

CHINESE RESEARCH ON CENTRAL ASIA SINCE 1991

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Abstract: With the disintegration of Soviet Union in the 1990s, the pattern of Central Asia has changed greatly as well as international relations have been readjusted. Central Asia, once a hub for communication between the East and the West and a place where cultures converge, has once again become a focus of world attention after several centuries.

Since Central Asia gained its independent geopolitical space, the achievements made by five Central Asian countries in the past 30 years are obvious: five Central Asian countries have effectively safeguarded their respective national sovereignty; more importantly, they have avoided major destructive events during the transition process and maintained national and social stability. In addition, through foreign exchanges, five Central Asian countries have better integrated into the international community and achieved steady economic and social promotion.

In this regard, Chinese scholars have paid more attention to Central Asia. Since 1991, China's Central Asian studies have obtained remarkable achievements and made important contributions to promoting friendly communication between China and Central Asian countries.

Key words: Since 1991; China; Central Asian Research

ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ КИТАЯ ПО ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ С 1991 ГОДА

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Аннотация: С СССР в 1990-е структура Центральной Азии претерпела большие изменения, а международные отношения были перестроены. Центральная Азия, когда-то важный город в древнем Шелковом пути, в истории была центром обмена между Востоком и Западом и местом, где собирались культуры. Спустя столетия она снова стала центром мирового внимания.

Поскольку Центральная Азия получила независимое геополитическое пространство, результаты, достигнутые пятью центральноазиатскими странами за последние 30 лет, очевидны: пять стран Центральной Азии эффективно защитили свой национальный суверенитет, что еще более важно, они избежали серьезного ущерба в ходе трансформации; Возникновение сексуальных инцидентов поддержало стабильность страны и общества, кроме того, благодаря иностранному обмену пять стран Центральной Азии лучше интегрировались в международное сообщество и достигли устойчивого экономического и социального развития. В связи с этим китайские ученые стали уделять больше внимания Центральной Азии. С 1991 года исследования Центральной Азии в Китае добились замечательных успехов за эти годы и внесли важный вклад в развитие дружественных обменов между Китаем и странами Центральной Азии.

Ключевые слова: с 1991 года; Китай; исследования Центральной Азии

1991 YILDAN BERI XITOYNING MARKAZIY OSIYODAGI TADQIQOTLARI

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Annotatsiya: 1990-yillarda Sovet Ittifoqining parchalanishi bilan Markaziy Osiyo manzarasi tubdan o'zgardi, xalqaro munosabatlar ham qayta tiklandi. Bir paytlar Sharq va G'arb o'rtasidagi muloqot markazi, madaniyatlar birlashadigan joy bo'lgan Markaziy Osiyo bir necha asrlardan so'ng yana dunyo diqqat markaziga aylandi.

Markaziy Osiyo o'zining mustaqil geosiyosiy makoniga ega bo'lganidan beri Markaziy Osiyoning beshta davlati o'tgan 30 yil ichida erishgan yutuqlari yaqqol ko'rinib turibdi: Markaziy Osiyoning beshta davlati o'z milliy suverenitetini samarali himoya qilgan; eng muhimi, ular o'tish jarayonida katta buzg'unchi hodisalardan qochib, milliy va ijtimoiy barqarorlikni saqlab qolishdi. Bundan tashqari, valyuta ayirboshlash orqali Markaziy Osiyoning beshta davlati xalqaro hamjamiyatga yaxshiroq integratsiyalashgan va barqaror iqtisodiy va ijtimoiy yuksalishga erishgan.

Shu munosabat bilan Xitoy olimlari Markaziy Osiyoga ko'proq e'tibor qaratganlar. 1991 yildan beri Xitoyning Markaziy Osiyo tadqiqotlari ajoyib yutuqlarga erishdi va Xitoy va Markaziy Osiyo mamlakatlari o'rtasidagi do'stona muloqotni rivojlantirishga muhim hissa qo'shdi.

Kalit so'zlar: 1991 yildan beri; Xitoy; Markaziy Osiyo tadqiqotlari

Introduction. Five Central Asian countries are a new international political region. As they are adjacent to China's Xinjiang region, China has been studying and paying attention to five Central Asian countries for a long time. Since 1991, some important organizations and universities in China have established institutes specializing in the study of Central Asian issues, with a certain scale of research teams, the research on Central Asian region and each country has been continuously deepened.

