia will turn to a centre of world economy, relations between Asian countries will continue to develop, and Central Asia will be at the focal point of the Asian network. It is of utmost importance to be located in Central Asia, while the exploration of common benefits continues.

The establishment of intracontinental trade links is especially crucial for Kyrgyzstan, which is willing to establish trade links with all possible countries. Kyrgyzstan has small natural resources but many traders operating between PRC, Russia, Turkey and Dubai. Because of the employment problem in Kyrgyzstan, the citizens have turned their faces to international trade, and they are becoming the new merchants of the Silk Road. There is also Kyrgyz diaspora emerging in Russia and smaller diasporas in Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (Dubai), China and South Korea. Additionally, Kyrgyzstan benefits from its ethnic multiplicity; the Uighurs are active in trade with China and the Uzbeks with Uzbekistan. Together with liberal policies of the state, Kyrgyzstan is turning to a hub of the Asian trade. However, the Kyrgyz state has limited power to support the further development of trade.

International trade, direct contact of people and intermarriages will also bring cultural changes. In addition to it, student exchange programmes, academicians' joint studies will further increase the blending of ideas in Asia. Multilateral relations will help to the real rise of Asia both in terms of economics and culture.

Politically Kyrgyzstan is an open and democratic republic. Kyrgyzstan is the closest to the model India presents as a “nation-building model based on participatory democracy, economic growth, building civil societies, pluralistic structures, ethno-religious harmony and the rule of law” which is proposed by India.⁵⁵ Together with Turkey, India builds a different model for parliamentary democracy. Kyrgyzstan will find its way through different models.

Kyrgyzstan tries to fight corruption, which is a common evil for most countries. Kyrgyzstan monitors corruption, but wages should also be increased, which requires creating new sources for state revenues, which can only be achieved after investing in production and forming new sources of taxation in Kyrgyzstan. In order to obtain more foreign investment, Kyrgyzstan pursues a multivector foreign policy in a very energetic diplomacy. The foreign investment

⁵⁵ “Keynote address by MOS Shri E. Ahamed” on June 2012.

will bring capital, employment, production, more exportation, and which can result in political stability in Kyrgyzstan.⁵⁶

The multiplicity of diplomatic relations with a variety of countries has also positive effect on the relative autonomy of the Kyrgyz state both in the domestic arena against centrifugal forces and in the international arena in the face of hegemonic powers. Kyrgyzstan has strong relations with Russia, good relations with the US, China and Turkey and promising relations with many European and Asian countries.⁵⁷ The presence of India will be a balancing factor against hegemonic powers, which will help to consolidate Kyrgyzstan. The multiplicity will also open more space to the countries other than hegemonic powers, such as Turkey. Additionally, it will reduce the burden on the great powers. Instability in Kyrgyzstan increases expectations from great powers, which can be met neither by the US nor by Russia alone, as it was witnessed during the ethnic clashes in June 2010.⁵⁸

Today, technological developments create many opportunities to reconnect Asia. The closure of the US Military Airbase and the prospect of turning the airbase to a commercial hub between the PRC and Turkey create an opportunity for India as well. Together with Russia, India can become the fourth leg of the new Silk Road on air. For Kyrgyzstan the establishment of trade links is more than a desire but a necessity. In addition to capital for investment, Kyrgyzstan needs know-how for development. As in example of flying geese paradigm, Kyrgyzstan can learn from India and other partners, make the long-awaited take-off and join the flying geese, which will be beneficial for all participants.

India's soft power policy based on the historical legacy and improvement of mutually beneficial recent relations will assist Kyrgyzstan. In the last six months (before April 2014), already many agreements and common projects were announced ranging from collaboration in education to investment. The rapid development of relations in the recent period will continue turning Kyrgyzstan to a gate to Central Asia for India.

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⁵⁶ Gürbüz, Y. Emre, “Kyrgyzstan: in Search for Stability”, *Insight Turkey*, Fall 2013: 191-205.

⁵⁷ Gürbüz 2013.

⁵⁸ An example great powers' incompetence is witnessed during the ethnic clashes in Southern Kyrgyzstan, in June 2010. Then President Roza Otunbayeva called foreign powers for help. Because of different preoccupations, both the US and Russia could not intervene for negotiations. Since then, Kyrgyzstan has turned to a more open country.

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