Security Cooperation and Change of Identities in Central Asia: A Model of Acculturation through Security Regionalization in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

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Since its establishment in 2001, The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has gradually increased its influence and importance while becoming an independent venue for the Central Asian states to manage regional and national security. The SCO focuses on a new type of (non-traditional) security, and its diverse membership differentiates it from other security institutions. In particular, and uniquely, the SCO has impacted the national security identities of its members. The processes examined in this paper are not easily reconciled with traditional state-centric security paradigms or the dominant strategic discourse. Thus, recourse must be had to analytical tools provided by social constructivism and, to a lesser extent, English School rationalism. The paper proposes a revised model of socialization with acculturation as a central mechanism and applies it to the security identity formulation of four Central Asian Republics in order to explain the shifts in the security discourses at both the national and regional levels.

Keywords: Regional Security, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Security Identity, Acculturation
I. INTRODUCTION

Contrary to traditional security and strategic approaches, this paper advances strongly the position that internal perceptions and identities are vital for understanding the collective policy output and interaction of groups of states. It also emphasizes that inter-subjective understandings act to constrain and enable state-level actors. In other words security identity formation is a mutually constitutive process between agents (the members) and structure (the Shanghai Cooperation Organization-SCO). Furthermore, it contends that the genealogy of regional security cooperation and identity has left its "civilizing" mark on the actors. Thus this paper argues that the process of security identity and policy formation, particularly with regard to the four states of Central Asia, is best understood through elements of social constructivism and English School rationalism rather than through power political approaches like neorealism or the transformative processes of neoliberalism.

The paper proposes a revised model of socialization with acculturation as a central mechanism and applies it exclusively to the security identity formulation of four Central Asian Republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, excluding neutral Turkmenistan). Qualitative and quantitative differences in the security relationships between China and Russia, and the four Republics, explain the reasons for the exclusion of the two superpower members of the SCO. First, at the level of interaction, China and Russia prioritize their mutual extra-regional engagement (bilateral relations, participation in the Six-Party Talks and the UN Security Council, and other avenues) over Central Asian regional engagement in the SCO. For Central Asian states, however, it is the region that plays the dominant role in the construction of their foreign policies. Second, the scale of engagement between China and Russia is much higher than engagement with any other Central Asian member. For example, while SCO ministerial-level officials meet and consult on a regular basis with a large number of joint working groups, China and Russia alone have set up thirty-five bilateral groups within this framework (Shambaugh 2004, 74). Therefore, an understanding of the Sino-Russian security hierarchy would require a separate study, which would include multiple external factors. The Central Asian states, sharing similar regional characteristics, are assumed to be influenced more strongly by the processes of the SCO security community.

The starting point for the paper is that ideas matter. They were important in creating images during the Cold War in order to solidify national projects and policies. Ideas remain important in the contemporary international operating environment with regard to creating national identities, which in turn play a role in generating internal solidarity in support of attaining national goals. This is especially true for the Central Asian states, which are recent creations. Inventive elites attempted to generate national identities based on imagined or assumed