Since the beginning of new century, especially the Belt and Road Initiative is proposed in the year of 2013, the friendly relations between China and Central Asian countries have developed rapidly, and gratifying results have been achieved in academic research.

Research methods. This article mainly adopts literature research method, multidisciplinary comprehensive research method and some other scientific methods. It is widely known that literature research method is a common research method, that is, collecting, identifying, and organizing historical literature, and forming scientific cognition facts.

In the process of selecting topic and writing, this article focused on the theme of Chinese research about Central Asia since 1991, and made full reference to Chinese and foreign database resources such as China Wanfang, VIP Chinese Science and Technology Journal Database, Sino-Western Science and Technology Literature Service Platform, China National Science and Technology Library, Google Scholar, Directory of Open Access Journals and others.

On this basis, the author carefully consult Chinese prime universities and research institutes which specializing in Central Asia as well as integrat these literature literature, objectively analyze important achievements and problems of these related institutes, and looking forward to the bright future.

Main Contents. The study of international relations between China and Central Asian countries has always been a field that Chinese scientific institutes are keen to research. The Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences is China's largest comprehensive research institute centering on Russia, Eastern European and Central Asian countries. It has always focused on major events such as

political and economic transition of these countries and their relations with China.

The famous scholar Zhao Changqing wrote the first book in China that comprehensively discussed contemporary post-independence changes of five Central Asian countries and three Transcaucasian countries. It not only systematically introduced the process of these eight young countries' revolution, but also conducted an in-depth discussion on some apparent issues that emerged. In addition to the above two parts, this book also recommended some regular cognition, which would undoubtedly be very valuable for future in-depth research[1].

In the meantime, he was also committed to introducing the relationship between the five Central Asian countries in politics, diplomacy, religious issues, regional security and China's western development to the Chinese people. When discussing this issue, he emphasized that in addition to friendly political relations and complementary economic relations, the two sides also had competition in many fields. The reason why people pay attention to the transformation of the five Central Asian countries and their impact is that they were the reference for the reform of China, especially the western part of China[2].

In his representative work *Foreign Relations of Five Central Asian Countries*, Sun Zhuangzhi, the he would continue to have an important impact on the changes in the geopolitical and economic patterns of Europe, Asia and even the world. He also pointed out that the political and economic stability of Central Asia had a vital influence on the security of northwest China. Therefore, strengthening the research on foreign relations of five Central Asian countries was not only had urgent practical significance for China, but also had long-term strategic significance. This book put forward many innovative viewpoints, which meant that China took a solid step in the research on the foreign relations of five Central Asian countries[3].

Xing Guangcheng, a researcher at the institute, believed that if China wants to make a great progress, it must have a peaceful international environment, especially a peaceful surrounding environment. He mentioned in the book *Relations between China and Newly Independent Central Asian Countries: from an economic point of view*, the region that will dominate the world's energy supply in the future is Central Asia, and the impact of this situation on the entire world cannot be underestimated. From a political point of view, the Central Asian region is increasingly showing its own unique political style. The more stable the relationship between China and Central Asian countries, the more it will promote peace and prosperity in the region[4].

The Central Asia Institute of Xinjiang Academy of Social Science was established in 1980. It was the earliest Central Asian research institute in China. It mainly conducted research on political economy of Central Asia as well as social development of Xinjiang. It was a guiding light for the study of Central Asian studies in China. The institute published China's first internal publication on Central Asia, *Soviet Central Asia Research Materials*, which was renamed *Central Asia Studies* in 1986. It published a total of more than a thousand publications covering the politics, economy, history and education of Central Asia.

When Central Asian countries became independent one after another in 1991, the Institute quickly published *Overview of the Four Central Asian Countries* and *Overview of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, these two books concentrated on the physical geography, politics, and economy of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Republic of Kyrgyz, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Turkmenistan, and the Republic of Kazakhstan. Later, the two books were combined and published as *Overview of the Five Central Asian Countries*, and it is a comprehensive research with the nature of a reference book.

The famous scholar Pan Zhiping showed clearly in the article *Xinjiang and Central Asia: An investigation of Geopolitical Culture* that Xinjiang and five Central Asian countries were part of the physical geography of landlocked Asia. Some ethnic minorities in Xinjiang were inextricably linked to many ethnic groups in Central Asian countries in terms of religion, language and culture. Therefore, bilateral exchanges have natural advantages[5].

Research on Relations Between China and Central Asian Countries focused on the current issues between China and Central Asian Countries. The main feature of the book was to inspect relationship between China and Central Asian countries at three levels: global, regional and local, focusing on the three dimensions of geo-political, geo-economical and geo-culture, from the «big picture» of the United States and Russia in Central Asia China observed international relations through game theory among regional countries, and looked at regional issues from a new perspective. For example, Kazakhstan’s “inspiration of nomadic tradition”, Uzbekistan’s “emergence of regional power consciousness”, Tajikistan’s “rediscovery of the Samanid Empire”[6], etc.

Xinjiang University, which has a long history of running schools shines brightly, it has two Central Asian research institutes. Relying on Xinjiang’s advantageous geographical location and taking the geopolitics of Central Asia as its research object, it has produced a number of outstanding results and cultivated lots of great talent.

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region’s important research bases for humanities and social sciences in universities have produced many achievements, such as Tursun Yimiti’s article Research on The Development of Relations Between China and Uzbekistan, which mainly analyze motivations and influencing factors affecting the development of relations between two countries from the perspective of international political relations. It also discussed constructive countermeasures to promote relations between China and Uzbekistan: namely strengthening security cooperation in the field of counter-terrorism such as jointly combating three evil forces; based on the development needs of two countries, enhancing cooperation in transportation infrastructure construction; creating a good image of China and actively responding to those who smeared China and giving full play to the bridging role of China’s Xinjiang region in the people-to-people exchanges between the two countries[7].

The Institute of Central Asian Research at Lanzhou University is also one of the earliest Central Asian research institutions established in China. Since its establishment, it has been aiming to promote friendly relations between China and Central Asian countries. Providing decision-making advice, training for relevant national departments, specializing in talent research are the main target. The institute has three major research directions: research on Central Asia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, research on anti-separatism theory and Xinjiang issues, as well as research on counter-terrorism. The Institute of Central Asian Studies at Lanzhou University consists of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Research Center and the Belt and Road Research Center, which conducts comprehensive and thematic research on Central Asia from many fields.

The institute concentrates on academic communication and has not only hosted several national seminars on Central Asia, but also co-sponsored the Central Asia Regional Security Forum. In 2015, the Central Asian Studies series founded by the Institute of Central Asian Studies at Lanzhou University was officially published and distributed at home and abroad, providing a new communication platform for Central Asian studies scholars in the world.

Yang Shu, the head of the institute, put forward that five Central Asian countries had traditional contact with China in many aspects. Developing and consolidating relationship was undoubtedly a priority strategic task for both sides. In the cooperation between the two parties, efforts should be made to explore new cooperation concepts and seek more effective ways of cooperation. He emphasized that since the independence of the five Central Asian countries, a series of major social changes had been basically completed. In this process, Central Asia’s political and cultural traditions, the influence of international environment, and the country’s actual interests were three key factors driving state behavior. No matter now or in the future, these three factors are a platform for the self-expression of the leadership groups of Central Asian countries, a hub for outsiders to study Central Asia, and an external basis for China to formulate Central Asian policies[8].

Yang Shu's book *Focus on Central Asia: The Transformation of Central Asian Countries And Their International Environment* introduced the social transformation and development of Central Asia, the Central Asian strategies of world powers, and the multilateral cooperation mechanisms of Central Asian countries. Taking Uzbekistan as an example, it was pointed out that the main reasons why Uzbekistan decided to suspend its membership of the Collective Security Treaty Organization again in 2012 were concerning that changes in the organization's decision-making procedures might limit its sovereignty, and cooling of relations with Russia in recent years, but relations with the West have improved significantly[9].

Famous researcher Jiao Yiqiang's book *Reasons And Effects of the Smooth Transition of the Uzbek Regime* proposed that internal reasons for Uzbekistan's successful transition of power in the post-Karimov era were the weak domestic opposition, the absence of large-scale interest groups, and the lack of Karimov's superb factional balancing methods made it difficult for Uzbekistan to form a political force that challenged elite regime at the critical moment of power transfer.

From an external perspective, President Karimov's pluralistic diplomacy made it difficult for external forces to interfere in Uzbekistan's internal affairs during the transfer of power. This fundamentally ensured the sustained and stable political and security situation in Central Asia, thereby promoting positive changes in the regional geopolitical landscape, which was of far-reaching significance to the construction of the New Silk Road Economic Belt and deepening development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization[10].

Professor Zeng Xianghong of Central Asian Research Institute of Lanzhou University is a leading figure in the study of Central Asian issues in Northwest China. In the field of the research of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, he believed that studying the impact of Central Asian member states on the development of Shanghai Cooperation Organization had important theoretical and practical significance.

In the article *The Influence of Central Asian Member States on the Development of Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, he pointed out that attitudes of Central Asian member states of SCO changed with the transformation of world situation, which had both positive and negative effects. Generally speaking, the positive impact outweighed the negative impact. In terms of positive impact, the attitude and behavior of being close to SCO had strengthened the cohesion within organization, and the cooperation between member states in politics, economy, security and other aspects had become more and more convenient, which was conducive to improving efficiency and expanding the influence of SCO[11].

At the same time, he mentioned that security cooperation within the framework of Shanghai Cooperation Organization had made great progress so far. However, it should be noted that SCO's security cooperation with anti-terrorism as the core was still at a relatively low level, mainly reflected in the following aspects: although SCO issued a number of legal documents related to security cooperation, the specific implementation was relatively slow, and the construction of SCO's security cooperation mechanism needed to be improved. In the security cooperation, anti-terrorism cooperation had largely remained at the exercise stage, and anti-terrorism coordination and joint response capabilities were limited[12].

In the book *Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Practice And Theory*, by studying some important issues in the development process of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, such as development of member states, the progress and limitations of cooperation under the framework of Shanghai Cooperation Organization[13], and the new situation faced by Shanghai Cooperation Organization after its expansion, not only an in-depth analysis of the organization was conducted, but also a preliminary attempt was made to promote the academic level of Shanghai Cooperation Organization research. Because of his outstanding contributions, Professor Zeng Xianghong was awarded the "Shanghai Cooperation Organization 20th Anniversary Medal" in 2022.

In terms of relations between China and Central Asian countries such as Uzbekistan, Zeng Xianghong, like most Chinese scholars, believed that since five Central Asian countries gained independence in 1991, China's Central Asian diplomacy had achieved significant results by actively developing relations with them. Although Central Asian countries had expressed their willingness to participate in the Silk Road Economic Belt strategic concept proposed by China in 2013, there were still some factors that affected their enthusiasm, such as details of the strategic concept have yet to be clarified.

In view of this, professor Zeng Xianghong suggested that in the process of further promoting China's Central Asian diplomacy and building the Silk Road Economic Belt, China needed to do a good job of publicity and used various public diplomacy means to make it clear to Central Asian countries that the Silk Road Economic Belt concept proposed by China was not an initiative aimed at competing for geopolitical power and was not exclusive. It was also necessary to respect the sovereignty and special concerns of Central Asian countries. More importantly, it was necessary to provide tangible benefits for Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries to participate in the construction of Silk Road Economic Belt[14].

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In addition, there are also many wonderful translations, including Uzbekistan Is Advancing Along the Path of Deepening Economic Reform, translated by Chen Shizhong, whom introduces that since gaining independence, Uzbekistan had carried out reforms, getting rid of the Soviet model, developing an independent economic model with Uzbek characteristics, vigorously developed a market economy, and Uzbekistan once became a trade center in Central Asia.

Although China's Central Asian studies have made considerable achievements, there are still some problems. In the first place, the team of Chinese Central Asian researchers is small and lacks international scholars. Although there are a large number of publications, there are not many scholars and institutes in the Chinese academic community that specialize in Central Asian research. And most authors who write articles about Central Asia do not pay attention to Central Asia for a long time.

Secondly, there is a problem of lacking of academic platforms. On the one hand, China has not yet established an academic organization dedicated to Central Asian studies, and there is no independent Central Asian association. Most scholars engaged in Central Asian research are also involved in researching other former Soviet Union countries, especially Russian issues, and Central Asian research is only one of their research directions. On the other hand, there is no dedicated academic platform for the publication of Central Asian research results.

Thirdly, Chinese scholars mainly focuses on current and hot issues, but is relatively weak in basic and historical research, and is unable to fully grasp the driving force behind

transformation of Central Asian countries.

Conclusion

In short, Central Asia has a special significance for China's development. Especially in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese scholars will continue to pay attention to Central Asian countries. Therefore, there is no doubt that Chinese research on Central Asian issues will maintain a good trend and will provide intellectual support for the development of strategic partnership between China and Central Asian countries with more and more high-quality results. With the participation of more young experts and the support of a large number of special funds, China's Central Asian research will further enhance its academic level and international influence.

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